

“Sorrow Brought Forth Joy”: Feelings of Faith in American Literature

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Abstract

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Feelings of Faith draws upon religious thought, specifically, Christian theological traditions, in a reconsideration of major debates in contemporary affect theory. The dissertation is a study of American literature across historical periods. Its nine short chapters discuss the captivity narrative of Puritan Mary Rowlandson; Flannery O’Connor’s devotional writing and fiction; the short fiction of Gloria Naylor; slave narratives by Solomon Northup and Harriet Jacobs; James Baldwin’s novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*; Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*; Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*; and *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson. The project claims that while much of contemporary affect theory takes the view that affect and cognition are separate systems, Christian traditions understand them to be deeply interconnected. Chapters on the sociality of the emotions, with a focus on the black church in the United States, suggest that specific emotions

have different meanings in a secular framework than they do in a religious one. Finally, while recent work on affect in literary and cultural studies tends to be anticipatory in its as yet unfulfilled claims regarding the transformative potential of affect for ethics, the prescriptive nature of religious doctrine offers clarity in its willingness to regulate conduct. The dissertation as a whole is written in the context of the secularization debates, with reference to what many scholars call the postsecular.

for Brandon

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Introduction: Feelings of Faith

Out of joy strength came, strength that was fashioned to bear sorrow: sorrow brought forth joy. –James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

But the true saints are like the fixed stars, which, though they rise and set, and are often clouded, yet are steadfast in their orb, and may truly be said to shine with a constant light. –Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*

I begin my study of American literature with the inaugural text in what many critics regard as the first literary genre to originate in the colonial new world. Mary Rowlandson was a Puritan minister's wife, the mother of four children, and a survivor of the devastations of war. She was also an influential figure among her contemporaries; according to literary historian Kathryn Derounian, Rowlandson's autobiographical account of her captivity during King Philip's War sold in excess of 1,000 copies over four editions in 1682, the first year of its publication, alone (239). Rowlandson's captivity narrative, even as it willfully misunderstands the indigenous culture against which it is situated, powerfully conveys the deeply held convictions that substantiated Puritan religious life. It also, as is true for so many American literary texts, offers complex representations of the affective dimension of religious belief and practice. For example, Rowlandson recalls that, when she was purchased out of captivity and returned safely to her family, she felt "full of joy, and yet not without sorrow." These two seemingly contradictory emotions together define her experience of "deliverance" (366).

In James Baldwin's semi-autobiographical 1953 novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, we find the same terms repeated. The title of my dissertation, "*Sorrow Brought Forth Joy*": *Feelings of Faith in American Literature*, is taken from the novel's final pages, in which the fourteen-year-old protagonist John Grimes experiences spiritual deliverance in a Harlem Pentecostal storefront church. This conversion scene is one of the most affectively dense

portrayals of religion in American literature, in no small part because it draws upon a dual meaning of “deliverance,” commonly accepted in black Christian traditions, that accounts at once for collective histories of enslavement and emancipation and individual salvation through faith. From discussions of the slave narrative and the Negro spiritual to the theology of action of Martin Luther King, Jr. to the fiction of Baldwin and Gloria Naylor, the beliefs and practices of the black church are at the heart of my dissertation.

In seeking out commonalities in the religious thought of James Baldwin and the eighteenth-century Calvinist theologian Jonathan Edwards, literary critic Joanna Brooks rightly arrives at the concept of the “threshing-floor,” the title of the section of Baldwin’s novel in which John’s conversion takes place, and a fitting metaphor for Edwards’s ceaseless desire to divide the true from the false. For John Grimes, and Baldwin himself in his adolescence, the “threshing-floor” is the literal floor of the church, the site of conversion. For Edwards, Brooks writes, it “marked a sacralizing crucible of judgment and sacrifice, where one must abandon that which does not tend to life and embrace that which does” (434). Those who make this totalizing commitment to Christianity are the “true saints” to which Edwards refers in his description of the men and women who, like the stars in the heavens, are steadfast and ever brightly shining.

In her Pulitzer Prize winning 2004 novel *Gilead*, Marilynne Robinson works within the same Calvinist theological tradition to depict the life of one such true saint, the Congregationalist minister John Ames. In my final chapter, I discuss the defining characteristics of a Christian saint, as outlined by Edwards and exemplified by Ames, who relates the story of his life to his young son in a letter that gives the novel its form. In a moment of direct argumentation that is rare in this novel, Ames writes, “many of the attacks on belief that have had such prestige for the last century or two are in fact meaningless.” He explains that he must insist upon this point, even

if only briefly, because everything else in the letter, as well as every sermon he has written and preached, “loses almost all its meaning and its right to attention if this is not established” (144). Like *Gilead*, this dissertation is written within the tension between the religious and the secular.

*

Recent years have seen a rapid shift in western thought on a fundamental point: the relationship between the religious and the secular. The thesis that has underwritten intellectual life since the Enlightenment holds that religious belief and practice will inevitably decline and end in an increasingly secularized modernity. But this expectation has gone unfulfilled, calling into question the validity of the secularization thesis. A discourse has emerged to accommodate this and related matters. Scholars date this discussion, often referred to as “the secularization debates,” to various historical events. Cultural critics Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, for example, argue in their 2008 book *Secularisms* that it was the Iranian revolution in 1979 that first forced a large scale reexamination of the secularization thesis, because, in short, it could not account for the establishment of a new theocracy in modernity. And the events in Iran could not be dismissed as an isolated incident. “As time passed,” they write, “it became clear that the Iranian revolution represented one of a number of powerful contemporary social movements in many parts of the world that were organized in the name of religion” (10).¹

The secularization debates did emerge, in part, from a dawning realization among the intellectual class that religion had unexpectedly persisted, and continues to persist, as a significant human motivation globally. But most accounts trace the debates more sharply to the terror attacks of 11 September, 2001. In that sudden morning, the explanatory power of the secularization thesis was irreparably diminished. Almost immediately, leading thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas began to argue that the attacks signified that the contemporary moment could

only be understood as “postsecular.” And it was in the years after 9/11 that the most groundbreaking scholarship in this area appeared. Anthropologist Talal Asad’s *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (2003) and philosopher Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (2007) are widely considered the threshold texts for the topic. By 2014, literary critics Peter Coviello and Jared Hickman could calmly announce: “the secularization thesis is dead” (645).

On the basis of these debates, many now view the religious and the secular as coeval frameworks of understanding. A representative excerpt from Taylor, in a 2006 article titled “Religious Mobilizations,” reads: “what we call secularization is a process that deeply destabilized and marginalized earlier forms of religion; but, partly as a consequence of this, new forms have arisen. The forms that are now ‘returning’ in strength are thoroughly modern, and we cannot understand either them or modernity if we ignore this” (281). Anthropologist Saba Mahmood advances another view of how religion functions in modernity; she argues in a 2009 article for an understanding of the term “secularism” as “the rearticulation of religion in a manner that is commensurate with modern sensibilities and modes of governance,” such as the separation of church and state (837). In these two accounts and others like them, religion has been transformed—but not weakened or superseded—in its encounters with the secular. Rather than religion vanishing, they argue, it seems to have a complicated permanence. An increasing number of thinkers are likewise coming to place the secular and the religious on equal terms.

For those who concur with Taylor and Mahmood on this point, the anticipation that an ascendant secularity will one day fully replace religion has faded. But the assumptions on which the secularization thesis is based have long resided not only in abstraction, but as features of the stories we tell to one another about the meaning of life. In other words, what may rightly be called a thesis by the sociologists who study it in demographic and statistical terms, is for

everyone else a narrative.² In 2007, Tracy Fessenden argued that the “narrative of secularization” is the “story of the West’s gradual but decisive emancipation from dependence on religious structures of organization, value, and meaning” (“Opposed” 154). One may argue or consider a thesis; it implies an impersonal frame of mind. But a narrative insists upon a more intimate involvement. The individual must situate herself within its structure, or, as Fessenden describes it, risk being relegated to the past.

More than other areas of society, the narrative of secularization has forcibly shaped scholarly communities of practice, whose central task is the forward-looking creation of new knowledge—though, as Jakobsen and Pellegrini note, it is also “accepted as common sense well beyond the boundaries of the academy”—and more than other areas of scholarship, the narrative has impressed itself upon literary and cultural studies (2). As Taylor notes in his monumental book *A Secular Age*, the “presumption of unbelief” has become absolutely dominant in intellectual life in the west (13). Entire fields of study and the individuals who participate in them have written themselves into the irresistibly progressive story of the advancement of enlightened knowledge.

The narrative of secularization thus deeply informs scholarly practices as we know them today. These practices were developed in the context of what is often called the secularization of knowledge, the process by which religious beliefs and habits of mind were deliberately excised from intellectual life. This process can be best described not as an inevitable development in the history of ideas, but rather as a decisive victory of one rival framework over another. In literary studies, the term “secular criticism” is key; its leading proponent, as readers will know, was Edward Said.³ In his excellent book on the secularizing of literary studies, *Secularization without End* (2015), Vincent Pecora writes, “when future generations of scholars look back at the last

half of the twentieth century, they may conclude that it was less an era when formalism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and new historicism competed with one another for intellectual credibility than an age in which the secular criticism of literary texts rose to dominance” (2). The intellectual traditions out of which these critical approaches emerge are very strong; there is, as Pecora’s title indicates, no end in sight of either the dominance of secular criticism or its internecine struggles. It is through its negotiations with itself that secular criticism continues to make important contributions to humanistic knowledge, and no one is calling for a halt to such activities. But the secularization debates have opened new, adjacent spaces for work in literary scholarship to be conducted differently.⁴

That contemporary scholarship is so deeply committed to secular criticism can be best understood as a reasonably assured outcome of exclusionary practices in the discipline. Pecora is illuminating on how such practices function, explaining that secular criticism “fulfills itself primarily by constant vigilance not only against received accounts of the sacred, but against all ideas or ideals that might share some of the characteristics of unquestioned sacred truth” (*Cultural Criticism* 4). If in literary studies we remain constantly vigilant, we will protect ourselves not only from a perceived threat to what we value, but also from ever coming nearer to resolving what literary critic Jonathan Freedman regards as “one of the great unanswered questions of contemporary literary criticism,” namely, “what are we to do with the sacred?” Fessenden, in response to Freedman, writes, “the question of the sacred seems still to bewilder and hush, as though it were a daring, even destabilizing inquiry for literary scholarship to pursue” (“Problem” 155). It is destabilizing—its implications go to the foundations of the discipline in the modern academy.

As Gauri Viswanathan persuasively argues in her 2008 *PMLA* article, the professional study of literature maintains a uniquely troubled relationship to the secularization debates. Its disciplinary formation, as she describes it, relied upon the logic of secularization for its very definition. “Literature” was conceived of “as a secular vehicle for ideas whose possible religious origins were subsequently effaced as religious sensibility became absorbed into aesthetic form and imagery,” and those who specialized in its study, she argues, came to set their priorities accordingly (466). The secularization of knowledge in this field therefore has important effects on scholarly identity formation, as literary critic Michael Kaufmann has documented. He writes, “histories of the profession of literary studies have long been underwritten by a narrative of secularization. It seems generally accepted that while the discipline and its practitioners were once more religious, literary studies is now a decidedly secular enterprise. The assumed fact of secularization thus serves as stable grounds for constructing our professional histories and identities” (607). Kaufmann goes on to describe religion’s “displacement” from professional scholarship to “the private domain of personal experience, belief, and practice” (607). Once so rearranged, a paradigm shift would be needed to push what had been privatized back into the public arena of scholarly circulation. The secularization debates have functioned in precisely this way.

Clear evidence of the scale and stakes of this shift is found in Terry Eagleton’s *Culture and the Death of God* (2014). Eagleton is the first major figure in literary and cultural studies to contribute to the secularization debates; in the preface to his book, he notes the stunning absence of attention to religion in these fields. “Almost every cultural theorist today passes over in silence some of the most vital beliefs and activities of billions of ordinary men and women,” he writes (ix). But what is most remarkable is not that he merely attends to religion, as a category of

experience that is important to the lives of many people, but rather that he declares it a permanent aspect of human life. This amounts to a reversal of Matthew Arnold's main points in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), in which the claim is first established that culture would take the place of religion as a source of meaning in secularizing societies. If culture will not ultimately replace religion, as Eagleton strongly suggests—then it follows that they harbor distinct capacities. A major claim of my dissertation is that, through close attention to literary texts, we can begin to ascertain what resources can be understood to be unique to religion and culture respectively.

In my readings of American literature, I find that the affective dimension of religion is one of its irreducible, and irreplaceable, qualities. In order to develop this claim, I have turned to a number of theological accounts of the emotions hitherto overlooked by scholars in contemporary affect theory. To acknowledge the absence of attention to religion in what is often called the “affective turn” in literary and cultural studies is to cite another result of the secularization of knowledge. Historian Thomas Dixon details in his book *From Passions to Emotions* (2006) how the emotions were established, rather recently, as a secular psychological category. In Christian religious thought, to take only the example dominant in the west, and the tradition to which this dissertation limits its inquiry, the emotions are often discussed as “passions” or “affections.” But religious language becomes marked as antiquated after the Enlightenment; as Dixon notes, the use of these terms indicates “allegiance to older ways of thinking about human mental life,” ways that are perceived as preceding the secular psychological categories that have since become accepted (6). The shift from the passions to the emotions was so sweeping that it effectively rendered these terms—“passions” and “affections”—archaic, even as religious belief and practice related to them went on unabated. To

use theological terms in scholarship today is to retrieve them from a wrongly assigned place in a prior historical temporality. If religion is part of modernity, then religious thought must be at least granted opportunities to be considered a current, not “older way of thinking.” In the context of the secularization debates, in other words, everything, including our terms, must be revisited and renegotiated. Alongside the terms affect, emotion, and feeling, which I use interchangeably, I also discuss passions and affections as they pertain to the theological discourses I draw upon in my readings of American literature.

The “affective turn” has swerved decisively and consistently away from the study of religion.⁵ The genealogies of affect theory, and its various approaches to interpretation, are currently drawn exclusively from secular thought. But the emotions have been accounted for by theology as well, of course. And just as religion has not disappeared in modernity, its various ways of explaining the meaning and value of the emotions are still entirely available to us. It is true that at stake here are questions of method and intellectual inheritance. But the purpose of my project is not to argue against affect theory as it is currently practiced. Rather, it is to substantiate a claim for the value of consulting theological accounts of the emotions, not *instead of* but rather *in addition to* secular perspectives. In short, in the study of the emotions as it is currently practiced in the fields of literary and cultural studies, there is no language with which we might theorize feelings of faith persuasively and without condescension. This dissertation offers starting points for such a theory.

Consider, for example, the distance between recent scholarship on the emotions and the perspective of theologian Jonathan Edwards, who writes, in *Religious Affections*, his 1746 treatise on feelings of faith:

The body of man is no more capable of being really the subject of love or hatred, joy or sorrow, fear or hope, than the body of a tree, or than the same body of man is capable of thinking and understanding. As it is the soul only that has ideas, so it is the soul only that is pleased or displeased with its ideas. As it is the soul only that thinks, so it is the soul only that loves or hates, rejoices or is grieved at what it thinks of. (98)

Nothing in the materiality of the body is “essential” to the affections, Edwards argues. In fact, “an unbodied spirit may be as capable of love and hatred, joy or sorrow, hope or fear, or other affections, as one that is united to a body” (98). Edwards argues here that the affections are available to disembodied souls, a point that is so foreign to contemporary affect theory as to be jarring to read in the context of current scholarship. As historian of ideas Ruth Leys notes in her exceedingly clarifying 2011 article, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” the affective turn has been, in part, “motivated by the view that the body in its lived materiality has been neglected in the humanities and social sciences” (441). Much of the best work in the field focuses on the body to describe affect in physical, material terms. But what of the soul, and its immateriality? For Edwards, the body is certainly not the locus of concern. And in the Christian theological imagination, it follows that the soul would continue to feel after it is separated from the body in death. This is essentially the opposite of what we see in affect theory as it is established in the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Brian Massumi.

I will cite here a final index of the lack of interest in religion by affect theory. In recent years, while religious studies scholars have started to draw upon theories of affect and emotion developed in the fields of literary and cultural criticism to better understand the affective dimension of their object of study, no reciprocal movement has been seen. It is therefore

instructive to consider what is to my knowledge the first full-length work of religious studies scholarship of this kind, Donovan Schaefer's *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (2015), as a foundationally interdisciplinary text, one that will surely be consulted by scholars working on religious emotion henceforth, regardless of their primary specialization. In Schaefer, we see a perfect example of how the preoccupation with the body in affect theory transfers to the study of religion. As he explains, religion can be best understood as pre-cognitive. He writes, "religion, like other forms of power, feels before it thinks, believes, or speaks" (8). If Schaefer had based his inquiry on theological accounts of the emotions, I do not think that it would be possible for him to have arrived at this conclusion. But, in turning to contemporary affect theory as it is currently practiced, he could have arrived at no other conclusion. My concern is that, in his deftly accurate rearticulation of affect theory for the field of religious studies, Schaefer produces a definition of religion that would be unrecognizable to anyone other than an affect theorist. To view religion as only a form of inarticulate power, containing it within the physical body that it so often and so insistently claims to transcend, is to do a disservice to its complexity.

After all, what is religion? Is it something that happens prior to belief? Sociologist Hans Joas, in his book *Faith as an Option* (2014), writes, "there is no such thing as religion as such. No uniform value judgment is possible about the diverse range of phenomena covered by the term. There are only specific religions, and even these can scarcely be understood as timeless entities; they are alive in the various historically situated convictions and actions of individual believers and religious communities" (6). This seems right to me. Whether we conceive of religion as the province of an individual interior life, or, and perhaps also, as a function of interpersonal sociality, questions of affect are central to any investigation into its meaning. But so, too, are intellectual questions. In studying representations of religious feeling in literary texts,

I am cautious to avoid “reducing to sentiment or affect the subjectivity upon which belief is formed,” an error against which Viswanathan warns in her incisive and highly personal 1998 book, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (xvi). In other words, heeding also the admonition of literary critic Jenny Franchot, I attempt “to engage intensively with the religious questions of the topic at hand *as religious questions*” (839).⁶ Such an approach is highly out of the ordinary. Medievalist Barbara Newman registers this when she writes, “against the grain of much contemporary writing, I persist in the belief that religious texts bear witness to religious experience.” She continues, “I must therefore oppose all forms of the currently fashionable constructivism that would reduce the private self to a blank page on which society inscribes its endless fascination with power” (16). I follow Viswanathan, Franchot, and Newman on a shared path. But once the methodological decision has been made to take religious questions on their own terms, other questions will arise that pertain to each specific area of study. There are, to my mind, four further issues that, as an Americanist, I am beholden to consider.

First, it is necessary to acknowledge the main approaches others have taken in the study of religion and American literature. Recent articles by Jordan Alexander Stein and Lawrence Buell outline these approaches clearly, condensing the enormous amount of research in this area. From an early Americanist perspective, Stein writes, there are four approaches consistently in use: religion as a social framework, as a rhetorical construction, as part and parcel with ideology, and as a category of experience. In some of the chapters to follow, I do emphasize the sociality of religious practice, and in many of them, I acknowledge the ideological force of doctrines as, in Stein’s words, “normative system[s].” But I am far more interested in the ways in which individuals are represented—meaning, ultimately, that I study religion as a category of experience, what Stein calls “the intersection of subjectivity and practice” (14). Buell considers

two approaches to religion and literature in American studies, placing them in direct opposition to one another in an attempt to ascertain which may become dominant in the coming years. Is it “more likely to take the form of some sort of reinvigorated history of ideas approach,” or, rather, “a cultural history approach?” he wonders. In other words, is religion “likely to be conceived in the future by literary studies more at the level of life-and-text informing beliefs that imbue discursive forms or as a set of cultural practices?” (52). My project has closest affinity with the former, though, in many of the chapters, it would be impossible to sharply divide cultural practices—for example, in the black church—from the history of ideas and experience out of which they are born.

Secondly, it is incumbent upon all of us who write after sociologist Robert Bellah’s groundbreaking 1967 article, “Civil Religion in America,” in which he first adapts Rousseau’s concept to the study of culture in the United States, to calibrate our work in relation to it. He explains, “there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America” (168). Continuing, he writes, “this public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling the American civil religion” (171). I do not take civil religion up directly in my dissertation, but I do pose the question for future work in affect and religion by Americanists: how might Bellah’s arguments, and the discussion of nationalism that his work enables, be taken up by literary critics without reducing the set of beliefs he describes to an affective dimension of blind ideology? The possibility that American civil religion, which Bellah insists is not one and the same with Christianity, may have its own accounts of the emotions, is open for consideration.

Thirdly, there is a question of scope. My inquiry here is strictly limited to traditions of Christian belief and practice, though I do understand that the notion of “feelings of faith” would

become more expansive, complex, and vital when considered in relation to the diversity of a religiously pluralistic society. In limiting my study in this way, I discuss only one small part of a much larger concern. In her study of American literature and religion, *Culture and Redemption* (2007), Tracy Fessenden writes on the common thought process by which “‘Christian’ come[s] to stand in for the ‘religious’ to the exclusion of non-Christian ways of being religious” (4). I do use the term “religious” to describe Christian belief and practice, at times without specifying that I am speaking solely of this tradition. Readers may find it helpful, in light of Fessenden’s excellent and well-taken point, to remember that I am always referring only to Christianity in this project, not to obscure other ways of being religious, or exclude them from the larger discussion, but rather to maintain a focus on the ways of being religious that are presented by many denominations and sects within one major religion—and that I do so for the sake of coherence. Even within the diversity of Christian thought, denominational representation here is incomplete; missing, for example, are considerations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, a group whose traditions are rooted directly in American territory and culture. And, although over a third of the project is devoted to the black church, I do not investigate any of the many other instances of ethnic faith community in American religion.

And finally, to the point of the multiple traditions of belief and practice that I take up within Christianity, it seems to me that a consideration of concordance is appropriate. If the content of belief matters to religious feeling; if the social dimension of worship matters to its affective power; if scriptural codes of conduct are fulfilled even in part by the emotions, then it is of great importance that we draw upon sources for our theoretical claims that resonate with our objects of study. In affirming this, I turn predominantly to theological accounts of the emotions that specifically align in some way with the writer who produced these texts, the individuals

represented within them—or, as is often the case, both, if they are one and the same. To take only one example, in my chapter on Flannery O’Connor, I look to the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, whose *Summa Theologica* is canonical in the Catholic church. That we know that O’Connor read, respected, and was directly influenced by Aquinas strengthens the concordance. Whenever possible, I take this approach in my selection of theological source texts. The one area in which I do not attempt concordance is in the case of varying usage of Biblical translations. I consistently quote from the New Revised Standard Version, simply to have at hand a base point of commonality among the chapters.

*

This dissertation is divided into nine short chapters collected under three sections. Each set of three chapters takes up a different debate in affect theory, investigating what Christian theology, broadly, with denominational specificity cued to the primary text under consideration, offers to these debates. In Christian religious thought, these three topics are perennially addressed: the relationship between affect and cognition, the social dimension of the emotions, and the role of feeling in morality and ethics. Theological accounts of the emotions significantly diverge from contemporary affect theory on the questions that drive the three major, ongoing debates in the field. I will elaborate on these topics in brief introductions to each section.

In close readings of American literary texts, I have found feelings of faith—from hope to sorrow to love—represented, interrogated, and expressed, and it is my contention that many of the most affectively dense passages in the canon cannot be fully understood without recourse to theological accounts of the emotions. I claim that this holds across periods of literary history as well as across the categories of identity through which we often attend to difference: race, class, gender and sexuality. The project is non-chronological, and it does not fit neatly into a literary

historical period. The genres of the primary texts under consideration range from life-writing to fiction; all are prose. The writers I discuss in the following chapters represent the emotions as vital to religious belief and practice. And they reject the false choices between religion and culture, the sacred and the secular. Slave narratives by Solomon Northup and Harriet Jacobs draw upon religious and secular frames, as does James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. And from the Puritan captive Mary Rowlandson's desire for both survival and salvation to the insistence, in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*, on cherishing the world even as one prepares to depart from it, many American literary texts persistently defy the narrative of secularization.

In the first section, I discuss the relationship between thought and feeling. In Christian theology, drawn from both Protestant and Catholic traditions, there is what I call an *orthodoxy of feeling*. This term, which I use to indicate shared beliefs about the meaning and mechanisms of the emotions across diverse theological traditions, inherently accepts the idea of authority; we can expect from the outset that religious thought will be more prescriptive than observational about the emotions, more interested in their regulation and control, and less in their emancipatory potentialities. The key finding of this section is that, while much of contemporary affect theory takes the view that affect and cognition are separate systems, the orthodoxy of feeling understands them to be deeply interconnected.

I find in Puritan, Catholic, and black church theology various arguments that maintain that the intellect cannot be separated from the emotions. But the religious writings of the Puritan leadership, the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas, and the sermons of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., while deeply informative on Christian doctrine, do not account for gendered, lived experience. To partially correct for the absence of women's voices in the orthodoxy of feeling, I turn to female-authored texts that focus on the interiority of belief and feeling as it is

experienced in women's lives. In my chapters on conviction in the captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson, devotion in the prayer journal and fiction of Flannery O'Connor, and hope in the short fiction of Gloria Naylor, I discuss the interplay of religious belief and the emotions.

In the second section, I discuss the sociality of the emotions in a study of *affective communion* in the black church. In overlooking religion, affect theory has inadvertently also overlooked the racial dimension to religious belief and practice, exemplified in American literature and culture in the black church. From the history of the segregation of Christianity in the United States to the resources of faith made available to believers in the face of oppression, racial difference—and racial violence—are important to the study of American religion. I argue that some of those resources are defined by a sociality of emotion that cannot be found outside of faith communities. The key finding of this section is that specific emotions have different meanings in a secular framework than they do in a religious one; furthermore, in some instances, entirely different feelings are available depending upon the framework in use. Drawing upon black theology, primarily by James Cone, I read in the slave narrative genre through the Harlem Renaissance and into contemporary scholarship in black studies an affective arc that is as deeply religious as it is secular.

All three chapters are informed by Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies, which argues that the emotions are better understood as circulating in a social field than as originating within individuals before being outwardly expressed, as they are often viewed. Rather than speculating on the interior lives of black men and women whose thoughts and feelings are oppressed in slavery and effaced in the slave narrative, I show instead that affective economies of sorrow and joy are established in this genre of black writing. This means that although these texts cannot be said to express sorrow and joy, the narratives of Solomon Northup and Harriet

Jacobs, for example, put these feelings into textual circulation. Sorrow and joy are then taken up and put into textual circulation in subsequent writings by other authors, among them W.E.B. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, Saidiya Hartman, and Eddie Glaude, Jr. The section concludes with a chapter on James Baldwin's *Go Tell It On the Mountain*, in which I discuss how the affective economies of sorrow and joy converge in the Christian account of deliverance.

The third section focuses on one influential tradition in American religious thought in a discussion of *Calvinist ethics, morals, and emotion* in the American novel. The ideals of Christian ethics can be summarized in the commandments to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” and to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Each chapter takes its basic structure from this commandment, first looking at a fictional character in a given novel in relation to God, and then in relation to others. The arguments throughout are informed by the most robust treatise on the emotions in American theology, Jonathan Edwards's *Religious Affections*. The key finding of this section is that, while debates in contemporary affect theory on the value of the emotions to ethics tend to be anticipatory in their as yet unfulfilled claims regarding the transformative potential of affect for interpersonal conduct, the prescriptive nature of religious doctrine offers clarity in its willingness to regulate what it views as right and wrong.

The chapters in this section narrate the three main plot points of the Christian story: the prideful fall of man, the redemption offered through love in Christ's resurrection, and the reconciliation of all things to God through grace and forgiveness. In readings of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851), Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* (2004), I discuss the affective dimension of each of Christianity's

central truth-claims. First, that in the original sin of Adam, man becomes inherently depraved; second, that the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ instills in him the authority to mandate brotherly love between all men; and lastly, that through a life of sincere faith and practice, man will be forgiven through divine grace. In Melville's Ahab, prideful anger is the defiant affect that motivates destructive action, with terrible consequences for all involved. In Twain's Huck Finn, we find the racialized limits of brotherly love in white subjectivity. And in the life of Robinson's John Ames, the cost of grace is counted in sacrifice and forgiveness.

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Chapters One, Two, and Three describe the relationship between the intellect and the emotions as it is understood in Christian theological traditions. In Chapter One, I focus on scenes of reading as important representations of religious conviction in *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. I argue that Rowlandson's narrative shaped what Perry Miller famously termed "the New England mind" alongside her male Puritan counterparts, who wrote primarily in the forms of theological treatise and sermon. What these theologians describe in argument, Rowlandson lives out in experience. At the end of her narrative, Rowlandson is "restored" to her family and community. But the terms of her survival are set in her ability to read the Bible restoratively, an act of self-discipline in which she repeatedly engages, and in which she finds a solace that takes the form of feeling and of thought.

In Chapter Two, I turn to the devotional writing of Flannery O'Connor, published in 2013 under the title *A Prayer Journal*. The journal was well-received by reviewers when it appeared—O'Connor's body of work is tragically short—but, to date, its implications for readings of her fiction have not been discussed. In this chapter, I read the journal as its own text, imbued with a dense relationship between religious thought and feeling. I then consider the ways in which the

journal functions as a site of contemplation in service of her fiction, with particular attention to her second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960). The prayers, written into a small, private notebook while O'Connor was a student at the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1946-1947, attest to their author's Catholic convictions. They also record the ways in which those beliefs were substantiated by feeling. In an early entry, O'Connor writes, "intellectually, I assent: let us adore God. But can we do that without feeling? To feel, we must know" (8). Her understanding of thought and feeling as related derives from the canonical Catholic theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, whose writings on the feelings produced by the contemplation of God provide a framework for the chapter.

The third chapter, and the final in this section, begins a series of chapters focused on the black church. While the entire second section of *Feelings of Faith* describes the social dimension of affect in the faith traditions that constitute the black church and its theology, this chapter takes up the collaboration of intellectual and affective commitments in the sermons of Martin Luther King, Jr. The bringing together of thought and feeling, for King, would always, ideally, result in action. The defining concept of King's religious thought, as a public theologian, is hope. To describe hope in his sermons, and to instill it in his audiences, King often compares it to what he calls "easy optimism" and "futile despair." He argues against each of these, on philosophical principle, as well as with regard to their efficacy as political strategies. King finds in Christian hope the alliance of thought and feeling that is, to his mind, both real and effective. But hope—political, theological—is extinguished in King's assassination, a world-defining event for so many of his contemporaries. One of them was Gloria Naylor, who examines the limits of hope in black women's lives in *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982). In scenes of unanswered appeals, Naylor portrays the value of hope even in the face of oppression. But she also marks the limit

point of that value. The brutality of sexual assault, its homophobic alibi, and its perpetrators' refusal to answer their victim's appeal with any measure of mercy is that limit. When the women begin to hope again—it is the note on which *The Women of Brewster Place* concludes—it is in the context of the sobering remembrance of the ruination of one woman's body, mind, and future.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six discuss the social dimension of emotion. In Chapter Four, I trace an affective economy of sorrow through three distinct generations of writers, beginning with the slave narratives of Solomon Northup and Harriet Jacobs. I interpret the figures of black slaves, separated by sale and murder, as objects of sorrow that circulate in a textual economy that is also laden with emotion. These figures accrue force in the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, who secularizes what had previously been an affective economy framed by both secular and religious concerns. Du Bois's interpretation of Negro Spirituals as secularized "sorrow songs" remains the dominant point of reference in the field, both affectively and intellectually. Taken together, these two sites of textual production form two important inheritances in the work of contemporary literary critic Saidiya Hartman.

Chapter Five is similarly structured, and also begins with readings of Northup and Jacobs. However, in this chapter, I recover a full range of feelings evident in black life even contemporaneously to slavery, including what are often labelled "positive" emotions. I distinguish between happiness and joy, arguing that the former can be best understood within a secular frame, while the latter is only present in moments of transcendence, or when the transcendent is metaphorically operative. This distinction is based on my readings of only two slave narratives, and it is certainly possible that a more extensive study of the genre would trouble it. But in the Harlem Renaissance era writings of Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon

Johnson, and Alain Locke, the positive emotions are advocated as part of black life. All three of these writers contradict Du Bois's secularizing efforts, emphasizing instead the affective diversity of black church traditions. Finally, I situate Eddie Glaude, Jr., in contemporary black studies, as the inheritor of this lesser-known affective economy of joy.

The sixth and final chapter in this section explores deliverance as a model of racial affect within the black church, specifically, black Pentecostalism as it is represented in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. In this chapter, I move between religious and secular discourses at work in the novel to interpret the affective qualities of black Christian traditions in a reading of "The Threshing-Floor," the culmination of the book and the conversion of its protagonist, fourteen-year-old John Grimes. My arguments in this chapter are also in a sense culminating, in that they take up sorrow and joy as the constituent parts of the religious concept of deliverance. In his detailed portrayal of John's conversion, Baldwin narrates a movement from sorrow to joy that both memorializes black suffering and celebrates black survival. Deliverance consecrates the experience of black life in the new world, making meaning out of oppression and looking toward a promised liberation. Many critics have approached the topic of Baldwin's personal convictions. Rather than attempt to locate Baldwin in relationship to black Christianity, which he both admired and critiqued, I claim that its affectively complex capacity for survival is the central aspect that Baldwin was unwilling to relinquish, even long after he left the church.

Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine turn to Jonathan Edwards's *Religious Affections* to demonstrate the ways in which morals and ethics, and therefore conduct, are informed by feeling in American Calvinism. In Chapter Seven, I begin with an overview of the doctrine of original sin, which is a fundamental theological argument in most Christian traditions. In this narrative, the first sin of man was pride, a destructive force that has been inherited by every subsequent

generation. Pride is also the error upon which the plot of Melville's *Moby-Dick* turns; Ahab, captain of the ill-fated ship, defies God and views himself as superior to others. Interpretations of pride in the novel have consistently looked to the chapter in which, while still on Nantucket prior to the journey, Ishmael listens to Father Mapple preach a sermon on the Biblical book of Jonah. Much has been written on the similarities between Ahab and this minor prophet who defies God and is swallowed by a whale. But a full half of the Biblical source text is elided in the novel. In retrieving it, I find that these two figures are similar in their prideful defiance of God, but, more than this, that they share in its dimension of feeling, which is anger. To better understand prideful anger, and the hard-heartedness through which it is often expressed, I turn to Edwards.

In Chapter Eight, I take up the ethical ideal of Christianity, which is to love God while also loving one's neighbor, or, in the language of the American Calvinist tradition, "loving brotherly." Edwards insists upon brotherly love as a requirement of social life among Christians, arguing that when one loves God, one will correspondingly develop love for others. Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* complicates Edwards's seamless formulation; in white slaveholding society, the dual commandment to love God and others is thrown into an unresolvable contradiction when the "other" is black. I argue that this contradiction is the point of origin for Huck's famous crises of conscience in relation to the escaped slave Jim. Contrary to one of the most influential articles on the novel, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn" (1974), by Jonathan Bennett, I argue that what Huck feels for Jim on the raft is not sympathy, but rather an illicit brotherly love. It is a feeling that does not run deep; on their return to white society—and, with this return, Jim's reenslavement—Huck easily discards his love for Jim. In these final chapters of the novel, what Toni Morrison calls Jim's "limitless store of love" becomes the affective resource from which white feelings are derived (*Playing* 56). As Huck and Tom

Sawyer pursue their adventures at Jim's expense, they and the other white characters also exploit Jim's affective capacities to feel a range of emotions that would be otherwise unavailable to them.

The ninth and final chapter of *Feelings of Faith* describes how sin and virtue are resolved in Christian theology through the concept of forgiveness. In Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead*, the Congregationalist minister John Ames writes a letter to his son in the weeks preceding his death. The story told in the letter is a retrospective on a Christian life, and the costs of suffering and trial that are its characteristic aspects. In *Religious Affections*, Edwards outlines the contours of what he calls a "holy life," a life of a Christian "saint." In this chapter, I take up Edwards's language as a religious vocabulary to better understand Ames, who is depicted as a saint, an identification that he would never claim for himself. In the finely detailed representation of Ames's interior life, Robinson articulates the ways in which Christian forgiveness mobilizes feeling.

In the pages to follow I am centrally concerned with feelings of faith. However, many of my arguments describe feeling and thought as mutually informing. Thus in my afterword I briefly consider what it might mean to "think in religious terms" in a postsecular age.

Section One Introduction: The Christian Orthodoxy of Feeling

Philosopher Charles Taylor's proposition in *A Secular Age* (2007) that we reside within what he calls conditions of belief, or "the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual, or religious experience and search take place," serves for him as a conceptual counterweight to the dominant narrative of secularization. Rather than tracing the decline of religion as a social formation, Taylor investigates its persistence at the level of the individual subject in history, a project to which literary studies has much to contribute. In these first three chapters, I am interested in the ways in which religious belief is pursued, maintained, strengthened, and protected within the contexts of understanding in which it originates and develops. I focus on conviction, devotion, and hope as terms through which to trace out commitments to religious belief that are both deeply felt and considered. This approach requires thick description of relevant contexts, and reference to the historical and material conditions in which genres and texts are produced. It also, I will argue, demands an attention to the ways in which "understanding," to use Taylor's term, is informed by feeling.

To describe the relationship between the intellect and the emotions as an intimate one is to cite the most contentious debate in contemporary affect theory. If the terminology were stable—it is not—it might begin to provide resolution, in that affects, understood strictly as physical, non-cognitive responses, might be productively distinguished from emotions, feelings, and moods. But literary critic Charles Altieri is correct to note that the question is a central one regardless; he writes that those who intervene in the field must eventually attempt to answer for "how our capacities for rationality can be correlated with our affective intensities" (153). In her study of American cultural politics and poetics of the emotions, Kathleen Woodward upholds the value of thought and feeling at once; she writes of psychological emotions that have a "cognitive

edge” (26). Ann Cvetkovich is similarly unwilling to yield to a divisive framing of affect; her cultural criticism engages the physical and cognitive dimensions of affective community. However, the analytical balance between thought and feeling these two scholars achieve is not representative of the field. The dominant view, articulated by Brian Massumi, Lauren Berlant, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, is that affects and cognition are separate systems and are not mutually informed.⁷ Ruth Leys notes that the “tendency to separate affect from meaning” characterizes the most influential scholars working in the field (440). For theorists like Massumi, she writes, “affect is a matter of autonomic responses that are held to occur below the threshold of consciousness and cognition and to be rooted in the body,” making it impossible, using this approach, for “reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings to play the role in action and behavior usually accorded to them” (443). On the other extreme, cognitivist perspectives on the emotions hold that feelings constitute a form of evaluative knowledge. Philosophers Robert Solomon and Martha Nussbaum have written the most comprehensive and persuasive accounts of this approach. Solomon insists that “emotions are judgments, not blind or irrational forces that victimize us” (15). And Nussbaum likewise argues that emotions are “intelligent responses to the perception of value,” and that they are “suffused with intelligence and discernment”—they “contain within themselves an awareness of value” (1).

In the three chapters to follow, my arguments align broadly with the perspective that understands feeling, and the wide range of terms it evokes, to be deeply implicated in thought. But I arrive at this approach by drawing upon theological sources across Christian traditions rarely consulted by scholars working in literary and cultural studies today.⁸ In short, the view advanced across denominational differences in Christian theology is that the intellect should both govern and be informed by the emotions. In many faith traditions represented in this dissertation,

the certainty of belief is assured with finality through an affective report. What I am calling the orthodoxy of feeling thus accounts for cognition and emotion together as crucial and interdependent dimensions of religious belief and practice.

This section of *Feelings of Faith* establishes connections between Christian theological foundation texts and three of the many faith traditions represented in American literature. Scholars working in the colonial period situate the Puritans as inheritors of St. Augustine; the Catholic Church derives much of its distinctive thought after the Protestant Reformation from St. Thomas Aquinas; and the black church in the United States, described by Raphael Warnock as being an “invisible institution” for much of its history, engenders black theology, a tradition most influentially originated by Martin Luther King, Jr. (10). Aquinas, Augustine, and King provide the theological grounding for my inquiry into feelings of faith, but the extent to which classical theology is gendered male produces unacceptable oversights. The American writers I consider in conjunction with these theologians are women for this reason; their life writing and fiction elaborate and concretely test the affective dimensions of affliction, doubt, and discrimination. In the captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson, the prayer journal of Flannery O’Connor, and the short fiction of Gloria Naylor, I locate contributions that are as valid and crucial as theology is to the orthodoxy of feeling. A small but telling example of the stakes of difference in this matter is the remark by Aquinas that “in simple souls and women devotion abounds by repressing pride” (1536). O’Connor’s devotional writing would certainly be less interesting if Aquinas had been accurate on this point.

In the first chapter, I will discuss conviction in *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682). Perry Miller’s *The New England Mind* (1939) was the first study to comprehensively account for the influences that shaped Rowlandson’s culture;

in it, he argues that Augustine “exerted the greatest single influence upon Puritan thought next to that of the Bible itself,” and describes the theology of the movement as “an effort to externalize and systematize [the] subjective mood” of piety exemplified by Augustine’s *Confessions* (4, 5). The precondition of piety is conviction, or the certainty of belief, which for the Puritans was intellectually and emotionally inflected.⁹ In Rowlandson’s experience of affliction, religious conviction is both tested and affirmed; at the center of this spiritual dynamic is the Biblical text. Rowlandson performs what I will call restorative reading, a term that is indebted to Michael Warner’s work on varieties of uncritical reading and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s reflections on paranoid and reparative reading. When Rowlandson reads the Bible, she thinks with her heart.

To be pious is to be devout; it is therefore not surprising that the most often cited devotional texts in the American canon were written by a Puritan. The preparatory meditations of Edward Taylor, a minister and contemporary of Rowlandson, are addressed to God in prayer. In a poem from 1686, he writes, “Thou art my king: let me not be thy shame. / Thy Law my Rule: my Life thy Life in mee” (Patterson 152). This couplet is composed in the posture of Augustinian piety, compressed in an often recited opening line of the *Confessions*, “our heart is restless until it rests in you” (3). In my second chapter, I will turn to the devotional practices of a different tradition, informed by Aquinas, and enacted in the postmodern era. Flannery O’Connor’s posthumously published *A Prayer Journal* (2013) contributes much to our understanding of the affective dimensions of faith and doubt under the conditions of belief prevailing in secularity. It also provides a point of reference for a reading of the ways in which her religious contemplations are taken up, and represented, in her fiction. Aquinas argues that acts of devotion produce three affective responses in the believer; first, love and joy in the worship of God, and secondarily, sorrow in the knowledge of her own sins and limitations. This

chapter will trace these claims in O'Connor's work with reference to the pressure of secularization.

Asked in May of 1964 for her thoughts on her contemporary and fellow Southerner Martin Luther King, Jr., O'Connor equivocated. "I don't think [he] is the age's great saint but he's at least doing what he can do and has to do," she replied (*Letters* 580).¹⁰ Her failure to recognize King's ministry as exceptional sits uneasily alongside her fundamentally accurate assessment of its purpose: to *do* what was necessary to end racial segregation in the United States. James Cone, whose writings have defined black theology for half a century, argues that King was a "theologian of action." By this, he means that King's religious thinking was shaped in and through political engagement; the arguments he advanced were dynamic and responsive to his historical moment ("Theology" 21). In the third and final chapter in this section, I discuss the ways in which political strategy and Christian theology coincide for King in the concept of hope. In his sermons and speeches, he insists upon hope as an affectively and intellectually invested resource for black survival and resistance. Gloria Naylor, who was eighteen years old when King was assassinated, understood his death as the end of hope for systemic and lasting change in the United States (Bonetti 50). But her first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), portrays the strategic value of hope in the lived experience of black women. In the details of the daily lives of her characters, Naylor infuses a spiritual ethic of survival that both answers racial discrimination and fully acknowledges its destructive power.

Finally, these three chapters can be read as preliminary engagements with Christian theology as an intellectual—and emotional—tradition worthy of inclusion as a significant point of reference for affect theory. What I call the orthodoxy of feeling offers accounts of the regulation, interpretation, and practical application of the emotions that are otherwise

inaccessible. Likewise, an attention to women's literary writing helps us to count the cost of contributions lost to this orthodoxy through its own often exclusionary historical practices.

Chapter One

The Solace of Belief: Restorative Reading in Mary Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative

Every account of early American literature must contend with the interpretive frameworks established by Perry Miller, whose expansive scholarship includes most notably *The New England Mind* (1939) and *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956), both of which explicitly chronicle Puritanism and its declension in a narrative of secularization. Americanist Joanna Brooks calls Miller “our Matthew Arnold,” not only because he works from the ascendancy of the secular as a first principle, but also in that he understands literature to be the site of transition: for Miller, as for Arnold before him, the literary replaces the religious in secular culture (426). But he fully engages the religious convictions that gave shape and meaning to Puritan life. In *The New England Mind*, he describes the fundamental characteristic of Puritanism as “Augustinian piety,” a totalizing desire to transcend the self, acquire knowledge of God, and be comforted in affliction (8).

Miller argues that the “first three generations in New England paid almost unbroken allegiance to a unified body of thought” indebted to Augustine, and cites theologians William Perkins, William Ames, and John Preston as the three most influential figures in the development of that perspective; he notes Richard Baxter, another prominent Puritan thinker, as well (vii).¹¹ In their collective work, it is possible to gather, as Miller did in his study of the life of the mind, a sense of the Puritan understanding of the heart. In our contemporary usage, this is to say that the Puritans discussed quite extensively the affects or emotions, though the terms they use are the affections or passions.¹² But to draw upon theology alone is to overlook *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), which also decisively shaped these first generations of New England settlers.¹³ In Rowlandson, the inheritance of Augustine and the

Puritan contribution to the orthodoxy of feeling are re-articulated in a woman's lived experience. She situates that experience as visceral, intellectual, and emotional when she writes, "my heart was even overwhelmed with the thoughts of my condition" (329).

To attain religious conversion and sustain religious conviction were the two heights of Puritan life, and all of the faculties and activities of the individual were bent toward these ends. Here, I will focus on the role of the affections, which were taken to require constant supervision by the intellect and will, and reading practices, through which instruction and comfort were thought to be imparted by God. As Richard Slotkin and others have documented, "the Puritans were preeminently 'the people of the Book.' Their doctrines required literacy so that the individual could understand the word of God appearing in Scripture" (39). The archives of Puritan writing, however, testify to the acquisition of understanding as only one aspect of textual engagement. The practice of self-examination was also privileged, as was what I will call restorative reading, a method in which sacred texts are read for affective assurances of previously established convictions.

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Though positioned as subordinate in a hierarchy of human capacities, the affections in Puritan theology are in relationship with cognition, not separate from it. Less esteemed than reason, they are nevertheless considered indispensable to conversion and to the shoring up of conviction. One way this conclusion can be derived is through attention to the Puritan sermon. While the archives attest to a wide range of genres active in Puritan culture, the sermon is among the most important formal categories, because it enacts the hermeneutics of a religious-historical perspective as well as the main points of orthodoxy. Admittedly, the tightly structured sermon form is an imperfect starting point for the study of a narrative culled from the disorder of war.

Rowlandson's account intently works toward an organized coherence, even as the idealized process of conclusive thought supported by reinforcing feeling is disrupted in her affliction. Nevertheless, Eugene White's 1972 study of emotional appeals from the colonial pulpit provides a concise overview of the theological evaluation of affect. He writes, "the Puritans distrusted the emotions. Even though they highly respected and valued them, the emotions were to be kept harnessed and under the supervision of the higher faculties, the understanding and will" (12). The image and act of harnessing indicate that the Puritans viewed the emotions as having volition, and that their trajectories would be difficult to anticipate; they understood the emotions to be, in a word, unreliable. The cautious control, which in turn belies an assessment of threat, meant that the insights available in and through affective experience would need to be directed by theology toward theology. White finds that sermons were designed to appeal first to reason, and only secondarily to the emotions or affections, which were "restricted essentially to a reinforcing function. Furthermore, in themselves, they carried no power to convince. Properly, they served to intensify previously established conviction" (16). My focus in this chapter will be on this intensification, as Rowlandson's narrative is preoccupied with spiritual sustenance rather than seeking. The Puritan theologians to whom I now turn acknowledge the complexity of the affections in both of these contexts even as they work to contain their potentialities.

My readings of the four theologians mentioned by Perry Miller—Ames, Baxter, Perkins, and Preston—bear out the clear hierarchy of intellect and emotion outlined by White. The affections are understood to require oversight. But, as White notes, the Puritans valued the affections. What were the parameters of that value? For all of these thinkers, the love and adoration of God is paramount. Ames writes that the cultivation of feeling in the faithful should be focused on "a primary and intimate affection toward Christ," which "comes only by faith"

(176). Baxter argues that love is “the master passion of the soul, because it hath the chiefest object,” namely, the goodness associated with the divine (261). Perkins holds that the “first and great commandment” is “that we love God with our mind, memory, affections, and all our strength” (92). For Perkins, to apply the fullness of the self to the worship of God is to love God, and the mind receives first mention in the list of capacities out of which love is called. Preston’s commentary is perhaps the most clear in its tripartite summary and its emphasis on what is at stake: “Men are as they love. God judges us by our affections. We are judged by what we love” (36). Here, individuals are accountable for their feelings, a logic that suggests dense interactivity between cognition and emotion. Furthermore, the affections are freighted with the content of belief; in fulfilling the commandment to love God, the Puritan congregant also assents to the existence, in particular form, of the transcendent.¹⁴

Ames describes thought and feeling as inseparable in his use of a metaphor of the body as a closed system reliant upon its various parts. He notes that effective sermons communicate the message of the scriptures forcefully, presenting “the word of the Lord [as] a two-edged sword, piercing to the inward thoughts and affections and going through to the joining of bones and marrow” (194). Ames imagines the interior life of the worshipping Puritan as based upon the strength of structured reason and alive in the vital marrow of the affections. Both physical elements are necessary for life, as are both capacities for authentic faith. Ames, more than any other Puritan theologian except for Baxter, sets out in an order the parts of faith, which are sequential and also recurrent. He lists first the “knowledge of what God testifies to” and then “a pious affection toward God.” These primary elements of Puritan religious life are two ways of knowing; the individual is to apprehend the sacred with mind and heart. That an intellectual understanding of the creed is the first phase of conversion justifies itself by its own logic:

intimacy follows familiarity. All parts of the self are disciplined to turn toward God, and conviction is substantiated reiteratively by reading the testimony of the Bible, and cultivating affection for its presumed source.¹⁵

For Ames, as for the other theologians considered here, reason and the will are tasked with disciplining the affections. Explicit in these arguments is the notion that the affections are inherently wayward, and that there are right and wrong ways to feel. Most concerning among the observations of these writers is that people fail, in the absence of concerted effort, to direct their feelings toward God. For Perkins, the affections are suspect from the start, because “every part of man is corrupted with sin,” and the capacity for feeling is not an exception (28). That the whole of the interior life of man was damaged in the Edenic fall is taken for granted in Puritan theology, but Perkins maintains that the affections are particularly dangerous. While the mind is apt to be distracted from worship, the passions are always truant, and require surveillance. Thus, “the remnant of God’s image in the conscience is an observing and watchful power, like the eye of a keeper, reserved in man partly to reprove, partly to repress the unbridled course of his affections.” He worries about “the malicious affections lurking in the heart”; they must be found, tracked, controlled (57). Preston maintains the same perspective, albeit in a milder tone, stating that believers must “subdue [their] lusts and rebellious affections” (108). Baxter is the least punitive of these writers. He focuses on the redemptive potentialities of the passions, though certainly not to the exclusion of their vulnerabilities, when he argues that they “are not sinful in themselves, for God hath given them to us for his service: and there is none of them but may be sanctified and used for him” (256). He specifies which applications of the affections are sinful.¹⁶ When passions “have right objects” and are “guided by reason,” they are good, he advises (256).

This is very much in keeping with Augustine—it is Baxter who most clearly resembles him—who stages an elaborate defense of the affections, as long as they “are exercised in a becoming way” and “follow the guidance of right reason” (*City* 454). Augustine often casts affective experience in moralistic terms. There are no neutral territories; every feeling in its context has significance and stakes.¹⁷ To take one example of the general argument, he writes, “we must live a good life in order to attain to a blessed life,—a good life has all these affections right, a bad life has them wrong” (455). Underscoring the point, he claims a place for the emotions on the cross, in the exemplary life of Christ. He writes, “as there was in Him a true human body and a true human soul, so was there also a true human emotion” (454). For Augustine, then, an ascetic religious life is not possible, because to disavow the emotions would be to fail to follow the model set out by Christ in its fullness. But he notes a different error, which is the failure, or refusal, to control the affections. The unrepentant are marked by lives lived “not according to God, but according to man,” and they can be observed to be “shaken with those wicked emotions as by diseases and disturbances” (456). The mastery of emotion, with the preservation of its intensity for use in worship, is the affective foundation of Augustinian piety.¹⁸

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Amid the overture to Rowlandson’s captivity, she watches as her sister is killed in the attack on Lancaster.¹⁹ Memorializing her, she writes, “in her younger years she lay under much trouble upon Spiritual accounts, till it pleased God to make that precious Scripture take hold of her Heart” (324). Thus the action of the narrative is interrupted by a portrayal of the ideal Puritan affective process. Rowlandson’s sister’s conversion is based first in the mind, to which the affections are subordinated in a reinforcing role. Implied are the years of imbued Biblical precepts; she had certainly acquired knowledge of God insofar as her daily life had been

constituted by the various pedagogies of the church and family. We can infer that the Scripture had already taken hold of her mind; it is the “heart” that is at issue. Under much trouble, that is, not as yet in possession of the fullness of belief, she occupies a space between knowing and not knowing. It is only when she is converted in her affections, a shift attributed to the intervention of God, that her spiritual burden is lifted. It is an arrival at certainty, it seems, that is permanent. Rowlandson writes, “more than twenty years after I have heard her tell, how sweet and comfortable that Place was to her” (324). Nowhere does the narrative so strongly recall Augustine’s *Confessions* as in this passage; it is identical in structure to his phrase, “our heart is restless until it rests in you” (3). If the perfection of faith is articulated in this portrayal of unruly affections quelled in the presence of God, then its opposite is Rowlandson’s representation of indigenous affect.

The interpretive violence of Rowlandson’s portrayal of her captors is often noted by critics as a dehumanizing colonial encounter with the other; indeed, it is. But it is more than this, because Rowlandson finds in the indigenous form not only something *less* but also something *other* than human. She diminishes the complexity of Native life by assigning to it only the undesirable characteristics of the natural and the supernatural. Her captors are suspiciously material in their mastery over a landscape she finds incomprehensible, and at the same time, she suggests that they resemble the devil to such an extent as to prove a kinship between the two (359, 344). Literary critic Eric Anderson argues that we must “work to see and hear Native ‘presences’ in earlier texts produced about Indians by non-Indians, such as seventeenth- and eighteenth-century white-authored captivity narratives” (256).²⁰ In Rowlandson, we find the preservation of indigenous affect, though in damaged form, misread and condemned through the constraints of a writer whose racial ideology and theology are antagonistic to Native life.

Rowlandson's interpretation of scenes in which the emotions of her captors are foregrounded is informed by an Augustinian vision of unregulated, chaotic feeling. "Oh the roaring, and singing, and dancing, and yelling of those black creatures in the night, which made the place a lively resemblance of hell," she recounts (326). She takes Native celebration of victory and mourning for death by turn as evidence of evil, not necessarily because of the content or motivations of those feelings, but rather for how they are articulated. The effect of this heuristic is a strikingly dismissive posture toward experiences that should seemingly resonate with her, given the enormity of her own losses. When an indigenous child dies, Rowlandson recalls, "they buried the Papoos: and afterward, both morning and evening, there came a company to mourn and howl with" the child's mother. She confesses that she "could not much condole with them" and abruptly announces that she felt constant sorrow for her own troubles, and was often alone (346).

Rowlandson presents the range of early American affect, then, as the space between two extremes. She strives toward the example of the Puritan saint while assiduously detaching herself from indigenous feeling. But her project is not primarily an affective one; tasked with sustaining her religious convictions under the conditions of affliction, she emphasizes the authority of the reason over the affections. At a crucial moment in the narrative, she participates in the consensus of Puritan theology on this point. Having been separated from most of her family in the initial attack, Rowlandson carries her young daughter into a shared captivity; the girl soon dies in her arms. She recalls, "my child being even ready to depart this sorrowful world, they bad me carry it out, to another Wigwam: (I suppose because they would not be troubled with such spectacles.) Whither I went with a very heavy heart" (328). Grief overcomes her, and she reports that she

stayed with her daughter's body until she could no longer prevail upon her captors to leave the dead unburied.

Rowlandson then acknowledges her desire—a desire unsanctioned by a religious system of belief in which suicide is forbidden, because it is viewed as a submission to despair rather than to the will of God—to follow her daughter to a shared and unmarked grave. She confesses that she has “thought since of the wonderful goodness of God to me, in preserving me so in the use of my reason and senses, in that distressed time, that I did not use wicked and violent means to end my own miserable life” (329). Puritan theology instructs, and Rowlandson here repeats, that her sorrow, distress, and misery cannot be trusted; they would encourage her to take her own life. However, God does not preserve her life, but only her reason and her senses, whereby she is able to preserve herself through the application of discipline—not denial—to the grief she feels. The goodness of God in this passage is discernible in the provision of a cold comfort; why preserve the mother's reason, but not the life of the child? This question traces back to the full title of the narrative, which turns on the phrase “the sovereignty and goodness of God.” The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is a foundational Puritan conviction. There is no explicit evidence that Rowlandson interrogated the terms of her faith on the basis of her grief for the loss of her daughter. The question of the child's life as potentially having been saved is not a question posed in the narrative.

As this example indicates, much of the affective complexity of the narrative arises from the tension between the imperatives of Puritan conviction and the material realities of captivity. If conversion is an arrival at a place of peaceful rest, then conviction is a territorial holding; conviction despises indeterminacy; it marks out the line between what is true and what is outside of the truth, and then unceasingly and defensively retraces its steps. Literary critic Mitchell

Robert Breitwieser's *American Puritanism and the Defense of Mourning* (1990) remains the most important single study of Rowlandson's account because it narrates the spaces beyond Puritan conviction. What he encounters there is "unassimilated and implacable grief," affective content that he characterizes as at once a wandering exile from and the primary adversary to Puritanism (29). Breitwieser uses a psychoanalytic framework to argue that Puritanism "was in large measure an attempt to sublimate mourning, to block and then redirect its vigor to various social purposes" (8). Sensing a prohibition on the expression of grief in the narrative, he traces its course into what he calls "Puritan theory's social unconscious" (20). Breitwieser suggests that grief is the most truant feeling of all, because it so explicitly selects a material attachment over devotion to God. His analysis yields rich interpretation, but it follows a secular habit of mind that searches for meaning beneath rather than above. Put another way, mourning in Puritanism may be neither expressed nor sublimated, but rather wrenched away from an object in the world to one that transcends it, an act only possible through the discipline of the affections.

Whereas Breitwieser reads in Rowlandson "significances that have teleologies leading, primarily, to mourning, rather than to faith," I pause over the idea that these two teleologies are mutually exclusive (8). It is not faith that is the opposite of mourning in the narrative, or its opponent, but a specific form of love. As Breitwieser is interested in Rowlandson's forbidden mourning, I am here interested in endorsed feelings of faith, and as such I find it strikingly relevant that Rowlandson includes not a single statement of love for the divine—not once does she announce her own love of God, nor does she encourage her readers to love God, as the sermons of Puritan theologians do—no mention at all. Put another way, while Breitwieser is interested in what Rowlandson might be unconsciously doing, namely, deeply and inconsolably grieving for the death of her loved ones, I am interested in what she is refusing to do, which is to

love God. Her voice is absent from what I take to be the foundation of the Puritan theological consensus on the affections, which is that the primary affective activity for the believer to perform is love for God. Indeed, it is such a general, normative imperative that its absence here calls into question the integrity of Rowlandson's faith, a point that circuitously supports many of Breitwieser's central claims even without the imposition of psychoanalytic literary theory. Recall the iterative process of belief put forth by Ames, in which the knowledge of what God testifies to is made complete by the cultivation of affection for God. After her daughter's death, in another moment of filial intimacy, Rowlandson is briefly reunited with her son Joseph. They read together Psalm 118:17-18, in which the speaker, whose life has been spared from danger, promises to "declare the works of the Lord" (336). Rowlandson's narrative fulfills this same promise. She declares the works of the Lord—but not her love for him.

The absence of an explicit statement of love for God is remarkable, and a reminder that there is value in giving attention to what is unspoken in the text. Rowlandson's silence on this matter lends support to the possibility that her affections countered rather than supported her religious convictions at the time of her writing. However, there are also many instances in which Rowlandson seems to straightforwardly endorse the central arguments of Puritan theology that I have collected here. Whether she was positioned to endorse, and correspondingly, to critique, Puritan beliefs and practices remains an enduring question. Much of the scholarship on Rowlandson takes up the limits of selfhood and agency in early American women's writing. An especially powerful piece of criticism in this vein is Dawn Henwood's reading of Rowlandson's use of the Psalms as a "vital means of self-expression" (171). While I find Henwood's work compelling, I have placed under discussion here the regulation of the affections, as a system and theological ideal, rather than their expression, which is a matter of individual subjectivity. This is

because Rowlandson's voice is at once unmistakable and compromised. Most concretely, Increase Mather's role in the preparation, publication, and circulation of the narrative, and his related desire to control perceptions of the war in the Puritan public sphere, has been persuasively demonstrated.²¹ Rowlandson did not write freely.

Furthermore, there is little evidence that Rowlandson stages or unintentionally records a form of proto-feminist resistance to Puritan patriarchy in her writing.²² The narrative can be read more accurately as a contribution to Puritan orthodoxy. I share the view taken by Americanist Margaret Davis, who unequivocally states that "Rowlandson suppresses the claim to individualized selfhood for the promise of present and ultimate salvation, the only choice allowed for a Puritan woman in seventeenth-century New England" (59). While this forecloses interpretive possibilities, there is much to be gained by the study of the plausible. For example, the insistence on the control of the affections by reason in the writings of the theologians recalls the authorization, and implicit censorship, of Rowlandson's narrative by Puritan leadership. My claim, in focusing on the ways in which the narrative labors to represent an exemplary life of Puritan faith in both convictions and affections, is that Rowlandson contributes to the orthodoxy of feeling by living it out. With literary critic Sidonie Smith, I argue that the "unity of the exemplary Puritan subject is discomposed" even as it is strived toward in the narrative (147). Rowlandson's refusal to announce a love for God is the clearest aspect of this discomposure, in my view. She describes a struggle toward composure, and composition. Both of these projects are supported more than any other single factor by her reading practices.

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The narrative is a study in what I will call, drawing from its title, restorative reading. This is a devotional practice in which the reader seeks affirmation of, and comfort within, previously

established religious convictions. Restorative reading is a controlled engagement with belief. It draws upon the text for solace and guidance. It is motivated by a sense of depletion or need; it is a hunger.²³ It does not operate in the modes of interrogation or critique. To read restoratively is to throw oneself before a sacred text with open hands, head bowed. Its posture is one of humble request. Such reading does not require circumstances of extreme precarity; indeed, the tasks of daily life might bring a worshipping Puritan to her Bible for its reinforcing words at any given moment.²⁴ Of course, that Rowlandson finds herself in conditions of serious affliction makes such textual engagements more pronounced. She performs restorative reading each time she takes up her Bible, which amounts to nine scenes in the pamphlet-length account, always using the copy offered to her by an indigenous fighter who had acquired it from a colonial town alongside other, more valuable, plunder (330). Each of the nine scenes demonstrates the text as a source of spiritual sustenance. And all of them foreground the discipline of the affections, either in the Biblical citation itself or the devotional commentary Rowlandson adds.²⁵ Her agency in captivity is in how she responds to the biblical scriptures, and though she makes herself available to receive comfort and guidance, she does not in turn describe herself as cultivating a love for God, as Puritan theology admonishes.

The first scene of restorative reading is the most complex, because it narrates a process in which the text does not offer immediate consolation. The Bible verses to which Rowlandson initially turns promise blessings to the obedient, but much more forcefully, punishments for those who turn away from God. The depictions of disaster, destruction, hunger and thirst, displacement, and enslavement in the passage she cites are relentless; they culminate in the existential misery of Deuteronomy 28:66, “your life shall hang in doubt before you; night and day you shall be in dread, with no assurance of your life” (*NRSV*). The imagery and affective

tenor of these verses bear a resemblance to Rowlandson's retelling of her experience of war, and they generate for her a reminder of her affliction rather than a way out of it. The deferral of comfort first makes Rowlandson's suffering more acute before it is partially resolved by the subsequent verses:

my dark heart wrought on this manner, that there was no mercy for me, that the blessings were gone, and the curses came in their room, and that I had lost my opportunity. But the Lord helped me still to go on reading, till I came to Chap. 30, the seven first verses: where I found there was mercy promised again, if we would return to him, by repentance: and though we were scattered from one end of the earth to the other, yet the Lord would gather us together, and turn all those curses upon our Enemies. I do not desire to live to forget this Scripture, and what comfort it was to me. (331)

Before she begins reading, Rowlandson has already reached a point of exhaustion. The religious convictions to which she has committed her life are diminished in importance by her immediate concern for survival and her desire for a future beyond her present suffering. What she reads in the first number of verses affirms her discouragement. Reading from reverence, she applies the message of the curse to her situation. What she encounters in the text, she accepts. The prophecy is terrifying, but to question it is out of the question, and the only available interpretive possibility is to *read on*. As quickly as she had at first found disappointment, she finds her comfort in affliction, through a redirection of the prophecy to her enemies and a claim upon the promise of mercy for herself.

Rowlandson describes her reading as directed by God. The selection of the Deuteronomy passages, and of the other verses quoted in the narrative, is explained as a form of divine

intervention in the world. It might be fairly assessed as a series of opportunistic editorial insertions, though this would not necessarily discount the rich commentary with which Rowlandson surrounds the quotes, connecting them to her experiences. Literary critics Michael Millner and Michael Warner offer two accounts of Rowlandson as a reader. Millner notes that she “believes herself to be addressed through her Bible by God. [She] practices a form of reading that she understands as actually guided by God’s hand (33). Warner argues that “her way of reading is enframed by the assumption that the text is everywhere uniformly addressed by God, in the vernacular, to the believer.” In the latter, more nuanced reading, the selection of verses need not be divinely appointed, but rather based in a “normative program” that accepts the text in all of its parts to be transcendently relevant (31). Both views acknowledge the Puritan belief that the Bible is a site of direct communication between the believer and the object of her worship. I would add that the information Rowlandson applies to her situation from her reading of Deuteronomy is as important as how she is given to feel about it; she believes that she is guided toward comfort by the God from whom both curses and blessings radiate.

In five of the nine scenes of restorative reading, the Biblical quote is taken from the Psalms. Rowlandson finds in these verses guidance for action and comfort for turbulent feeling. To take two examples, she quotes Psalm 55:22, “cast thy burden upon the Lord and he shall sustain thee,” and Psalm 46:10, “be still, and know that I am God.” The Bible is a “great comforter,” to her and these verses are “quieting;” they “still [her] spirit” (339, 341). Rowlandson seeks both solace and instruction when she reads the Psalms with Goodwife Joslin, an English captive who has confided in Rowlandson her intent to run away, though she will soon give birth to a child. Rowlandson pleads with her to stay; they read together from Psalm 27, “wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine Heart, wait I say on the

Lord” (331). Goodwife Joslin’s refusal to wait has precipitous effects. The decision of her captors to punish her by death for her attempt to escape, as an example to their other prisoners, is in turn appropriated by Rowlandson as she sets out an example of disobedience to a much larger audience (332). The ease with which Goodwife Joslin is narratively dispatched—her death, in the retelling, extends seamlessly from the collapse of her trust of God—reflects a significant omission in Puritan theology.

The focus on systematization produces a tendency to select for the general over the specific, an observation that can be made in even the most cursory readings of Puritan theological arguments. While they are exhaustively detailed, they do not approach the task of imagining the ways in which affective regulation, for example, is inflected by an individual’s material conditions. The expectation to respond fully and immediately to the command to “wait on the Lord” holds implacably across all situations and thus all intensities of feeling. Rowlandson fulfills the expectation of obedience, embodying the idealized disciplined self, in opposition to Goodwife Joslin. But contingencies such as the Goodwife’s pregnancy, Rowlandson’s hunger, and the palpable fear among the captives are essential to the narrative. Rowlandson upholds such theological points as the discipline of the self before God, but not before describing the harrowing context in which this self-control is achieved. She writes,

Heart-aching thoughts here I had about my poor children, who were scattered up and down among the wild beasts of the forest. My head was light and dizzy (either through hunger or hard lodging, or trouble all together), my knees feeble, my body raw by sitting double night and day, that I cannot express to man the affliction that lay upon my spirit, but the Lord helped me at that time to express it

to Himself. I opened my Bible to read, and the Lord brought that precious Scripture to me. (332)

The verse she reads in this passage, Jeremiah 31:16, promises deliverance; it guides the reader away from sorrow. It states, “refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears” (332). These phrases command Rowlandson, distraught by the separation from her family, physically weakened and tormented, and filled with inexpressible worry, to control the full range of feeling to which she is at that moment vulnerable. That the verse focuses on the outward expression of mourning suggests that the discipline of the body, through the restraint of tears, is related to the calming of the internal strife which gives rise to them. The mind is understood to have authority over the physical and affective dimensions of sorrow; it responds to the command to refrain from weeping by in turn issuing that command to these subordinate parts. Available to us in Rowlandson’s narrative is the Puritan contribution to the orthodoxy of feeling, both in theory and, crucially, in practice.

The material conditions of captivity are such that the affective regulation at work in these passages is authorized by a source higher than the reason and the will, both of which, along with religious convictions, are weakened by the assaults of hunger, fear, and grief. Rowlandson suggests that God directly leads her through these desolate moments and into hope. “The Lord helped me still to go on reading,” she writes; across these scenes, specific verses of scripture are intentionally “brought into [her] hand” by God for her support (339, 341). Her recollections of the details of her reading practices throughout her captivity broadly align with theologian Richard Baxter’s guidance to the Puritan reader. He argues that the Bible is “a doctrine of unseen things, and of the greatest mysteries; and therefore [one should] come not to it with arrogance as a judge, but with humility as a learner or disciple.” He elsewhere promotes the subordination of

the affections to the intellect, but in this passage he emphasizes the limits of the human mind in the encounter with the sacred text. He encourages the reader to “presume not on the strength of [her] own understanding, but humbly pray to God for light” in the attempt to apprehend the truth of the scriptures (264-5). The premise of each scene of restorative reading is that there is a divine purpose at the horizon of Rowlandson’s knowledge of her own life. This limit point is contracted in the extremity of her situation, and she becomes by necessity more reliant on the Bible both at the level of intellect, for guidance, and the level of the affections, for comfort.

In a scene of reading farther into her captivity but prior to definitively learning of her husband’s efforts to purchase her freedom, Rowlandson listlessly pages through the Bible, seeking solace. The verses that “a little revive” her are Isaiah 55:8 and Psalm 37:5, both of which emphasize the limits of human understanding. The first reads, “for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord”; the second entreats the reader to trust God on this basis (343). Restorative reading is a space in which the authority of God is acknowledged to supersede the mind of man. It is a way of reading in which even the most sophisticated hermeneutics, the most incisive critiques, are irrelevant. These are not the habits of mind brought to the act of reading by the Puritan, particularly in conditions of suffering.

But the Puritan mind can be observed in the mode of critique when the textual object shifts from the Bible to the self. I take the practice of self-examination, which is fundamental to Puritan religious life, to be a form of reading. It draws heavily upon Biblical knowledge, as the Bible is the standard against which the self is assessed. In *Culture and Redemption*, Americanist Tracy Fessenden quotes Richard Baxter as defining this practice as “the serious and diligent trying of a man’s heart” by “the rule of scripture” (18). Preston places the affections even more explicitly at the center of the process, advising his readers to “examine your own hearts, and see

if by it how much the more you love the world, by so much the less you are affected to the Lord” by, above all, looking “to your will and affections” (98). Self-examination is premised upon a hierarchical relationship between the mind and heart. That the cognitive faculties are taken to supervise the emotions bears a structural resonance here, as the “heart” is taken under close study and scrutiny by the Biblically literate intellect. Rowlandson enacts this reading practice continually in her narrative. As Dawn Henwood notes, she engages in “ceaseless introspection” during her captivity and in the reflective process of writing (175). But while she finds herself lacking, she does not specify results from the sort of competitive affective scene envisioned by Preston. At no point does Rowlandson compare her desire for survival, her longing for English things and places, or her love for her lost daughter to her feelings for the God of the Bible.

In the context of Puritan self-examination, the meaning of the word “conviction” must be reconsidered. One can come to believe in something, to have a conviction of its truth, which is the sense of the word I have been using throughout this chapter. But, to feel “convicted” signifies to the Puritan that she has sinned and must repent. It is an affectively charged recognition of inadequacies, shortcomings, and wrongdoing—or wrong ways of feeling. Jonathan Edwards would come to call this, in *Religious Affections*, his 1746 treatise on the emotions, the “conviction of conscience;” it was, for him, a mobilization of the intellectual and the affective, and one of the signs of salvation (291). As David Downing notes, reading the Bible is involved in this process for Rowlandson; the book “is a two-edged sword for [her], bringing ‘streams of Scripture comfort’ but also conviction of her sins. The verses she focuses upon reveal in her mind the characteristic Puritan ambivalence between assurance of God’s faithfulness and doubt about one’s own salvation” (253). Whereas in restorative reading the affections reinforce previously established beliefs, in self-examination, they support new knowledge of one’s own

life; the latter often surfaces in the form of epiphany. Reduced to the inactivity of waiting, and without control over her movements, Rowlandson recalls that in captivity she “had time to examine all my ways: my Conscience did not accuse me of unrighteousness toward one or other: yet I saw how in my walk with God, I had been a careless creature.” Self-examination illuminates for her a carelessness of which she had been previously unaware. The insight that she has fallen short in the demands of her faith is rife with “sorrow,” and she is comforted only when reassuring scriptures “come to mind” (346). Conviction, in every sense, is a continual process that engages mind and heart, triangulating them with the Bible to achieve a total effect of a religious life.

Rowlandson’s self-examination emanates outward into an assessment of the afflicted conditions under which she finds herself; the line between the person and the lesson is porous. This is to say that she reads herself into her situation, assessing it as the necessary preparation for her repentance. As literary critic Tara Fitzpatrick notes, the Puritans “explained affliction as inextricably bound up with the doctrine of election,” which, in Rowlandson’s narrative, can be summarized by her reference to Hebrews 12:6, “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth” (366). Suffering is the sign and prerequisite of salvation to come. Whereas Rowlandson does not state explicitly that she loves God, she explains that he loves her; the intensity of her suffering is an index of this divine love, an assurance in itself of her election, her salvation.

Americanist Bryce Traister goes a step farther to argue that Rowlandson’s explanation of suffering as having an ascertainable value for the individual is the defining characteristic of a religious, rather than secular, perspective. He writes, “in the Protestant-Calvinist framework, affliction becomes meaningful within a rendering of saintly perseverance, whereas modern

secularity defines human suffering as the definitive challenge to modern civilization” (325). In other words, suffering becomes meaningless “when it fails to indicate transcendence” (340).

Traister argues that in Rowlandson, we see the invention of the secular. But insofar as she carries the transcendent through the wilderness of her captivity and, in renewed form, back into her community, she can be said to render her suffering meaningful. In her concluding notes, she writes, “I hope I can say in some measure, as David did, *It is good for me that I have been afflicted*. The Lord hath shewed me the vanity of these outward things” (366). Of the affective responses to suffering available to the Puritan, first among them is gratitude.

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Rowlandson’s direct identification with the Old Testament figure of David in her conclusion is a reminder that if there can be said to be one provision offered to the Puritan by the Bible in as much abundance as divine presence, it is human example.²⁶ Exemplification, or typology, is “Puritanism’s focal *project*,” Breitwieser argues (51). It seeks “to teach the soul the path for which it has been searching” by foreclosing other paths, and in so doing produces “refined convictions” untangled from the brambles of guideless wandering. Breitwieser maintains, however, that this refinement of belief is purchased through violence; typology is an aggressive framework, characterized by its insistence “on exclusivity and totality, on being the whole story, the only path.” As such, it is not merely one among many ways of thinking, but rather an “assault on other ways of thinking,” and, for his central argument, of feeling (25).

Breitwieser notes that there is a “discord criticism feels between the type and the experience,” alluding to the difference between the exclusivity of typology and the notion of the inexhaustibility of the text taken as the starting point of much scholarship in contemporary literary studies (25). His book demonstrates the capacity of literary criticism to access the

potentialities of a text, whether they are said or unsaid by, known or unknown to its author. He does not deny the ways in which Puritan culture understood itself, but rather seeks to exceed them. As such, he implicitly responds to Perry Miller's argument that Puritanism's "real being was not in its doctrines but behind them; the impetus came from an urgent sense of man's predicament, from a mood so deep that it could never be completely articulated" (4).

Breitwieser's concept of the Puritan social unconscious is the mechanism by which he articulates the unacknowledged, latent aspects of Rowlandson's culture. But Michael Warner argues that literary scholars such as Breitwieser can produce powerful interpretations that are also inaccurate, as contemporary critics "are seldom prepared to recognize in their own materials anything that they would have to describe as uncritical reading. So the ritual gesture, when confronted with a Rowlandson, is to show that this apparently uncritical reading really was critical in some sense or another" (33). Breitwieser's notion of the Puritan social unconscious, Warner suggests, is one such gesture.

Yet, if we choose to read Rowlandson as uncritically as she reads the Bible, would it not require us to take her *at her word*? Warner does not offer a method for enacting what he calls uncritical reading in the professional study of literature. He does, however, provide an account of the selective inattention of the field to methods of reading that are based in religious piety. These forms of reading, dismissed by scholars as uncritical, constitute "the unconscious of the profession; whatever worlds are organized around frameworks of reading other than critical protocols remain, for the most part, terra incognita" (33).²⁷ This history, a result of the secularization of knowledge in the academy, has culminated in a significant scholarly oversight. The concept of restorative reading helps to counter it. My reading of Rowlandson's textual engagements with the Bible does not require the avoidance of critique. Rather, it asks us to allow

for and recognize the integrity of pietistic reading practices; inquire into their mechanisms and value; and analyze their affordances and limitations. Literary historian Andrew Piper reminds us that it is in Augustine's *Confessions* that the initial bond between reading and prayer is established; we reenact it "every time we hold a book today," regardless of the method we apply to the pages that open before us (5). In turning now to the private devotional life of Flannery O'Connor, I will discuss in more detail the persistent relationship between prayer and reading—and, also, writing.

Chapter Two

The Anguish of Devotion: Contemplative Writing in Flannery O'Connor's Prayer Journal

It is often remarked that Flannery O'Connor was a devout—not merely practicing—Catholic. She began each morning, Joyce Carol Oates recounts, “with a ritual reading of prayers from a breviary” after which she attended mass. Such habits of being leave an impression of total continuity in religious life. But the complex internal mechanisms of devotion are obscured by established patterns of worship that can be traced across the surface of a life. For this reason, the 2013 publication of *A Prayer Journal*, which O'Connor wrote privately from January 1946 to September 1947 while a student at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, was an important event in American literary history.²⁸ O'Connor was twenty years old when she opened a slight Sterling notebook and began composing her petitions to God. The pages that have been preserved, and now made available for study, represent a partial recovery of the interiority of a very public life of faith. They also constitute a significant contribution to the orthodoxy of feeling: her prayers are centrally concerned with the affective dimension of religious belief and practice.

The theological arguments at work in *A Prayer Journal* can be best understood as gestures toward the comprehensive statements articulated in Catholic doctrine. In an undated entry, O'Connor writes, “intellectually, I assent: let us adore God. But can we do that without feeling? To feel, we must know” (8). Throughout the prayers, she consistently suggests, as she does here, that the intellect and the emotions are related, and that together they underwrite Christian worship. In this passage, she describes feeling as following thought, a notion canonized by the church in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas.²⁹ In the *Summa Theologica* (1274), his systematic account of theology and practice, Aquinas argues that emotions—though he calls them passions or affections—proceed directly from thoughts. For Aquinas, devotion begins in

the contemplation of the goodness of God, and produces feelings of love, joy, and sorrow (1536). After transcendent love, he writes, “the direct and principle effect of devotion is the spiritual joy of the mind, though sorrow is its secondary and indirect effect.” For, he contends, reflection upon the ultimate realities of God’s perfection and the fallen human condition produce joy and sorrow, respectively (1537). In her prayers, O’Connor negotiates the emotions attendant to her belief in God’s perfect love and her assessment of what she views as her own failures to approach that divine offering. The writing in the journal is contemplative in that it attempts to directly conceptualize, communicate with, and serve the God she worships.

Contemplation is likewise the foundation of the aesthetic theory advanced by twentieth-century Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain in his *Art and Scholasticism* (1930), which takes its main points from Aquinas. The book deeply influenced O’Connor’s approach to fiction.³⁰ Maritain argues that the purpose of the arts is to “produce an intellectual delight, that is to say a kind of contemplation, and they also pre-suppose in the artist a kind of contemplation, whence the beauty of the work ought to overflow” (27). I understand *A Prayer Journal* as a site of contemplation for O’Connor, where incipient conceptual work is recorded and later taken up in the fiction. There is evidence for this claim across the novels and short stories; here, I will take up one recurrent theme of the journal—the protection of one’s beliefs—as it is developed in the protagonist of her second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960). The character of Rayber often meditates upon the transcendent; in a perfect inversion of O’Connor’s religious devotion, he does so not to adore, but rather to renounce God. The landscape he inhabits attests to the critical consensus that views O’Connor’s aesthetic as consistently spare, harsh, and bleak. But beauty, for Maritain, need not be ornate. While it takes many forms, it is exclusively achieved through the artist’s application of both the contemplative mind and the fullness of emotion to the work.

He further specifies that, through beauty, an “*effect* of art is to produce emotional states” in its audience (38). Following Maritain, O’Connor’s aesthetic can be said to emerge from her religious devotion even as it generates for the reader occasions for transcendent recognition. On both sides of the proposition, thought and feeling collaborate.

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The sole reference to Thomas Aquinas recorded in *A Prayer Journal* is in an entry dated 11 January 1947. It enigmatically reads, “St. Thomas [. . .]” and is followed by an editorial note explaining that “the remaining text on this page of the journal appears to have been excised” (26). But his spectral presence is invoked earlier in the text as well; a little more than two months prior to this entry, on 6 November 1946, O’Connor had written, “can’t anyone teach me how to pray?” (23). Aquinas designed the *Summa Theologica* with the express purpose of answering such petitions, writing both to contribute to ecclesiastical discourse and to offer practical advice for the laity.³¹ My discussion of O’Connor’s journal is primarily organized around the main points of the commentaries in the *Summa* titled “Of Devotion” and “Of Prayer,” an interpretive decision motivated more by an acknowledgement of the general concordance between the beliefs of the writer and the theologian than by the reasonable possibility that she consulted his work for guidance during this period. As influential a figure as he was for her, O’Connor saw his insights as ultimately limited, advising in a 1958 letter to a friend that “I don’t want to discourage you from reading St. Thomas but don’t read him with the notion that he is going to clear anything up for you. That is done by study but more by prayer” (308). She reserves for the direct relationship between the penitent and God the highest place in religious life, even as she reveres Aquinas for his theology.

The arguments in the *Summa* are predicated upon and organized by distinctions of value. The scope of Aquinas's discussion of Christian worship, to take the example relevant here, is inclusive of "all those things through which reverence is shown to God" (1539). But all of those things are not equal. He locates devotion and prayer in a larger schematic of religious adherence, which I will briefly outline before turning to them in detail. His first distinction is between internal and external forms of worship. Though he describes all worship as acceptable in the eyes of God, it is the internal acts to which Aquinas attributes the most significance; in their immateriality, they pertain most directly to the relationship between the individual soul and God.³² The two "interior acts of religion," he writes, are devotion and prayer, which extend from the will and the intellect, respectively (1534). The will, he maintains, is the highest of human faculties, because it "moves the other powers of the soul to their acts" (1535). Therefore, devotion is the highest form of worship. But the intellect is nearly as important. He writes, "after devotion which belongs to the will, prayer which belongs to the intellective part is the chief of the acts of religion, since by it religion directs man's intellect to God" (1540). For Aquinas, devotion is the condition of possibility for all other religious acts, because it represents the surrender of the self in its totality to the service of God (1535). Prayer, in a more specialized sense, is the surrender of the mind (1540). In the closing remarks of these commentaries, Aquinas poetically defines prayer as the Christian's "ascent to God" (1552). Devotion, then, is the spiritual preparation for that ascent.

Following Augustine, Aquinas argues that every act of the will emerges from thought. This claim tempers the apparent dominance of the will, and complicates its relationship to the intellect. Although it is the highest power, the will does not act unattended; it is ignited and informed by the mind. As Aquinas describes it, the process of devotion begins in contemplation,

transitions through feeling, and ends in action. “Through meditation,” Aquinas writes, “man conceives the thought of surrendering himself to God’s service.” He argues that two specific considerations impel the individual to this decision. The first is the thought of God’s “goodness and loving kindness”; the second is the comparative recognition of “man’s own shortcomings,” and his corresponding reliance upon God for strength. These thoughts motivate devotion, but its true consummation is in feeling. Contemplation of God “wakens love” for Him, substantiating with desire what had been rationally established as a need (1536). Furthermore, joy and sorrow are produced as the effects of these thoughts. Devotion is finally enacted in the interior life of the believer when she surrenders herself to God. This act can be metaphorically visualized as a rearrangement of the body into a prostrate posture before its object of worship.

In reaching for a physical metaphor through which to conceptualize devotion, I hope to emphasize its intangibility. For Aquinas, devotion is inaccessible to outside observers. It finds its true audience in God. However, the forms of worship it makes possible are often externally displayed. This means that the closest proximity we can attain to devotion for the purposes of analysis is the external religious act to which it is most closely related: prayer. Of course, because prayer can also be entirely internal, its contents would have to be recorded and preserved, as they are in *A Prayer Journal*. In the act of composition, O’Connor performs something between silent and spoken prayer, a note on which Aquinas offers a measure of advice. Considering what he takes to be the only two possibilities, he concludes that it is preferable, but not essential, for individuals to give voice to their prayers rather than to hold them in their minds. The act of speaking “excites interior devotion,” he writes, by moving the mind, and consequently the affections, toward God.³³ In reading O’Connor’s prayers, externalized in

writing, rather than in speech, we encounter the thoughts of an intellect turned toward God, as well as the feelings that follow from that turn.

Pausing to revisit O'Connor's striking line, "to feel, we must know," we find the Thomistic statement on the affective dimension of worship summarized in five words. For Aquinas, feeling follows thought; put another way, contemplation generates emotion. In this model, every feeling carries the cognitive content of its site of production; feelings are bound to thoughts in meaning. As I have noted, in the commentaries on devotion and prayer, Aquinas focuses on love, joy, and sorrow as arising from the initiating contemplations of devotion. He does not anticipate any deviation in the individual from these outcomes. Implicit in Aquinas is the argument that the feelings he describes are the right ones. One of the tasks of the emotions in worship, then, pertains to their clarifying and confirming presence. In this view, feelings are a crucial source of knowledge; they signify the efficacy of the intellect by confirming its production of a prescribed affective result. *A Prayer Journal* tests and articulates the trajectories catalogued by Aquinas, and demonstrates the continuance in prayer of devotion's first thoughts. In meditating upon God, O'Connor expresses a desire for transcendent love; in reflecting upon her shortcomings, she reveals a bitter sorrow. Joy, however, is conspicuously missing from the prayers. Its absence is an interpretive problem that the *Summa* can only partially resolve.

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The total effect of the many mentions of emotion in *A Prayer Journal* is the sense that O'Connor finds the separation of the emotions and the intellect to be an uninspiring starting point for religious belief and practice. In an encounter with a member of the clergy, she is challenged to consider her position on this point. She recalls, "the Msgr. today said it was the business of reason, not emotion—the love of God. The emotion would be a help" (14). In this

instance, Aquinas vindicates the worshipper in the pew rather than the authority in the pulpit. In removing the emotions entirely from the question of the believer's faithful commitment to God, the Monsignor misrepresents the nuance of the relationship between thought and feeling established in the canonical Thomistic account. O'Connor could hardly be more accurate in her offhand remark that "emotion would be a help." For Aquinas, this is precisely what feelings are expected to do: help. At the very least, the argument advanced by the Monsignor is incomplete in its exclusion of the emotions, even as it maintains fidelity to Aquinas in the evaluation of reason as the *primary* source of the knowledge of God. In the same prayer, O'Connor frames her religious practice in intimate relational terms; knowledge, for her, has less to do with comprehension than with the task of drawing "near" to God. She explains, "the nearness I mean comes after death perhaps" (14). In this line, she seems to accept the experience of divine love in a fallen world as a limited and transitory one.

In a particularly moving prayer, O'Connor centers her thoughts on that love. She writes, "I don't want to be doomed to mediocrity in my feeling for Christ. I want to feel. I want to love." She worries about the consequences of feeling "unmoved" when she attends mass (35). Alarmed that the thought of the Christian figure of salvation does not produce strong emotions for her, she quickly clarifies that she seeks them in a quite specific form—she wants to feel love. In comments such as this, O'Connor evinces awareness that, the Monsignor's remarks aside, the doctrines of the church associate specific feelings with religious contemplation. For O'Connor, there is an urgency and frustration to the experience of worship; she repeatedly encounters deviations from the ideal. In the subsequent entry, her desire for transcendent love takes on a darker valence. "Dear Lord," she writes,

please make me want You. It would be the greatest bliss. Not just to want You when I think about You but to want You all the time, to think about You all the time, to have the want driving in me, to have it like a cancer in me. It would kill me like a cancer and that would be the Fulfillment. It is easy for this writing to show a want. There is a want but it is abstract and cold, a dead want that goes well into writing because writing is dead. Writing is dead. (36)

O'Connor suggests in these passages a desire for her trusting devotion to be substantiated not by theological rationales alone, but also by exceptionally deep and personal feeling. She articulates in these moments a desire for desire, a petition for spiritual intimacy so intense that it would be fulfilled in and through her own sacrificial death, mirroring the crucifixion. Of all of the prayers in the journal, this latter passage most acutely represents the religious sensibility O'Connor brings to her fiction. From her perspective, the individual is only alive—eternally alive—in death. And the remnants of a life, epitomized by the written text as a testament to a life lived and documented, are ashes and dust. O'Connor argues that it is a simple matter to “show a want” in writing; it is altogether another to feel the warmth of divine intercession.

In *A Prayer Journal*, joy, much like transcendent love, takes the form of longing rather than realization. O'Connor believes that joy should animate her prayers, but she rarely mentions it; when she does, it seems beyond her reach. She strives to conceptualize the feeling through the Biblical phrase the “fear of God,” commenting that “it must be a joy” (22). This line recalls the refrain of the Psalms and Proverbs, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (*NRSV*). In pairing this phrase with the anticipation of joy, O'Connor again emphasizes the relationship between thought and feeling. She imagines joy as a reward given to those who have attained wisdom through humility before God. But, during the time in which she composed the journal,

O'Connor viewed herself as falling far short of this aspirational vision. On nearly every page, she measures the distance between the person she sees in the present moment and the ideal self toward which she strives. A prayer that exemplifies this habit begins, "tore the last thing out. It was worthy of me all right; but not worthy of what I ought to be" (33). Even her expressions of gratitude are replete with disappointment; she writes, "I am impressed with how much I have to be thankful for in a material sense; and in a spiritual sense I have the opportunity of being even more fortunate. But it seems apparent to me that I am not translating this opportunity into a fact" (5). Her tone, particularly in moments of self-reading, can be extremely harsh. It is calibrated in severity to the cost of failure; her very salvation is at stake, nothing less. She writes often of how little she deserves.

Sarah Gordon, a leading O'Connor critic, finds the lack of joy in *A Prayer Journal* deeply unsettling (756). She reads the prayers as unremittingly bleak, writing that they are filled with the author's "self-recrimination, self-doubt, and a persistent belief in her own unworthiness." Gordon usefully inventories possible sources of happiness and pleasure—none of them explicitly derived from traditions of religious belief and practice—that go unnoticed in O'Connor's prayers. She "records no experience of delight in the natural world," Gordon notes, and "never alludes to classes, friends, books, or even to the changing of the seasons." It is true that the journal dwells in sorrow, exasperation, and distress. However, O'Connor's discouragement, I would argue, is a function of her confrontation with what she sees as a perfect God, and, by that measure, with her shortcomings. Such an interpretation aligns with Aquinas in his expectation that the thought of the goodness of God would heighten one's awareness of the fallen state of man; in the Thomistic account, the comparison is inevitable, as is its resultant sorrow. But Aquinas also maintains that the contemplation of God necessarily results in joy.

Though O'Connor seeks this affective dimension of worship, it continually evades and confounds her. She writes, "it is the adoration of You, dear God, that most dismays me. I cannot comprehend the exaltation that must be due You" (8). Perhaps, as Gordon concludes, the source of the "unrelievedly grim" perspective of the journal is its connection to legacies of "self-abjuring spiritual records in the Roman Catholic tradition" (754). But this reading disregards the insistence upon religious joy that is an inheritance of that same orthodoxy.

The pronounced absence of joy in *A Prayer Journal* thus emerges as one of its central interpretive problematics. To begin to resolve it, I suggest a return to, and revision of, Aquinas. He describes the contemplations of devotion as static; that is, he does not engage the possibility that the thoughts of the goodness of God and the imperfection of man might appear with varying intensity each time they occur. But it follows from his arguments that if one of these were to be more pronounced, so too would be its corresponding emotion. What Aquinas allows us to theorize, then, is the auditing of thoughts through feelings. This theoretical framing brings the connection between cognition and emotion into sharp focus. Through it, we can interpret the lack of joy and the dominance of sorrow in the prayers as direct effects of O'Connor's preoccupation with the self and its imperfections, and her relative inattention to the attributes of God that Aquinas expects would lead the believer to exaltation. Her speculative, tentative comments on what joy "must be" can be best understood as attempts to contemplate God's goodness that ultimately fail, overshadowed by the immediate concerns of the imperfect self. In the context of a writer whose reception has in large part been defined by her Catholicism, some readers may view this conclusion as a scandalous one. But such self-involvement is endemic to prayer; it is not reflective of the depth of an individual's religious commitment. Rather, it is merely one, and the most pernicious, representative of the larger and inescapable problem of distraction.

Because it extends from the intellect, prayer requires the mind to focus on God; distraction is its enemy.³⁴ O'Connor registers this when she notes that her "attention is always very fugitive" in prayer (4). She regards this as a significant problem; distraction measures, for her, both an interruption of a sought connection with God and a personal failure to follow through with the best intentions of her religious practice. But "even holy men sometimes suffer from a wandering of the mind when they pray," Aquinas reassures, citing the Psalms. "The human mind is unable to remain aloft for long on account of the weakness of nature, because human weakness weighs down the soul to the level of inferior things." He quite clearly does not place the blame for distraction on the individual. As long as other thoughts are not purposefully sought after, Aquinas argues, prayer distracted by a wandering mind is *as* valuable as prayer focused on God (1548). He argues that the struggle against distraction is condemned to failure, based as it is on flawed materials, and so it is theologically necessary for this failure to be sanctioned. His claim that the mind can never inadvertently wander so far as to imperil the salvation of the soul is a strikingly merciful counterpoint to O'Connor's response to the problem, which is far less forgiving.

From the first to the last page of the journal, she struggles against the consuming distractions of the self and the moment. In the opening prayer, she writes, "Dear God, I cannot love Thee the way I want to. You are the slim crescent of a moon that I see and my self is the earth's shadow that keeps me from seeing all" (3). And it is on a note of despair that O'Connor abruptly ends her journal. The final entry begins, "my thoughts are so far away from God. He might as well not have made me." Defeated, she concludes, "there is nothing left to say of me" (40). The facsimile, appended to the transcription of her handwritten entries in the published version of the journal, continues on for two full blank pages beyond this sorrowful closing line.

The final markings in the journal are on the inside of its back cover; we cannot know when they were drawn. Sketched in the top right corner is a bar of music in three quarters time. Though there is no indication of the song—or hymn—to which it pertains, what is clear is that the notes are ascending.

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A Prayer Journal rapidly exhausts itself in the impossibility of perfect religious contemplation. O'Connor finds the limits of prayer in the restlessness of the mind. But distraction is only one of the challenges the intellect encounters as it turns toward God. Another is the adversarial pull of doubt. In the journal, O'Connor records the doubts that arise from the ongoing confrontation between her religious convictions and the dominant perspectives of a secular academy. She describes a violent conflict, praying for God to provide Christians like her with "some kind of weapon, not to defend us from them but to defend us from ourselves after they have got through with us" (16). For O'Connor, the intellect is the battleground upon which such altercations are staged, and her self-critical commentary in the prayers on doubt focuses on what she views as her own intellectual shortcomings, not in comparison to God, but rather in relation to those whose beliefs are hostile to her own. She writes, "my intellect is so limited, Lord, that I can only trust in You to preserve me as I should be," and, "my mind is a most insecure thing, not to be depended on" (4, 12). Lines such as these contribute to the joylessness rightly noted by Sarah Gordon as the journal's dominant affective characteristic. But they are distinct from O'Connor's use of self-recrimination as a form of discipline toward a religious ideal, and as such, they cannot be fully understood in terms of the Thomistic model of the emotions in worship. In these moments, O'Connor is not engaging in religious contemplation as Aquinas describes it, nor is she distracted. Rather, she is preparing for war; the time for rejoicing

is necessarily deferred. She conducts an assessment of her faculties as resources in a larger struggle between irreconcilable systems of belief. In the process, she comes to understand her intellect as unreliable, and her feelings as having the capacity to shelter her previously established convictions, in a reversal of Aquinas.

The specific forms of doubt from which O'Connor seeks refuge are produced by secular modernity; she writes often of "the psychologists" who explain religious belief in the material terms. Philosopher Charles Taylor describes "a secular age" in which "belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will also likely mean that at least in certain milieux, it may be hard to sustain one's faith" (3). He points to "the academic and intellectual life" as the exemplary secularized institution; in this context, he argues, "the presumption of unbelief" has "achieved hegemony" (13). O'Connor corroborates this in her repeatedly expressed concern about the comparative strength of religion against arguments in which it is dismissed or overtly dismantled. To take one example, she remarks, "at every point in this educational process, we are told that [religion] is ridiculous and their arguments sound so good it is hard not to fall into them." She wonders, "how am I to remain faithful without cowardice when these conditions influence me like they do" (16). Arguments against religion "sound so good" that they cause her to waver; she must actively strive against the doubts they engender.

In the secular intellectual life described by Taylor and O'Connor, it is more difficult for a devout individual to sustain belief than to abandon it. In an early journal entry, she confides, "I dread, Oh Lord, losing my faith. My mind is not strong. It is a prey to all sorts of intellectual quackery" (6). O'Connor does not recapitulate arguments against Christianity in the journal, nor does she write in an apologetic mode. In fact, she never considers secularity as a serious philosophical possibility on which to base her life. Instead, she anticipates with dread a scenario

in which her religious beliefs would be lost not by replacement but rather by a casual attrition. In response, she becomes preoccupied by the fortification of religious feeling. Reflecting upon what, precisely, sustains her religious commitments, she comes to a provisional answer in the suggestion that “maybe the vague thing in me that keeps me in [the church] is hope” (8). But she struggles to elaborate upon the concept of hope, confessing that she is “somewhat at a loss” with regard to its structure and significance (17).³⁵

It seems that the church would provide an institutional haven for O’Connor in this moment of crisis. Certainly, she continued to attend mass during these years; however, we know that doing so left her “unmoved.” The journal’s mere existence suggests that O’Connor’s experiences in a secularized academic space exceeded the intellectual and emotional grasp of the church; we might recall the Monsignor’s argument that the love of God is the business of reason, not emotion, as a concrete example. O’Connor writes her prayers, then, in opposition to the secularized institution of academia, but also outside of the religious institution of the Catholic Church. The journal represents an intensely private form of worship.

One of the foundations of what is often called the secularization thesis, which, as I have outlined in my introduction, anticipates that attachments to transcendent sources of meaning will inevitably decline and vanish in modernity, is that religion will recede from public life. This claim, as outlined by philosopher Jürgen Habermas, holds that “the churches and other religious organizations [will] lose their control over law, politics, public welfare, education and science; they [will] restrict themselves to their proper function of administering the means of salvation, turn exercising religion into a private matter and in general lose public influence and relevance” (17). O’Connor’s turn to contemplative writing is, in part, a function of the pressure of secularization. The secularization thesis as Habermas describes it does not imagine that the

ability of the church to carry out its “proper function” will be compromised as it recedes from public life. At the level of genre, O’Connor’s written prayers take secularization at its word, as a process that is inevitably well underway, not only in redefining public institutional spaces, but also in diminishing the overall role and relevance of the church, even in the life of the individual believer.³⁶

The strongest evidence for this interpretation comes in her description of canonical prayer as inadequate to her present needs. Unable to explain why, she writes that she is compelled to depart from the shared language of church tradition in order to find an emotional connection with God. In the opening prayer of the journal, she explains, “I do not mean to deny the traditional prayers I have said all my life; but I have been saying them and not feeling them.” By contrast, she continues, “I can feel a warmth of love heating me when I think & write this to You.” Finally, she cites the chilling effect of the secular, writing, “please do not let the explanations of the psychologists about this make it turn suddenly cold” (4). In these three consecutive lines, O’Connor characterizes the church as lacking in relevance; infuses her writing with the feeling of transcendent love she continually seeks and very rarely attains in her prayers; and guards against a menacing secularity, embodied by anonymous psychologists, who would view her beliefs through a distant observational gaze, prepared to explain away what is, for her, an enduring mystery.

In an introduction to O’Connor’s collected correspondence, her close friend Sally Fitzgerald notes that there is in the letters “not a hint of deviation from her orthodox position, even in her mind. She says in so many words to one correspondent that she has simply never doubted, or for a moment wanted to leave the fold” (xv). We now know that she did doubt the strength of her position. But nearly twenty years after writing *A Prayer Journal*, she speaks

publicly of her religious beliefs with thundering confidence. In a March 1963 lecture at Sweetbriar College in Virginia, entitled “Novelist and Believer,” she states, “I shall have to speak, without apology, of the Church, even when the Church is absent; of Christ, even when Christ is not recognized” (155). Her encounters with the secular at Iowa appear to have ultimately sharpened her religious beliefs.³⁷ In her fragmented and vulnerable prayers, O’Connor begins to articulate the project she undertakes as a Catholic novelist writing toward the contrast of a secular world.

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That O’Connor explicitly defined herself in relation to what she considered a predominantly secular audience is a pillar upon which much of the scholarship on her writing is constructed. She often invoked the broad historical arc of the secularization thesis to explain the disconnect she perceived between the meanings she intended for her stories and the interpretations offered by her readers. And she consistently viewed the era in which she lived, with considerable dismay, as a period of religious degeneration. In the lecture “Novelist and Believer,” O’Connor describes her contemporaries as the inheritors of an ascendant secularity, and, correspondingly, a diminished religious sensibility. “For the last few centuries,” she writes, “we have lived in a world which has been increasingly convinced that the reaches of reality end very close to the surface, that there is no ultimate divine source, that the things of the world do not pour forth from God” (157). In this context, the religious writer cannot directly represent theological concepts, “because no one will have the least idea of what you are about” (166). She goes on to specify that her aesthetic is defined by the use of “distortion,” through which, she explains, she responds to the imperative of communicating transcendent value to readers unable to recognize it in any other form (166).³⁸ Charles Taylor takes O’Connor as the exemplary

Christian writer in a secular age precisely because the dominant secular order is the most significant determinant of her aesthetic innovation. She is forced by it to “invent a new language or literary style” through which to express religious insight (732).

From her collected letters, we know that the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain influenced O'Connor's style; scholars often quote her as noting to a friend in April of 1957 that she had “cut her aesthetic teeth” on his *Art and Scholasticism*. They less frequently include her assessment of Maritain's limits; in the same letter, she continues, “some of the things he says get soft at times. He is a philosopher and not an artist but he does have a great understanding of the nature of art, which he gets from St. Thomas” (216). The full quote is relevant to the task of reading Maritain's aesthetic theory as an important precedent to O'Connor's fiction, because the guidance he offers to the Christian artist is so deeply personal—or, as O'Connor describes it, soft—that it is difficult to ascertain with precision the ways in which his influence may have shaped her novels and stories. In a representative example of this, he writes, “if you want to produce Christian work, be a Christian, and try to make a work of beauty into which you have put your heart” (54). In *A Prayer Journal*, O'Connor emphatically concurs with Maritain on this point. She prays, “please let Christian principles permeate my writing and please let there be enough of my writing (published) for Christian principles to permeate” (5). But even taken together with other similar lines from the journal, this approach merely enables the labeling of O'Connor and her fiction as “Christian.” It is not adequate to the task of literary interpretation.

Instead, it is Maritain's arguments on artistic contemplation that are made newly relevant with the publication of *A Prayer Journal*. Though we could previously see O'Connor's thinking in her letters, her contemplative writing in the journal, in the sense in which Aquinas and, following him, Maritain, use the term, is directed to God. For Maritain, emotions are an effect of

it, and beauty overflows from it. Furthermore, he argues that the aesthetic object, in this case a novel or story, will produce in its reader “a kind of contemplation,” that will relate to the original contemplations of the artist. *A Prayer Journal*, far from being a stand-alone devotional text, is a preliminary document to the fiction; it is a site of contemplation where O’Connor enacts the conceptual work from which she later culls material for aesthetic distortion. As such, we can trace the specific contemplations of the journal through to their continued presence in the fiction. The example I will take up here is the character Rayber in her second and final novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*.³⁹ Rayber inhabits the landscape O’Connor envisions when she prays for God to help her to “see the bareness and the misery of the places where [He is] not adored but desecrated,” and embodies the cold intellectual asceticism against which O’Connor struggles in the journal (9). In Rayber, O’Connor uses inversion, which I take to be the most complete form of distortion, to display the interior life of an atheist for whom the emotions are not a refuge, but an existential danger. Because Rayber’s stated intention is to never believe in God, he decides that he must studiously avoid feeling anything, especially transcendent love.

The novel is set in Tennessee, during an unspecified era that the reader is given to understand as approximately contemporary to the moment of O’Connor’s writing. At the center of the novel in its action and meaning is the character Bishop, Rayber’s developmentally disabled son. Rayber’s nephew, Tarwater, believes the child to be an object to be acted upon through supernatural directives; tasked with baptizing Bishop for the honor of God, he instead drowns the child as evidence of his freedom of action, the Devil’s challenge to him during their many conversations throughout the novel. Bishop is thus sacrificed to Tarwater’s choice, but also to Rayber’s complicity.⁴⁰ Rayber feels an unavoidable love for his son, and so attempts to contain all of his emotional experience in this transcendent connection to Bishop, who, he

simultaneously maintains, is “an idiot,” who will be “five years old for all eternity,” and therefore “useless forever” (34). Yet, even as he has found that he “could not live without” his child, his greatest fear is not that he may one day lose Bishop, but rather that in Bishop’s death, the “horrificing love” he feels for the child would overwhelm, and thus destroy, the other territories of his ascetic, rational life.

In Rayber, O’Connor imagines a life without feelings of faith. In doing so, she also reveals a categorical distrust of intellectuals; she defines them narrowly and views them as leading lives of deadening atrophy, both emotional and religious. Literary critic Tara Powell describes O’Connor’s fiction as taking a recurring interest in “the pitfalls of an intellectual life untempered by spiritual humility” (20). Powell describes Rayber as the “most fully realized example,” in all of O’Connor’s writing, of intellectuals who “consciously reject as inferior” forms of knowledge and experience derived from sources other than reason alone, an assessment with which I strongly agree (35). Rayber’s decisions to pattern his interior life upon his own intellectual understanding, and to perceive the world solely through “strict patterns whereby certain scientifically perceptible laws determine human behavior,” leave him unable to apprehend the loss of his son (44). Rayber’s approach to life can be summarized, in his own words, in the phrase, ““what we understand we can control”” (194). Literary critic Susan Srigley argues that O’Connor’s underlying message is that “when asceticism is lived in isolation and directed against love, as in the case of Rayber,” it takes on the attributes of “self-torture and annihilation” (191).⁴¹ Rayber’s social isolation is acute, and he violently excises love from his life.

Rayber describes his feelings for Bishop as “love without reason, love for something futureless, love that appeared to exist only to be itself, imperious and all demanding.” What

Rayber fears and dreads is the possibility that Bishop is only the center of this feeling, which would make it far more expansive in its authority. Rayber explains, “if, without thinking, he lent himself to it, he would feel suddenly a morbid surge of the love that terrified him—powerful enough to throw him to the ground in an act of idiot praise. It was completely irrational and abnormal” (113). The clause “without thinking” indicates the point of vulnerability for Rayber; his method in avoiding feeling is to engage in continual, purposeful thought. O’Connor poignantly describes him as embarking upon the choice to “anesthetize his life” (182). He engages in “a rigid ascetic discipline. He did not look at anything too long, he denied his senses unnecessary satisfactions. He slept in a narrow iron bed, worked sitting in a straight-backed chair, ate frugally, spoke little, and cultivated the dullest friends” (114). And he plans for the worst: in the event of Bishop’s death, he decides, he will brace himself against the overwhelming feelings that would suddenly have no limit. In the details of his daily life, he prepares himself for this struggle against love and the religious belief it would require. But when Rayber gives Tarwater permission to take Bishop boating on the lake, it becomes clear that he will tacitly allow the child to be murdered. Looking out over the water, with a sudden certainty that Bishop is gone, Rayber expects his rigidly kept feelings for the child to expand beyond his control. Instead, he waits “for the raging pain, the intolerable hurt that was his due, to begin, so that he could ignore it, but he continued to feel nothing. He stood light-headed at the window and it was not until he realized that there would be no pain that he collapsed” (203). Rayber has become emotionally incapacitated.

The distortion of religious contemplation in Rayber is his focused renunciation of God. The posture that he strikes is defiance, the opposite of devotional worship. This in itself is not surprising. Rayber is an atheist, and, like the more well-known protagonist of O’Connor’s first

novel, *Wise Blood* (1952), Hazel Motes, he is obsessed with religion even as he denies its claims to truth. What is most interesting about Rayber's contemplative life is its relationship to his emotional life. He actively and purposefully interrupts the process of thoughts generating feelings by violently struggling to never feel at all. For Rayber, rather than thought leading to feeling, the intellect turns in upon itself. He forces his thoughts into a closed circuit of ascetic abstraction. The result is that in training himself to not feel, to not love, he cannot feel, cannot love, even when he has reasoned out in advance that he should. Bishop's death marks the terminal point of Rayber's emotional life, not its beginning.

In *A Prayer Journal*, O'Connor expresses that she wants to feel and wants to love; feelings would give her reassuring evidence of her convictions. Rayber wants the opposite; for him, the integrity of unbelief is evidenced by his ability to not only control, but ultimately to kill, his feelings. For O'Connor, the knowledge of God is in an intimate proximity; she wants to be "near" God; Rayber strives to know without feeling, materially, empirically, and intellectually, as far from the concept of divine authority as possible. O'Connor forces the reader to contemplate the consequences of this asceticism, both for Bishop, whose life is taken from him, and for Rayber, whose story ends at the moment of his collapse. If Maritain is right, then what the reader feels in that moment will relate to O'Connor's lifelong contemplations of the transcendent. But it may be instead that the reader's own contemplations and beliefs will determine that trajectory of feeling.

Chapter Three

The Work of Hope: Appeals and Actions in Gloria Naylor's Short Fiction

Asked in a 1988 interview to discuss her reasons for joining the Jehovah's Witnesses, a religious group to which she devoted seven years of her life, novelist Gloria Naylor replied,

They had assassinated Martin Luther King, Jr., in April of 1968. It was after that assassination that I just felt that there was no hope in this system, in this country, for any kind of real change. And up until that point, we had thought that there could indeed be change. And I said, "My God, if they kill a voice that is this moderate, where is the hope?" This is the messenger that must be slain. And that's a very mild message. Then there is absolutely no hope left. And so I decided to work for a better world. (Bonetti 50)

Naylor recalls King's death through a refrain: his murder represents the violent dissolution of hope.⁴² She feels hopelessness in the project of racial equality in the United States; she also finds this to be the only reasonable conclusion as she thinks through the political situation. Naylor draws upon feeling and thought to articulate the ways in which, after King's assassination, hope becomes suddenly untenable. In this chapter, I demonstrate that her portrayal of hope as both affectively and intellectually invested echoes King's commentaries on its meaning, value, and application. Furthermore, I argue that Naylor's fiction elaborates, in its representation of the details of individual black lives, the general principles of King's theology.

Across King's public writings, hope is a defining concept. He presents it as both a necessary theological virtue and an effective political strategy. From the pulpit, he emphasizes the Christian God as its final, transcendent referent, but also allows great latitude for the believer, in worship of that God, to be disappointed. In other words, King consistently argues that his

listeners should expect that many of their appeals will go unanswered, and that they should continue to hope in spite of this.⁴³ Of his many notable sermons, two give particular attention to the interpretation of Biblical passages in which hope is discussed; in each, the concept is contextualized by an acknowledgement of black suffering. In “Shattered Dreams,” delivered on 5 April 1959, and “The Meaning of Hope,” given on 10 December 1967, both at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, King argues that genuine hope requires religious faith. But he promotes an understanding of hope that, while it adheres to a belief in God’s eternal justice, also demands that the believer actively work for a better world. In asking his congregants to cultivate hope—even in the face of white supremacy—he brings thought, feeling, and action into a coherent whole.

In his statements on hope, King also develops and advances a view of the relationship between emotion and cognition that has a concretizing effect on the orthodoxy of feeling. This is because his primary concern is not exegesis, but rather black survival. For King, thought and feeling must function together to culminate in meaningful action. He continually returns to hope, despair, and optimism as the three possible responses to hardship. As he portrays them, they are similarly constructed, each one consisting of feeling and thought; they can be best understood as emotion substantiated by belief. He advocates hope among them as the most powerful, specifically as evidenced by the religious convictions he views as bringing it into being, but also because of its capacity for motivating and sustaining action. Thus, in the sermons, and in his other public writings, King explicitly describes hope as having political as well as theological stakes. He associates Black Power with despair, arguing vehemently against it on those grounds, and he sees in liberal Christian theology an unrealistic and escapist optimism too weak to

transform social relations or the country. King's theology of hope cannot be understood without attention to the ways in which he positions it against what he views as its inferior alternatives.

King's theology and political strategy provide a rich archive of general principles; from his statements on hope, I construct a theoretical frame through which to read Gloria Naylor's first book, *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982). In the seven short stories that constitute the novel, Naylor imagines the potential of characters who cultivate hope within lives that are constricted—and many times destroyed—by racism and misogyny. The women of Brewster Place see their dreams shattered by racial discrimination. In every case, their losses are unrecoverable. And yet they persistently maintain hope in the face of violence against the black body and soul. Naylor depicts hope as a rigorous approach to life, and an expansive one, but she also tests its limits and marks its vulnerabilities. Her portrayals of the affective and intellectual dimensions of hope acknowledge the complexity of gender and sexuality. These are points of difference that are suppressed in the orthodoxy of feeling, a suppression that carries over into King's sermons, and one that can be partially corrected through attention to her work. Like King, Naylor emphasizes the capacity of hope for motivating action. When her characters make an appeal, which is the expression of hope—it can be silent or spoken—they also actively move toward its fulfillment. They do not wait for an answer.

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To refer to Martin Luther King, Jr. as a theologian is to cite a series of scholarly debates on influence, institutionalized racism, and academic credibility.⁴⁴ I follow James Cone's comprehensive account of King as a "theologian of action," which maintains that the black church was the central influence on, and the Civil Rights Movement the primary site of, the development of King's religious thinking. Cone, who established black theology as an academic

discourse with *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969), argued in a 1986 essay that King's place as one of the most creative and important theologians in American history had been obscured by the "narrow, elitist, and racist definition of theology" prevailing in academia. For King, Cone contends, theology was not a matter of scholarly argument, but rather of a freedom struggle; King was "an engaged theologian, actively seeking to transform the structures of oppression. His thinking emerged from his efforts to establish a just society." As such, Cone argues, King "refined his theology according to the needs of the people with whom and for whom he was struggling. His theology was not permanent or static but was dynamic, constantly emerging from the historical circumstances in which he was engaged" (21). Cone's perspective allows for the consideration of King's religious thinking as a sophisticated form of public theology and the foregrounding of King himself as a figure of hope in the national imagination.

However, an acceptance of a sharp divide between the terms "public" and "intellectual" would do little to acknowledge the complexity of their interplay in King's work. For my purposes, this is a matter of emphasis; in stepping back from academia as a privileged site of intellectual labor, and focusing instead on King as a pastor in the pulpit and a citizen in a political movement, I am claiming with historian David Garrow that we should not be satisfied to interpret the years King spent as a student as the defining moments of his intellectual biography.⁴⁵ But neither do I turn my attention here to extensive reading from the archives, in which, Garrow argues, the only authoritative version of King's beliefs can be found. In "The Intellectual Development of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Influences and Commentaries," (1986), he writes, "dependable analysis of King's thinking must be based on wide-ranging usage of his hundreds of unpublished" writings, a commendable and rigorous standard to set, but one that is overly dismissive of interpretive work that self-critically limits its scope to the important public

dimension of King's work (5). In situating King as a public theologian, and reading only from work published or otherwise formally presented during his lifetime, I am engaging in a delimited study through which much, I believe, can nevertheless be learned.

The sermon, particularly in the rich vernacular traditions of the black church, is the privileged genre of public theology. In his sermons, King includes arguments about the meaning and value of the emotions, and this is the aspect of these texts in which I am most interested. Though the view he advances is not systematic, specific principles emerge. Fundamentally, King highly values the affective when it is authorized by the intellectual; in this, he concurs with Augustine and Aquinas, whose theological contributions to American culture I have discussed in chapters one and two. King distinguishes between emotions that are informed by rigorous thinking and what he calls "emotionalism," a term he uses to underscore emotional experiences he views as empty of cognitive content.⁴⁶ He dismisses the latter, acknowledging the emotions as worthy of serious consideration only in the former sense. Many of his statements on the emotions thus turn upon the active involvement of cognition, interpretation, and belief.⁴⁷ For King, emotions are reflections of the depth and precision of the ideas behind them; thus, intellectual errors correspond to what he calls "superficial" emotion. He repeatedly describes hope, the defining spiritual concept of his work, as co-constructed by thought and feeling; it cannot function with only one of these in isolation.

King first elaborates upon hope directly and at length in his sermon "Shattered Dreams," offering a powerful vision of black survival. This sermon can be understood as a study of the unanswered appeal of the faithful Christian to his God; King devotes considerable attention to the nuances of disappointment, grief, and racial oppression before turning to hope as their reigning counterpoint. Taking Paul as the scriptural case study for maintaining hope in struggle,

King reads Romans 15:24 as an exposition on life in “a world where our highest hopes are not satisfied” (79).⁴⁸ He begins by situating hope in the most general frame, often relying upon the word “man” as an all-encompassing signifier of potential identities, and using inclusive phrases such as “we” and “our human experience.” When King argues, for example, that “shattered dreams are a hallmark of our mortal life,” he is making a claim to the general tragedy of a broken world, a shared premise of Christianity across racial and denominational lines (79). But when he turns to the transformative potential of hope in response to suffering, he consistently foregrounds American slavery.

Enslaved black men and women, living in the expectation of freedom while enduring the sufferings of oppression, are the exemplars, in King’s public writing, of hope. “Many Negro slaves in America,” he reminds his listeners, “having longed passionately for freedom, died before emancipation” (79). He addresses the role of hope in the life of the individual and the community by drawing upon the historical continuities between the projects of emancipation and civil rights. Connecting the devastating shattered dream of enslavement to the lived experiences of the congregants before him, he contends that “Negroes have long dreamed of freedom, but still we are confined in an oppressive prison of segregation and discrimination” (83). King argues that the immediate response of the human personality to suffering is withdrawal into bitter resentment. But this is not inevitable. Black slaves instead developed a “bottomless vitality” through which they “transformed the darkness of frustration into the light of hope,” even in a “seemingly hopeless situation,” King writes (84). It matters greatly that the enslaved are understood in this passage to be devout Christians. Their trust in God, for example, gives them a “capacity to deal creatively” with what they face. “The Christian faith,” King writes, is the foundation by which believers can “absorb the most intense pain without abandoning our sense

of hope” (86). Hope derives from committed belief, and the affective provisions of hope are in turn called upon to “absorb” the pain inflicted upon black life while continually sustaining faith in God. King argues that the institution of slavery yielded insights into faith and hope that his congregants could claim as an inheritance. He then turns to the application of this argument to the ongoing political confrontation against legacies of discrimination born of that same history.

Hope, at the level of the individual, is transformative in that it leverages belief and emotion together to respond to hardship. King preaches that hope is a resource to be used by each congregant in his or her personal experience of the sorrow, foreclosure of opportunity, and physical violence that defined Jim Crow segregation and its northern counterparts. In mobilizing a collective to confront this overwhelming history of racial violence, King must also persuade his listeners that hope can be an effective strategy in the task of reshaping a society. He writes, “our most fruitful course is to stand firm with courageous determination, move forward nonviolently amid obstacles and setbacks, accept disappointments, and cling to hope” while fighting segregation (83). Hope is defined in part by its resistance to certainty or guarantee; King forthrightly acknowledges that “some of us, of course, will die without having received the realization of freedom, but we must continue to sail on our charted course. We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope” (83). King’s understanding of hope is that it will likely not be fulfilled within the frame of material life; it will more likely testify to an unanswered appeal. His argument requires the transcendent both as a source of ultimate justice—the fixed destination of the charted course—and as a redemptive eternity from which hope draws its intangible substance.

In the sermon “The Meaning of Hope,” delivered eight years after “Shattered Dreams,” King reiterates the main arguments of “Shattered Dreams.” But he further refines his view of the

active participation of the believer in bringing about change. He explains, “genuine hope involves the recognition that what is hoped-for is in some sense already present.” This line of argumentation is a departure from the stark binary he had previously discussed between the dream and the disappointment. Here, King argues that there is already evidence of an event or circumstance that has not yet come to pass. “It’s not present in the sense that it is not fulfilled,” he continues, but what you really hope for is present in the sense that it is in you as a power that drives you to fulfill the hope.” To clarify by way of example, King examines peace on earth. The world is not peaceful, he explains, “but peace is here in the sense that there are some people who love peace and peace is here in the sense that it is in those persons as a power that drives them to seek to make peace a reality” (3). More firmly here than at any other point in his sermons, King describes the transformative effect of hope upon the external world. Having established the point that individuals have interpretive and affective agency, even in response to violence against them, King here insists that hope is an actively engaged approach to racial injustice and violence that *in itself* brings about a better world. The internal power that drives people toward the fulfillment of their hopes is the attribute that neither optimism nor despair can match.

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King’s discussion of hope is often comparative. For example, he argues that hope is not to be mistaken for optimism, and that it can be best understood in direct opposition to despair. In his intellectual autobiography, “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” first published in *Christian Century* in 1960, he discusses what he calls the “easy optimism” of liberal Christian theology. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (1968), a collection of political essays and speeches published shortly after his assassination, provides representative examples of King’s critiques of, to use his phrase, the “futile despair” of Black Power.⁴⁹ These two points of comparison also

surface in the sermons. He presents optimism and despair as flawed approaches to life and ineffective political strategies for the achievement of racial equality in the United States, and though they are very different perspectives, he sees them as similarly misreading hope—to tragic effect—and mistakenly rejecting it as a mechanism for social change. As King presents it, liberal theology endorses the idea that human nature is inherently good, and anticipates positive progress as consequently inevitable; it finds hope unnecessary. To his mind, Black Power understands hope as an empty promise, and rejects the possibility of positive reform within the constraints of a racist American society.

King characterizes the defining emotional texture of liberal theology as an “easy optimism,” based in a belief in the better nature of man.⁵⁰ He acknowledges that he had previously found this to be an intellectually satisfying conclusion; in seminary, he was for a time “absolutely convinced of the natural goodness of man and the natural power of human reason” before questioning and ultimately rejected these arguments. The view that the heart is inclined toward good rather than evil leads to an emphasis on the capacity for justice and progress to overcome violence and destruction. But King finds a “false idealism” in this claim, in that it lacks a sufficient response to the abundance of historical evidence for the “depths and strength of sin,” evidence that he doubtlessly understands to be primarily drawn from the archives of racial violence in the United States (135). And “reason, devoid of the purifying power of faith, can never free itself from distortions and rationalizations” designed to justify and exonerate sinful actions, he writes (136). He thus confronts as inadequate the foundational belief of liberal theology that human beings can be trusted to choose good over evil in any given circumstance.

It could be argued that optimism, as a cultivated disposition of taking a positive view of the world, is as productive an inner resource as hope.⁵¹ But this perception-based attribute of

optimism is its weakness, in King's view. For King, a crucial distinction between hope and optimism is the level of action each generates. In short, you work toward that which you hope for; you wait for events you are optimistic will come to pass. To step back from the course of events and passively observe them as demonstrating a momentum toward the good disables urgency and action. Thus, the weakness of optimism for black survival converges upon a complacency of thought and feeling; to regard human intentions and historical outcomes as inevitably tilting toward the good disarms the participatory agency that hope makes possible.⁵² King's central argument against optimism as a political strategy is that there is no guarantee of an eventual racial equality and brotherhood. It must be forged.

King contrasts hope with optimism, but also with pessimism and despair, two terms he uses interchangeably to indicate intellectual and affective defeat. In a chapter of *Where Do We Go From Here?* titled "Black Power," he notes that "first, it is necessary to understand that Black Power is a cry of disappointment," a "cry of daily hurt and persistent pain (33). He sympathizes with and honors this outcry. "Nevertheless," he argues, it lacks both the "substance and program" necessary for it to succeed in becoming "the basic strategy for the civil rights movement in the days ahead" (45). By turn, he critiques the thinking behind the movement and the emotions informed by those intellectual commitments. Black Power is, in King's reading, "the view that American society is so hopelessly corrupt and enmeshed in evil that there is no possibility of salvation from within" (45). This sentence is more explicitly informed by theology than any other in the critique. As I have elaborated above, King argues consistently in his sermons that there is no situation in which a verdict of abject hopelessness is the correct one. He agrees with the assessment that the nation is corrupt and enmeshed in evil, at the level of policy through to the white individual; however, it is not, in his view, beyond redemption.

On the contrary, he argues, a hopeful future entails the recognition of interrelatedness. He writes, “in the final analysis the weakness of Black Power is its failure to see that the black man needs the white man and the white man needs the black man” and, on this basis, to acknowledge that “we are bound together in a single garment of destiny” (52). King directly critiques the movement’s fundamental beliefs, but he reserves his strongest words for the joining of the intellectual and the affective in which those beliefs culminate: despair.

But revolution, though born of despair, cannot long be sustained by despair. This is the ultimate contradiction of the Black Power movement. It claims to be the most revolutionary wing of the social revolution taking place in the United States. Yet it rejects the one thing that keeps the fire of revolutions burning: the ever-present flame of hope. When hope dies, a revolution degenerates into an indiscriminating catchall for evanescent and futile gestures. The Negro cannot entrust his destiny to a philosophy nourished solely on despair, to a slogan that cannot be implemented into a program. (46)

Despair registers the frustration and bereavement of racial oppression; it is a spark that leaps high into the darkness as it burns away. It gives the first breath to the revolution, but it also extinguishes itself along with the revolution. Despair, King writes, provides no sustenance. While hope takes its strength from faith, and nourishes those who seek it, the philosophy of Black Power takes its strength from despair, and ends in ashes. This passage marks King’s most violent rhetorical encounter with opponents internal to the civil rights movement. It argues for hope as the only viable combination of thought and feeling; it warns that despair is an investment in affective and intellectual suicide.

There remains the possibility that King misunderstood the movement he tried to forestall. James Cone devotes an opening section of his landmark *Black Theology and Black Power* to the question “Black Power: Hope or Despair?” His answer to the question both opposes and complicates King’s assertion that the movement could be defined by, and reach a point of failure in, despair. Cone writes, “Black Power is an expression of hope, not hope that whites will change the structure of oppression, but hope in the humanity of black people” (29). Shifting the locus of hope from the transcendent to the material, he implies that the civil rights movement before the ascension of Black Power always required more than faith in God. It required hope that white people would transform themselves and the defining structures of the society they controlled. He continues, the “willingness of black people to die is not despair, it is hope, not in white people, but in their own dignity grounded in God himself. This willingness to die for human dignity is not novel. Indeed, it stands at the heart of Christianity” (30). In this passage, Cone describes a theory of racial affect, of a black hope that produces a willingness to sacrifice life to gain dignity in social life. Black Power does not understand itself as a movement defined by despair. Instead, it claims to offer a different account of hope, one that strives toward the divine on the basis of its reflection in the black body, a vision by which white power is rendered irrelevant. But these opposing theological-political views both elide the ways in which racial violence strikes gendered bodies differently. I turn now to the fiction of Gloria Naylor, which brings these differences to the fore.

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To date, Maxine Montgomery’s *The Fiction of Gloria Naylor: Houses and Spaces of Resistance* (2010) is the most important critical study of Gloria Naylor’s work. In situating Naylor in the African American literary canon, Montgomery argues that her debut novel, *The*

Women of Brewster Place, departs from the tradition of urban realism defined by the “trenchant violence and despair” most forcefully represented in Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946) (xix).

Montgomery notes that the differences between the two novels are embodied by their female protagonists, Lutie Johnson and Mattie Michael. *The Street*, she writes, “closes with a resounding note of hopelessness and despair as Lutie flees Harlem. If there is a characteristic that distinguishes Mattie from her fictional precursor in Petry’s work, it is the resourcefulness that Naylor’s central mother figure exercises in coping with the demands of city life” (5). To this reading I would add that Mattie’s resourcefulness derives in large part from her quiet but abiding Christian faith. To insist upon this is to acknowledge the religious dimension of Naylor’s work, the sum total of which literary critic James Coleman calls “a comprehensive cultural exposé of the African American sacred, spiritual, and supernatural” (13). Furthermore, Mattie’s beliefs are commonplace in context; Naylor describes Brewster Place as a religious, spiritually imbued cultural site. She writes, “practically every apartment contained a family, a Bible, and a dream that one day enough could be scraped from those meager Friday night paychecks to make Brewster Place a distant memory” (77). As important as the dream of departure and a renewal to be found elsewhere is the persistence of the Biblical text as an object of continuity and tradition. Montgomery’s analysis emphasizes the materiality of domesticity and the forms of black women’s resistance that emerge from the home as a political space. But these intimate spaces also accommodate thoughts, feelings, and acts of faith.

Three scenes in the novel, from its beginning, middle, and end, best illustrate the structural complexity of hope as both affectively and intellectually invested. Each of the scenes turns upon an appeal—which I read as expressions of hope—and each demonstrates that hope is effective in motivating action. Naylor thus elaborates King’s theology in her representations of

black women's lives; but she also complicates it by restructuring it as fundamentally interpersonal. While King understands hope as cultivated by individuals and accruing in strength when gathered into the service of a collective mission, Naylor depicts hope as immediately relational. The women in the novel "understand" one another, a term Naylor uses consistently to indicate a fullness of mutual comprehension that exceeds mere cognition to include the experiential and the emotional. Many of the women of Brewster Place can be described as going "way back, a singular term that claimed co-knowledge of all the important events in their lives and almost all of the unimportant ones" (58). This "co-knowledge" enables the women to sustain hope for each other when it recedes, and to protect one another from threats, which in this novel consistently take the form of black male aggression. In the first scene, Mattie's mother intervenes to save her daughter from domestic violence. In the second, Mattie finds Ciel, a woman she helped to raise from childhood, at a point beyond despair; she carries her back into hope. And in the final scene, the limits of black women's hope are indelibly marked out. Lorraine, excluded from the protective co-knowledge of the other women by their homophobia toward her lesbian relationship, is destroyed when she is sexually assaulted by seven men. Her appeals for their mercy go unanswered, and no one helps her. When Mattie wakes in the morning to discover Lorraine alone in the street, she immediately acts, but the mistakes of the women and the crimes of the men cannot be retracted, and cannot be healed.

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The first of these three scenes takes place prior to and apart from Brewster Place; it is the formative scene of Mattie's coming of age as a woman. Pregnant and unmarried, she is a living disappointment to her controlling and devoutly religious father. But Mattie's mother Fannie understands her daughter's situation; she reassures her that her pregnancy "ain't nothing to be

ashamed of. Havin' a baby is the most natural thing there is. The Good Book call children a gift from the Lord." While her mother describes "the act of fornication" as a sin, a remark that is in keeping with a Biblical interpretation of sexual ethics clearly informed by the respectability politics at work in this scene, she has already forgiven her daughter for that act. Mattie's mother is entirely focused on the hope of new life, represented by the child her daughter carries (20). From this place of co-knowledge, she intervenes to save Mattie's life even as she movingly appeals to a silent God for help that will not come.

When Mattie refuses to name the father of her child, her father beats her for the first time in her life. Her silence on the question of the child's paternity enrages him, and he takes up a broom and hits her, striking "the whimpering girl" until her mother tries to pull him back. Throwing Fannie aside, he hits Mattie so continuously that the broom handle breaks, leaving "a jagged section of it that he had in his fist." In the background, now on the floor across the room from her daughter, Mattie's mother appeals, "'Oh, God, oh, God,'" but she does not stay still; she repeats these words "as she got up on her bruised knees." Now standing, she continues to pray. "'Oh God, oh, God,' Fannie kept saying, as she searched blindly around the room. She finally found the shotgun pegged over the front door" and lifts it to her shoulder. Aiming at her husband, she screams, "'hit my child again, and I'll meet your soul in hell!'" (24). Mattie's father stops, steps back, and, realizing what he has done, begins to weep. The escalation of Fannie's emotions, among them fear and anger, paired with the established conviction that her husband does not have the final word on the value of Mattie's life and future, are joined in the appeal, "Oh God." According to King's comparative argument, Fannie's decisive actions are the result of the strength of her hope. Had she despaired, interpreting along with her husband that a socially illegitimate pregnancy was the end point of meaning in Mattie's life, or optimistically waited for

her husband to, in her words, “come round” on the issue, the outcome of this scene would have been drastically altered (20).

The simultaneous combination of religious appeal and independent action modeled by Mattie’s mother in this scene forms an inheritance for her which she will pass down to Ciel, a young woman who she helps to raise from childhood. When Ciel’s little girl dies in a household accident, the culmination of a turn of events set in motion by Ciel’s boyfriend Eugene, Mattie emerges as a stalwart redemptive figure. She ushers a faltering Ciel back from her inconsolable grief. At the funeral for the child, Ciel is numb; around her, “the plaintive Merciful Jesuses, lightly sprinkled with sobs, were lost on her ears.” These appeals to a higher power, for solace or for explanation, are met with silence. They also are unheard by their secondary audience, Ciel, for whom the prayers are not comforting, but are only meaningless collections of sound. She instead thinks of the prayers she herself has offered to God, and reflects on the significance of the fact that they have gone unanswered:

Ciel’s whole universe existed in the seven feet of space between herself and her child’s narrow coffin. There was not even room for this comforting God whose melodious virtues floated around her sphere, attempting to get in. Obviously, He had deserted or damned her, it didn’t matter which. All Ciel knew was that her prayers had gone unheeded—that afternoon she had lifted her daughter’s body off the kitchen floor, those blank days in the hospital, and now. (101)

It soon becomes clear that the prayers in question are not for her daughter to be saved or brought back, a request that Ciel’s story indicates is simply an unreasonable one, but rather that, in the wake of the child’s death, Ciel would be allowed by a merciful God to die as well.

Ciel's desire for her own death can only be described in theological terms as a form of despair; her feelings of complete loss are substantiated by the belief that this loss is a retribution she deserves. Naylor demonstrates the radical passivity that is borne of despair, writing that Ciel "was forced to slowly give up the life that God had refused to take from her." She fulfills her own appeal for an end to her life by ceasing to eat or drink unless forced to do so. She withdraws, explicitly doing "what God had chosen not to" (101). Her pernicious inaction directly results from despair. But Mattie refuses to accept Ciel's interpretation, instead feeling, thinking, and acting from hope on her behalf. Her intervention in the scene begins with a realization: "Dear God, she thought, she's dying, and right in front of our faces" (102). Mattie overturns Ciel's appeals for a merciful death, demanding that she survive. She yells, "Merciful Father, no!" and begins to act even as she is still speaking; her words are a "blasphemous fireball that shot forth and went smashing against the gates of heaven, raging and kicking, demanding to be heard. 'No! No! No!'" She "surged into the room, pushing the neighbor woman and the others out of her way" (103). Physically lifting Ciel out of her chair, she bathes her, places her into her bed and watches over her.

Mattie understands both where Ciel is and the destination, signified by the beginning a new day, that she must reach in order to survive. Naylor concludes the chapter with a rehearsal of Mattie's unspoken understanding, writing, "Ciel lay down and cried. But Mattie knew the tears would end. And she would sleep. And morning would come" (105). In this scene, Mattie most clearly embodies the active participation of the hopeful believer, who, as King argues, directly shapes the external world, by making the hoped-for outcome already "present in the sense that it is in you as a power that drives you to fulfill the hope." Mattie, like Fannie before her, is adequate to the task of fulfilling the hope of a loved one's survival and overcoming.

But none of the losses endured by the women of Brewster Place are recoverable; in King's words, the women are forced to "accept" their shattered dreams, without remaining beholden to them, to survive and move forward. But there is an exception. The victim of a rape viciously motivated by hatred of women and queer desire, Lorraine can only be said to survive her attack in the physical sense. While her body persists, her ability to think and feel is extinguished by the total corrosion of her ability to act on her own behalf. Defenseless against her attackers, and with no intervening force to protect her, she suffers an internal collapse. Her one source of hope is retained by the men who in their every act further destroy her; she makes unanswered appeals to them, again and again, for mercy. Naylor writes, "she worked her sore mouth, trying to form the one word that had been clawing inside her—'Please.' It squeezed through her paralyzed vocal cords and fell lifelessly at their feet" (170).

Few scholars have written on this scene; it is particularly difficult to map out Lorraine's narrative end point, which is neither death nor survival, but rather a psychological disintegration so complete that it reduces her expressive capability to a blank stare and the repetition of the word "please," for the rest of her life (171). However, literary critic Laura Tanner offers a nuanced reading of the scene of the rape and its narrative impact. She interprets Lorraine's body as the site of storytelling, not only of abject victimization. Tanner writes, "Lorraine's inability to express her own pain forces her to absorb not only the shock of bodily violation but the sudden rupture of her mental and psychological autonomy. As the body of the victim is forced to tell the rapist's story, that body turns against Lorraine's consciousness and begins to destroy itself, cell by cell" (577). The rapist's story narrates the violence of racial oppression as it is experienced by the black men of Brewster Place; the rape thus inscribes on Lorraine's body both the specific

aggression of these men against this lesbian woman and the systematized aggression against all black lives by white society.

In the morning that follows these events, Mattie wakes to see Lorraine's altered form, a body crawling and incoherent in the alleyway outside her window. She cries out, "'merciful Jesus!'" She threw a coat over her nightgown, slipped on a pair of shoes, and tried to make her arthritic legs hurry down the steps" (172). But no amount of haste, or concern, or petitioning, will restore Lorraine. I have described the project in which King was engaged as a public theology of hope. In the novel, the concept of the "public" must be scaled to the community of Brewster Place and its referents in other parts of the country, such as Mattie's hometown in the south and Ciel's resettlement on the west coast. This community of women can be best understood as an intimate public, in which knowledge of the lives of others is gathered and shared between the women upon whom the book is so completely focused. Throughout the stories, everyone on the street is always watching one another; the details of their lives are known, but the women support one another to varying degrees. Lorraine was discriminated against by the other women, and set out as a target of violence for the men. Her situation is hopeless, and it could have been averted. As such, everyone is involved, and everyone is complicit.

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In this chapter, I have argued that Martin Luther King, Jr., contributes as decisively to the orthodoxy of feeling as Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. His contributions are shaped by the history of racial violence in the United States, which leads to the question of whether the orthodoxy of feeling is itself segregated. The orthodoxy of feeling is a reflection of Christianity as it has been organized in history. In the United States, an important aspect of that history is the

division of Christianity along racial lines that originated in the often forced conversion of black slaves. The traditions that are now gathered under the name of “the black church” derive from, and richly exceed, this origin. The following three chapters will focus on the black church in an analysis of the sociality of the emotions.

Section Two Introduction: Affective Communion in the Black Church

Contemporary affect theory is fundamentally grounded in an inquiry into the social dimension of the emotions. In her essay, “Invoking Affect,” (2005), an early account of what has been called the “affective turn” in literary and cultural studies, feminist theorist Clare Hemmings underscores the social as a point of reference. She notes that, as it is described in the foundational writings of Brian Massumi and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, affect “possesses, in itself, the capacity to restructure social meaning” (550). From Ann Cvetkovich’s well-regarded work on affective communities to Teresa Brennan’s discussion of the transmission of affect, in which she argues that the affects “of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another,” a discursive focus on social context is evident (3).⁵³

Yet, its unequivocal commitment to the social notwithstanding, affect theory has given little attention to religion, or to the communal contexts in which it is often practiced. Furthermore, scholarship on the emotions has only occasionally engaged race as an organizing principle.⁵⁴ In the three chapters in this section, I discuss representations of communion—by which I mean the act of gathering together in shared belief—in American literary and critical writings on black Christian traditions from slave narratives to the autobiographical fiction of James Baldwin. I compare the affective resources of the black church in the United States, which have developed in response to racial violence, to those of the traditions of secular thought that emerge from this same history. Black life in the new world, as it is documented by W.E.B. Du Bois and many others, cannot be fully understood without reference to both the secular and the religious as distinct and related conceptual frameworks.⁵⁵ It is, therefore, my claim that in order for affect theory to develop comprehensive approaches to race for use by scholars in black

studies, it must first revise its current disposition toward religion. These chapters offer starting points for this larger project.⁵⁶

Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economy, to which the chapters in this section are most deeply indebted, suggests that emotions "mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective." They act to "bind subjects together" ("Affective" 119). My aim in this section is to extend Ahmed's work beyond its materialist frame, through an inquiry into the binding potentialities of spiritual and supernatural encounters. In doing so, I will take into account examples of both religious and secular forms of affective communion in black America in a consideration of different structures of sociality between the dead and the living. Namely, in the black church, an eternal temporality is brought into relationship with the present moment in the concept of the communion of saints, broadly defined as all believers through time. From the vantage of the secular, the present is haunted by the ghosts of the past. I argue that these two forms of intergenerational contact produce two distinct affective economies, and I discuss the implications of this claim in detail.

As a field, affect theory has tended to overlook race and religion, but it can be as fairly said that scholarship in black studies has yet to fully contend with the affective implications of its core debates. The past two decades have seen an intense focus on the theorization of history as it relates to black literatures and cultures. Succinctly, should scholars conceptualize the enslavement of black peoples in the new world as an enduring exercise of power that, though structurally reformulated in law and society, in literary critic Saidiya Hartman's words, "has yet ceased happening?" ("Time" 758). Or, as religion scholar Eddie Glaude Jr. has argued, does such an interpretation problematically orient "us retrospectively instead of prospectively," thereby "reducing our capacity to reflect and act in light of the hardships" of black lives? In this section,

I demonstrate that these perspectives produce and circulate emotions, a point that may seem obvious but is deserving of elaboration. My focus is on the tension between sorrow and joy; to continue with these examples, Hartman emphasizes mourning, while Glaude calls upon his readers to celebrate “the sheer joy of black life” (*Shade* 79).

It could be said, then, that sorrow and joy are not only categories of feeling, but also describe two implicit, competing critical framings of contemporary scholarship in black studies. However, both are necessary. To memorialize black suffering requires a personal confrontation with vast and immeasurable sorrow, while the full acknowledgement of black experience demands attention to exaltation and joy. These chapters seek to clarify the relationship between them. To do so is to honor Frederick Douglass’s description, in his *Narrative of the Life* (1845), of “the highest joy and the deepest sadness” expressed “at once” in the songs of slaves occasionally released from their daily labors to perform errands away from the fields (57). The simultaneity of these antithetical emotions—theologian James Cone calls them the dialectic through which black life in the new world has always been lived—continues to define black artistic production, and our criticism should reflect this (*Cross* 13).

One reason that it does not—and it is my contention that sorrow is the dominant affective framework of contemporary black studies—can be traced back to an interpretation of the Negro spiritual advanced by W.E.B. Du Bois in his canonical *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois characterizes the spirituals as “sorrow songs” (180). Importantly, his analysis of the songs points “not toward the transcendent, but instead toward a social and political transformation of this world,” as literary critic Paul Anderson notes (87). Although key figures in the Harlem Renaissance, among them Alain Locke, Zora Neale Hurston, and James Weldon Johnson, would forcefully disagree with Du Bois on these two points, countering that the spirituals were both

religious and affectively expansive, his arguments have held sway while theirs are rarely read. Political scientist Adolph Reed, Jr. argues that *The Souls of Black Folk* is the most influential articulation of the “perspective that consolidated among black political elites during the first two decades of the twentieth century.” This collection of essays, he continues, “has largely shaped what has been recognized as black political discourse and practice—including the academic study of black politics—ever since” (254). The shaping influence of *Souls* extends to the disciplines of cultural and literary studies as well. Du Bois sets a sorrowful emotional tone to the scholarly conversation. By taking Du Bois up into a textual economy of circulating ideas, contemporary scholars work within an affective economy as well; sorrow is passed from reader to reader in a memorializing posture of grief.

In my fourth chapter, the first in this section, I turn to sorrow. I describe how intergenerational affective economies, both religious and secular, emerge from the history of racial violence that begins in slavery. These economies are based on different currencies; black Christian traditions claim sorrow and joy as feelings of faith, related to one another and the transcendent through deliverance. But black secular traditions emphasize sorrow, viewing the positive emotions as unavailable to the oppressed. I will draw upon both frames in readings of slave narratives by Solomon Northup and Harriet Jacobs; work in a variety of genres by W.E.B. Du Bois; and the writings of contemporary literary critic Saidiya Hartman. In these texts, social separation is represented as the origination point of sorrow; in the memorialization of shared loss, the absent and the dead are recognized by the present and the living, a process that becomes an inheritance for future generations. In contemporary discourse, this project makes frequent reference to haunting, a secular formation in which the spiritual realm is used metaphorically to achieve intergenerational contact.

In the fifth chapter, I study joy, which, I argue, is not synonymous with happiness. I revisit Northrup and Jacobs to read for this distinction, in an inquiry into what evidence there might be of positive emotions in the slave narrative genre. My insistence on this possibility is contextualized by a condemnation of the notion of the “happy slave,” a widely and rightly reviled justification for the institution. The separation of happiness and joy, I contend, is a necessary preliminary step to the assessment of a full range of feeling in the black literary traditions that begin in enslavement. If, as Du Bois writes, the spiritual is the “articulate message of the slave to the world,” a description that can be reasonably applied to the slave narrative as well, then that message is certainly complex, not only intellectually, but also affectively (182). Evidence of positive emotions must be considered as an aspect of that complexity. In fact, this is the basis of the explications of the Negro spiritual advanced by Locke, Hurston, and Johnson, which I will discuss in this chapter in counterpoint to Du Bois. To close, I will read Glaude’s arguments on pragmatism and black Christian traditions, wherein he finds that the “sheer joy of black life” derives in part from an intimacy with suffering that is at once unwarranted and deeply transformative.

As James Baldwin writes, “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” (“Down” 98). In the sixth and final chapter in this section, I discuss *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), Baldwin’s semi-autobiographical coming of age novel. Its protagonist, fourteen-year-old John Grimes, is immersed in the social rituals and sanctions of a Harlem storefront Pentecostal church, where he experiences religious deliverance. Baldwin is the modern inheritor of the secular and the religious in black thought; throughout his writings, he confronts whiteness as a political problem, but also, in religious studies scholar J. Kameron

Carter's phrase, as a "theological problem" (4). Though Baldwin left the church in adulthood, and was often pressed in interviews to describe his relationship to Christianity in terms of embrace or renunciation, he refused to give a clear answer. I will discuss this fact of his biography with reference to Terry Eagleton's *Culture and the Death of God* (2014). Eagleton argues that culture cannot replace religion, and establishes as a task for literary criticism the delineation of the different resources they offer. My contribution to this discussion focuses on the distinct affective resources that can be said to be affiliated with religion and culture, respectively. In Baldwin's novel, this question turns on social belonging, intersected by race, sexual desire and identity, and spiritual acceptance.

My arguments on sorrow and joy in the first two chapters in this section lead to an exploration in chapter six of deliverance as a possible model for understanding racial affect. The title of *Feelings of Faith* is drawn from the conversion scene in Baldwin's novel, in which John reflects, "out of joy strength came, strength that was fashioned to bear sorrow: sorrow brought forth joy. Forever?" (221). It is a question that demands our close attention.

Chapter Four

Sorrow: The Slave Narrative and the Memorialization of Black Suffering

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), literary theorist Sarah Ahmed argues that “even if emotions have been subordinated to other faculties, they have still remained at the center of intellectual history” (4). I would add that the emotional tenor varies with the discourse; in every scholarly conversation, some categories of feeling have more currency than others. In this chapter, I argue that the dominant affect in contemporary black studies is sorrow, as it extends from literary texts in which intense suffering is represented to scholarship from the turn of the twentieth century in which sorrow is emphasized. Sorrow is an interpersonal and retrospective feeling; its tasks include mourning and memorialization, both of which we are called upon to carry out in the wake of loss. This chapter attends to how sorrow functions in black literary and scholarly traditions; how it circulates and persists; and how it is constructed as a framework through which to understand, through feeling, histories of racial violence that would be otherwise incomprehensible.

Ahmed’s theory of affective economies, in which “feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation,” helps us to think about the emotions as social without attributing them solely to individuals (8). Rather than explaining the emotions as expressive, as belonging to the self, or as representative of psychological interiority, Ahmed thinks of the emotions as “social and cultural practices” (9). The idea of circulation is of crucial importance to her theory of affective economies, though it is not the emotion, as such, that is circulated through texts and other communicative processes, but rather “it is the objects of emotion that circulate.” These objects, which vary by cultural practice, become “saturated with affect,” accumulating “affective value” over time and with repetition (11). For Ahmed, emotions

are not felt by us so much as they are invested in by us; “emotions work as a form of capital,” she writes, and “affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation.” It is a process through which value accrues: the more these objects circulate, “the more affective they become” (45). The two questions, in applying this theory to any given cultural practice, are: what is the object, and how does it move?

I draw on Ahmed’s theory in readings of key texts in the history of African American thought, expanding the temporal frame of her work on contemporary culture to analyze an intergenerational affective economy sustained by textual circulation. Furthermore, I extend her theory beyond its original materialist limits—her thinking is influenced equally by Marx and Freud, and her analysis is firmly grounded in these secular lineages—to the ways in which the spiritual and supernatural are represented and encountered in these texts. The study of race is a cultural practice, and scholarship on black life in the new world is beholden to a past defined by suffering and loss. Many generations of victims of racial violence are documented only in ledgers as nameless property to be purchased and sold. It bears repeating that the institution of slavery commodified human life; men, women, and children were circulated as objects in a capitalist economic system. In opposition to this system, first in the slave narrative and subsequently in the study of slavery (and its inheritances from emancipation to the present day) the dead are remembered and circulated as immaterial objects in a textual, affective economy of sorrow. Of primary importance to this economy is whether the frame of reference is secular or religious. In short, sorrow functions differently if its object is circulated within the limits of secular time or beyond them, in a restorative eternity.

In this chapter, I turn to exemplary texts drawn from three interrelated archives. First, in Solomon Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) and Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a*

Slave Girl (1861), I find social separation, through sale and murder, to be the origin of a retrospective affective economy of sorrow that is taken into textual circulation in the slave narrative genre. In these narratives, sorrow is both secular and religious; it serves equally as affective evidence of the sufferings endured by the slave, meant to persuade white reading publics to immediately demand abolition, and a feeling of faith lifted in prayer to a Christian God. But, in the essays that constitute the chapters of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), to which I next turn, W.E.B. Du Bois portrays sorrow in black life as primarily a secular emotion. In the essays “Of the Faith of the Fathers” and “Of the Sorrow Songs,” Du Bois interprets the black church and the Negro spiritual within a trajectory of secularization; in his analysis, sorrow should not be corrected by the “comforting dream” of an ever-diminishing religion, but rather by political action for material progress and racial uplift (144). *Souls* is the transition point at which the affective economy of sorrow becomes secularized. Third and finally, in the academic and personal writings of historian Saidiya Hartman, I find the secular affective economy of sorrow in its current form to be intensely retrospective and intergenerational. I argue that this economy is one of the mechanisms by which mourning in black studies has accrued into an affective present that is inextricably tied to the past.

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Because gender was an organizing principle of the institution of slavery, its forms of violence, and the means of resistance and escape available to its captives, I have chosen to read male- and female-authored slave narratives alongside one another. Both of the texts I consider here—*Twelve Years a Slave* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*—trace fine distinctions of antebellum political geographies and the differences in forms of suffering inflicted upon the male and female body. But it is the figure of the slave mother, separated from her children, that

accrues the most affective saturation in its textual circulation.⁵⁷ In *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), Solomon Northup recounts his life as a free man in the north, out of which he is captured and sold into slavery for more than a decade before securing his escape and reuniting with his family.⁵⁸ He movingly describes his love for his wife and children, and the pain of separation from them; he has no assurance that he will one day be free again. When he is captured, he writes, he finds himself at “the threshold of unutterable wrong, and sorrow, and despair” (11). His sufferings are overwhelming. But he writes from the vantage of survival, and the emotional power of his account derives less from his eventual return to his loved ones in freedom than his descriptions of those for whom death would be the only emancipation. His narrative is often elegiac, and it is in his tributes to those he left behind in his return to the north that he participates most compellingly in the affective economy of sorrow.

When Northup is captured, he is only one of many men and women who are being driven southward into slavery. Also with him in those first weeks of his captivity are Eliza, who had lived in relative security as the mistress of her master until, upon his death, his white children sold her away as part of his estate; her son Randall; and her daughter, Emily, who was her master’s child. They travel together in shock—“were the events of the last few weeks realities indeed? Or was I passing only through the dismal phases of a long, protracted dream? It was no illusion,” Northup recalls thinking—until they reach the slave auction (50). Eliza’s separation from her children, in Northup’s retelling, defies the cold calculations of property valuation. First, Randall is purchased; Eliza begs the man to buy her and Emily also, and to his reply that he cannot afford them all, she “burst into a paroxysm of grief, weeping plaintively.” Their captor threatens her with the whip in an attempt to silence her cries (53). But a moment later, she is separated from Emily as well. Northup writes,

It would be a relief if I could consistently pass over in silence the scene that now ensued. It recalls memories more mournful and affecting than any language can portray. I have seen mothers kissing for the last time the faces of their dead offspring; I have seen them looking down into the grave, as the earth fell with a dull sound upon their coffins, hiding them from their eyes forever; but never have I seen such an exhibition of intense, unmeasured, and unbounded grief, as when Eliza was parted from her child. (57)

Northup wishes to refuse the task of memorializing Eliza's suffering; in retelling it, he suffers as well. He insists that the intensity of the scene cannot be put into language. But, with recourse to comparison, he describes her sorrows: the loss of her children, in the separation of the auction block, is worse to endure than their deaths would have been. Indeed, it is unendurable; Eliza's story, which I will discuss further in the chapter to follow, ends as she predicts, when she states, "I can never work any if she is taken from me: I will die" (57).

Northup is a shaping force in the establishment of an affective economy of sorrow that begins its textual circulation in the slave narrative genre. By memorializing Eliza and bringing the details of her suffering to publication, he produces an object that accrues in affective value: Eliza, a grieving slave mother, one singular individual among the murdered. Affective economies require objects for circulation to function, a process through which feeling is produced and given its dimension of sociality. In its portrayal of Eliza's sorrow, *Twelve Years a Slave* also provides a model for how such an economy might become intergenerational. "Eliza never after saw or heard of Emily or Randall," Northup writes. "Day nor night, however, were they ever absent from her memory. In the cotton field, in the cabin, always and everywhere, she was talking of them—often *to* them, as if they were actually present" (60). Eliza makes the

presence of her children real through an affective communion that cannot be assigned to the religious or the secular, but rather occupies an indeterminate space between the two. Speaking not only of them, in memorial, but *to* them, Eliza gathers her children together with herself, at all hours and in all places, defying the physical separation they are otherwise powerless to overcome. In doing so, she conjoins the past with the present, folding the temporality of sorrow into an affective moment in which she lives until her life is finally taken.

Harriet Jacobs acts as both author and object in the affective economy of sorrow. She narrates her experience of motherhood first as only a desperate means of survival, later coming to resemble Eliza as she finds that her children animate her life with new meaning and purpose. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs, as the pseudonymous Linda Brent, “with deliberate calculation” becomes pregnant by a man of her choosing, an act of resistance against the master whose threat of rape is suspended constantly over her life (54). Having conceived her children, she shields herself with their presence, always aware that her relationship to them is precarious and fully under her owner’s control. She shares this precarity with Eliza and all slave mothers, and in circulating her story, she contributes to the accrual of affect to the figure of the slave mother.

Unlike Eliza and so many unnamed others, however, Jacobs is able to sustain a hope that she and her children might one day escape their enslavement; furthermore, their intervals of separation are never permanent. Jacobs is careful to note these distinctions; she acknowledges that her “life in slavery was comparatively devoid of hardships” when contextualized by the range of severities to which countless others were daily subjected (115). On her way north to freedom, she encounters an old friend, Fanny, who is also in flight. They discuss their losses. For her part, Fanny dwells “on the agony of separation from all her children on that dreadful auction

day.” Jacobs, going north ahead of her own children, says, ““we have the same sorrows,”” but her friend corrects her. ““No,” replied she, ‘you are going to see your children soon, and there is no hope that I shall ever even hear from mine” (157).

If Jacobs cannot rightly claim filial separation as her fundamental sorrow, she can be said to concentrate throughout the narrative on its dreadful possibility. Worse than her anticipation of what awaits her children under slavery is the thought that they might suffer it in her absence. Her own adversities are mitigated by the intimacies of kinship; though she witnesses families severed at the auction block throughout her life, Jacobs is parted from her own parents and grandmother, as well as other extended family, only by death. The prevailing concern of her youth is the evasion of rape by her master; but after her children are born, she turns to securing their freedom and family ties at any cost. She concludes that she must go into hiding and then escape, risking total separation in order to gain a chance for all their freedom.

She does not make this decision alone. Going one evening to the graves of her parents, she stands in “the burying ground” of the slaves (67). Filled with “conflicting emotions,” she seeks communion with the dead. “For more than ten years I had frequented this spot, but never had it seemed to me so sacred as now,” she recalls. “I seemed to hear my father’s voice coming from it, bidding me not to tarry till I reached freedom or the grave,” she continues. Jacobs departs “with renovated hopes” (91). In her most isolating moment of distress, she surrounds herself with memories of those she has lost, made concrete in their place of rest. But they are not resting. Prepared to speak into her life, their voices join with her prayers to substantiate them with the sufferings of generations. Her sorrows and her hopes are also theirs. Like Northup’s recollections of Eliza’s conversations with her children, Jacobs here portrays a model of

intergenerational communion for an affective economy of sorrow that persists into subsequent generations of writers and becomes a defining characteristic of their work.

First fleeing, then purchased, out of her enslavement, Jacobs feels “as if a heavy load had been lifted from [her] weary shoulders” (200). Securely in New York, she receives a letter from her beloved grandmother. It reads, in part, “I cannot hope to see you again on earth; but I pray to God to unite us above, where pain will no more rack this feeble body of mine; where sorrow and parting from my children will be no more” (195). For her grandmother, the release from physical pain and the sorrow of separation will come only through death. She looks to a reunion in a restorative eternity. The object of sorrow that this letter contains is the mother severed from her children. To interpret this object within the limits of secular time is to confront the totality of loss that the institution of slavery represents, and Jacobs’s grandmother does this, when she acknowledges that she “cannot hope” to see her again. She then interprets the object—she is also its embodiment—a second time, circulating it outside of the secular and into a transcendent frame. In this interpretation, the object ceases to produce sorrow as an effect of its movement. Perhaps this is because, as the letter implies, eternity is understood to be a place of rest. Sorrow cannot be produced there, but neither is joy, its opposite affect, promised. I will now briefly discuss the significance of differences between secular and religious temporalities in the slave narrative genre before turning to their reconceptualization in the writing of W.E.B. Du Bois.

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Because Sara Ahmed’s work deemphasizes the notion of emotions as private, subjective states, it is particularly useful for readings of literary forms that limit representations of interiority. As Toni Morrison argues in her essay “The Site of Memory” (1995), slave narratives exemplify this limitation; though speaking, their authors are silenced, and while revealing, they

are selective, cautious of the genres of information that would not be “palatable” to their white audiences. “Most importantly,” Morrison continues, there is “no mention of their interior life” (91). Following Ahmed, my readings of Northup and Jacobs have focused on the circulation of emotions rather than—as they are often regarded—as originating and intensifying within individuals. This approach acknowledges the omissions of this genre as acting both to protect and erase the interior lives of those who escaped and narrated their enslavement, while also maintaining distance from an interest in the feelings of the white readers who first consumed these narratives, readers whose experiences should not be our primary concern.

But it is partly because of the rhetorical situation of the slave narrative genre, in which the political and, often, the religious sentiments of northern white readers are made to converge upon the goal of abolition, that these texts hold the secular and the religious in tension. Faith in justice beyond this world and a desire for freedom in life are represented as interwoven concerns. For example, Northup and Jacobs often implicate their audiences in their depictions of the prayers of the enslaved; the summary of all their prayers is for the institution to be dismantled, a task, they suggest, that is achievable given adequate political will, even absent divine intervention. In each instance, prayers that families not be separated or that the agony of the whip be stopped can be acted upon in the most immediate sense by human choice. Jacobs describes her master’s disregard of the pleading words, ““O, pray don’t, massa,”” spoken by a slave who is thrown beneath his whip (13). When a trader or owner ignores the petition of the suffering slave, the writer, or the slave for whom the writer speaks, turns to God. Northup envisions the end of slavery as a prayer finally answered; he writes, “a terrible day of vengeance [will come], when the master in his turn will cry in vain for mercy” (191). When men persist in acts of injustice, and those who could stop them stand idly by, they invite the vengeance of God.

Northup places the religious and the secular into a perfect rhetorical balance. He allows for the possibility of full recourse and consolation in the afterlife while resisting the notion of religious belief as an adequate provision for the wrongs committed against him in secular time. Having been restored to freedom, Northup seeks out the man who captured and sold him into slavery. He “confront[s] him in a court of law” out of “a desire to bring him to justice” (251). The court does not convict the man, and, in witnessing the failure of justice in this world, Northup appeals to an arbiter beyond it. He writes, “a human tribunal has permitted him to escape; but there is another and a higher tribunal, where false testimony will not prevail, and where I am willing, so far at least as these statements are concerned, to be judged at last” (251). Interpreted within the limits of a secular temporality, the outcome of the case deepens Northup’s losses; the theft of years of life will not be vindicated, and the finality of the court’s decision means the slave trader will live out his days unaccountable for his crimes. Extended to an inclusion of the transcendent, however, Northup’s sorrow is admissible as evidence in that “higher tribunal” in which final assessments of human life might be made. If there is to be justice, its unfolding is guaranteed only by the belief in eternal life that animates Christian theology.

Jacobs devotes a chapter to “the church and slavery,” in which she indicts the Christianity of the slaveholder. She argues that many white people who are religious in outward practice cannot be understood as Christians because their membership in the church does not fundamentally alter them or their treatment of others (74). In making the distinction between authentic faith and the exteriority of religious custom, Jacobs preserves the black Christian traditions that are her inheritance while setting aside the hypocrisy of the white parishioners who segregate the church and use its sacred texts to support their plunder and cruelty. She describes

the transformative effects of religion on black life under slavery, and the range of feelings that are put into circulation in the gathering together of a community in shared belief. But she also demonstrates that control of the Sabbath is retained by the slaveholder, who seeks continually to foreclose the potentialities of black communal life.

Directly after the Nat Turner revolt, Jacobs reports, slaveholders across the region reconsidered the practice of allowing black worship to ever take place without surveillance. Such meetings rapidly become prohibited. She recalls, “the slaves begged the privilege of again meeting at their little church in the woods, with their burying ground around it. It was built by the colored people, and they had no higher happiness than to meet there and sing hymns together, and pour out their hearts in spontaneous prayer” (67). Jacobs describes the church building as a place of self-ownership. It is set apart, built with black labor not for the profit of white owners but instead for worship. It commemorates the ground where the dead are buried, even as it provides sanctuary for the fullness of feeling denied to black women and men under slavery. But it is as precarious as the lives of its congregants: against their appeals, the church is destroyed. In the slave narrative genre, writers draw upon the religious and the secular as rhetorical resources for the persuasion of white readers. It is this same duality in which white slaveholders discern a threat to their false authority. Their concern about a slave revolt in secular time illuminates the fear that they, perhaps, conceal even from themselves; namely, that they will be called to account before a perfect, transcendent source of justice. It is a reckoning for which they are wholly unprepared. But the black church, a site of worship and resistance, is constructed from materials both religious and secular, which taken together signify its power. I turn now to the early twentieth-century writing of W.E.B. Du Bois, who decisively departs from this dual framework in the pursuit of an enlightened secularization.

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Canonized within W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* are certain habits of thought and feeling that contribute to the ways in which black studies is practiced today. Working within a Western enlightenment tradition that understands secularization as a process through which religion inevitably vanishes in modernity, Du Bois reshaped his object of study, namely, black life in the new world, into a trajectory aligned with this understanding. As I have argued, the black church was constructed from its inception using both religious and secular materials; but in his interpretation of the institution, Du Bois places a decisive emphasis on the latter, reconceptualizing black Christian traditions as developing primarily from a desire for freedom in secular time rather than an encounter with the transcendent. Having established this main point in his analysis of the church in his essay, "Of the Faith of the Fathers," Du Bois turns to the Negro spiritual, in which he finds the secular again to be the central point of reference. But in this essay, "Of the Sorrow Songs," he shifts his method from a primarily analytical one to an affective interpretive framework. In his analysis, he secularizes the affective economy in which sorrow is produced as a form of knowledge.

The essay "Of the Faith of the Fathers," traces the beginnings of the black church from "the African forests" through slavery and emancipation to the turn of the twentieth century (138). Du Bois characterizes the adoption of Christian religious practices by the newly enslaved as uninformed, impelled by despair, and illusory. At first, the religion of the slave was only nominally Christian, he writes; the convergence of indigenous African beliefs and the theology of the slaveholder "gave these rites an early veneer of Christianity" and only after "the lapse of many generations" does the church come to identify fully as Christian (142). The black slave "was unconsciously ripe for a new philosophy of life," prepared to alter his perspective to

accommodate the sudden and irrevocable loss of “the joy of this world.” In its place, he “eagerly seized upon the offered conceptions of the next” as a palliative response to his suffering (144). But the “doctrines of passive submission embodied in the newly learned Christianity,” Du Bois writes, served the slaveholder far more than the Christian slave for whom these doctrines were only a “comforting dream” (144).

Reading the inception of the black church as a provisional but false answer to the suffering of the enslaved, Du Bois turns to the shape the institution was taking, as he observed it, under Jim Crow segregation. He argues that the faith of the fathers, always of questionable value as a response to racial oppression, had become further distorted as successive generations of black women and men were denied equal legal and social status in the United States. The religion as it appears in his contemporary moment, “instead of a worship, is a complaint and a curse, a wail rather than a hope, a sneer rather than a faith,” he writes (146). The black church as Du Bois portrays it is imbued with joylessness; in his view, the overt discrimination that makes opportunities for a better life racially determined in the United States undermines the integrity of the black Christian faith. But it could also be argued that the oppression of Jim Crow would make religious practices, and the social life in which they adhere, all the more prominent.

Du Bois arrives at his conclusion rather than this opposing possibility by collapsing the transcendent into the secular. He explains that, from the early nineteenth century, the black church “transformed itself and identified itself with the dream of Abolition, until that which was a radical fad in the white North and an anarchistic plot in the white South had become a religion to the black world. Thus, when Emancipation finally came, it seemed to the freedman a literal Coming of the Lord” (145). The word “seemed” recalls Du Bois’s description of black Christianity as having an illusory quality, a dream or set of “conceptions” of eternal life to which

the black slave held with a desperate grasp. Rather than what it “seemed” to be, Du Bois implies a desire for the enslaved to have seen emancipation for what it was: a political transformation of a material situation. His desire for this clarity of vision, a perspective in which the hard facts of the observable world, bounded by the limits of secular time, are given to be also the limits of the truth, extends beyond the historical figure of the slave to include his contemporaries.

Unsatisfied with the notion of a “comforting dream,” Du Bois demands an improved reality, one that includes in its offerings the first principles of the country of his birth.

But Du Bois also argues that the propensity for faith in human liberty, which is in his account one and the same with religious belief, is an inheritance essential to black racial identity. At that very moment, he writes, “the deep religious feeling of the real Negro heart” still “broods silently” under segregation. He does not call for this “emotional nature” to be reformed, but rather used differently, as a resource and leveraged to attain secular progress. He envisions a day when “the Awakening will come, when the pent-up vigor of ten million souls shall sweep irresistibly toward the Goal.” They will advance upon and overtake that place “where all that makes life worth living—Liberty, Justice, and Right—is marked ‘For White People Only’” (149). Du Bois is concerned with the recognition of the value of black life, and he insists upon a politics through which that value will be recognized, protected, and freely lived. He claims that black religious energies will come to serve that goal, by transitioning into a political awakening that will take the span of a human life as its sole concern. For Du Bois, this secularization narrative holds out the promise that religious belief in a life to come would eventually be replaced by the concrete things that make life in this world worth living. For us, it helps to explain how it was that Du Bois heard only sorrow in a musical tradition that emerged from religious conviction.

In the essay “Of the Sorrow Songs,” Du Bois decisively establishes the Negro spiritual as “the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment” (182). This final chapter in *Souls* is a culminating interpretive meditation on the aesthetics of the spiritual, its historical conditions of production, and its significance to American culture. But the entire book is held together by this music; in an epigraph to each chapter “stands a bar of the Sorrow Songs, —some echo of haunting melody from the only American music which welled up from black souls in the dark past” (4). This placement of the songs, defined at the outset as sorrowful, thus casts a tone of mourning over all of his arguments, and, I contend, over the scholarly discourses of contemporary black studies in the United States over which Du Bois stands as an extremely important, if not the most important, progenitor.⁵⁹

The chapter opens, “they that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days—Sorrow Songs—for they were weary at heart” (180). Du Bois acknowledges a critical distance on the songs in his own personal experience, a biographical note that comes into prominence when one compares his analysis of the spirituals to those of other writers who would later disagree with his conclusions. The songs “came out of the South unknown to me, one by one,” he writes. He encounters them with a sense of dislocation, but he feels this concurrently with an immediate intimacy; he reflects, “yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine” (180). His recognition of the songs, and his identification with them, are physical processes. The songs live authentically “in the hearts of those who have heard them truly sung and in the hearts of the Negro people”; in other words, his authority on the meaning of the songs is both a matter of experience and inheritance (182).

Du Bois provides a textual analysis of the lyrics of the songs, and categorizes them into various types, by occasion, the particular relationships they represent, and their textual citations.

But he reads their affective content as universally negative: “They are the music of an unhappy people,” he writes, “they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways” (182). He also finds that the spirituals are religious.

Though Du Bois searches for secular origins in the spirituals, he finds that their lyrics consist of “chiefly paraphrases of the Bible,” or “cant phrases of a dimly understood theology” (185). The songs are marked by religious thought, but he argues that they are also capacious enough in their testimonies to relate to this world. He writes,

Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope – a faith in the ultimate justice of things. Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes a faith in death, sometimes assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins. (188)

Du Bois finds in the songs a persistent hope in a “truer world,” which he here describes not as a philosophical proposition of a world of ideal forms, nor a theological vision of a perfect eternity, but rather as a better version of *this* world. He acknowledges but also fiercely resists the religious dimensions of the prophecies the songs announce; in the “fair world beyond” of Christian theology, it is not men who judge the souls of other men, but God. But for Du Bois, the cadences of the spirituals can be heard instead in secular time, at a juncture they anticipate, at which “sometime, somewhere,” in human affairs, men will not judge other men on the basis of race. This expectation of political progress resonates with his equally deep investments in the narrative of secularization, and its idealized future of enlightened knowledge.

The violence of enslavement and segregation, in opposition to which all of Du Bois’s writing stands in impassioned testimony, inescapably leads to the conclusion that suffering and

sorrow are fundamental to black life in the new world. But Du Bois is nevertheless uniquely focused on affective objects that produce sorrow as they circulate. And he attributes to them a finitude of meaning set at the limits of secular time. As I will discuss in the next chapter, many black writers and artists working in the Harlem Renaissance explicitly counter his emphasis on sorrow and attempt to halt his secularizing momentum; the flashpoint of these two debates in this period is the Negro spiritual. In the chapter to follow, I will take up these counterpoints in detail. But it is sufficient to say, here, that the concerns articulated by Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, and Alain Locke are grounded in personal histories of engagement with the black church and its music as well as deeply learned perspectives on the history of black life in the new world. To this formidable and multivocal argument against Du Bois's interpretations can now be added a body of research into the validity of the secularization thesis—the fundamental assumption upon which his analyses rest, namely, that religion will inevitably decline and vanish in modernity. In light of the new debates around the secularization thesis, a reconsideration of Du Bois's secularizing descriptions of black Christian traditions is now necessary. In departing from the productive tension between the religious and the secular that defines the slave narrative genre and the spiritual in favor of an ascendant secularity, Du Bois decisively reshapes not only subsequent academic understandings of black life, but also the affective economies in which scholarship circulates and accrues emotional significance.

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Saidiya Hartman is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential voices in contemporary black studies. First and foremost a literary critic, she is also an expert in cultural history, and her close readings bring together texts from aesthetic, legal, and historical archives. Her field-defining book, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-*

Century America (1997), demonstrates the “diffusion of terror and violence perpetrated under the rubric of pleasure, paternalism, and property”; instead of conceptualizing slavery through its reiterations of “shocking spectacle,” she focuses on “the terror of the mundane and quotidian” (3). Even the seemingly unremarkable moments in the life of the slave were imbued with misery, Hartman rightly contends, and therefore every scene presented to us in the archive is sorrowful. She thus centers her writing on a vocabulary of mourning, which she views as the appropriate affective encounter with slavery and its inheritances, without exception.⁶⁰

Scenes of Subjection opens with a refusal to circulate an image: Hartman cites but does not reproduce a famous scene depicting a slave under the whip.⁶¹ While this decision is rhetorically powerful in supporting her contention that the line between historical witness and spectator is a thin one, it is ultimately ineffectual in relation to the affective economy of sorrow. Noting that it is customary in the study of slavery to use images of brutal violence against the black body, Hartman asks, “what does the exposure of the violated body yield?” (2). This is an important question. But the direct representation of the wounded and scarred flesh of the slave is not necessary to the circulation of that suffering person as an object in an affective economy. The mere invocation of the object—it might be the memorialization of a suffering black body, or of a grieving slave mother, with or without a name and a story—sets the object into motion and increases its circulation. In other words, understood through Sara Ahmed’s theory of affective economies, the study of black life in the new world requires and cannot avoid the circulation of objects that produce sorrow. As Hartman also concludes, albeit without reference to Ahmed, sorrow is the inescapable affective result of the study of slavery and its inheritances.

However, as I have argued, sorrow functions differently depending upon whether it is circulated in a secular or a religious frame. This means that Hartman’s commitments to the

secular have high affective stakes. The speed and grace with which she makes the secularizing move in *Scenes of Subjection* renders it almost imperceptible, but it is unmistakably present. In her introduction, she quotes from two of the many interviews with ex-slaves conducted in the 1930's as part of the Federal Writers' Project and later gathered by editor B.A. Botkin into the classic work of folk history *Lay My Burden Down* (1945). The first, Charlie Moses, explains that slavery is wrong because "God almighty never meant for human beings to be like animals. Us niggers has a soul an' a heart an a min'. We ain' like a dog or a horse" (4). Tom Windham, another emancipated slave, explains the matter slightly differently; he states, "I think we should have our liberty cause us ain't hogs or horses—us is human flesh" (5). In reading these two remarks consecutively, Hartman writes, "The flesh, existence defined at its most elemental level, alone entitled one to liberty" (5). Her attention to the body within a secular framework is striking; as if at a crossroads, she turns decisively away from the mention of the "soul" as a defining characteristic of humanity, as well as the history of the black church. Her work represents a foreclosure of the transcendent as a resource, or point of contact between generations, in black life.

In *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007), a personal narrative intended to be accessible to audiences beyond the academy, Hartman reflects on her search for heritage, traveling the slave trade routes and reading in the archives. In each of her books, she situates her thinking in a secular frame, but it is in *Lose Your Mother* that she discusses this perspective most explicitly. As the descendent of slaves, she writes, "I am the vestige of the dead. And history is how the secular world attends to the dead" (18). Hartman is intensely retrospective; she does not propose that we derive lessons from history to be applied to our actions in the present. Rather, she understands our responsibility to history to be one and the

same with the tasks that personal sorrow demands: mourning and memorialization. In reading the ways that she attends to the dead—especially in this book—and is haunted by them, it is possible to trace through her work a continuation of a Du Boisian scholarly tradition that secularizes the affective economy of sorrow I have described throughout this chapter.

Hartman turns fully to the possibility of intergenerational contact in *Lose Your Mother*. It becomes clear in this book that she seeks not only to attend to the dead, but also to engage with them. Maintaining that filial separation is the definitive experience of slavery and the point of origin for the sorrow it produces, an argument that resonates with the affective priorities of the slave narrative genre. She describes the slave as “a stranger, torn from kin and community” (5). Her research and her travels are acts of communicative reclamation of lost kinship. She movingly describes her encounter with an archival piece of evidence of her own personal history. “I happened upon my maternal great-great-grandmother in a volume of slave testimony from Alabama, while doing research for my dissertation. I felt joyous at having discovered her in the dusty tiers of the Yale library,” she recalls. But when Hartman reads the testimony, she finds a voice that, instead of speaking, stays silent. The great-great-grandmother tells her interviewer that, of slavery, she remembers “not a thing.” Hartman is devastated. Just at the point of reconnection, no content of her ancestor’s experience is transmitted. But the end of the story is even more compelling. A number of years later, looking through the same documents, she can find no evidence of her ancestor. Searching for the woman’s records again, she cannot find any evidence of the first encounter. She recalls, “it was as if I had conjured her up. Was my hunger for the past so great that I was now encountering ghosts?” (17).

Though she chose not to disclose her story, Hartman’s ancestor—or the supernatural presence in the archives—is still a site of affective value, and a point of contact between

generations. The dead are circulated as immaterial objects, becoming sorrowfully felt more forcefully with each publication, reading, and citation. They accrue affective value. But because their circulation is constricted to the secular, no release or resolution is possible. Hartman's recourse to the idea of haunting recognizes a form of afterlife, and a metaphorically supernatural experience, but allows her to still articulate a secular theory of history.⁶² The immaterial presences of the dead remain in the world, and they do not relinquish their investments in the full lives they were denied. They instead persist as remnants of those oppressed people, as much a part of secular temporality as the living. There is no transcendent destination, no restorative eternity. This presence accrues affective value in literary texts and in our scholarship; it circulates through our discourses, and its circulation produces the feelings of sorrow that are evident, and dominant, in our work.

Chapter Five

Joy: The Slave Narrative and the Celebration of Black Survival

The mistaken impression of the enslaved as happy in their condition, cultivated by the avarice and condescension of the white mind, was a formidable affective stronghold of the institution of slavery. Indeed, a consistent feature of the genre of the slave narrative is a forthright correction of this error and the moral complacency it helped to sustain. By the turn of the twentieth century, W.E.B. Du Bois found it still necessary to remind his audience that the life of the black slave was not “joyous . . . careless and happy” (182). And the task of dismantling the distorted image of “the happy slave” in contemporary literary and cultural criticism remains unfinished. Across historical periods, condemnations of the false alibi of happiness have rightly pointed to the misery, sorrow, and mourning that slavery engendered. And, as I argued in my previous chapter, sorrow has been the affective framework through which black cultural production has been predominantly interpreted since Du Bois.⁶³

The memorialization of black suffering is an imperative that cannot be undertaken without producing sorrow. But the full acknowledgement of black life requires attention to the range of human emotion, and it is the purpose of this chapter to trace out a counter-tradition within black thought in which the textual circulation of what religion scholar Eddie Glaude, Jr. calls “the sheer joy of black life” is evident (79). I will take as my first examples *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), by Solomon Northup, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), by Harriet Jacobs, to describe the ways in which positive emotions are depicted in the slave narrative genre. I will then turn to a selection of critical essays written during the Harlem Renaissance to discuss arguments relating to race and the emotions in the work of Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke, and James Weldon Johnson. The essays take up the Negro spiritual, directly disputing W.E.B. Du

Bois's interpretation of the songs as secular and as exclusively, or even predominantly, sorrowful. Finally, I will briefly engage two of Glaude's books, *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (2000), and *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (2007), to discuss how they stage a politically active, philosophical pragmatism together with the study of black Christian traditions as secular and religious departures from mourning that implicate both of these foundations of black American life.⁶⁴

The broad conceptual categories of the religious and the secular are often understood to be in an embattled opposition to one another. This understanding derives in large part from the secularization thesis. One of its key assumptions, as I have mentioned previously, is that public spaces will become protectorates of the secular, while religion will withdraw ever further into the private sphere. In short, the secularization thesis imagines modernity as a landscape of territorial holdings to which the religious and the secular variously lay claim.⁶⁵ In this chapter, I apply this spatial metaphor to the emotions, to inquire whether some affective experiences can be said to belong to the religious, and others to the secular. In doing so, alongside others who have called the secularization thesis into question, I both rely upon and attempt to complicate the opposition of the secular and the religious.

I first insist upon a distinction between "happiness" and "joy," on the premise that the former references the material world while the latter cites the transcendent.⁶⁶ I then follow recent critiques of the thesis, led by philosopher Charles Taylor, which resist the idea that the secular will fully replace the religious, arguing instead that both will persist in different forms in modernity. I suggest that happiness and joy are coevals, separately recognizable, differently located, and of equal value. Though the two terms are often collapsed into one another in the

study of the emotions, a situation following from their commonly interchangeable usage, my discussion of literary and critical texts will show that there are considerable differences between them. My claim is that the clarification of these differences, together with the recuperation of a tradition of black thought that stands in open defiance of sorrow, makes possible a reconsideration of racial affect.

I should clarify from the outset that I am not suggesting anything essential about the connection between the terms “racial” and “affect.” In other words, my analysis does not participate in, to use Glaude’s phrasing, an “account of race resting on bad biology” in which races are “defined as types with innate characteristics” (*Exodus* 14). Rather, I discuss the emotions as themselves social without assigning them to categories of racial identity. In doing so, I continue to draw upon Sara Ahmed’s theory of affective economies. Instead of explaining the emotions as originating in the self, from which they emerge as expressions or reflections of individual psychology—or, worse, biology—Ahmed views affects as “social and cultural practices” (*Cultural* 9). Emotions may, then, like any other social or cultural practice, become racialized in the logic of a given society; the violence against the black body through which the United States has historically shaped itself embeds the logic of segregation into social and cultural practices, and therefore into national affective economies. The affective economy of joy that I trace in this chapter, in opposition to its dominant other, sorrow, which I discuss in the previous chapter, is fundamentally prospective, just as sorrow is retrospective. Joy is produced as “an effect of [the] circulation” of the object of its affective economy, which in my analysis is the figure of the black body free from bondage (45). In open opposition to the capitalist slave-system economy in which black bodies are circulated for profit, the affective economy of joy represents investments in a different futurity. It stages an intergenerational affective communion in which

the dead are honored as progenitors of this future, and children are the beneficiaries of the long-suffering of their foreparents. It underwrites celebration—of emancipation, and often of reunion with loved ones—and its task is not to memorialize black suffering, but rather to prevail over it.

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The secular and the religious are often understood as both irreconcilable and chronological; a fundamental assumption of Western thought since the Enlightenment is the anticipation of the replacement of religion by secularity. But in *A Secular Age*, philosopher Charles Taylor proposes the terms “immanent frame” and “the transcendent” to situate them as concurrently active frameworks for understanding. The immanent frame allows us to view human life, morality, and “the highest good” as conceivable within the limits of the material; it follows that the world can be comprehensively “envisaged without reference to God” (543). In this frame, human flourishing is the highest good. The idea of “flourishing” is subjective and therefore indefinite, but we might begin to describe flourishing as the fulfillment of material needs and the development of individual potential. Even so, the immanent frame does not, in Taylor’s view, decisively fasten itself into the material world. It is “self-sufficient” in that it does not rely upon the transcendent to function, but it also does not seek to progressively replace or violently destroy its other, two tenets of the secularization thesis against which Taylor argues. Rather, he maintains these two frames are in a relationship of complexity—not combat.

As such, the immanent frame tolerates incursions of the transcendent into its boundaries; “it is something which permits closure, without demanding it,” he writes (544). Taylor’s arguments support the need for closer attention to both frameworks together. And his work is an important basis for the study of cultural traditions that have functioned from their inceptions within a system of meaning constructed upon dual reference to the secular and the religious. My

previous chapter argues that this is the case for black cultures that were formed in slavery, even as cultural critics in the twentieth century have emphasized the secular, sometimes to the exclusion of religious traditions.⁶⁷ Finally, Taylor's theory sustains the distinction between the secular and the religious while not replacing one for another, and as such, his work enables a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which emotions like happiness and joy might diverge but also coexist in the same historical moment.

The differences between happiness and joy are concretely represented in the accounts of Joanna Draper and Felix Haywood, two ex-slaves whose testimonies were recorded in the 1930's as part of the Federal Writers' Project and later gathered by editor B.A. Botkin into the classic work of folk history *Lay My Burden Down* (1945). Referring to her daughter, Draper says, "I lives with Dora now, and we is all happy, and I don't like to talk about the days of the slavery times, 'cause they never did mean nothing to me but misery" (103). Her happiness is defined by her present flourishing in freedom, especially as compared to her prior suffering under slavery. Haywood, asked to describe the end of the Civil War and emancipation, recalls, "The end of the war, it come just like that—like you snap your fingers . . . How did we know it! Hallelujah broke out [. . .] Just like that, we was free" (223). The response of the enslaved to the news of emancipation is stated in the vocabulary of religious praise; the transcendent is explicitly referenced in explaining the feelings put into circulation by freedom granted in secular time. Joy is produced in and by the suddenness of the event, and as it accrues in weight, it initiates celebration.

In the slave narratives of Solomon Northup and Harriet Jacobs, as in the testimonies of the emancipated slaves whose words I quote above, happiness is a feeling that is produced exclusively within the immanent frame. It is animated by human flourishing, and its object is the

same as the one we find circulating in the affective economy of joy: the figure of the free black individual. Happiness is produced by what its object evokes, namely, the material potentialities of freedom. Joy, quite differently, comes into circulation through the transcendent and in the transformative aspects of the secular in which the transcendent is metaphorically operative. Emancipation, as a fact in and of itself—not what it makes possible in material terms—is an example of this. With the advent of freedom for all of the enslaved, the affective economy of joy, already established among the free black women and men in the north, expands as the circulation of the figure of the freed slave becomes generalized.

In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Sara Ahmed, following Simone de Beauvoir, points out that happiness “can involve an immanent coercion, a demand for agreement,” a violent “alignment” with oppression (212). This is a powerful articulation of the process by which the image of the “happy slave” was first configured, and it speaks to the ways in which “happiness,” as a cultural practice controlled and designed by white slaveholders, in fact rightly belongs to the affective economy of sorrow. An inauthentic happiness can be produced as masquerade. It can be performed, demanded as a performance, and constructed as an exterior to be worn by the powerless. As Ahmed elsewhere argues, “emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time,” actions that can be violently enforced (*Cultural Politics* 4). Happiness, in this sense, can be at once exploited by the oppressor and denied to the oppressed. Slave narratives portray this coercive “happiness.” They also insist that its authentic versions *are* available to the enslaved—unreliably, at intervals of departure from and resistance against the institution—but available nonetheless. And the narratives demonstrate that joy is a distinct emotional register; joy, beyond the reach of repertoire, is not vulnerable to manipulation. Most often, Northrup and Jacobs associate it with the sacred.

In turning to the positive emotions in the slave narrative genre, we must hold in tension examples of happiness that are coerced, and those that are authenticated by the writers. In his *Narrative* (1845), Frederick Douglass describes the circulation of authentic feelings of sorrow as a dangerous choice for the slave. “The slaveholders have been known to send in spies among their slaves, to ascertain their views and feelings in regard to their condition,” he writes. By the means of constant surveillance, and the brutal punishment of deviation from feigned contentment, the “happiness” of the slave is enforced, and also further circulated when it is reported by outside, naïve white observers. This is why, “when inquired of as to their condition and the character of their masters, [they] almost universally say they are contented, and that their masters are kind” (62). Douglass testifies to the coerced happiness of the slave as one of the productions of the affective economy of sorrow.

But it is Solomon Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* in which the forced production of false emotion is most memorably portrayed. The slave master Edwin Epps is as inclined to chase and whip his slaves for an evening’s entertainment as he is to make them dance. If he “came home in one of his dancing moods,” Northup writes, “no matter how worn out and tired we were, there must be a general dance” (137). With his whip in his hand, Epps acts as overseer to the “merry-making” (136). “With a slash, and crack, and flourish of the whip, he would shout again, ‘Dance, niggers, dance,’ and away they would go once more” (137). The regulation of emotive performance in these evening cruelties is an extension of the control of labor during the day. Mercilessly driven to exhaustion, and “bent with excessive toil—actually suffering for a little refreshing rest,” the slaves are “made to dance and laugh” beyond the point of physical and emotional collapse (137). Entertainment for the slaveholder is a form of labor, and it demands hollow laughter, an audible affective mask, in excess of the visible façade of dancing.⁶⁸ In

Northup's portrayal of the slave Eliza, he demonstrates that the coercion of happiness is also widely understood by slaveholders to function as a prerequisite to labor productivity.

Separated from her children at auction, Eliza is inconsolable.⁶⁹ Assigned first to domestic labor, she disappoints her mistress by being "more occupied in brooding over her sorrows than in attending to her business" (77). She is similarly "useless in the cotton-field," and is eventually "bartered for a trifle, to some man." Northup recounts that she dies alone, "on the ground floor of a dilapidated cabin" (119). The complexity and depth of Eliza's suffering is reduced by the economic system of slavery to its impact on her labor output. The slaveholders use coerced happiness as an evaluative rubric; in demanding a performance of contentment, they seek to guarantee a certain level of productivity from the enslaved. In short, the circulation of unproductive emotions is to be avoided, disciplined away, while affective fabrications sutured to the labor at hand are understood to increase productivity and, in turn, profit. The refusal to affectively perform the script that is demanded by the slaveholders corresponds to a decline in value, as traced in Eliza's story, to the point at which she is regarded as disposable. That she cannot be conscripted into the circulation of falsified happiness in the absence of her children precipitates her decline and effectively ensures her death. Her sufferings exemplify the meaning of happiness in its total inversion; Eliza's story is surely the epitome of the destruction of human flourishing under slavery.

In being separated from her children, the possibility of happiness is extinguished for Eliza, and no transcendent interruption of her suffering brings her joy. But Northup's own story ends in reunion with his family, and as he describes his escape from bondage, he accounts for both happiness and joy, associating them with the secular and the religious, respectively. He recalls that, upon his return to New York, his "heart overflowed with happiness" as he "looked

upon the old familiar scenes” (251). These scenes represent to him the flourishing available in freedom; in the free North, he is “restored to happiness” (252). But when Northup is reunited with his family, he remarks upon a different emotion. Joy breaks through as the separation of long years suddenly ends. A “violence of emotions” overcomes the family upon the recovery of a connection they believed to have been irreparably lost. These feelings then “subside to a sacred joy” (251). The concluding pages of Northup’s narrative put into textual circulation the figure of the free black individual, an object which at once produces the happiness of human flourishing and the joy of celebration. This object comes into being through a restoration of the black kinship structures that slavery worked unceasingly to destroy.

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs engages the same distinction between “happiness” and “joy.” In her characteristically compressed style, she places them in the same sentence. Recalling time spent in teaching a fellow slave to read, she notes how his happiness increases alongside his acquisition of literacy. The man views reading as a pathway toward knowing “how to serve God better,” he says, and his sense of his own flourishing is tied to this devotional desire (72). “The happy smile that illuminated his face put joy into my heart,” Jacobs reflects (73). Her joy is an abrupt and unrequested response to the man’s smile. His happiness is genuine, and it stands in sharp contrast to the contortions of the forced laughter of slaves dancing under the whip. The pedagogical interaction between Jacobs and her fellow slave is a temporary form of escape from the overarching oppressions of the institution of slavery. Any pursuit of human flourishing under the institution, always a form of resistance, is described by Jacobs as a site of the production of an authentic happiness. This happiness is circulated by the defiant slaves in a clandestine affective economy.

Jacobs often associates joy with a particular interpersonal scene: a reunion in freedom of those who had been separated in slavery. Having escaped to New York, and subsequently succeeded in bringing her son there, Jacobs describes the moment of their first meeting on the other side of slavery. “O reader, can you imagine my joy? No, you cannot, unless you have been a slave mother” (173). When Jacobs and her children are “free at last,” she recalls,

I remembered how my poor father had tried to buy me, when I was a small child, and how he had been disappointed. I hoped his spirit was rejoicing over me now. I remembered how my good old grandmother had laid up her earnings to purchase me in later years, and how often her plans had been frustrated. How that faithful, loving old heart would leap for joy, if she could look on me and my children now that we were free! (200)

Measured against the devastations of the past, the rejoicing of her departed father and grandmother take on an aspect of happiness in secular time, but the transcendent is fully present here. Jacobs’s visions of her loved ones participating in the freedom she has attained create a space of eternal temporality in which an intergenerational affective communion is made possible. Joy functions to alter and expand the present moment, opening it up to the anticipation of a shared future.

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The Negro spiritual can be understood as the musical counterpart to the slave narrative; the songs originating in slavery expressed, as W.E.B. Du Bois argues in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), the sorrow inherent to the oppression of slavery. As I have noted, Du Bois’s description of the spirituals as “sorrow songs,” emphasizes the suffering to which they are a partial testimony.⁷⁰ But these same songs have been interpreted by other black writers as encompassing

a much more wide-ranging and complex affective experience. Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, and Alain Locke all published on the topic. They all concur with Du Bois in the assertion that the spiritual is an art form worthy of full recognition. But counter to Du Bois, they insist that the spirituals are religious, not secular; and they argue that the songs express a wide range of emotion not limited to sorrow. In the circulation of their perspectives, which has, to this point, been quite limited in comparison to the canonical status of Du Bois's interpretation of the spirituals as "sorrow songs," they contribute to the shaping of an affective economy of joy that I trace in this chapter. In short, these texts are starting points for a turn in black studies toward a counter-tradition of joy. To study and also to participate in this affective economy requires that we read and cite such texts alongside the dominant perspective established by Du Bois.

In *The New Negro*, the 1925 anthology edited by Alain Locke and regarded by critics as the definitive publication of the Harlem Renaissance, Locke directly credits Du Bois for his incisive and early work on the spirituals. He writes, "It was the great service of Dr. Du Bois in his unforgettable chapter on the Sorrow Songs in *The Souls of Black Folk* to give them a serious and proper social interpretation" (106). This honorary preface, however, rapidly leads into a number of critiques of Du Bois's arguments. Locke celebrates the spirituals as a body of work "for which the only historical analogy is the spiritual experience of the Jews and the only analogue, the Psalms" (106). Hurston echoes Locke's assertion in her 1934 essay "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals." She writes, "nothing outside of the Old Testament is as rich in figure as a Negro prayer. Some instances are unsurpassed anywhere in literature" (873). Johnson, in a preface to his 1925 collection *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, exclaims that the spirituals are

“unsurpassed among the folk songs of the world and, in the poignancy of their beauty, unequalled!” (12).

Hurston, Locke, and Johnson insist, in contradiction to Du Bois, that the spirituals are fundamentally religious. They claim that the religiosity of the music determines the emotions that will be represented in or expressed by the songs. Hurston defines the spirituals as “Negro religious songs, sung by a group, and a group bent on expression of feelings and not just sound effects.” Throughout her analysis, it is clear that the religious aspect of this tradition is not contingent, but essential. She makes continual reference to congregations, not chorales; she describes the songs as a part of every Sunday, and as taking their meaning from prayer. The key difference between the two cultural formations Hurston denotes as “spirituals and neo-spirituals” is that in the latter, there is a displacement of the songs from their folk setting. As folk songs, Hurston explains, they are inextricably connected to the black church. In this setting, rather than the highly practiced, public facing performances of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, for example, the spirituals are subject to continual revision. “The real spirituals are not really just songs. They are unceasing variations around a theme” (870). The variations, and continual updating to reflect the momentary priorities of the congregation, indicate a diversity of emotion that is not captured by Du Bois’s analysis. Indeed, Hurston’s tone can be described as unmistakably exasperated when she turns to this point. “The idea that the whole body of spirituals are ‘sorrow songs’ is ridiculous. They cover a wide range of subjects from a peeve at gossipers to Death and Judgment” (870). Hurston argues for an acknowledgement of the full complexity of black life, which is in excess of sorrow, and includes everything from petty annoyance to the question of eternal salvation, and a correspondingly wide affective range.

Johnson also grounds his analysis in the black church, through personal recollections of his childhood. His most enduring memory is of the lead singer, “Ma” White. “Even as a child my joy in hearing her sing these songs was deep and full,” he recalls (22). This counters Du Bois’s description of sorrow; the songs in Johnson’s analysis produce joy. One member of Johnson’s church had an informal position of leadership in the congregation; he was known to be “a great judge of the appropriate song to sing [. . .] a song that expressed a certain sentiment” (23). He here implies that there are many emotional registers from which singers select, and that different situations and moments in the service will inspire that choice. Johnson shows more leniency than does Hurston regarding the flexibility of occasions for the spirituals to be performed. He does not argue against their formal and practiced performance, maintaining that in any setting, it is the expression of emotion that distinguishes the Negro spiritual from other forms. He is describing a theory of racial affect; the emotions expressed in the songs are unmistakable because they are drawn from “the truth about their origin and history” (29).

More than any of the other writers considered here, Johnson demarcates the secular and the religious in black musical traditions. He describes the difference between the two as “that of different physical responses to differing sets of emotions. Religious ecstasy fittingly manifests itself in swaying heads and bodies; the emotions that call for hand and foot patting are pleasure, humor, hilarity, love, just the joy of being alive” (31). Johnson’s suggestion that there are different “sets” of emotions at work in the two frameworks is useful in understanding what is missing from the Du Boisian analysis; Du Bois places his affective investments in the memorialization of black suffering, and does not attend to the joy that is often circulated in the traditions of the black church.

Alain Locke most forcefully counters Du Bois in his defense of the religious foundations and emotional registers of the spirituals. He respectfully, but firmly, contends that the spirituals “transcend emotionally even the very experience of sorrow out of which they were born; their mood is that of religious exaltation, a degree of ecstasy indeed that makes them in spite of the crude vehicle a classic expression of the religious emotion” (106). He concedes that there are secular strains to be found within all artistic traditions, but considers any argument that situates the spirituals outside of religion “a travesty” (107). He notes that there are

discoverable sensuous and almost pagan elements blended into the Spirituals. But something so intensely religious and so essentially Christian dominates the blend that they are indelibly and notably of this quality. The Spirituals are spiritual. Conscious artistry and popular conception alike should never rob them of this heritage, it is untrue to their tradition and to the folk genius to give them another tone. (106)

Like Johnson and Hurston, Locke explicitly emphasizes the complexity and range of the religious emotion of the spirituals, situating Du Bois’s secular analysis of them as a betrayal of their authentic meaning. Locke calls for a “break” from the mode of analysis in which Du Bois engaged, a break that would be possible through attention to voices such as his, Hurston’s and Johnson’s. Yet, these three essays are rarely read or cited in contemporary scholarship. It is the secularized sorrow song of Du Bois’s now classic, foundational argument that has defined the field.

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Eddie Glaude, Jr. is an important voice in contemporary black studies, in part because his work spans both religious and secular discourses with depth and precision. In his first book, *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*, he studies the

Old Testament story of Exodus as it was circulated in this period of black cultural history both as a “sacred text” as well as “in this-worldly and historical terms as a model for resistance and, perhaps, revolution” (3). He thus works from a duality of the secular and the religious even as his analysis focuses on a biblical text. In his second book, *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America*, he elaborates his consideration of black politics through a retelling of the history of ideas—in this case, the philosophical tradition of pragmatism—inclusive of black thinkers who have made unrecognized contributions to that tradition. He describes pragmatism as an approach to the challenges of black political life in the United States that seem intransigent but that, he claims, can be effectively acted upon. In both books, his critical posture is prospective rather than retrospective. He celebrates the joy of black life even as he acknowledges the injustices and sorrows that have often shaped its development in the new world. My claim is that we can derive from his work a number of approaches to black studies through which to further circulate a more full range of emotion, including both religious joy and secular happiness, than has been customary in the field to date.

Exodus opens with the lyrics of a spiritual as an epigraph, calling to mind both the music of the black church and the competing interpretations of its meaning. The lyrics read, in part:

Canaan land is the land for me,
 And let God’s saints come in. [. . .]
 Say, Moses, go to Egypt land,
 And tell him to let my people go. (2)

Glaude argues that these lines, and the religious tradition they represent, indicate that black Christianity is a fundamentally anticipatory set of beliefs and practices. He writes, “these lines collapsed the past with the present in order that a future might be imagined” (29). Emphasizing

this point, he continues, “the journey forward—the promise that where we are going is radically different from where we are—marks the transformative aspect of the narrative” (5). Glaude insists that the songs of the church contain not only a specifically black theology, but also black secular politics of progress. In response to “white Christian racism,” viciously displayed in the thoroughness with which all aspects of daily life were segregated in this period, “faith in God and obligation to community were inextricably bound together in early nineteenth-century black America,” he writes (26). In his analysis, communal secular politics and black Christianity are irreducibly connected. Glaude maintains that black communities in this historical period responded to racism by developing a nationalist tradition that was informed by religious conviction and community.

Within the dual framework of the secular and the religious, Glaude then turns to traditions of celebration in black cultural history. In doing so, the affective implications of the “transformative” narrative of futurity embedded in the Exodus text become more apparent. Black religious life provided “the languages to resist dread and despair,” he writes, and the forms of worship—“the liturgies, the singing and dancing”—amounted to a joyous celebration of “the uniqueness of black people and their relation to God” (29). Of course, the celebration of black life was not confined to the church. One of the most compelling points in Glaude’s early research is his study of freedom celebrations, which formally commemorated “the abolition of an element of slavery” (85).⁷¹ Free blacks living in the north engaged in acts of “*countermemory*,” he argues, through which they developed “an alternative narrative that . . . oppose[d]—operating under and against—the master narrative of the nation” (84). This narrative establishes an alternative affective economy; in opposition to the suffering imposed by slavery, these communities circulated the joy of black life in freedom. Glaude argues that the celebrations were “as much

about projection and anticipation as they were about recollection and memory”; rather than the memorialization of suffering, these occasions signified a victorious overcoming, and their “primary aim was prospective” (101). Glaude’s insistence on progress—his pragmatism—is the defining characteristic of his scholarship.⁷²

In *A Shade of Blue*, Glaude turns to pragmatism as a philosophical resource for the further development of a black politics that is deeply invested in future possibility. But he also remains focused on the ways in which “religious language has been a critical resource in the construction of black identity,” and much of the book takes up the problematics of black theology as they pertain to national politics (66). Echoing his work in *Exodus*, he writes that the spiritual collapses “the past with the present in order that a future might be imagined.” He continues, “the kinds of stories we tell ourselves about past experiences indelibly shape our characters and orient us to our fellows and to our world in particular ways” (89). Glaude does not turn away from history. But he does deploy it quite differently from many of his contemporaries, in his use of it as a critical resource for envisioning the future of black politics, not for mourning the dead.

Ultimately, Glaude makes an affective argument, and in doing so, he again orients himself in parallel with what he has described as a forward-gazing black Christian tradition:

if our lives are reduced simply to struggle and our stories presume an understanding of black agency as *always already* political, then the various ways we have come to love and hope are cast into the shadows as we obsess about politics, narrowly understood, and as History orients us retrospectively instead of prospectively. We end up, despite our best intentions, ignoring the sheer joy of

black life and unwittingly reducing our capacity to reflect and act in light of the hardships of our actual lives. (79)

Glaude does not at any point indicate that all is well for black people in the United States. He directly and forcefully acknowledges the hardships and injustices inflicted upon them by white racism. But, he argues, to acknowledge only these aspects of black life is to obscure much of its complexity. I would point out that it is an affective, as much as an intellectual or political, complexity that he seeks. The “love and hope” and “sheer joy of black life” are, for Glaude, resources for present action toward future goals at least as much as they are feelings uniquely developed out of suffering. When he specifies “the various ways we have come to love and hope,” he is designating a racial affect, not a general one, and his point that much is lost when they are ignored in discourses of race is one that I have worked to make throughout this chapter.

Glaude’s phrase, “sheer joy,” connotes a fullness of feeling that, lacking in nothing, is in itself complete; it does not reference or seem a part of the limitations of materiality. But when Glaude turns next to happiness, he locates it firmly within the material, using even the same terminology we find in Charles Taylor’s description of what he calls the “immanent frame,” with “human flourishing” as its highest good. Glaude writes, “we must, if we are to experience happiness, be able to forget (as well as to remember) at the right moment. [. . .] A balance is required, if we are to flourish, between the historical and the unhistorical” (80). In making this point, he reiterates the tensions between religious and secular frameworks of understanding, as well as between their respective affects.

Any attempt to understand happiness and joy in the context of racial violence should give us pause. The suffering with which we contend in the study of slavery and its inheritances is not abstract; our work must never erase, silence, or forget the sorrows inflicted upon the enslaved.

This extends, to my mind, to the imperative to give serious attention and action to the racial violence that is daily occurring in American society. But we must also cultivate the willingness and ability to expand our analyses of black cultural history to include a full range of emotion. Perhaps, as Glaude argues, this does not require that we forget, but rather that we work toward prospective thought and feeling as habits of mind. I have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter that an astonishing range of affective diversity beyond sorrow is already in circulation, from the slave narrative genre to contemporary academic discourses in black studies. In reconsidering texts from across various historical periods in this light, we can enact what we might think of as a pragmatic remembering.

Chapter Six

Deliverance: James Baldwin and the Consecration of Black Life

The opening pages of James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) are set during Sunday morning service in a Harlem Pentecostal storefront church. It is a scene in which John Grimes, the novel's fourteen-year-old protagonist, has been immersed throughout his life. A preacher's son, John is without question a member of the congregation, known and established. But he is not yet counted as one among the communion of saints, a designation reserved for those who have experienced conversion. His sense of social separation from his community manifests in feeling and in thought:

There had never been a time when John had not sat watching the saints rejoice with terror in his heart, and wonder. Their singing caused him to believe in the presence of the Lord; indeed, it was no longer a question of belief, because they made that presence real. He did not feel it himself, the joy they felt, yet he could not doubt that it was, for them, the very bread of life—could not doubt it, that is, until it was too late to doubt. (7)

John meets the joy of the saints with fear, able only to witness a feeling he cannot claim. But their emotion forms the basis of his belief in God and his uncritical acceptance of the tenets of the church. This passage foreshadows the affective report that will be the final evidence of John's religious deliverance; when he shares their joy, he will be assured of his salvation.

The phrase "they made that presence real" marks the ways in which the broad conceptual categories of the secular and the religious are in tension in Baldwin's writing as well as in its critical reception. The word "made" might signify a rendering or an invocation, depending upon whether the discourse at work is secular or religious. This discursive opposition defines the two

most common interpretive approaches to “The Threshing-Floor,” the section of the novel in which John’s conversion is portrayed and the name the church gives to the place where the individual encounters God. Literary critic Jason Stevens summarizes the dominant readings of this culminating sequence of the novel as divided between “an ironic camp, which explains the event in purely psychological terms and completely rejects the black church and Christianity, and an affirmative camp, which asserts that the experience is an authentic act of grace” (273). Ironic readings of the novel suggest that the making of the presence of the Lord is an interpersonal creative act, based in psychological and affective performativity. In this view, thought and feeling are the constituent parts of religious experience; there is no external supernatural referent.

Affirmative readings, conversely, maintain that a spiritual presence is called into being through the sociality of worship. Relevant to this interpretation is the New Testament verse Matthew 18:20, in which Jesus of Nazareth is quoted as saying to his followers, “for where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (*NRSV*). The Pentecostal hermeneutic takes this and other verses quite literally to mean that the Holy Spirit is an active and physical presence in the life of the church. Religious experience, in this reading, involves thought, feeling, and spirituality as distinct parts of self and world.

In this chapter, I take a different approach to “The Threshing-Floor.” In turning to theology as a resource for the understanding of literary representations of religious experience, I grant the possibility of religion’s claims to truth. But even as I do not find religious belief and practice to be necessarily ironic, neither are my arguments reliant upon an affirmation of their authenticity. I make no comment here as to whether the point of origin of John’s conversion is psychological, supernatural, or otherwise. Instead, I move between secular and religious discourses to interpret the affective qualities of black Christian traditions, which are inextricably

tied to histories of racial violence against the black body. I study the novel as one representation of the ways in which the black church has claimed and elaborated the emotions as resources against this violence. In my previous chapters, I discuss the memorialization of black suffering and the celebration of black life as the tasks of sorrow and joy, respectively. In this chapter, I turn to deliverance, which situates sorrow and joy as mutually dependent feelings of faith. Black Christian accounts of deliverance draw upon scriptural texts and folk narratives to consecrate suffering. But to make meaning from oppression is not to necessarily accept or to forgive it. In the novel, black suffering is made sacred, even as white violence is held beyond redemption. The narrative structure of deliverance, as it is established in the Biblical book of Exodus, is based on a distinction between oppressors and oppressed, and it is the voices of the oppressed that are heard and answered. Because it attends to this difference, deliverance is an ideal conceptual model for thinking about racial affect.⁷³

Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies, which also informs my previous two chapters, is particularly powerful in its acknowledgment of racially asymmetrical histories of violence and the differences in subjectivity that these histories produce. As objects circulate, as in an economy, they accrue affective value, while the role of the subject is interpretive. In her view, emotions are produced in the encounter between the subject and the affectively dense object; she writes, "contact with an object generates feeling." But the feelings that are generated by encounters are not stable or predictable. They are substantiated by the histories, personal and collective, that precede the point of contact. Ahmed writes, "whether something feels good or bad already involves a process of reading, in the very attribution of significance. Contact involves the subject, as well as histories that come before the subject" (*Cultural* 6). In my analysis, the novel's protagonist, John, is the subject under consideration, and the histories that

come before him are present in the narrative as retellings of the memories of his mother, father, and aunt. The novel details the acts of white violence committed against successive generations of John's family, and these narratives inform his interpretations of the objects he encounters on the threshing-floor.

The object and its means of circulation are variable. In the section of the novel in which John experiences deliverance, the most compelling affective object is a multidimensional one, with both religious and secular connotations. It is a briefly-mentioned figure with which John comes into contact in the moments directly preceding his vision of God. Articulated only as "the body on the tree," this figure signifies both the crucified Christ and the lynched black body.⁷⁴ Initially, the feelings generated for John by this encounter are sorrow—to the point of despair—and overwhelming fear. The object evokes for him the history of enslavement, rape, and murder of black individuals that are his inheritances as a racialized black subject. But in coming to identify the cross with salvation through Jesus Christ, John interprets it as having another meaning as well; it generates for him a transcendent joy. Both of his interpretations, and the full range of feeling they produce, emerge from the sociality of the black church. As Ahmed notes, "emotions are not only about movement, they are also about attachments," and "what moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place" (11). The object John comes to recognize as a site of both sorrow and joy circulates in an intergenerational affective economy; these two feelings equally form the basis of his attachments to his family and his fellow Christians. In the view of the church, this affective and social cohesion is eternally binding. In his deliverance, John takes his place among all believers through time, in the communion of saints.

The material for *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is drawn explicitly from the “prolonged religious crisis” Baldwin himself experienced at the age of fourteen (“Down” 15). But the novel does not represent the period of intense doubt that followed Baldwin’s conversion and precipitated his eventual departure from the church. Throughout his adult life, he openly critiqued and condemned religion; he also refused to entirely renounce it. Rather than continue in the ongoing, and, it seems to me, failing project of attempting to ascertain Baldwin’s personal position in relation to faith, I instead consider the provisions of religion that he was apparently unwilling to relinquish. It is my contention that whether Baldwin ultimately affirmed or rejected religion, he maintained that it was an aspect of black life in the United States that could not be fully replaced, exceeded, or forgotten. Amidst the truly agonizing question of racial theodicy; doubts surrounding doctrinal plausibility; and in spite of the patent hypocrisies and corruptions displayed in the lives of individual Christians both black and white, Baldwin finds in the affective depth and power of shared worship in the black church something worth preserving.

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Baldwin’s representation of John’s conversion is one of the most affectively dense passages in American literature. It begins in anguish and terror; it ends in wonder and love. Being brought through sorrow and into joy, and moving from “lost” to “found” in categorical terms, are two of the emotional and narrative features embedded in the genre of Christian conversion.⁷⁵ But each convert confronts his own personal fears, sorrows, and shame before finally encountering the shared affective object that produces for believers an unmistakable and transcendent joy. For John, the fear of death is inextricably related to the terror of white violence, the shame of sexuality is constructed through the desire for a socially impossible intimacy with the friend and beloved Elisha, and his joy participates in the joy of black liberation. Ahmed’s

theory makes it possible to speak of the sociality of the emotions themselves while also acknowledging the interpersonal social contexts in which feelings are produced, and I will address both points throughout my discussion of John's deliverance.

The scene is set in the final lines of the preceding section of the novel, in which John's mother Elizabeth looks up from her prayers at the sound of her son's voice crying out. She sees that, "on the threshing-floor, in the center of the crying, singing saints, John lay astonished beneath the power of the Lord" (192). A perspectival shift follows; while Elizabeth is able to interpret the scene with an immediacy of understanding shaped by her religious convictions, evidenced by her naming of the threshing-floor as both a theological concept and a place. But John has no reliable point of reference. "He knew, without knowing how it had happened, that he lay on the floor," and unable to recall his arrival there, he strives to orient himself physically in space and time, grasping at the concrete details of his surroundings. He sees that "above him burned the yellow light which he had himself switched on," he can feel the floor shaking beneath him from the movements of the saints, and he can hear the sounds of their voices. But this reassuring inventory of information quickly dissolves as John attempts to stand. He realizes that he is no longer under his own power. The narrative strikes a speculative tone; "something moved in John's body which was not John. He was invaded, set at naught, possessed," Baldwin writes (195). Ironic readings of the novel might explain this as an extreme psychosomatic event. Pentecostal theology offers a different interpretation.

The defining characteristics of Pentecostalism as a denomination, or sect, help to delineate what it means to be black and Christian in the novel, particularly in the scene of John's conversion. Pentecostal churches are most strikingly distinguished from other black Christian traditions by their belief that the Holy Spirit is a physical presence in religious experience. While

other groups acknowledge it as having varying involvement in human life as one part of a trinity composed also of God the Father and the Son, Pentecostalism posits a degree of active participation that is no less than the inhabiting of the human body.⁷⁶ As theologian Kenneth Archer notes, historically, Pentecostalism differentiated itself in that it “would not settle for anything less than an experiential manifestation of the Spirit’s ‘direct divine, incontrovertible intervention which did not rely on the intellect or feeling but on a sign of the presence of the Holy Ghost which both the individual experiencing it and all who were looking on’” would recognize (23). Archer insists that the visible signs of divine intervention are not merely extensions of the psychological or the emotional. Rather, he argues, the spiritual is its own realm of experience with its own evidences and forms of knowledge. According to Pentecostal belief, there is an autonomous region of interiority—I will refer to it as the spiritual—into which the Holy Spirit manifests itself, and through which divine understanding is revealed. In the novel, the imparting of such knowledge to John is represented in a series of visions and voices, experiential factors that may also be read as psychological projections. The scene of John’s deliverance turns upon these visions and the immaterial affective objects that populate them; the voices that speak to him intensify the feelings produced by his encounters with these objects.

On the threshing-floor, John finds himself in darkness; all affectively significant objects are obscured. The first sound he hears is “a malicious, ironic voice” telling him mockingly to rise; but he cannot lift himself from the floor. This same voice then “insisted yet once more that he rise from that filthy floor if he did not want to become like all the other niggers.” He cries out in anguish, finding that “the utter darkness does not present any point of departure, contains no beginning, and no end.” It presents no possibilities within which he might affirm his humanity or feel anything other than abject pain. The voice intensifies the fear that emerges from his pain,

and encourages him toward despair. Still not knowing even how he has arrived there, John can bring to mind a single memory. Thinking back, “he remembered only the cross,” and that, prior to finding himself on the floor, “he had turned again to kneel at the altar, and had faced the golden cross.” But this memory does not clarify. For John, the cross is inanimate; he does not attempt to interpret it, and it produces no feelings for him. Between this impenetrable symbol, upon which is displayed the message “*Jesus Saves*,” and the vicious words spoken by the mocking voice, John locates himself solely as a racialized black subject, despised, cast out, and alone (196).

At this moment, Elisha comes into focus, and beside him, John’s father, Gabriel. These two men represent the fundamental interpersonal dynamic of John’s conversion. The scene is invested with John’s “desire, sharp and awful as a reflecting knife, to usurp the body of Elisha, and lie where Elisha lay” and his desperation to escape the violence and authority of his father (197). John’s perception of Elisha and Gabriel, who are physically present in the church sanctuary—one speaking in tongues, the other silent and stern—is interrupted by a dream-like vision in which he struggles against his father and confesses his forbidden desire for Elisha.⁷⁷ The objects he encounters produce for John fear and shame by turn. Throughout, he hears his father’s threat repeated: “I’m going to beat sin out of him. I’m going to beat it out,” until finally he sees his father’s “hand outstretched in fury,” bringing a knife down upon him. John cries out, “Father! Father!” The vision dissolves; “there was silence, and his father was gone” (201). Many critics rightly attend to the full text of the novel through readings of John’s relationship to his abusive (step) father and his unspoken attraction to Elisha in the context of racial violence. But the focus of my work here is on the sociality of the emotions themselves, and the binding interpersonality of the Christian communion of saints, rather than the specific relationships—

filial, sexual—that draw the narrative lines of the novel through the conversion scene and give the book its structural integrity.

John's first vision culminates in affective exhaustion. "He lay silent, racked beyond endurance," feeling nothing, "no lust, no fear, no shame, no hope" (202). He finds himself again alone. But the darkness is "so cold and silent" that he knows that it can only be, he surmises, "the grave." Revealed to him there is his family standing together. They do not acknowledge him; their faces are transfixed instead on a "cloud of witnesses." This term is synonymous with the communion of saints, and these innumerable representatives of the faith fill John's field of vision (202). Before him is a theological argument: the grave is not desolate, but rather abundantly filled with the eternally living presence of believers who have preceded him there. For those who understand themselves as having received salvation through the death and life of Jesus Christ, the grave is the site of a promised resurrection. But John is still alone, apart, and hopeless; in the grave, he reflects, "there was no love; no one to say: You are beautiful, John; no one to forgive him" (203). In spite of the overwhelming number before him, John repeats that there is "no one" there—no one, that is, for him. At this point in the narrative, there is no reassurance in the vision of the communion for John, because his position in relation to the affective object around which his beliefs cohere has not yet shifted.

John's despair is replaced by sorrow as he encounters once more the symbol of the cross. In the most explicit confrontation with histories of racial violence in "The Threshing-Floor," the suffering of Christ is invoked simultaneously with the brutality of lynching. John hears an indiscernible sound; he recognizes it as having been there "all his life," a sound that "came from darkness" even as it "bore such sure witness to the glory of the light." He rapidly moves from

recognition to identification. He hears the sound emanating from his own “cracked open heart.”

The sound becomes

a sound of rage and weeping which filled the grave, rage and weeping from time set free, but bound now in eternity; rage that had no language, weeping with no voice—which yet spoke now, to John’s startled soul, of boundless melancholy, of the bitterest patience, and the longest night; of the deepest water, the strongest chains, the most cruel lash; of humility most wretched, the dungeon most absolute, of love’s bed defiled, and birth dishonored, and most bloody, unspeakable, sudden death. Yes, the darkness hummed with murder: the body in the water, the body in the fire, the body on the tree. (203)

This is the wordless testimony to the suffering and sorrow of generations of black people in the new world, the history within which John must negotiate his identity.

As literary critic Robert Reid-Pharr makes explicit, “one is never converted to blackness but instead is born into it. There is no choice of black identity” (101). John occupies the tension between this inheritance, a racialized body defined precisely by its generic availability to the lynch mob seeking to murder, and the offering of salvation toward which he is called, an individualized selfhood beholden to the crucified Christ. The sorrow of enslavement and oppression binds John to the vision of black suffering; sorrow is as binding in his racial identity as joy will be to the identity, both racial and religious, that he will assume in his conversion. He first understands himself as a black subject, acutely aware of the precarity of black life. In coming to view the body on the tree as his own, a lynched black man, he counts himself among the murdered. But Jesus Christ, theologian James Cone reminds us, was also murdered; the cross,

he argues, was a first-century lynching (*Cross* 161). In coming to view the body on the tree as a transcendent object, John counts himself also among the saved.

From the sound of rage and weeping arises a vision, and John, “seeing before him the lash, the fire, and the depthless water, seeing his head bowed down forever, he, John, the lowest among these lowly,” can endure no longer (204). He pleads for help. He whispers, ““Oh, Lord, have mercy on me. Have mercy on me.”” The voice that replies to this petition, so different from the first, corresponds to what will be John’s final vision on the threshing-floor. The voice permits, then commands, him to ““go through,”” and John sees God in the form of a blinding light. This is the moment of his deliverance; he is “set free; his tears sprang as from a fountain; his heart, like a fountain of waters, burst. Then he cried: ‘Oh, blessed Jesus! Oh, Lord Jesus! Take me through!’” He then “felt himself, out of the darkness, and the fire, and the terrors of death, rising upward to meet the saints” (207). The saints in the church sanctuary, whose joyful worship is meant to intercede for John’s safe passage “through,” participate in the scene of the threshing-floor as a framing counterpoint to the anguish, fear, and chaos through which John struggles alone. The affective structure of deliverance, the saints know, is a movement from sorrow to joy, but John has no assurance that joy will come. In order for him to be brought through the darkness, he must see evidence of the light. The worshipping saints thus provide for John a communal affective destination. As Ahmed argues, emotions do not only move us; they also hold us in place by informing our attachments. John’s interpretive transition thus moves him to a social identification in which blackness and Christianity are intersected. This is also a movement, in the church, from social dislocation to alignment, legibility, and full belonging. In his conversion, he is given, in Ahmed’s beautiful phrase, a dwelling place.

John is “filled with a joy, a joy unspeakable, whose roots, though he would not trace them on this new day of his life, were nourished by a wellspring of despair not yet discovered.” As he departs from the church after the long night of his deliverance, and walks into the breaking light of day, he reflects, “out of joy strength came, strength that was fashioned to bear sorrow: sorrow brought forth joy” (221). I describe deliverance as a linear path from black oppression to liberation, or, in affective terms, a movement from sorrow to joy. But John complicates this model in his description of the two emotions as emerging continually from one another in a reiterative process, a crucial part of which is the production not of emotion alone but also of “strength.” These lines of the novel are incomprehensible without reference to a theological tradition in which suffering is made meaningful; indeed, in which it is at the center of meaning. If the agonies and death of Christ are the necessary preconditions of the resurrection, so also is each instance of suffering consecrated through the higher purpose it serves, which is, at least in part, to strengthen those who endure it. This deeply theological response to suffering is an inheritance of the religious traditions developed by the black slaves from whom John descends.

Early in the novel, the core theological arguments of black Christianity are articulated in the voice of John’s grandmother. In her experience of deliverance, the secular and religious coincide; emancipated by the “armies, plundering and burning” that had “come from the North to set them free,” she remembers the event as an “answer to the prayers of the faithful, who had never ceased, both day and night, to cry out for deliverance.” Throughout her life, she had committed herself to the imperative to “endure and trust in God,” and she pitied the proud white families who would inevitably be brought low, who “had not fashioned for themselves or their children so sure a foundation as was hers.” She actively repurposes her oppression into a source of strength. She ascribes value to her suffering; at the same time, she does not sanction it. The

injustices of slavery, she insists, flow directly from the freely chosen actions of white slaveholders. It is the “will of God,” she explains, that the enslaved would hear the story of God’s deliverance of the Israelites, and from this shared story of exodus to sustain their faith, and survive (64). But the suffering she endures, she maintains, is not in accordance with God’s will. Rather, it is directly in opposition to it, and it has its source solely in white choice.

Yet, even if the white oppressor is ultimately responsible for black suffering, is the God of Christianity not ultimately sovereign? In Baldwin’s words, if God “loved all His children, why were we, the blacks, cast down so far?” (“Down” 31). John’s grandmother’s experiences under slavery, and the continued persecution of her descendants, thus raise the question of racial theodicy.⁷⁸ Religious studies scholar Anthony Pinn, whose work on this topic is indispensable, summarizes the common approaches to the question as either placing responsibility for human suffering entirely on “human misdoing” or interpreting suffering as valuable. In the latter view, “although situations causing group pain (for example, slavery) are wrong, God is able to bring about the betterment of African-Americans through their suffering” (8). In the novel, Baldwin represents both explanations, honoring the ways in which black Christians have not only answered the open question of their suffering, but also consecrated it as a source of strength in the bringing together of sorrow and joy as feelings of faith.

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James Cone notes that “although James Baldwin rejected the Christianity of his youth, he did not reject the spiritual dimension of black existence or the capacity to find beauty in suffering” (*Cross* 162). It is true that, while Baldwin frequently critiqued and condemned the church, he also never renounced his conversion; he can be best understood as a modern inheritor of both the secular and the religious dimensions of black thought. The complexity of his

relationship to these conceptual categories and the traditions that arise from them suggests that he found them distinctly valuable. In never fully exchanging one for the other, he defies the notion that such an exchange is possible, warranted, or productive. This is to say that the secularization thesis, which rests on the argument that the secular overtakes and replaces religion as societies become more modern, is not a useful metaphor for Baldwin's life. Whether one man's biography is sufficient to the task of revealing the weaknesses of that thesis, which has underwritten western thought for centuries, is the provocation of this final section of the chapter.

As I discuss in my introduction to *Feelings of Faith*, literary criticism inherits the secularization thesis from Matthew Arnold's 1869 *Culture and Anarchy*, which first adapted it to the discourses of that field of study, claiming that "culture" would be the vehicle through which religion would come to be abandoned as a source of meaning. Arnold's argumentation relies upon an assumption of equivalence between religion and culture, whereby one can be seamlessly traded for the other. But in light of recent broad-scale critiques of the secularization thesis by philosophers such as Charles Taylor and Talal Asad, Arnold's claims are also now being called into question. In *Culture and the Death of God* (2014), literary critic Terry Eagleton revisits Arnold to ask whether the trajectory he predicted is reflected in the historical record of the intervening eras. In short, Eagleton finds that it is not. In Eagleton's retrospective, rather than culture inevitably replacing religion, it seems inevitable only that culture would fail to do so. In this short book, he begins to delineate the ways in which religion and culture cannot be exchanged one for another. Eagleton demonstrates that culture, called upon to act as a "surrogate form of transcendence" in the project of secularization, was not capable of or fitted to the task (ix).

Eagleton's arguments are remarkable not only in that they take up the secularization debates from the methodological perspective of cultural studies, a privileged site of secularity, but also in their defense of religion as autonomous and irreplaceable in human life. He offers a provisional list of the differentiating qualities of religion, which include: the unifying of theory and practice, the bringing together of the elite and the populace, and the acknowledgment of the spirit and the senses; furthermore, he writes, religion involves absolutes and requires conviction and commitment. "No symbolic form in history has matched religion's ability to link the most exalted of truths to the daily existence of countless men and women," he writes (122). Yet there is no mention of race in Eagleton's account of religion in the west, nor does he specify—and, perhaps this is unfair to expect, given the parameters of his inquiry—any denominational differences within "religion," which he renders a totalizing concept. His arguments are catalytic; however, to my knowledge, they have yet to be placed into productive encounters with primary texts. Baldwin's writing presents us with an occasion for such a preliminary encounter.

In his nonfiction writing, Baldwin anticipates Eagleton's critique of Arnold's work. Namely, he does not seem to regard religion and culture as seamlessly interchangeable categories. Rather, he identifies the distinctive characteristics of religion that would be lost if the secularization thesis were to unfold as predicted, on a schedule of replacement. In selections from *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) and "Down at the Cross" (1962), the essays I will consider here, the secularization thesis is not at issue. But Baldwin's arguments on religion are highly relevant to its reconsideration. He is clear in his statements against the church; there is no mistaking the force of his critiques. But he is also careful in attending to the aspects of black Christian life that are not easily translated into *any* secular formation. The structure of his argumentation, which follows a pattern in which he first discards religion entirely, then reclaims

some of its provisions, indicates a desire to preserve those experiences and capacities that are available only in and through religious belief and practice. First among them are the affective resources of the black church, which, he argues, have been instrumental in the survival of black peoples in the new world.

In his statements on religion, Baldwin often follows a critique with a protective closure. He reveals and condemns the failures of the church, then constructs parameters for any further detraction that his remarks might invite. This can be attributed at least in part to the fact that it is not the church, as such, that Baldwin honors, but rather specific attributes of black Christianity. Though he attempts to separate its constituent parts—racial, religious—they implicate one another in black church traditions. In an essay in the collection *Notes of a Native Son* titled “The Harlem Ghetto,” for example, he describes the churches of Harlem as conducting “fairly desperate emotional business.” He then cautions, lest the reader imagine that this is a simple matter, that their worship amounts to much more than “merely a childlike emotional release,” but is rather a sophisticated containment of the bitterness that stems from oppression (59). Much of the rest of the essay is dedicated to an extensive critique of the church, after which he suddenly turns, and affirms it. He writes of the justifiable bitterness felt by black Americans, noting, however, that “the survival of the Negro in this country would simply not have been possible if this bitterness had been all he felt” (64). The larger argument that frames this remark is that black affect is not consumed by bitterness in large measure because of the emotional depth of the black church, constructed by generations of black interpretive labor that responded to sorrow theologically until it brought forth joy.

The essay “Down at the Cross” is Baldwin’s lengthiest nonfiction discussion of religion. It is most often quoted for its rebukes of the church, but it subtly follows the pattern of critique

and defense that I have outlined above. His wide-ranging arguments against the church include its hypocrisies, failures, and the inadequacy of theological answers to material problems. In a point that can be taken as representative of the whole, Baldwin describes the “principles” of Christianity, in both its white and black institutional forms, as “Blindness, Loneliness, and Terror, the first principle necessarily and actively cultivated in order to deny the two others. I would love to believe that the principles were Faith, Hope, and Charity, but this is clearly not so for most Christians, or for what we call the Christian world” (31). Yet, two paragraphs later, he memorializes his experiences in the church as singularly valuable. His defenses are once more grounded in the affective.

He writes, “the church was very exciting. It took a long time for me to disengage myself from this excitement, and on the blindest, most visceral level, I never really have, and never will.” To substantiate this remark with descriptive detail, he continues,

There is still, for me, no pathos quite like the pathos of those multicolored, worn, somehow triumphant and transfigured faces, speaking from the depths of a visible, tangible, continuing despair of the goodness of the Lord. I have never seen anything equal to the fire and excitement that sometimes, without warning, fill a church, causing the church . . . to “rock.” Nothing that has happened to me since equals the power and the glory that I sometimes felt when, in the middle of a sermon, I knew that I was somehow, by some miracle, really carrying, as they said, “the Word” – when the church and I were one. Their pain and their joy were mine, and mine were theirs. (33).

Baldwin’s argument draws upon the affective, the spiritual, and socially connective aspects of shared worship in the black church. By writing comparatively but without counterpoint, he

implicitly draws upon the opposition between religion and culture. The pathos of the congregation is unmatched, for example, by the pathos that is conveyed by the arts. In this passage, Baldwin suggests that the church is unique in its capacity to affectively bind its members to one another in a sociality that both honors and exceeds racial identification.

This consideration of the experiential depth and power of religion is a brief interlude in Baldwin's discussion of his reasons for abandoning it. In retrospect, he writes, "all that repentance and rejoicing had changed nothing" (37). And, he notes, the fundamental doctrines of Christianity are not visible in the lives of its adherents; in his observation, "there was no love in the church. It was a mask for hatred and self-hatred and despair. The transfiguring power of the Holy Ghost ended when the service ended" (39). It seems that this would be the final word on the efficacy of religious belief and practice. "But, I cannot leave it at that," he reflects. "There is more to it than that. In spite of everything, there was in the life I fled a zest and a joy and a capacity for facing and surviving disaster that are very moving and very rare" (41). Once more, Baldwin writes from a recuperative, rather than a critical, posture. It is black Christianity's affectively complex capacity for survival that he continually holds in reverence.

Section Three Introduction: Calvinist Morals, Ethics, and Emotion in the American Novel

Contemporary affect theory insists upon the transformative ethical potential of the emotions. As historian of ideas Ruth Leys summarily reports, “the claim is that we human beings are corporeal creatures imbued with subliminal affective intensities and resonances” which have “the potential for ethical creativity and transformation” (436). Brian Massumi and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick are among the most influential figures in the turn to affect in literary and cultural studies; both are suggestive on this point. Massumi, whose work reaches tellingly back to Spinoza’s *Ethics* (1677), is interested in the practices that could be cultivated through scholarly attention to affect. In *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), Massumi discusses the self-imposed political limitations of cultural theory, a field that works against its own empowerment as an effective agent of social change by refusing to disseminate its ideas through a “contagion” model, and by encouraging the development of contradictory lines of transformative, self-interested inquiry. But given the “affectively engaged yet largely disinterested” process in which such scholarship is undertaken, he wonders “what cultural studies could become,” namely, a site for “an amoral collective ethics” (255). Because cultural studies is disinterested, that is, it has not been captured by agendas that would force it to have loyalties to any specific side of an ethical question, it is uniquely equipped to knit the social field together.

And in a powerful reading of Sedgwick, whose primary source on the affects is the twentieth-century psychologist Silvan Tomkins, literary critic Tyler Bradway finds an “alternative ethical model” in which “specific affective states contribute to qualitatively unique intersubjective, ethical, and political relations” (79). These theorists regard affect as interpersonally dynamic; it is precisely in its lack of systematization that its creative capabilities reside. But their accounts also convey a sense of expectancy. They rely on the notion that

practicable ethical models may yet emerge from the discourse.⁷⁹ As such, the absence in these arguments of the defining characteristic of many established systems of ethics—prescriptive clarity—can be read as either a refusal or a deferral.

The shared habit of mind that informs affect theory's ethical engagements across origins as different as Spinoza and Tomkins is the sorting of affects into positive and negative categories.⁸⁰ But “positive” and “negative” are not commensurate with “right” and “wrong,” a point that Massumi makes when he specifies that the affective ethics he envisions will be “amoral.” What he means is that the emergent collective will not restrict or mandate the behavior of its participants. To regulate conduct is the task of morality, and it is certainly possible to cordon this off from ethics as Massumi has carefully done. However, the two can also be imagined together. An example is the formulation advanced by philosophers Ronald Dworkin and Kwame Anthony Appiah.⁸¹ Dworkin distinguishes between the two terms, arguing that ethics “includes convictions about which kinds of lives are good or bad for a person to lead, and morality includes principles about how a person should treat other people” (485). But Appiah complicates the issue; he understands Dworkin to “allow that the ethical might subsume the moral. It might be best to lead a life in which you treat others as they should be treated,” he writes (278). It also might be mandated. Laws governing human interaction are frequently expressed through religious traditions; in many of them, adherence to these laws is necessary to the definition of a well-lived life. And there are numerous detailed accounts of the relationship between ethics and the emotions available in religious thought. However, affect theory has yet to consult them. This is the project I take up in these chapters.

In the American theological canon, the text that has no rivals on this topic is *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746), by Jonathan Edwards. It is unquestionably the most

robust theorization of the emotions in American Christianity.⁸² Its arguments, which predominantly focus on the signs of election—the feelings, thoughts, and actions observable as evidence of authentic faith and, correspondingly, of salvation—were written in the context of the Great Awakening of the 1740’s. Edwards was a central figure in the revivalism of his era. Feelings of faith were so important to this movement that it was often referred to by contemporaries as “affectionate religion” (Smith, John 4). Edwards defends the emotions, or, as he calls them, the affections, as valuable sources of religious knowledge. “True religion, in great part,” he writes, “consists in holy affections” (95). This is the aspect of the treatise that is most widely known. But it is his commentaries on the relationship between the religious affections and conduct—the exterior, but also the interior acts of Christian life—to which I will attend in these chapters. In short, he argues that the affections inform behavior to such a degree that they are the defining guideposts by which a believer should proceed in life. “True Christian fortitude,” he writes, “consists in strength of mind, through grace, exerted in two things; in ruling and suppressing the evil and unruly passions and affections of the mind; and in steadfastly and freely exerting, and following good affections and dispositions” (350).

The importance of Edwards, and more broadly, his theological predecessor John Calvin, to literary production in the United States is difficult to overstate. That the Pilgrims, Puritans, and Dutch in New York were all Calvinist settlers is a concise reminder of how fundamental this point of reference was from the colonial era forward. And while Edwards was by all rights an original thinker, he was nevertheless, as religious studies scholar Amy Pauw argues, also a “rightful heir to Calvin’s theological legacy” (92). That the three authors I consider in these chapters were influenced by this tradition is therefore somewhat unremarkable. Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Marilynne Robinson were all brought up in what Melville wryly

calls, in *Moby-Dick*, the “infallible Presbyterian church” (58). Literary critic Jonathan Cook describes Melville, who left the church in adulthood, as “indelibly marked by his early exposure to the rigors of Calvinist theology” (37). Similarly, critic Joe Fulton argues that Edwards’s writings “offered a powerful catalyst” for Twain’s fiction (242). And Robinson, in a 2014 essay, reflects, “Jonathan Edwards provided me with a metaphysics that made the phenomenal world come alive for me again and that seemed to me to undercut every version” of the materialist, secular, dominant viewpoint (“New Light”). In discussions of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and *Gilead* (2004), I describe the ways in which this theological tradition, as it is articulated in Edwards’s *Religious Affections*, animates portrayals of affect and ethics in the novels.

Each chapter is similarly structured so as to address the two basic ethical orientations of Christian life, which I understand as also pertaining to morality: the hierarchical relationship between the individual and God and lateral relationships between individuals.⁸³ In each novel, a main character—all of the characters under consideration in these chapters are gendered male—interprets his position in relation to God, and within this framework makes decisions regarding his treatment of others. In chapter seven, I discuss pride, described in the Genesis account of creation and in much subsequent Christian theology as the first unethical act of humanity. I revisit in *Moby-Dick* the well-read sermon given by Father Mapple on the biblical book of Jonah to account for anger as the affective dimension of Captain Ahab’s “fatal pride” (564). Edwards notes that a “haughty spirit” indicates that a person is prideful (396). Ahab frequently comments upon his own strength and cunning in relation to the ship’s crew, and his actions, which include a refusal to help another imperiled ship, the *Rachel*, find its lost sailors and the many decisions that result in the deaths of all but one of the men on board the *Pequod*, can be read as an affront to the

ethical principles advanced by Christianity. In the words of chief mate Starbuck, for Ahab to place the ship in the way of “deadly harm” would make him “the willful murderer of thirty men and more” (559). Pride is characterized as much by its inner workings as by its catastrophic external effects, which often inflict harm on others, a point that is forcefully portrayed in the concluding pages of the novel.

In the New Testament, we find the commandments to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (*NRSV*). Edwards gives more attention to love than to any other feeling of faith. In his thinking, love is unique in that it is “not only one of the affections, but it is the first and chief of the affections, and the fountain of all the affections” (108). For Huck, religious love is a troublesome abstraction until it becomes a matter of conscience. He is confronted with the moral choice between protecting Jim, an escaped black slave, and following the Christian custom of the white social order into which he has been conscripted through the “civilizing” attention of his caretakers. Alone in prayer, Huck weighs his options. As he recalls how lovingly, and with what loyalty, Jim has treated him, the scale tips the former. But he has been taught that the God to whom he prays is the author of divine laws that endorse the institution of slavery; he believes that his decision to not turn Jim in to the authorities will result in his own damnation. ““All right, then, I'll *go* to hell,”” he announces (228). The matter seems settled. But in the final chapters of the novel, it becomes clear that Huck's feelings for Jim had been merely passing affections, not authentic brotherly love. Huck, with Tom Sawyer, engages in unconscionable conduct in the events surrounding Jim's reenslavement, events that have their affectively expansive source for Huck, Tom, and the other white characters in what Toni Morrison calls Jim's “limitless store of love” (*Playing* 56).

The first two chapters in this section focus on observable acts of conduct. But Edwards dwells also on a category he describes as “immanent acts, that is, those exercises of grace that remain within the soul, that begin and are terminated there,” often taking place, he argues, “in contemplation” (422). In the third and final chapter of the section, I turn to *Gilead*, in which Robinson depicts this precise type of ethical interiority in the form of a letter written from the Reverend John Ames to his young son. The letter tells the story of a life of faith, offers guidance, and memorializes the love of a father for a child who will know him for only a few short years. It is also, finally, a narrative of forgiveness. Early in his first marriage, Ames loses his wife and child; in order to continue in his vocation and religious belief, he must reconcile himself to their deaths and to the lonely decades that follow. It is a process unobservable by others, and it takes place entirely between himself and God. But Ames also embodies what Edwards calls “the exertion of grace producing its effect in outward action” (422). In the lifelong project of forgiving others the wrongs they have committed against him, Ames negotiates the feelings of anger and of love, concluding that “there is no justice in love, no proportion in it,” and that eternal temporality, which we cannot comprehend, requires us to move beyond our grievances, to come to peace with them (238).

In the story Christianity tells about itself and its world, pride is the first sin, love is the first law, and reconciliation through love corrects sin, restoring the ruins of a fallen creation. These three chapters thus constitute an affective narrative arc that is intensely theological. By focusing on scenes of ethical and moral crisis in the American novel, I hope to illuminate the relationship between feelings of faith and the actions that, as Edwards writes, “spring” from them (100). In doing so, I offer a starting point for an expansion of affect theory, one that will consider theological accounts of the relationship between the emotions and our conduct as a source of

knowledge that can only add complexity to its current understanding of the transformative potentialities of its object of study.

Chapter Seven

Prideful Anger: The Inheritance of Sin in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*

In both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, warnings against pride are unequivocal. The Book of Proverbs associates it with destruction, and in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus of Nazareth is said to have noted it as a source of corruption (NRSV 16:18, 7:22). In classical Christian theology, pride cannot be separated from its narrative structure: it goes before the fall. Pride is understood in this tradition as the human desire to be as powerful as God. The satiation of this misplaced longing, as depicted in the creation story of Genesis, causes the ruination of a perfect world. In *The City of God* (413-427) and *Summa Theologica* (1265-1274), the respective masterpieces of St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, pride is therefore considered the first sin, unethical primarily in its false interpretation of the self in relation to divine authority. However, pride also causes external harm. Its repercussions extend far beyond its point of origin. At stake in these arguments is certainly the individual, the solitary figure turning away from God in willful contempt; but they also theorize an ever widening scope of destruction following that turn. The first error of humankind, they argue, persists into all subsequent generations.⁸⁴

This is a doctrine that continues in John Calvin, who tends to make the point more forcefully than his predecessors. He writes, in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), that “all of us born of Adam are ignorant and bereft of God, perverse, corrupt, and lacking in every good,” all characteristics inherited from the original sin of pride (16). Much like the object of its inquiry, the doctrine of original sin is passed down from one theologian to the next, to be contested and rewritten; even in those traditions in which it is denied, it maintains its presence as a foundational point of reference in Christian thought.⁸⁵ The idea that the first instance of pride implicates all of humanity, and that it marks and limits us—no one is innocent—is among the

most important contributions of the religion to intellectual history. And it has had considerable influence on American literature. Many writers in the national canon, whether broadly or narrowly conceived, are in direct conversation with Calvin and with those theologians who adapt his thinking to the colonial new world, such as Jonathan Edwards.⁸⁶

Herman Melville's debts to the Calvinist theological tradition have warranted a book-length study and much other commentary beside.⁸⁷ The degree to which Melville liberated his mind from Calvinist religious sensibility through his critiques of the church and departure from it in adulthood is a matter of intense scholarly debate. In my discussion of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851), I am less interested in drawing out evidence of Melville's personal theology than in describing his illumination of the concept of pride—particularly, its affective dimension—in the character of Captain Ahab. The novel tells the story, among many others, of Ahab's "fatal pride," the attribute around which his irresistible power coheres, and which ultimately results in a catastrophic loss of life (564). The ethics of this turn of events—it is within reason to consider Ahab responsible for the deaths of those on board the ship—have as much to do with pride as with its affective manifestations. This is a reading that requires attention to Christian theological traditions.

There is general critical agreement that the most important single passage related to these traditions in the novel is the scene in the ninth chapter in which a congregation on Nantucket listens to a sermon preached by Father Mapple on the book of Jonah. It chronicles, of course, the life of the prophet who, having defied God, is swallowed by a whale and henceforth delivered safely back to shore. The content of Mapple's sermon emphasizes Jonah's prideful disobedience, his punishment, repentance, and rescue. However, in concluding his remarks with Jonah's miraculous release from the dreaded whale, Mapple disregards nearly half of the Biblical source

text.⁸⁸ This decision obscures Jonah's final encounter with God, in which the prophet expresses anger, despair, and a wish for death. In one common reading of the sermon as a heuristic for the entire novel, Jonah and Ahab are said to converge on the basis of their characteristic actions and depart from one another in their response to crisis. In this interpretation, they are given to be most alike in their self-will, and different in that while the former is brought to shore in a posture of humble gratitude, the latter sinks beneath the weight of his unrenounced pride. However, I contend that my reading of the complete story of Jonah's tribulations brings into view a new, and more accurate, concordance between the two men, namely, the dimension of feeling, and indicates that the defining affective characteristic of Ahab's pride is hard-hearted anger.

If pride has, as I argue, a special relationship to anger, then its destructive capacities can be better explained. Anger is a powerful feeling. Literary critic Philip Fisher calls it a "vehement passion," one of a handful of overpowering emotions that "assert a world in which there is only a single person over against all others" (53). These feelings, which also include fear and grief, render sociality irrelevant in their "world-annihilating" self-referentiality (83). Taking *Moby-Dick* as an exemplary demonstration of this point, Fisher notes that "the entire world of the ship goes down after Captain Ahab has turned it into a mere arm of his anger" (64). My discussion will describe the relationship between Ahab's pride and his acts of destructive anger. I should note that in my analysis, pride is not itself an emotion.⁸⁹ It is a characteristic, demonstrated through observable behavior, defined by the inaccurate evaluation of the self as equal to God and superior to others. In the section of the chapter concerning the culminating events of the novel, I will turn first to Ahab's altercations with divine authority; secondly, I will consider the harm he inflicts on others. My analysis throughout will be informed by theologian Jonathan Edwards's

assertion in *Religious Affections* (1746) that the emotions have ethical value. But first I will turn to the significance of Father Mapple's sermon.

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The critical literature on the use of biblical sources in *Moby-Dick* is vast, as is the distance between those who argue that the novel either endorses or subverts Christian doctrines.⁹⁰ Competing interpretations of the ninth chapter of the novel, "The Sermon," have historically organized themselves around the terms of this debate. Readers who find in Father Mapple's presentation of the book of Jonah a tone of sincerity emphasize pride as the point of affinity between its protagonist and Captain Ahab, and trace in the narrative a cautionary lesson; those who read the sermon ironically understand it as an authorial statement against Christian theology. These two perspectives are consolidated in Howard Vincent's *The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick* (1949) and Lawrance Thompson's *Melville's Quarrel with God* (1952), two landmark mid-century works of literary criticism. Vincent argues that the sermon is the "key" to understanding the novel (70). He writes, "Ahab acknowledges no law but his own; his search will be carried on in self-assertion, not in self-submission. In the early, unrepentant Jonah, Ahab has been prefigured" (75). In short, Vincent understands Ahab's pride to be the central problematic of the narrative; this is a theological reading in that it accepts pride and humility as valid concepts, drawing upon their religious meanings to interpret the action of the text. In the final analysis, he writes, Ahab is entirely lacking in humility; the "winged words of Father Mapple, we realize, have never reached his spirit" (376). Had Ahab's pride been tempered by adherence to the pointed lesson of the sermon, Vincent suggests, the narrative may have turned on the deliverance rather than the destruction of the ship and its crew.

Thompson counters that this is far too credulous a view; he anticipates that any reader “bias-bound by his Christian heritage” might see in the novel “an exemplum; an object lesson, to illuminate the validity” of the religion, and notes that at the time of his writing, this was the academic consensus (10). He finds, instead, evidence of “Melville’s anti-Christian purposes” in Mapple’s sermon, as well as throughout the remainder of the novel (153). Melville scholars have increasingly come to endorse the latter reading, to such an extent that critic Giorgio Mariani recently remarked that contemporary work on *Moby-Dick* often “merely updates” Thompson’s arguments.⁹¹ Mariani suggests a different approach, arguing that “the best commentary on Mapple’s sermon is to be found in the book of Jonah itself” (38). This is also my contention. A consideration of the two chapters of Jonah unmentioned in Mapple’s sermon allows for new readings of the novel that would be fundamentally uninterested, and indecisive, as to the question of Melville’s authorial intentions. This approach restricts itself instead to an acknowledgement of the Calvinist influence on the text, not attempting to settle the score between sincerity and critique. As such, it is my hope that readers on either side of that debate will find it informative.

In his sermon, Mapple retells the story of Jonah and the whale in detail and with some embellishment; readers of the novel will be familiar with this scene.⁹² But the first half of the biblical text bears concise repeating here for the purpose of comparison to its subsequent chapters. Jonah, a prophet of the Old Testament God, is tasked with the conversion of the city of Nineveh. He rebels; boarding a ship, he flees from God. But God is inescapable; the sea rages at his command, and an unrelenting storm threatens to destroy the ship and the men on board. Jonah, aware that he is the cause of all their danger, tells the crew to throw him into the open water; they watch the ocean calm as Jonah is swallowed by a “great fish,” traditionally understood to be a whale. At this point, Jonah prays for deliverance, submitting in mortal

desperation to divine authority. If his life is spared, he promises, then he will praise and serve this god; his petition reads, in part, “I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; / what I have vowed I will pay” (*NRSV* 2:9) The final verse of the second chapter is apparently conclusive in its response to this contractual prayer. It reads, “the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land” (*NRSV* 2:10) The chapter ends here; there is no report in the text of Jonah’s feelings as he is brought to safety.

Father Mapple supplies the affective enthusiasm that is grimly lacking in the biblical text. With no basis in these verses, Mapple explains to his congregation that the story tells of “the deliverance and joy of Jonah” (47). This is technically false across English translations, including the King James Version that Mapple would have had at hand. Jonah is depicted as being rescued from the ocean and the whale, miraculously delivered to shore. But, while such experiences of deliverance are often associated with joy in other books of the Bible, no feeling—not even mere relief—is mentioned here. Perhaps the assumption that Jonah would have rejoiced over his salvation from certain death is a fair one, particularly given the other explicit connections in this religious tradition between joy and deliverance such as the Old Testament account of Exodus and the affective structure of Christian conversion.⁹³ However, Mapple inserts the affective report of joy into his retelling of the story while at the same time occluding the less encouraging emotions the text does describe in its second two chapters. He notes that “this book, containing only four chapters—four yarns—is one of the smallest strands in the mighty cable of the Scriptures” (47). But his sermon stops short at a scene that is located at the end of the second, not the fourth, chapter of the book of Jonah. Dwelling upon the meaning of the prophet’s experiences at sea, Mapple commends Jonah to his congregation as a “model for repentance,” imploring his listeners to

observe his prayer, and learn a weighty lesson. For sinful as he is, Jonah does not weep and wail for direct deliverance. He feels that his dreadful punishment is just. He leaves all his deliverance to God, contenting himself with this, that spite of all his pains and pangs, he will still look towards his holy temple. And here, shipmates, is true and faithful repentance; not clamorous for pardon, but grateful for punishment. (52)

At this point, Father Mapple turns “over the leaves of the Book once more,” in a gesture of narrative closure (53). Were he to have read through to the end of Jonah’s encounter with God, he would have arrived at a very different conclusion.

The affective complexity absent from the first half of the story of Jonah is represented in its second two chapters, when the contract the prophet has offered for his life comes due. Jonah is called once more to go to Nineveh; this time, he obeys. Upon his arrival, its king, mindful of the threat of divine punishment in Jonah’s warnings, decrees that his subjects repent. “‘Who knows?’ the king reflects, ‘God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish’” (*NRSV* 3:9) His calculations are accurate; God stays his hand, and the city is spared. In the context of the Old Testament, this narrative arc is not remarkable. The deity represented in these scriptural accounts is characterized by divine wrath and the destruction of cities, as well as receptivity to appeasement. What is notable is that in the wake of these events, the story of Jonah portrays man’s anger toward God, an affective relationality matched only by the far more often studied figures of Moses and Job.⁹⁴ The preservation of Nineveh is “very displeasing to Jonah,” and he becomes “angry,” demanding, “‘O Lord, please take my life from me.’” Twice, Jonah repeats the phrase “‘it is better for me to die than to live,’” and twice, God replies, “‘is it right for you to be angry?’” (*NRSV* 4:1-10)

This exchange underscores the distinction made in Christian traditions between God and man; in short, the wrath of God is always justified, the anger of humanity only variably so.⁹⁵ Jonah is repentant when his life is in danger, but the fearful voyage in the whale does not fundamentally change his perception of himself in relation to the will of God. Rather than abide by it, or bear witness to it, Jonah would ask for death. His pride, which announces itself first in his refusal of his commission, and a second time in his expression of disagreement with the pardoning of Nineveh, generates his anger. He wishes for the destruction of the city, and, failing this, turns his destructive energies upon himself. The effects of his anger are unknown to us; the book of Jonah ends inconclusively on unanswered questions posed by God to an unwilling servant. But readings of the significance of the book of Jonah for the novel that limit themselves to the first two chapters overlook the emotional stakes of the full text. These two final chapters demonstrate that the similarities between Jonah and Ahab are more complex than have been traditionally thought.

Father Mapple, for his part, concludes his remarks with a meditation on the shortness of life and the immensity of the relationship between the individual and God. He does not use the word humility, but these lines portray a model, humble, Christian life in retrospect:

And eternal delight and deliciousness will be his, who coming to lay him down, can say with his final breath—O Father!—chiefly known to me by Thy rod—mortal or immortal, here I die. I have striven to be Thine, more than to be this world's or mine own. Yet this is nothing; I leave eternity to Thee; for what is man that he should live out the lifetime of his God? (54)

As powerful as these final lines of Mapple's sermon are—whether they are taken to be sincere guidance for the faithful or an incisive critique of the faith—they fall short of the complexity and

indeterminacy of the full narrative of Jonah. It is both prideful action and enraged feeling that bind Jonah and Ahab from the beginning to the end of their stories—and that bind them both to their shared progenitor, Adam.

Melville animates the concept of pride, for which Adam is chiefly known, with feeling. Ahab attributes to the white whale “not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations,” Melville writes. Far exceeding a response that would be commensurate to the cruel loss of his leg in his prior encounter with Moby-Dick, Ahab “piled upon the whale’s white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his heart’s hot shell upon it.” His preoccupation is both with the whale and with what Melville calls the “intangible malignity which has been” present “from the beginning” (200). Absent from the origin story of Genesis is an explicit connection between the sin of pride and the feeling of anger. But, to theorize anger within the framework of Calvinist theology requires that we consider the possibility that man’s anger at God dates to the fall, originating concurrently with the sin of pride. In this reading, the object of Ahab’s anger is the Christian God, the source of the original infliction of the wound of mortality, the full vulnerability of which the captain’s injured leg is a mere foreshadowing. The inheritance of the fall of man, then, can be described as the reiteration in every human heart of the dynamic between anger and pride. The destructive acts that result from this interplay of feeling and thought take God as their object, but finding God to be unassailable, they turn to that which is within reach, namely, other men and the world.

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Jonathan Edwards is a major figure in the project of extending Calvinist Protestantism into the intellectual territories of the new world. His predecessors in the Puritan tradition discuss

the emotions, and value them highly, but Edwards places what he calls “the affections,” at the center of his theology.⁹⁶ His shaping influence on the revivalism of the 1740’s—known as the Great Awakening—can be attributed in large part to his defense of religious feeling. For Edwards, the affections inform the relationship between the individual and God as well as interactions between the individual and others, the two basic ethical orientations of Christian practice. In *Religious Affections*, the most comprehensive statement on the emotions in American Christian theology, Edwards associates pride with anger. His work corroborates my claim that, as evidenced by the book of Jonah and by *Moby-Dick*, where one finds pride, one finds anger also.

Religious affections, for Edwards, both prove authenticity of faith and motivate the conduct by which that faith is externally observable in the lives of “saints,” his term for all believers who have experienced conversion and committed their lives to Christianity. These true saints are his main concern and intended audience. He addresses those outside of this scope, the fallen unrepentant and those for whom belief is performative or based in self-deception, primarily as negative comparisons to the ideal.⁹⁷ In an evocative description of this ideal, he writes that a true Christian can be identified by such affective acts as “steadfastly maintaining the holy calm, meekness, sweetness, and benevolence of his mind, amidst all the storms, injuries, strange behavior, and surprising acts and events of this evil and unreasonable world” (350). Melville’s Ahab, of course, represents the total inversion of this exemplary religious individual. He is steadfast only in his pursuit of his enemy; storms, injuries, and events inspire him to ever further extremes of anger and destruction. And while it is not the purpose of my analysis to subject this fictional character to a test of faith, Edwards is suggestive in illuminating the ways in which the relationship between Ahab and the God of the Bible, narrated throughout the novel as explicitly broken, has an important affective dimension.

Ahab stands in proud defiance against this God; opposition is the structure of the relationship between them. Edwards writes, a “proud spirit is a rebellious spirit, but a humble spirit is a yieldable, subject, obediential spirit.” The proud spirit, in its rebellion against the sovereignty of God, is marked by anger; pride, Edwards argues, is “haughty” in its affective expression (396). And Ahab’s anger takes numerous forms. He refuses to acknowledge or submit to a higher power, but he also appropriates all power to himself. Ahab does not only reject the sovereignty of God; he also misidentifies himself as equal to God in position and strength. He comes to see himself as singly capable of “an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge” against the white whale (202). And he directly challenges the heavens. ““What I’ve dared, I’ve willed; and what I’ve willed, I’ll do!”” he exclaims, interpreting himself as ““the prophet and the fulfiller one. That’s more than ye, ye great gods, ever were”” (183). This usurping of roles, to both announce and enact world-shaping events, places Ahab above God and the prophets; he is human and also more than human. He views himself as limitless.

Ahab is also often regarded as exceptional by those around him. On Nantucket, before the ship sails and long before Ahab physically appears in the narrative, the veteran sailor Peleg remarks that the captain is “a grand, ungodly, god-like man,” as he commissions Ishmael to the voyage (88). And in his first encounter with Ahab, Ishmael sees “an infinity of firmest fortitude, a determinate, unsurrendable willfulness, in the fixed and fearless, forward dedication of that glance.” There is, he observes, “a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe” (135). Ahab conveys to the men around him an immensity of suffering and an overpowering selfhood that is beyond the scope of normal human affairs. Although “socially, Ahab was inaccessible,” and is always “shut up in his cabin” on board the

ship, the men find his authority irresistible, and they go to their deaths in the wake of his decisions (166, 174).

Later in the novel, as the ship is routed finally toward the seas in which Moby-Dick is known to spend his summers, Ishmael compares Ahab to the sun in the sky. In its self-sufficient movements, he finds an apt metaphor for the captain's momentum. "For a long time, now, the circus-running sun has raced within his fiery ring, and needs no sustenance but what's in himself. So Ahab," he reflects (416). This comparison is a repetition of an earlier declaration made by Ahab about himself. When Starbuck tells him that his motivations in seeking out Moby-Dick are blasphemous, he replies, "'talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me'" (178). Ahab would strike back at any incitement; he views the sun in the sky as his peer. When Starbuck later and more insistently questions the pursuit of the whale, Ahab responds by pulling "a loaded musket from the rack," pointing it at his first mate, and exclaiming, "'There is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one Captain that is lord over the *Pequod*'" (517). God is irrelevant; Ahab displaces him with the territorial claim that the omniscient power "over the earth" does not, within this purview, have authority over a ship at sea. Ahab's willful resistance to a higher power is explicit and remorseless. It is also filled with rage.

Edwards argues that anger is a feeling against, or in opposition to "what is in view," particularly when the "self-love" of the subject is threatened or harmed (98, 174). Philip Fisher similarly contends in *The Vehement Passions* that anger is an affective indication "that an unacceptable injury to self-regard has taken place" (176). Such injuries demand retribution, whatever their source; in short, anger fosters a desire for revenge. Ahab's anger is ostensibly directed at Moby-Dick, but the whale is merely a proxy. His feelings originate in the wound of mortality, inflicted upon Adam by God as punishment for the first sin, according to the biblical

account of creation which Melville cites throughout the novel. But revenge against God is impossible. Therefore, pride and anger function together in Ahab's character to bring about instead the destruction of the self, the ship, and the hunted whale.

My arguments concern pride as it is understood within religious discourse, foregrounding the relationship between Ahab and God that the concept in its theological meaning requires. But in its interpersonal formations, pride can be best described as the mistaken belief in the innate superiority of the self over others. As such, the social manifestation of Ahab's pride—his assessment of himself in relation to the men on board the *Pequod*—with anger as its affective dimension, could be as productively discussed without reference to the supernatural. Such an analysis would find an important starting point in the work of Marxist theorist C.L.R. James. His *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* (1953), describes the ethical stakes of what he calls Ahab's "intense subjectivism," the turning away from others and inward upon the self, a process that encourages Ahab's prioritization of himself and dehumanization of the crew (50). James shows how Ahab's subjectivism is heavily racialized and hierarchized within capitalism, and his analysis is a touchstone for many contemporary materialist readings of the novel. Ahab persistently devalues the men around him, a habit that James discusses at length. A notable example is the scene in which Ahab reflects on his success in persuading the men to support his search for the white whale. It is a mission to which none of them initially agreed, and one that they are not contractually obligated to complete. But they declare their fidelity to it at Ahab's request. "'Twas not so hard a task,'" he says. "'I thought to find one stubborn, at the least; but my one cogged circle fits into all their various wheels, and they revolve'" (183). This industrial, mechanistic image supports the analysis that James advances regarding the place of the novel within the context of economic developments in secular modernity.

However, his arguments on the affective qualities of the narrative are less persuasive. James briefly notes Ahab's anger, attributing it to the Captain's location in history; "the voyage of the *Pequod* is the voyage of modern civilization seeking its destiny," he writes. "Ahab, we know, is consumed with anger at that civilization" (19). James points to textual evidence of Ahab's accruing bitterness against the society from which he has become personally alienated even as he exemplifies its values. I do not dispute this point. But James overlooks the proportions of Ahab's feelings of rage, which, I maintain, date to the mythology of Genesis. In this reading, the source and object of Ahab's anger far precede modernity, and his interactions with others more closely resemble those of any number of Old Testament figures than the modern subject in whom James finds a point of comparison.

Ahab's anger at God places him alongside Jonah, Job, and Moses, and his very namesake is the Israelite King Ahab, who institutes the worship of idols in direct disobedience to God's commandments (Coffler 172). But in his interpersonal relationships, Ahab conducts himself most like the Pharaoh of Exodus, who refuses even in the face of plague and punishment upon Egypt to release the Israelites from captivity. Like the Pharaoh, Ahab is immovable; his interactions with and interpretations of others are defined by hardness of heart, an unwillingness to change course even when the lives of others are at stake—in other words, when there is an ethical imperative to do so. Hardness of heart might be understood on its surface to be a lack of ability to feel or an absence of feeling. But Edwards counters this notion, arguing that the affections reside in such individuals though they may not be apparent. "Hatred, anger, vainglory, and other selfish and self-exalting affections, may greatly prevail in the hardest heart," he writes (118). There is, then, also a cold, harsh indifference to others that is generated by pride, an affective regime that does not share the expressive qualities of anger. But this indifference

substantiates the dehumanization of others, and while it is not visible in the way that its kindred outbursts of fury may be, it is evidenced by the willingness to allow others to suffer and to die in the service of personal aims. And it does nothing to counter or mitigate selfish feelings like anger; hard-heartedness does not indicate a lack of emotion, though it may appear to.

The most striking example in the novel of hard heartedness is Ahab's response to the desperate petitions of the *Rachel*, the Nantucket whaling ship that encounters Moby-Dick just days before the *Pequod* sights him. The captain, an acquaintance of Ahab's, begs for assistance: a number of his sailors have gone missing in their attempt to kill the whale. In the exchange, it becomes clear that two among the lost are sons of the captain, and he offers to pay Ahab any price to search for them over the course of the coming two days. He begs, "you must, oh, you must, and you *shall* do this thing." But Ahab stands before him "like an anvil, receiving every shock, but without the least quivering of his own," Ishmael reports (578). His reaction is as unyielding as the hardest metal, against which other metals are forged into their shapes. He replies, "Captain Gardiner, I will not do it. Even now I lose time. Good bye, good bye. God bless ye, man, and may I forgive myself, but I must go." He commands his men to sail on, and abruptly disappears into his cabin, "hurriedly turning, with averted face," leaving the devastated captain to his urgency and his grief (579). Ahab turns away from the imperative to lend assistance, and in doing so, demonstrates no feeling whatsoever. He does not scream in anger at the captain, as he has done so many times to those members of the crew who have in any way become an obstacle to his intentions. Rather, he calmly displaces from himself the ethical responsibility to help in the search, leaving the possibility of rescue to a God in whom he does not seem to seriously believe. And in the same breath, he invests himself with the authority to forgive his own transgressions. In this scene, the "selfish and self-exalting affections" listed by

Edwards as present in “the hardest heart” are kept beneath the surface. What is visible is only the hardness that encases those affections.

Captain Gardiner is not the last man to plead with Ahab to change course. Starbuck comes to realize that Ahab will be ““the willful murderer of thirty men and more, if this ship come to any deadly harm; and come to deadly harm, my soul swears this ship will, if Ahab have his way”” (559). Starbuck voices concern throughout the novel, sometimes to himself and others, and on a number of occasions to Ahab directly, regarding these premonitions of disaster. His attempts to persuade the captain become increasingly desperate, even as he fails to decisively act in opposition to him. In his final and most moving petition, Starbuck speaks of his wife and child, who are waiting for him to return home to Nantucket. ““See, see! the boy’s face from the window! the boy’s hand on the hill!”” he exclaims, vividly placing before Ahab’s gaze the losses that will be incurred in his life alone, multiplied by all of the other men on the ship. ““But Ahab’s glance was averted; like a blighted fruit tree he shook, and cast his last, cindered apple to the soil,”” Melville writes (592). Ahab once again physically turns away from others and inward, self-absorbed. The hardness of his heart is indicated by the aversion of his glance. And his pride is, unmistakably, one and the same as the first error of Adam among the trees in the garden.

Ahab’s final acts of destruction follow in rapid succession from his denial of the petitions of Gardiner and Starbuck. For three days, the *Pequod* chases the white whale, and at the end of that time, all except Ishmael are lost. Ahab’s pride and anger reverberate across these concluding scenes. On the first day of the chase, Moby-Dick is sighted, and instantly the glory into which Ahab has conscripted the other men vanishes. The rewards of the task are to be his alone, while its risks and devastation will be shared. ““The doubloon is mine, Fate reserved the doubloon for me. *I* only,”” he tells them (595). The previously trolling journey of the ship reaches a breakneck

pace with the sudden appearance of its long sought after prey. Ahab is “furious,” not yet close enough to kill the whale, but near enough to feel “helpless in the very jaws he hated” (598). In the first attempt to strike Moby-Dick, the whale attacks his assailants, and is clearly at the advantage. Ahab’s “bodily strength did crack, and helplessly he yielded to his body’s doom: for a time, lying” on the floor of one of the small boats (600). Three times in this short passage, Ahab is described as “helpless,” a word that directly opposes his own self-understanding. The man who claims to be greater than the gods and equal to the sun is remarkably insignificant in relation to the whale. But Ahab recovers himself quickly, asserting with unfathomable confidence that he “stands alone among the millions of the peopled earth, nor gods nor men his neighbors!” (602). He refuses to be persuaded from his view of himself in relation to divine authority and to other men.

Ahab persists in this false claim to total superiority on the second day, as events increasingly testify against it. In an encounter with the whale, Ahab’s prosthetic leg is snapped off and broken, leaving only a splintered piece. His response to being summarily returned to the same state in which his initial battle with the whale ended is to defiantly state that “nor white whale, nor man, nor fiend, can so much as graze old Ahab in his own proper and inaccessible being” (610). Nothing can harm or have victory over him; what is essential about him resides in a place beyond physical tribulation and at a height above all else. He claims to transcend the very disaster that he has brought upon himself and the crew. On the third day of the pursuit, shortly before the ship is finally and completely destroyed, Ahab becomes introspective. He reflects,

Here’s food for thought, had Ahab time to think; but Ahab never thinks; he only feels, feels, feels; *that’s* tingling enough for mortal man! to think’s audacity. God only has that right and privilege. Thinking is, or ought to be, a coolness and a

calmness; and our poor hearts throb, and our poor brains eat too much for that.

And yet, I've sometimes thought my brain was very calm—frozen calm, this old skull cracks so, like a glass in which the contents turn to ice, and shiver it. (613)

In one breath, Ahab seemingly reverses both of the interpretive errors upon which his pride is based. He differentiates himself from God and locates himself within, rather than above, mankind. Ahab only feels; his heart, like “ours” is filled with feeling. But he never thinks, he claims, although he has previously understood himself to be capable of prophecy and premeditated revenge. Here, he argues that thought is available only to God, who, in Ahab’s estimation, does not feel at all. This line between thought and feeling, and between God and man, is too neatly drawn; it frays as Ahab turns the problem over, conceding that he has “sometimes thought” that his own mind had the cold composure in which he imagines thoughts should be produced. But Ahab’s actions stem from thought and feeling, most often the interplay between pride and anger. Perhaps he misattributes the “frozen calm” that he observes within himself to his mind, when it instead is all-encompassing. All that Ahab contains is inaccessible to others as well as to himself; the “contents turn to ice” as his heart hardens into the contours of his furious pride.

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Christian theological traditions caution against pride and insist upon its destructive capacities. I have argued that the anger that is associated with pride is instrumental in the destruction that follows in its wake. This kind of anger, then, is a warning that catastrophe is imminent. Its ethical value is in the information it conveys: it tells us of our own destructive potential. Perhaps such a warning could motivate restraint from inflicting harm upon others. In

the next chapter, I turn to love, the feeling through which Christianity claims that we become capable of honorable, even heroic, conduct.

Chapter Eight

Brotherly Love: Unconscionable Conduct in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*

In "A Model of Christian Charity," his 1630 sermon to the Puritans who would soon disembark from the *Arbella* to establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop envisioned an ideal social order constructed upon shared religious feeling. Love, he insisted, must become a "familiar and constant practice," and "in this duty of love, we must love brotherly without dissimulation, we must love one another with a pure heart fervently. We must bear one another's burdens" (156). For Winthrop, the success of the colony would be determined equally by the depth of interpersonal emotional connection among its participants and by their willingness to fulfill these feelings in the conduct of daily life. To "love brotherly" was a specific kind of Christian love, requiring both affective purity and sacrificial action, the former motivating the latter in the carrying of one another through hardship. Implicitly excluded from these practices were those whose lives and social infrastructures the settlers displaced; the ethical obligation to love others extended only as far as the boundaries of homogenous racial and religious identity.

A century later, the same terms are intact in the Puritan tradition as it is articulated by theologian Jonathan Edwards, who places brotherly love at the center of his treatise on the emotions. In *Religious Affections* (1746), he writes, "it is men's duty to love all whom they are bound in charity to look upon as the children of God, with a vastly dearer affection than they commonly do" (187). Edwards preserves the mandate to love others as well as its unstated condition of exception. He implies that there is no obligation to love those who are not "children of God." That these excluded subjects are allowed for but not specified is in keeping with a main line of Puritan thought. It is also a problematic that inheres in the New Testament of the Bible, in

which readers are instructed to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31). The original ambiguity of whom, exactly, is the “neighbor,” or the “brother” of the worshiping Christian can thus be attributed to the religious source text. In this scripture and its afterlives, brotherly love is understood to extend directly from its precedent, love for God. It is a seamless, if not simple, formulation.⁹⁸

However, American literary texts trouble the theological certainty of religious figures like Edwards, none more so than Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* (1885).⁹⁹ Twain narrates brotherly love as it is mediated and limited by white racism, exemplified by the institution of black slavery and its attendant cultural formations. In this context, to love brotherly across racial lines is an unconscionable transgression against God and society. The white supremacist appropriation of Christian ethics ensures that the two parts of the commandment, to love God and others, will be thrown into contradiction for the white subject when the “other” is a black slave.¹⁰⁰ The conflict can be resolved only through racial fidelity, which in practice requires the continual denial of the black slave as “brother.” Of course, this is precisely the ethical difficulty that Huck confronts in his famous crises of conscience in chapters 16 and 31 of the novel. As he describes it, he has to “decide, forever, betwixt two things,” to protect the life of the runaway slave Jim and face eternal damnation, or to tell the white authorities of Jim’s escape, thereby upholding what he perceives to be the law, religious and secular.

Huck’s crises of conscience form the ethical core of the novel, and much has been written on the precariousness of Jim’s life and Huck’s power over it. The most contentious, if not most influential, article on this theme is “The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn” (1974), by the philosopher Jonathan Bennett.¹⁰¹ His argument concerns scenarios in which “sympathy and

morality may pull in opposite directions.” Bennett understands this to be the case for Huck in his moments of internal conflict. Sympathy for Jim, Bennett argues, impels Huck to defy the prevailing moral authority of the state and the religious teachings of his community. Sympathy, for Bennett, is all-encompassing; he takes it to mean “every sort of fellow-feeling,” and, as I will discuss, he is mistaken both in defining it so broadly and in deploying it as an interpretive model for the novel (124). In *Huckleberry Finn*, sympathy is always fraudulent, as in the example of Huck’s father, the abusive and alcoholic Pap, asking for “sympathy” as a means of taking advantage of the generosity of strangers (31). Rather than sympathy, I contend that Huck demonstrates an illicit brotherly love for Jim, one that is ultimately unfulfilled, during the journey on the raft, that is abandoned in the final chapters of the novel.¹⁰² To theorize this point, I turn to Jonathan Edwards, and his discussion in *Religious Affections* of the defining characteristics of this kind of Christian love.

Finally, I will consider Edwards’s argument that love is “not only one of the affections, but it is the first and chief of the affections, and the fountain of all the affections” (108). I extend his discussion of how love leads to all other emotions within the individual to an analysis of how these feelings might be exploited and distributed across figures of racial difference. To do so, I draw upon Toni Morrison’s reading of *Huckleberry Finn* in her landmark piece of literary criticism, *Playing in the Dark* (1992), in which she concludes that, especially in its final chapters, the novel “simulates and describes the parasitical nature of white freedom.” She argues that the meaning of white freedom is dependent upon its opposite, black enslavement, a point that she makes most persuasively when she reminds her readers of the “elaborate deferment of a necessary and necessarily unfree Africanist character’s escape” on which the plot of the novel turns. She is, of course, referring to Jim, whose unfree presence makes the narrative possible, as

Morrison writes, “in imaginative terms.” But the affective dimension of Twain’s portrayal of Jim is also enabling within the novel, and I will explore how what Morrison calls Jim’s “apparently limitless store of love” makes a range of feelings possible for white characters (56).

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In his often-cited article on the ethics of *Huckleberry Finn*, philosopher Jonathan Bennett examines the consciences of the fictional Huck and the historical Jonathan Edwards side by side.¹⁰³ His aim is to conceptually separate “sympathy” and “morality,” and by doing so, to shed light on Huck’s decision-making process; the theologian is present in the article solely as a point of comparison (129). Bennett sees sympathy and morality as not only distinct, but also potentially in direct conflict. Scenarios will arise in which one must be chosen at the expense of the other. Bennett takes the crises of conscience Huck experiences in relation to Jim as classic examples of this conflict; for Huck, sympathy ultimately takes precedence over what Bennett calls the “bad morality” of a slave society (125). In his assessment, Huck does the right thing precisely by choosing his feelings for Jim over the standard of conduct prescribed by his culture. Huck consistently articulates his choices as starkly oppositional; he does not see a possibility in which he might evade his allegiances to Jim and his accountability to the law.

By contrast, Bennett argues, Edwards does avoid the conflict between sympathy and morality. This is only possible by “giving up, or not ever having, those sympathies which might interfere with one’s principles,” Bennett explains. In a sermon on the justification of the damnation of the unrepentant, the only text on which Bennett bases his claims about the theologian, Edwards vividly describes the suffering of these eternal souls, declares it well-deserved, and refuses to pity them (131). Bennett condemns Edwards for what is in his view an unconscionable lack of feeling. But Huck Finn, he writes, “whose sympathies are wide and deep,

could never avoid the conflict in that way” (131). Bennett focuses on the ways in which Edwards anticipates and excises any feeling for the suffering of the damned, and contrasts this to Huck’s seemingly inescapable anguish over the question of protecting Jim.

But is Huck really confronted by a choice between sympathy and morality? Is Edwards? Bennett never asks how “sympathy” functions in the novel. Nor does he consult *Religious Affections*, Edwards’s major statement on the emotions, to discern what the term means, if anything, to the theologian. Particularly in the absence of such inquiries, the intellectual affordances of a direct comparison between the specter of Edwards in the pulpit and the fictional protagonist of the novel become quickly exhausted. In working through these questions myself, I find that, in short, both *Huckleberry Finn* and *Religious Affections* resist Bennett’s use of the term “sympathy” as a heuristic for “all fellow-feeling” (124). Edwards’s contributions to religious theories of the emotions, specifically, his remarks on brotherly love, are more clarifying. After a brief discussion of the limits of the term “sympathy” in these two texts, I turn to the crises of conscience scenes in chapters 16 and 31 of the novel. In these chapters, I find in Huck’s account of himself not sympathy for Jim, but rather a nascent brotherly love, felt increasingly over time as Jim becomes humanized in Huck’s eyes. As Edwards makes clear, brotherly love is a different form of fellow-feeling altogether.

If the term “sympathy” cannot capture all of the kinds of fellow-feeling, it is furthermore a specifically problematic term in relation to *Huckleberry Finn*. In the novel, “sympathy” is always elicited through performance. It is tied to fraud, dishonesty, and manipulation. In an early scene, Huck’s father specifically asks for “sympathy,” proclaiming himself a repentant and reformed individual. In this chapter, Pap tells the new judge in town that “what a man wanted that was down, was sympathy; and the judge said it was so” (31). The judge and his family

accommodate Pap not only in feeling, but also in action; Huck retells how Pap is taken in, and given food, shelter, and clothing. By the next morning, he has decimated these kind offerings, having resumed his drinking immediately after the tears of his audience have fallen, their hands extended with resources for the taking. “The judge he felt kind of sore,” Huck recalls; “he said he reckoned a body could reform the old man with a shotgun, maybe, but he didn’t know no other way” (32). The distance between Pap’s solicitation of fellow-feeling and his actual behavior leaves the judge with the sense that he has been deceived by the sympathetic encounter, and that no amount of interpersonal affect, however defined, could make a difference to Pap.

But Pap’s antics in town only dimly foreshadow the malicious use of sympathy in the later chapters. The king and the duke, the two thieves without proper names who travel with Huck and Jim for a time, manipulate the “sympathies” of the friends and family of the recently deceased and formerly wealthy Peter Wilks. They pretend to be the man’s grieving brothers—and therefore his executors of estate. Huck recounts,

Well, the men gathered around, and sympathized with them, and said all sorts of kind things to them, and carried their carpet-bags up the hill for them, and let them lean on them and cry, and told the king all about his brother’s last moments, and the king he told it all over again on his hands to the duke, and both of them took on about that dead tanner like they’d lost the twelve disciples. (175)

The demonstration of fellow-feeling through the shedding of tears, and the offering of material assistance, are features of the sympathetic transaction in both the story of Pap and in this scene. The gathering of the men around the two frauds is more than spectatorship; the townspeople carry the burdens of the royal pair, physically holding them up, in a caricature of John Winthrop’s sincere admonition to the Puritans that they must carry one another’s burdens. For

his part, Huck looks on with disapproval; to watch the king and the duke present themselves in this way makes him feel “ashamed of the human race” (175). To summarize, there is no shortage of ridicule in the novel for those who take sympathy at its word. It is portrayed as an easily manipulated affective relation that impersonates the claims to fellow-feeling and action that brotherly love mandates.

Perhaps this aspect of sympathy helps to explain its near-absence from *Religious Affections*. For Edwards, it is love that is the “greatest thing in religion,” and “the vitals, essence, and soul of it” (107). He does not count sympathy among the religious affections. And the only mention of the term in the treatise is in an extended metaphor on a Christian life. He writes, “a little child has his heart easily moved, wrought upon and bowed: so is a Christian in spiritual things. A little child is apt to be affected with sympathy, to weep with them that weep, and cannot well bear to see others in distress: so it is with a Christian” (360). In his major statement on the emotions, Edwards only finds figurative use for sympathy; he does not theorize it as a matter pertaining to serious religious belief and practice. While it seems that he finds the immediacy of the child’s connection to others to be commendable, he describes the predominant characteristic of sympathy as naiveté. For the spiritually mature Christian, Edwards’s ostensible reader, the rapidity of response that the child demonstrates in pure feeling is a model for higher things. True saints, he argues, are to be religiously, not sympathetically, affected.

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In *Religious Affections*, Edwards argues that the entirety of the Christian religion can be summarized in one biblical verse: the dual commandment to love God and others. He writes, “surely it is such vigorous and fervent love which Christ speaks of, as the sum of all religion, when he speaks of loving God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds, and

our neighbor as ourselves” (108). The two parts of the commandment are cumulative; both are necessary to a full definition of Christianity. Yet, the white Christian slaveholding society that sets the terms of Huck’s relationship with Jim bars him from loving both God and neighbor. I read in Huck’s crises of conscience, then, a conflict not between sympathy and morality, but rather between love for God and love for others—another, as embodied by Jim.

Huck Finn claims that he does not have much use for a conscience; “it don’t make no difference whether you do right or wrong, a person’s conscience ain’t got no sense, and just goes for him anyway. If I had a yaller dog that didn’t know no more than a person’s conscience does, I would pison him,” he says. (245). This exasperated philosophical conclusion comes late in the novel, after Huck has experienced two explicit crises of conscience that erupt from the prolonged, nagging moral disjuncture that pervades his journey with Jim on the Mississippi. The comparison of a conscience to a yaller dog is an important one, on the basis of domestication and training; as readers of the novel will recall, Huck’s sense of morality reflects in great part the religious teachings to which he is subjected by the provisional maternal influences of the Widow Douglas and her sister Miss Watson. Brotherly love is at the heart of the project of Huck’s adoption, as is the rehearsal of the white Christian racial logic that the novel so faithfully represents. Miss Watson tells Huck that he “must help other people, and do everything I could for other people, and look out for them all the time, and never think about” himself (19). It is unspoken that these “other people” are raced white. While Huck finds such religious lessons to be of questionable relevance to his life, they nevertheless impart to him the dominant narrative of white Christianity in the antebellum south. When Huck’s conscience “goes for him,” it does so to impel him into alignment with this version of Christian morality, one that is corrupted by its relationship to the institution of slavery. The theological underpinnings and legal regimes of

Huck's society collaborate to make the feelings he develops for Jim on their journey illicit and, finally, not actionable. Huck's responses to the crises are unconscionable in the view of his society—and he knows it.

Huck's dilemma is social; it is also theological. The core theological concern for Edwards, throughout the treatise, is the question of authenticity. He focuses insistently on discerning between true religious affections and their misleading counterfeits. And so it is no surprise that he discusses at length the difference between the brotherly love required by the commandment and the good intentions that often stand in its place. Those who speak of their feelings for others may indeed feel deeply for them. But the distinguishing mark of brotherly love, Edwards argues, is action. Is not action, he asks, "a more credible manifestation of a spirit of love to men, than only a man's telling what love he felt to others?" He concedes that those whose words attest to fellow-feeling may very well "think they have a willingness of heart for great things, to do much and to suffer much, and so may profess it very earnestly and confidently, when really their hearts are far from it" (411). This insight, which circulates in the vernacular as the common phrase "actions speak louder than words," is the crucial one for understanding Huck's behavior during—and after—his crises of conscience.

"Passing affections easily produce words," Edwards continues, "and words are cheap; and godliness is more easily feigned in words than in actions" (411). Critics have often read Huck's behavior in the closing chapters of the novel as an aberration from what they view as significant moral development during the crises of conscience scenes. But by the end of the novel, we can retrospectively, and I think fairly, categorize Huck's feelings throughout the journey as having been "passing affections." As readers, we cheer when Huck lies to the strangers on the raft, a verbal exchange that shields Jim from certain capture in chapter 16. And

we are heartened by Huck's commitment in chapter 31 to reject his society and its religious mores, to "go to hell" in order to protect Jim. Yet, all of what we take to be Huck's actions on Jim's behalf are merely words in the end. The nascent brotherly love that he begins to feel is ultimately unfulfilled, never applied in practice, but only performed in speech. It is a foray into the possibility of interracial brotherly love constructed upon what J.L. Austin calls "performative utterances." Huck's words produce material effects, in that they keep Jim safe from specific threats, but they are not fully committed actions. Throughout the crises of conscience scenes, Huck functions in a moral space between words and acts, a space in which he approaches brotherly love, but does not achieve it, demonstrating instead a series of passing affections for Jim.

In chapter 16 of the novel, Huck becomes seriously concerned about his role in Jim's escape from slavery. He experiences a dawning realization of the gravity of the situation. "I begun to get it through my head that he *was* most free—and who was to blame for it? Why, *me*. I couldn't get that out of my conscience, no how nor no way" (100). Huck cannot displace responsibility; he knows that he could have at any point "told somebody" that Jim was a runaway slave. This persists as the clearest available option, and he determines to "paddle ashore at the first light and tell." It is a decision that alleviates the pressure of his conscience, as it has positioned him once more in the framework of conscionable behavior in his society. His transgressions against white society are washed away, and in his choice to betray Jim, he feels "easy and happy and light as a feather right off. All my troubles was gone" (101).

The moral question with which Huck is confronted requires him to determine whether to speak or to stay silent. His decision to "tell" who and where Jim is would be an action made of words. And while the stakes could not be higher for Jim, whose life hangs in the semantic

balance, Huck can waver between racial fidelity and his passing affections for Jim by simply avoiding the task of “telling” what he knows. But Huck is soon forced by circumstance to speak. The test of his commitment to “tell” about Jim paddles up to him, in the form of a “skiff with two men in it, with guns” (102). Huck has to decide, then and there, whether to say the destructive words that are true, or to speak duplicitously. He lies, intimating that the other man on board with him is his father, who is ailing with a vaguely terrible communicable illness. The strangers guess, after some discussion, that small-pox is on the air, and they quickly drop their line of questioning. Huck recounts, “they went off and I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low, because I knowed very well I had done wrong” (103). Though Huck characterizes his choice of words as an action, something that he has “done wrong,” he has in fact not done much nor suffered much, to use Edwards’s terms.

Huck revisits the dilemma of whether or not to speak in chapter 31. Once more beset by the guilt of keeping Jim’s secret, he determines to write a letter to Miss Watson explaining to her where her property is, and confessing his involvement in Jim’s escape. He writes the letter, feeling afterward “good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life.” But his absolution is short-lived. He “got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me all the time: in the day and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind.” The crisis of conscience is now at its peak. Huck arrives at the “close place,” where he has to “decide, forever, betwixt two things.” He chooses, as critic James Kastely writes, “without repudiating the authority of his conscience,” to “disobey it and come to Jim’s rescue” (412). Holding the letter in his hands, he considers the problem. “I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath,” he recalls, “and then says

to myself: ‘All right, then, I’ll *go* to hell’—and tore it up. It was awful thoughts and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said” (228).

Critic James Wilson views these words as the climax of the novel, and its moral terminus. He describes Huck as submitting “selflessly to a morality of the heart, even at the expense of social and religious damnation.” This “morality of the heart,” which Wilson claims to have been imparted to Huck from his relationship with Jim, is in his view permanently transformative. Huck’s “decision on the raft thus becomes the climax of the novel; with the words, ‘all right, I’ll *go* to hell,’ he rejects forever the conscience and values of Tom Sawyer’s civilization” (92). But Wilson does not assess the closing chapters of the novel, or how much they matter for his arguments. In the end, it becomes clear that Huck has by no means rejected the values of Tom Sawyer’s, Miss Watson’s, and the Widow’s civilization. Huck’s behavior in the final chapters is not a deviation from a permanent moral change, but rather a continuation of his reliance upon the dominant moral codes of his society. After all, his pronouncements are only words, and words are cheap.

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The contrast between Huck’s willingness to speak—and to stay silent—on Jim’s behalf while they are alone on the raft, and his abuses of Jim in the final chapters of the novel, is the question on which the majority of the criticism on *Huckleberry Finn* turns, as Toni Morrison points out in her scathing rehearsal of the seemingly endless critical speculation on Twain’s failure to imagine “sustained alternatives to the “sivilizing” complex of Christianity, whiteness, and slaveholding that Huck Finn is ever in flight from,” in Americanist Tracy Fessenden’s words (*Culture* 148).¹⁰⁴ In these closing chapters of the novel, the illicit brotherly love Huck has begun to feel for Jim evaporates—suddenly, agonizingly. During their journey on the Mississippi, Huck

does not move beyond words into action. But as the novel concludes, he acts decisively. In league with Tom Sawyer, he cruelly elaborates Jim's suffering and puts his life in grave danger. In the end, the man who has referred to Huck as his only friend is reduced to a game for white children to play (228).

Morrison notes how patiently and lovingly Jim endures these cruelties. She writes, "Jim permits his persecutors to torment him, humiliate him, and responds to the torment and humiliation with boundless love. The humiliation that Huck and Tom subject Jim to is baroque, endless, foolish, mind-softening—and it comes *after* we have experienced Jim as an adult, a caring father and a sensitive man." I will elaborate on what Morrison calls Jim's "boundless love" for Huck and the other white characters in the novel to claim that, just as Jim's enslavement gives meaning to white freedom for these characters, his love enables a range of feelings in them. This extends Morrison's main point about the parasitical nature of white freedom to the affective dimension of that freedom.

But it relies as heavily on Jonathan Edwards's argument that love is "the fountain of all the affections" (108). Edwards understands these other affections, which he describes as being brought forth through love, to be "virtuous" (108). "From a vigorous, affectionate, and fervent love of God," he writes, "will necessarily arise other religious affections" (108). If the source of love is, instead, the exploited black body, then the morality of the behavior that will be motivated by the other affections will shift. From a love of God will proceed a love of others, which will in turn promote virtuous actions. However, from Jim's boundless love, other affections arise, and the behavior that they motivate, because it is based in violence, degradation, and hatred, will be unconscionable. Edwards does not consider race, nor does he consider the consequences of his theories in the context of a corrupted version of Christianity in which black bodies and lives are

exploited for every resource—including the affective. Bringing these two thinkers together allows us to ask: would white feeling in the novel be possible without limitless black love?

The final chapters demonstrate that Huck, as well as the other white characters, prey upon Jim in order to feel a range of emotions. Critic James Kastely is nearly correct when he claims that “one of Jim’s roles is to be a touchstone of true feeling” for Huck (431). Rather than a touchstone, I suggest that we consider Jim an affective resource: the raw material of the slave’s body includes its affects. Here we see the mining of the slave’s feelings for white feeling to formulate itself. I will follow Morrison in focusing on Jim’s affective serviceability to Huck, Tom, and the other white characters, for whom Jim’s “limitless love” serves as the fountain of all other affections. The affective relation between Jim’s love and the constellation of feelings it enables becomes most pronounced in the final chapters of the novel. This is, not coincidentally, the part of *Huckleberry Finn* in which the most strikingly unconscionable behavior is displayed.

The wide range of feelings distributed across the white characters are catalogued in the climactic dialogue between Tom Sawyer and Aunt Sally. Tom and Huck have played their games with Jim’s life, plotting a complicated and unnecessary scheme to break him out from his re-enslavement. To heighten their own suspense during this time, the boys deliver a letter to the house that warns that “a desprate gang of cutthroats from over in Ingean Territory going to steal your runaway nigger to-night,” predictably terrifying Aunt Sally and the others (283). In this scene, Aunt Sally discovers that there had been no gang, but instead just two well-known “rascallions,” and she is furious. She recalls the apprehension that the letter’s claims had caused. Tom and Huck had ““been making all this trouble, and turned everybody’s wits clean inside out and scared us all most to death,”” she admonishes. Anger and fear are just two of the thrills of affective response that course through the final chapters (303).

Aunt Sally's outrage in this conversation is contrasted with Tom's sheer pleasure. "Tom, he *was* so proud and joyful, he just *couldn't* hold in," Huck recalls. But Tom is quickly surprised to learn that Jim is still being held captive. Momentarily setting aside his enjoyment of the situation, he looks at Huck "very grave," and asks him if Jim has not in fact escaped. Before Huck can answer, Aunt Sally replies, "he's in that cabin again, on bread and water, and loaded down with chains, till he's claimed or sold!" The scene takes a serious turn, as Tom's tone becomes one of "grave" concern, and Aunt Sally's becomes more cruel. This exchange transfigures Tom from a scolded child to an indignant voice of authority. "Tom rose square up in bed, with his eyes hot, and his nostrils opening and shutting like gills, and sings out to me: 'They hain't no *right* to shut him up! *Shove!* –and don't you lose a minute. Turn him loose! he ain't no slave; he's as free as any cretur that walks this earth!'" At this point Tom explains that he has known all along that Jim had been set free by his owner, Miss Watson, while Jim and Huck were still on the Mississippi River. When Aunt Polly, exasperated, asks, "what on earth did *you* want to set him free for, seeing he was already free?" Tom replies, "Why, I wanted the *adventure* of it" (303). The implied excitement, danger, and agency of adventuring conjoin the imaginative and affective aspects of Tom and Huck's exploitation of Jim. The existence of the black slave makes white freedom possible, in its enactment and, also, its enjoyment.

This point becomes even more clear in the last chapter of the novel; in addition to the range of feelings related to adventure and mischief described above, Tom also aspires to feel the pleasure of recognition for his actions. He is proud of his scheme as it is brought off, but his plans had been more grand. Huck asks, "what it was he'd planned to do if the evasion worked all right and he managed to set a nigger free that was already free before?" Not content to merely prolong Jim's suffering for a matter of days, Tom responds that he would have travelled up and

down the river once more, with Jim, eventually returning to a public celebration. Tom responds, in other words, with a continuation of the adventure fantasy he references in the conversation with Aunt Polly, with the additional note that “he would be a hero” and with no evident concern for the enormity of danger Jim would face in such a scenario (306).

The final word on morality in the novel is an ambiguous one.¹⁰⁵ Jim’s life, always in the balance of the calculations of the white conscience, is granted a semblance of security. His return to captivity as a fugitive slave comes to an end when Tom conveys the message that Jim has been released from slavery by his owner, Miss Watson, who on her deathbed had faced a crisis of conscience of her own. In Tom’s account, ““she was so ashamed she ever was going to sell him down the river, and *said* so; and she set him free in her will”” (303). She seems to have sincerely hoped that the act of setting Jim free would be an adequate substantiation of her feelings of shame, and of her words in *saying* so.

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Morrison writes that *Huckleberry Finn* “lingers over in every fissure, the slave’s body and personality,” seeking to extract from it a set of resources, physical, emotional. One of these, she writes, is “what possibilities there are for forgiveness” (56). But this novel is uniquely unable to answer the question of forgiveness, because it never resolves its defining internal contradiction, the placing in opposition of the Christian imperatives to love God and others. Huck’s transgressions against Jim are, for all intents and purposes in the imaginative world of the novel, off the books. In Twain’s story, Jim is perpetually restricted from his full humanity, and held beyond the reach of brotherly love—and, likewise, from any meaningful transgression of it. In the final chapter of this section, I will turn to Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead*, a novel in which the question of forgiveness is central.

Chapter Nine

Costly Grace: Immanent Acts and Forgiveness in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*

In a 1998 essay on the German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the novelist Marilynne Robinson writes, “in the great light of his theology, which is an ethics from beginning to end, he is always, and first of all, a man devoted to the church” (112). Bonhoeffer paid for his religious commitments—and his ethics—with his life. As Robinson notes, he “first put himself at risk in 1933 by resisting the so-called Aryan Clause, which prohibited Jewish Christians from serving as ministers in Protestant churches. In 1945 he was executed for ‘antiwar activity’” by the Nazis, just months before the Reich fell (108). He is considered by some a modern Christian martyr. Bonhoeffer’s biography is a firm reminder that Christianity is not only a religion of creeds. Along with belief, it requires that its adherents act. Not all lives of faith are so immediately compelling in their details, but Bonhoeffer argues that every true Christian is called to total sacrifice—to what he calls “costly grace.”

Such grace is costly, Bonhoeffer explains, “because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son” (45). His arguments implicitly cite New Testament verses such as Matthew 16:25, attributed to Jesus Christ. The passage reads: “for those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (*NRSV*). In her Pulitzer Prize winning 2004 novel *Gilead*, Robinson writes from the perspective of Congregationalist minister John Ames, whose quiet, steady life in a small Midwestern American town does not call attention to the costs of Christianity but is nevertheless a life of devastating loss, sacrifice, and, ultimately, grace.¹⁰⁶

The novel takes the form of a letter written by Ames in the weeks preceding his death, a task that he has set out for himself in the wake of a troubling medical diagnosis; his heart is failing. In its pages, he tells the story of the familial lineages of his faith, and quietly imparts its tenets to his son (the child, who is seven years old, is never named in the novel). The religious considerations expressed in *Gilead* range from the sacrament of baptism to the doctrine of predestination. But the letter is not a theological treatise. Rather, it is the account of a life of sincere and abiding faith, and of the contemplations, prayers, and feelings through which such a life is constructed. At its center is the act of forgiveness, the defining expectation of Christian ethics and the significance the religion claims for the death of Christ, the cost and the means of a promised reconciliation between God and a fallen humanity.

In *Postmodern Belief* (2010), her landmark study of religion in the contemporary American novel, literary critic Amy Hungerford writes that reconciliation is the overarching project of Robinson's fiction (120). My arguments in this chapter develop Hungerford's observation through close attention to its theological implications, which includes a necessary distinction between the concepts of reconciliation and forgiveness. The shape of the project of reconciliation in *Gilead* turns on the question of how Christian forgiveness mobilizes feeling and thought to enable an individual to act from grace rather than anger or pain. But reconciliation, which requires a reciprocity of forgiveness, is not always achieved. A number of the characters in the novel do not ultimately forgive one another in equal measure, evidence that the defining project of Robinson's work is one that is left deliberately unfinished.

Rather than exploring solely the content of Ames's beliefs, I focus as well on the mechanisms by which those convictions are enacted over the span of the many decades recollected in the novel. Ames experiences deep loss and loneliness in the wake of the death of

his young wife and child early in his adulthood; it is only much later that he remarries and becomes the father of the boy to whom *Gilead* is addressed. And there is loneliness in this as well, because Ames knows that he will soon be parted from his young family in death. The early tragedy defines his relationship to God and to others, and much of his life is taken up in the task of reconciling himself to carrying out his religious vocation in spite of his personal grief, and forgiving those, particularly his best friend's son Jack Boughton, whose actions renew and sharpen his pain. In his sifting through of old sermons and in a series of seemingly minor remarks, Ames dwells in the affective complexities of how one is to resolve the tension between "our trespasses and those who have trespassed against us" (Matthew 6:14-15).

To better understand Ames, both in terms of his deeply held beliefs and in the ways in which those beliefs are costly in practice, I turn once more to the eighteenth-century American Calvinist theologian Jonathan Edwards. His delineation, in *Religious Affections* (1746), of the requirements of Christian life provides a religious vocabulary that is in concordance with the worldview to which Ames ascribes. For Edwards, the capacity to forgive is an indication of authenticity of the faith of the "saints," his term for those who devote their lives to Christianity. I argue that Ames can be best understood as an embodiment of Edwards's Calvinist ideal of a Christian "saint." Ames exemplifies the qualities of the men and women Edwards describes; his daily habits are defined by "Christian practice," and his life can cumulatively be described as "holy," in part because of his ethical capacity for forgiveness (406).

For Edwards, the Christian is marked by essential, affective qualities. Three things, "forgiveness, love, and mercy" must, without exception, belong "to the temper and character of every Christian" (353). Ames exhibits the "truly gracious affections" that motivate the conduct to which saints are to aspire—to virtuous acts of forgiveness, love, and mercy. "Gracious and holy

affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice,” Edwards explains (383). As a narrator, Ames is self-effacing; he would never claim sainthood for himself, and, likewise, he does not disclose the details of any sins he may have committed, though he alludes to weakness and temptation. Indeed, to all appearances, he is as unremarkable as the prairie landscape that surrounds him. But in a telling moment, he cautions his son to look beyond the exterior of Gilead, and beneath the surfaces of the quiet lives of its residents. He notes, “there have been heroes here, and saints and martyrs, and I want you to know that. Because that is the truth, even if no one remembers it” (173).

The evidence for any reading of Ames as a religious figure must be drawn first and foremost from his interior life. As Hungerford argues, especially in Robinson’s later novels, “ordinary people have rich and complicated interior lives,” and “they embody a silent discourse of thought that, if we knew its voice, would astonish us” (114). In his discussion of the defining characteristics of a holy life, Edwards offers us a way to understand the man to whom Robinson gives voice in *Gilead*. Edwards holds that there are two types of ethical actions in Christianity, external behavior and internal, or “immanent acts” (422). While visible conduct is important, Edwards explains, “what is inward is of greatest importance” (425). Robinson echoes this notion in her most recent collection of essays, *The Givenness of Things* (2015), writing that “the whole traffic of interaction among human beings, and between the human and the divine, is essentially a matter of inward experience” (80).¹⁰⁷ In *Gilead*, Robinson explores interiority, and in doing so, she demonstrates that the work of Christian forgiveness by the individual is accomplished first through immanent acts, only later becoming externalized in word and deed. To bring Edwards and Robinson together is to examine two projects in the American Protestant imagination; what Edwards delineates, Robinson portrays.¹⁰⁸

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In a 1927 lecture, controversial for its time, the philosopher Bertrand Russell remarked that the word “Christian” no longer had “quite such a full-blooded meaning now as it had in the times of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. In those days, if a man said that he was a Christian it was known what he meant. You accepted a whole collection of creeds which were set out with great precision, and every single syllable of those creeds you believed with the whole strength of your convictions” (566). Russell need not have reached back so far; less than a century earlier, Jonathan Edwards had spent decades in systematically addressing the question of the full and precise meaning of a Christian life. In *Religious Affections*, he endeavors to “show the nature and signs of the gracious operations of God’s Spirit” and to distinguish these from those thoughts and feelings that do not have their source in God (89). This project culminates in his outlining of twelve signs that can be understood with certainty as indicating an individual’s salvation.¹⁰⁹ These signs are to be assurances to the Christian that he is in fact a Christian—and they are evidence to others of the same. In describing the twelve signs, Edwards offers a vocabulary for understanding precisely what it is that, in the view of the Calvinist theological tradition, the term “Christian” denotes.

In *Gilead*, the authenticity of John Ames’s identity as a Christian is presumed as inherent to his lifelong vocation in the church; it also announces itself in other, subtler ways. Throughout the novel, Ames fulfills Edwards’s definition of a Christian, particularly in his embodiment of the twelfth sign, which concerns ethical conduct. Of this final sign, Edwards writes, “Christian practice, or a holy life, is a great and distinguishing sign of true and saving grace. But I may go farther, and assert, that it is the chief of all the signs of grace, both as an evidence of the sincerity of professors unto others, and also to their own consciences” (406). To live according to the rules

of the religion “should be the practice and business” of one’s life, Edwards maintains; to do so is to be assured of the grace that is necessary to salvation. Of all of the signs of grace available to the “professor” of Christianity, one’s own application of belief in practice—through both external and internal acts—is the single most important. In other words, a holy life, on levels both seen and unseen, is the clearest and most reliable evidence that the grace of God is at work in the life of the saint.

There are three components to the twelfth sign, each of which are evident in John Ames’s retrospective account of his life. For Edwards, a life can only be considered holy if it displays all three of these aspects. First, one’s “behavior or practice in the world” must be “universally conformed to, and directed by Christian rules.” Secondly, one must place this undertaking “above all things” so that it is the “business which he is chiefly engaged in, and devoted to, and pursues with highest earnestness and diligence.” Thirdly, the twelfth sign is fulfilled by unwavering commitment throughout the course of a lifetime. For a Christian, the religion is “not only to be his business at certain seasons, the business of Sabbath days, or certain extraordinary times,” but of the whole of his life, “which he perseveres in through all changes, under all trials, as long as he lives” (384). A distinction holds across all three of these aspects of Christian practice, namely, between internal and external conduct. In this section of *Religious Affections*, Edwards theorizes that there are acts of interiority, which he calls “immanent acts of grace,” that are visible only to God, known only to the individual. It is the portrayal of these acts in the life of John Ames, as he reports them, one might say faithfully, in his writing, that brings *Gilead* fully into conversation with Edwards.

Ames fulfills each of the three defining requirements of a Christian life; furthermore, his external conduct leaves those around him with the strong impression that his commitment to the

religion is genuine. He has a sense of how he is viewed by others, explaining to his son that, “when I say that my reputation for piety and probity and so on may be a bit exaggerated, I would not wish you to believe therefore that I have taken my vocation lightly. It has been my whole life” (65). Ames universally holds himself accountable to Christian rules of conduct; he places no task, desire, or attachment above his religious convictions; and, regardless of the circumstances of his life, which are often difficult, he remains steadfast in his religious commitments. Finally, there is no point at which he abandons his faith; he “persists in it to the end of life” (384). Ames celebrates his 77th birthday during the time of his writing, and the letter concludes on a note of open-endedness that indicates that if he had woken up the following morning, he would have continued the project. This makes the narrative remarkable in the acuity of its observations on the closure of a holy life. In its final line, “I’ll pray, and then I’ll sleep,” the novel leaves no margin for the possibility that Ames turns away from his religious commitments in his final days (247).

The continuity of belief that is evident in Ames’s life is intergenerational, a point that is important to the plot of the novel and its project of reconciliation. Orienting his son to the history of their family, Ames explains that his “mother’s father was a preacher, and my father’s father was, too, and his father before him, and before that, nobody knows, but I wouldn’t hesitate to guess” (6). His father’s brother Edwards “was named after the theologian Jonathan Edwards, who was much revered in my grandfather’s generation,” Ames notes. And his own older brother, his only sibling, “was named after my uncle, with the final *s*, but he never liked it, and he dropped it when he left for college,” where he discovers and is persuaded by the many arguments against his religious beliefs (86). Long expected to return to Gilead and to the family tradition of Christian ministry established over four generations, Edward devastates his parents and

community when he announces his rejection of the faith along with the theologically significant “s.” For Ames, however, the namesake is an important reminder of the family’s Calvinist inheritance, and he memorializes it for his son, to whom the connection would have otherwise surely been lost. Without question, the persistence of belief in the lives of prior generations of Christian saints, to whom he looks as examples, contribute to Ames’s capacity to sustain his faith throughout his life. But he does not mention a relationship to his brother in adulthood, signaling that the two men did not reconcile their fundamental differences.

It is, then, the second clause in Edwards’s point on the necessity of steadfast commitment to Christianity over the course of a lifetime that resonates most strongly with the interpretation of Ames as a saint. At first glance, Edwards seems to be merely commenting on duration, or completion. But what Edwards goes on to argue is far more demanding. It is not only perseverance, but perseverance through hardship, that is required. In all circumstances of life, in hope as well as despair, the Christian must continue to live in accordance with the tenets of the faith. It will not be easy. Edwards writes that saints must be “steadfast in a holy walk, through the various trials that they meet with. By trials here, I mean those things that occur, and that a professor meets with in his course, that do especially render his continuance in his duty and faithfulness to God, difficult.” These trials strike in a multitude of forms; Edwards explains, “many things make it hard to continue in the way of their duty,” among them being “pain, ill will, contempt, and reproach, or loss of outward possessions or comforts.” These are the sufferings that make grace costly; they cannot be avoided in the life of the saint.

Above all, Edwards insists upon confronting the inevitability of suffering. He writes, “if persons, after they have made a profession of religion, live any considerable time in this world, which is so full of changes, and so full of evil, it cannot be otherwise than that they should meet

with many trials of their sincerity and steadfastness” (389). Christians, specifically, can be assured that they will suffer; their profession of religion will not spare them this, and it may in fact intensify their struggles. The shifting malignance of the material world causes suffering for all, Edwards suggests, but it will produce for the Christian the additional task of steadfastly responding to trials with forgiveness, love, and mercy.

It is on this point that Ames is most compelling as a religious figure. His trials are both dramatic and enduring, and in the face of them, he is steadfast in his religious belief and practice. He quietly recounts, “Well, I suppose, that I married a girl when I was young. We had grown up together.” He continues,

Well, my wife died in childbirth, and the child died with her. Their names were Louisa and Angeline. I saw the baby while she lived, and I held her for a few minutes, and that was a blessing. Boughton baptized her and he gave her the name Angeline, because I was over in Tabor for the day—the child was not expected for another six weeks—and there was no one to tell him what name we had finally decided on. She’d have been Rebecca, but Angeline is a good name. (18)

The grief Ames experiences in the loss of his wife and daughter is followed by another, distinct suffering. For many subsequent decades, Ames is alone; he states clearly that it was very painful. He recalls, “my own dark time, as I call it, the time of my loneliness, was most of my life” (44). During those many years, he remembers, “I’ve shepherded a good many people through their lives, I’ve baptized babies by the hundred, and all that time I have felt as though a great part of life was closed to me” (54). The disjuncture is striking. Ames has lived a life of immense solitude, shut out of the intimacies of family and domesticity. Yet, he has also lived a life of intense belief and action, and has been in many instances crucially present in the lives of others.

“I have been candid with you about my suffering a good deal at the spectacle of all the marriages, all the households overflowing with children, especially Boughton’s—not because I wanted them, but because I wanted my own,” he confesses (134). Loneliness is difficult to endure, and still more difficult in the context of comparison.

It is instructive to revisit Edwards on this point, as suffering has a theological meaning in the Calvinist tradition that cannot be adequately understood only in material terms. He argues that the site of suffering is also the operative site of grace in the life of the Christian. “For in the heart where Christ savingly is, there he lives, and exerts himself after the power of that endless life that he received at his resurrection. Thus every saint that is a subject of the benefit of Christ’s sufferings, is made to know and experience the power of his resurrection” (392). The Christian, through personal suffering, participates in the suffering—but also the power—of the resurrection of Christ. Anguish accrues to the saint; but so also do “benefits,” available only together. Edwards intimates that each Christian individual will encounter hardships differently; for Ames, it comes in the form of loneliness. But his solitude is correspondingly the condition of possibility for the development of an interior life filled with immanent acts of grace. “I don’t know why solitude would be a balm for loneliness, but that is how it always was for me in those days,” Ames muses, himself unsure of precisely how to explain the experience (19). Literary critic Michael Colacurcio explains that the term “grace,” as Edwards deploys it, signifies that “an entirely new relation to reality has been produced” in the life of the individual (75). This seems to hold in the account Ames gives of his life; it is the grace that follows the tragic loss that fundamentally alters his relation to reality. The death of his wife and child precipitate, but are not the causal agent of, the development of his holy interior life.

The most explicit mention in *Gilead* of what literary critics call “interior life,” and what Robinson refers to as “inward experience” is the height of cliché. In the opening pages of the novel, Ames ventures, “there’s a lot under the surface of life, everyone knows that” (6). The placement of this banal remark suggests that the action of the narrative to follow will take place beneath the surface; of course, it does. There are many ways to elucidate the submerged aspects of the novel; but it is Edwards’s Calvinist theological account of inward experience that is, in my view, most appropriate to the task.¹¹⁰ In *Religious Affections*, Edwards theorizes that there are two distinct ways in which grace is enacted in the life of the saint:

there are those that some call immanent acts, that is, those exercises of grace that remain within the soul, that begin and are terminated there, without any immediate relation to anything to be done outwardly, or to be brought to pass in practice. Such are the exercises of grace, which the saints often have in contemplation; when the exercise that is in the heart does not directly proceed to, or terminate in anything beyond the thoughts of the mind. (422)

Immanent acts of grace are felt as one might feel an unexpressed emotion, or reflect upon an unspoken thought. Edwards is describing feelings as actions, thoughts as actions, in and of themselves. When Ames sits quietly in contemplation, a spiritual activity is taking place beneath his tranquil and silent physical presence. In his soul, grace moves in what I interpret as a circular, ever deepening path; it begins and is terminated there, before beginning and ending again.

The second type of grace is found in those actions which are visible and external; “they are the exertions of grace in the commanding acts of the will, directing the outward actions,” Edwards explains (422). Can a Christian life be lived in any other way? For Edwards, there are no exceptions. Not some, but rather “all true saints live a life of such acts of grace as these; as

they all live a life of gracious works, of which these operative exertions of grace are the life and soul” (424). Immanent acts cannot be observed, except by the saint himself, and by God, who assesses what is internal with far more weight than that which is outwardly expressed. But the interior acts give rise to the possibility of what is materially enacted. These immanent acts constitute an inner life that can rightly be called “Christian.”

According to Edwards, immanent acts of grace take place between the individual and God. But the external acts, visible in the interpersonal relationships of life in a larger social frame, will necessarily relate to the internal situation. Examples of immanent acts of grace in the novel include contemplation, the writing of sermons, and the habit of prayer. Ames writes his sermons “in the deepest hope and conviction. Sifting my thoughts and choosing my words. Trying to say what was true” (19). His sermons are the most concrete example of how immanent acts of grace become externalized in a social field; the depth of his contemplations become articulated for his congregation. He also prays for others continually. Walking alone through the town he spends his evenings glancing from the sidewalk to the opaque windows of the houses that line the street. Considerate of the hardships those homes contained, he would pray for them, then “go into the church and pray some more and wait for daylight. I’ve often been sorry to see a night end, even while I have loved seeing the dawn come” (71). These seemingly empty moments, like the seemingly empty landscape of the American heartland, are personally and theologically significant. They contain acts that are internal to Ames, imperceptible on the surface, silent and unnoticed.

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In looking back over his life, Ames finds that he has produced thousands of pages of notes for sermons given each week. From this archive, one is given particular weight in the

novel: a sermon on the topic of forgiveness is singled out and described in detail. “It is dated June 1947,” Ames writes. The biblical passages it interprets are a phrase from what is often called “The Lord’s Prayer,” which reads, “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”—and a section of the New Testament parable of the prodigal son, who famously receives pardon from a father who embraces him upon his return rather than holding him accountable for his mistakes. Ames considers the main points of the sermon, and writes,

I believe it concludes quite effectively. It says Jesus puts His hearer in the role of the father, of the one who forgives. Because if we are, so to speak, the debtor (and of course we are that, too), that suggests no graciousness in us. And grace is the great gift. So to be forgiven is only half the gift. The other half is that *we* also can forgive, restore, and liberate, and therefore we can feel the will of God enacted through us, which is the great restoration of ourselves to ourselves. That still seems right to me. (161)

Edwards decisively corroborates Ames’s interpretation. In his words, Christians must be “of a spirit of forgiveness,” inclined and able to forgive those who have wronged them. He continues, “if we are of such a spirit, it is a sign that we are in a state of forgiveness and favor ourselves: and that if we are not of such a spirit, we are not forgiven of God” (353). God’s pardon of the individual generates the necessary conditions for interpersonal reconciliation among men. Furthermore, this same sacred presence initiates the religious affections that motivate the individual to forgive. Edwards writes, “gracious affections do arise from those operations and influences which are spiritual,” and they signify the presence of “Christ living in the heart, the Holy Spirit dwelling there, in union with the faculties of the soul.” (392). For Edwards, religious

affections are the feelings of faith that bring the believer into proximity with, and, ultimately, resemblance of, Jesus Christ.

But such a resemblance can never be perfected, even by a man whose faithfulness through suffering has made him a parabolic figure in his community. The first time Ames mentions forgiveness in the novel, it is not its fulfillment, but rather its failure that he narrates. “It grieved my father bitterly that the last words he said to his father were very angry words and there could never be any reconciliation between them in this life,” Ames writes (10). While this careful phrasing preserves the infinite possibilities of a life after death, it also provides an affective index of forgiveness “in this life.” The destructive words of Ames’s father are motivated by anger, and they bring forth a bitter grief. Anger, then, cannot be said to be a gracious affection.¹¹¹ In order for the two men to have reconciled, their love for one another would have had to be felt more powerfully than their anger, and they would both have had to participate in a reciprocal act of forgiveness.

The failure of forgiveness between the two men is repeated in the relationship between Ames and his father, though this aspect of the story is given in fragments and never conclusively described. Ames’s father, having left Gilead to live nearer to his oldest son, Edward, renounces Christianity. When Ames receives a letter from his father to this effect, he “dropped it right in the stove,” severing their ties. His brother, whose atheism had initially wracked the family, ultimately receives their father’s approval, as well as his philosophical agreement. Ames rightfully should have had his father’s full acceptance; his devotion to the family’s homestead and to their shared vocation, his loyalty to those things that were sacred in his upbringing, should have assured it. When his father turns away from Christianity, he simultaneously rejects the life

that Ames has chosen. He does not forgive his father – or, if he does, he does not confirm it in the letter.

The relationships among the men of the Ames family are by no means peripheral to the novel; they provide a point of comparison to demonstrate what is at stake when the ethical expectation to forgive is not upheld. But at the center of the story of Ames's adult life is Jack, his best friend Boughton's wayward son, who returns to Gilead as Ames is facing death and writing the narrative. Their relationship is fraught from its very beginning. On the day of the baptism, which Ames was to perform, he recalls, "we'd talked it over. The child's name was to be Theodore Dwight Weld. I thought that was an excellent name." But, intending to honor his childless friend, Boughton makes a different final decision. Standing before the congregation, Ames asks Boughton, "'by what name do you wish this child to be called?' he said, 'John Ames.' I was so surprised that he said the name again, with the tears running down his face." Rather than finding himself pleasantly surprised by what Boughton clearly intends as a gift, Ames feels suddenly cold. "It took me a while to forgive him for that. I'm just telling you the truth. If I had had even an hour to reflect, I believe my feelings would have been quite different. As it was, my heart froze in me and I thought, This is *not* my child—which I truly had never thought of any child before" (188). The baptism is completed under these strained emotional circumstances, and the consecration of the child's life and name becomes a turning point. For, while all of the other children in the Boughton family are exemplary, Jack causes far-reaching suffering. The cruelty of his actions extends specifically to Ames, who is further tormented by his sense of responsibility for having failed to lovingly bless the child in baptism.

Jack's crimes against Ames are petty and immature; as a teenager, he steals a cherished photograph of Ames's deceased wife, fully aware of the pain its sudden absence would cause.

But it is Jack's conduct in relation to others from which Ames struggles to exonerate him. Early in his adulthood, Jack fathers a child out of wedlock with a poverty-stricken young woman—so young that she is still living in her family home. The situation in itself brings shame upon the pious Boughton family, but the final outcome adds sorrow to their shame. Jack abandons both the girl and the child, refusing to care for them. The Boughtons intervene, but their offers of support are turned away. Within a year, the child dies; there is no question that, had she been cared for, this outcome would have been prevented. This series of events takes on an overwhelming significance for Ames. He cannot but compare the loss of this child to his own:

Remembering and forgiving can be contrary things. No doubt they usually are. It is not for me to forgive Jack Boughton. Any harm he did to me personally was indirect, and really very minor. Or say at least that harm to me was probably never a primary object in any of the things he got up to. That one man should lose his child and the next man should just squander his fatherhood as if it were nothing—well, that does not mean that the second man has transgressed against the first. I don't forgive him. I wouldn't know where to begin. (164)

Though Ames attempts to displace from himself the responsibility of forgiving Jack for the harm he caused in bringing a child into the world only to allow it to suffer and perish, by the end of his musing, he confirms, "I don't forgive him," indicating that he continues to feel that he should. The indeterminacy of the last phrase, "I wouldn't know where to begin," is telling. To apply his own interpretation of Christian forgiveness to the situation, in order to forgive Jack, Ames must first be forgiven by God. According to his theology, this is the only juncture from which an act of human forgiveness may begin.

Underlying the situation between the two men that comes out of their history together is a very present concern. Ames, not knowing any of the details of Jack's life over the intervening years, reads him as a threat to his wife and child. This is reasonable, both because Jack has a history of harming women and children, and because Ames rightly notes that he will not long be able to intervene to protect his wife Lila and their little boy; his prognosis is too severe. "Harm to you is not harm to me in the strict sense, and that is a great part of the problem. He could knock me down the stairs and I would have worked out the theology for forgiving him before I reached the bottom. But if he harmed you in the slightest way, I'm afraid theology would fail me" (190). Again, Ames is struggling to forgive Jack not for things he could do to him personally, but for the harm he might inflict on others. And, again, the theology of forgiveness is central to his thinking.

This central plot of the novel culminates in the revelation of Jack's suffering, hitherto unknown to Ames; in the intervening years since the tragic death of the marginalized little girl, Jack has lost the woman he considers his wife—anti-miscegenation laws in Tennessee and Missouri, where the couple lived, made legal and recognized marriage impossible—and their beloved son. While they are still alive, Jack's separation from them appears to have become permanent, as their life together is criminalized and undermined. Every time Jack finds housing for them, and a job, their interracial relationship is inevitably discovered, and they are driven out from every secure place. He finally determines to leave them under the care of the woman's family, and to remove himself from their lives. He is clearly devastated; it is a nearly unendurable suffering. When Ames learns of this, he forgives Jack for his "meanness," the quality of cruelty that Ames associates with Jack as his primary characteristic. Ames writes, "that look of utter weariness came over him and he covered his face with his hands. And I could only

forgive him” (230). As Jack departs from Gilead, Ames asks him if he can bless him, surely an act of redemption for the flawed baptism. “I’d have gone through seminary and ordination and all the years intervening for that one moment,” Ames recalls (242). And as Jack catches his bus out of town, Ames says to him, “we all love you, you know,” to which Jack replies, “You’re all saints” (242). That Ames has the ethical capacity to forgive Jack, and that he does so in action, suggests that Ames is himself forgiven for his own sins.

*

I contend, with Amy Hungerford, that reconciliation is at the center of Marilynne Robinson’s concerns. As such, I interpret all of her writings as reverberating from one passage in her 1980 novel *Housekeeping*, a novel that is widely considered to be a contemporary classic. In it, she writes, “the force behind the movement of time is a mourning that will not be comforted. That is why the first event is known to have been an expulsion, and the last is hoped to be a reconciliation and return” (192). Gilead holds the tension between the mourning that refuses to be comforted and the hope for a final resolution—while refusing to resolve every broken relationship—which taken together convey the story that is told by the Christian religion and its many theological traditions. For millions of readers in our postsecular era, Robinson’s fiction is an invaluable source in which that story persists in being retold. And reread.

Afterword: Thinking in Religious Terms

In a 1994 interview, poet Czeslaw Milosz remarked that “the incapacity of contemporary man to think in religious terms” is “one of the essential problems of our time.” He did not convey any expectation that this would be imminently resolved, instead explaining, “we are in a largely postreligious world.” Largely, but not entirely; Milosz was himself a Christian, and he spent significant time in fellowship with others who believed as he did (Faggen). But he seemed, even to himself, to mark the vanishing point of religion in modernity. By the end of the twentieth century, to think in religious terms was to think anachronistically. And yet, even as he conceded to the secularization thesis both validity and victory—he is speaking here, quite clearly, of religious declension—Milosz viewed the disappearance of religious habits of mind as a problem, not merely for the individual, but much more broadly, as an era-defining problem. He registered in the postreligious landscape the loss of an essential form of knowledge, and in that loss, a diminished ability to fully comprehend and respond to human experience.

It now appears that Milosz was on the wrong side of what would come to be called the secularization debates, which have produced a newly dominant interpretation of the contemporary world as not *postreligious*, but, conversely, *postsecular*. These debates have had a recuperative effect on our collective ability to think in religious terms. This is because, irrespective of one’s personal convictions, to participate in discussions on the ways in which religion persists in modernity is to take the question of religion seriously. If, as these discussions suggest, the secular and the religious are coeval frameworks for understanding, then they must be interrogated and articulated on their own, level terms. As sociologist Hans Joas argues in *Faith as an Option: Possible Futures for Christianity* (2014), this reconsideration of the fundamental assumptions underlying western intellectual life also entails the discarding of what has become a

standard affective relationship between the religious and the secular, namely, the presumption of opposition and mutual threat. When literary critic Kathryn Kerby-Fulton claims that the word “faith” is “perhaps the most frightening” one “in the modern scholarly vocabulary,” she is calling out the affective dimension of secular criticism—with secular here referring to what has now become an obsolete, or at the very least, incomplete, conceptual starting point (5). It seems to me that a turn toward faith as an area of inquiry has become imperative, for affect theory as much as for other areas of scholarship, whether we fear it or not.

The Old Testament proclaims to us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” while the Gospels advise that “there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” As a Protestant Christian, I read these verses in productive tension, and I continually seek to strengthen in myself the fear that characterizes humility, while renouncing the prejudicial fears of cowardice. I have worked in these chapters to write always about belief, rather than from belief, a distinction that has become very important to my approach to literary criticism. But it is also true that I base my life—my thinking, my sense of social place, or displacement, and my moral and ethical conduct, to the best of my ability—on Christian theology and doctrine.¹¹² I hold my scholarship accountable to my religious convictions, as well as to the secular methodological mandates of my discipline, the latter being the common ground I share with those for whom I have written *Feelings of Faith*: practitioners in literary studies.

Across traditions of Christian theology, thought and feeling are understood to be connected. From this perspective, insofar as we develop the capacity to think in religious terms, we also cultivate the emotional capacities that I have described in these chapters as feelings of faith. To make a space for such an undertaking in contemporary affect theory does unsettle its

dominant methods, but it does not require secular critics to alter their most deeply held beliefs.

Instead, it helps us to more clearly understand how others have arrived at theirs.

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Notes

¹ The most important text in this early period of the reconsideration of the secularization thesis is José Casanova's *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994).

² Sociologists have made notable contributions to all sides of the secularization debates. For an early sociological critique of the secularization thesis, see David Martin, *The Religious and the Secular: Studies in Secularization* (1969). In response to the more recent discussions, Steve Bruce defends the thesis in *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (2011). And theologian John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (1990) is a landmark critique of sociology from the perspective of religious thought. He argues that "the secular as a domain had to be instituted or imagined, both in theory and in practice," and that sociology was a primary site of these related projects (9).

³ See, for instance, Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1984), 230–34; *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), 270–72; and *Orientalism* (1979), 120–21.

⁴ An explicit response to the secularization debates, for example, can be found in the introduction to a recent special issue of *American Literary History*, edited by Jonathan Ebel and Justine Murison: "The recent retheorizing of the secular by scholars such as Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and Charles Taylor, however, has challenged literary scholars both to rethink the place of religion in American literary study and to test accepted narratives entrenched in our methodological and ideological inheritances" (Ebel 3). Two further examples of direct responses to the secularization debates in literary studies are Stephen Sicari's, "Modernist Theologies" (2012) and Charles LaPorte's "Victorian Literature, Religion, and Secularization" (2013).

⁵ There are exceptions, of course. Religion is a core area of inquiry for medievalists, and the example of the recent volume *Cultivating the Heart: Feeling and Emotion in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Religious Texts* (2015), edited by A.S. Lazikani, attests to the research being done on feelings of faith by these scholars. Likewise, Abram Van Engen's *Sympathetic Puritans: Calvinist Fellow Feeling in Early New England* (2015) demonstrates that early Americanists, already accustomed to the study of religion in literature, are taking up questions of the emotions in relation to religious belief and practice. Jenna Supp-Montgomerie, in a 2015 article titled "Affect and the Study of Religion," provides a concise list of the moments in affect theory in which religion comes directly under examination. My research corroborates her findings, which are that "much of the initial work on religion and affect comes from scholars of other fields who engage particular religious traditions or histories in the service of broader arguments about affect. This is true for Teresa Brennan's discussion of Jewish and early Christian thought in *The Transmission of Affect* (2004), William Connolly's *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (2000) and *Pluralism* (2005), Ann Cvetkovich's examination of spiritual apathy and despair in *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012), Christian Lundberg's reading of evangelical enthusiasm for The Passion of the Christ in *Lacan in Public: Psychoanalysis and the Science of Rhetoric* (2012), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's address of Buddhism and affect in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003) and *The Weather in Proust* (2011)."

⁶ What Franchot means by this, she explains, is that scholars who study religion must develop “a working familiarity” with theological understandings of personhood, “that is, a created individual who possesses varying amounts of free will, an immortal soul, and a guiding sense of eternal destination. It is an unhelpful simplification of religious thought to claim that such an understanding merely articulates a naïve view of selfhood as coherent and unified” (836).

⁷ It should be noted that the three theorists listed here cannot be reduced to a single point of view. The distinctions can perhaps be most efficiently illustrated by a note on antecedents: Masumi follows Spinoza, Berlant follows Marx, Sedgwick follows Tomkins.

⁸ Perhaps this speaks to a disciplinary difference between literary studies and philosophy, or foreshadows the affinity between the contemporary cognitivist view and classical Christian theology: of the scholars of the emotions listed here, only Nussbaum and Solomon explicitly think through theological perspectives before dismissing them (both look to Augustine).

⁹ The exceptionalist paradigm established by Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch has been exceeded in the field their work made possible; in a recent article, Sarah Rivett describes the discovery instead of a “multivocal past” (394). But in his assessment of the conditions of belief under which Rowlandson would have lived and written, Charles Taylor ascribes a sense of the extraordinary to the collective turning toward the transcendent documented in the Puritan archives. He describes a community constructed upon a shared conviction that the power of God made a new social order possible, one that did not seek “human flourishing” as its end (82).

¹⁰ By this date, any casual observer would have been aware of King’s rise to international prominence and familiar with the fundamental arguments and goals of the movement for which he spoke. O’Connor died in August of that year, just a few short months before King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

¹¹ Prominent English Puritan theologians included William Ames (1576-1633); Richard Baxter (1615-1691); William Perkins (1558-1602). For detailed accounts of the lives of these three writers, as well as John Preston (1587-1628), see Emerson (236).

¹² This tradition culminates in Johnathan Edwards, who systematizes the Puritan theological statement on the emotions in *Religious Affections* in 1746.

¹³ I will follow Mitchell Breitwieser in using the Slotkin edition of the narrative; as he notes, this version is widely available and has excellent annotations and historical context. For reference, the title of the narrative in its entirety is *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, together with the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson. Commended by her to all that Desire to Know the Lord’s Doing to, and Dealings with Her. Especially to Her Dear Children and Relations. Written by Her Own Hand for Her Private Use, and Now Made Public at the Earnest Desire of Some Friends, for the Benefit of the Afflicted.*

¹⁴ To worship, Ames maintains, is “to subject to another the soul itself, and the inward affections and acts of the will” (239). By using the phrase “the affections of the will,” he locates feeling

within what he views as a higher faculty controlled by the individual; thus, his views align with Preston in that the affections are not outside of or beyond a matrix of moral accountability.

¹⁵ Ames proceeds in his analysis three steps beyond knowledge and affection. These being established, the believer must “assent to the truth testified to.” This is the point at which the individual speaks for herself; she is responsible first for acting upon, not merely settling into, Christian thought and feeling. The final two phases of faith are of a different, more mature order; having made the preliminary commitment one must begin “resting upon God,” in all things, and applying “what is made available to us in that testimony” to all decisions (165).

¹⁶ The details of Baxter’s outline of the passions are informative, and they are summarized in this long quote: “they are sinful, 1. When they are misguided and placed on wrong objects. 2. When they darken reason, and delude the mind, and keep out truth, and seduce to error. 3. When they rebel against the government of the will, and trouble it, and hinder it in its choice or prosecution of good, or urge it violently, to follow their brutish inclination. 4. When they are unseasonable. 5. Or immoderate and excessive in degree. 6. Or of too long continuance. 7. And when they tend to evil effects, as to unseemly speeches or actions, or to wrong another. Passions are holy when they are devoted to God, and exercised upon him or for him. They are good when, 1. They have right objects; 2. And are guided by reason; 3. And are obedient to the well-guided will; 4. And quicken and awake the reason and the will to do their duty; 5. And tend to good effects, exciting all the other powers to their office; 6. And exceed not in degree, so as to disturb the brain or body” (256).

¹⁷ This binary is reminiscent of the division between “positive” and “negative” affects upon which much of the work of Silvan Tomkins relies, though Tomkins is not moralistic in his approach.

¹⁸ The term “intensity” recalls the foundational work in affect theory of Brian Massumi. The distinction between his use of the term and mine, for the purposes of interpreting Augustine, is that the cognitive content of belief is sustained in the theological account, whereas for Massumi, following Spinoza, intensity is diminished or increased at the level of the body.

¹⁹ Mary Rowlandson was born in England between 1635 and 1638. She moved with her family to the settlement of Lancaster in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1639. Two of her four children with her husband, Rev. Joseph Rowlandson, survived to adulthood; one died in infancy, another in her arms in the early weeks of her captivity. Shortly after her restoration to her family and community, her husband passed away. Archival work by literary scholar David Greene documents a second marriage and confirms the date of her death as 5 January 1711. For an extensive account of King Philip’s War, see the excellent work of Americanist Richard Slotkin. From June 1675 to August 1676, battles between colonists and local tribes devastated the New England region; the first attack was led by Wampanoag chief Metacom, known to the English settlers as King Philip, in response to a series of political maneuvers that had significantly reduced tribal lands and power. Colonial aggression in retaliation decimated indigenous populations in the northeast; while the settlers incurred heavy material losses that would take a generation to recuperate, the conclusion of the war marked the end of native resistance in the

region. The consequences of the war were severely asymmetrical. Most indigenous survivors of the fighting were executed or sold into slavery (Slotkin 3-43).

²⁰ In her well-known cultural history, *Captive Selves, Captivating Others: The Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives* (1999), Pauline Turner Strong conversely argues that captivity narratives, as one of the most expansive genres in early American literature, eliminated indigenous perspectives and experiences from the overwhelmingly dominant cultural record.

²¹ Slotkin establishes, and Breitwieser elaborates, the role Mather played in the formation of the narrative. Mather was “the war’s major theorist,” and he devoted himself to an “anxious scramble to ensure that every event of the war be properly understood” by the public (Breitwieser 83). In a preface to the original narrative, signed “Per Amicum” and widely attributed to Mather, the reader is encouraged to “lay up something from the experience of another, against thine own turn comes: that so though through patience and consolation of the Scripture mayest have hope” (322). This stands as a formal authorization by the Puritan theocratic leadership of the affective use value of the Bible portrayed in the narrative.

²² Lisa Logan argues that captivity, as a metaphor, “works at several different levels to reveal [Rowlandson’s] subjection and resistance to social, discursive, and political structures which define and confine women.” In Logan’s view, Rowlandson “attempts to recuperate her position as a valued member of the community, a position that she nonetheless finds troubling” (259). Tara Fitzpatrick writes, “her narrative’s implicit challenge to the communal order may explain some of its enormous popularity among contemporary readers, who could find in it sanction for their own desires” (12).

²³ That Rowlandson reads to fill a need, from a point of depletion toward a point of satiation, is an argument that derives in part from the strong tradition of critical work on hunger in the narrative. Jordan Alexander Stein’s article, “Mary Rowlandson’s Hunger and the Historiography of Sexuality” (2009) is a recent example. Breitwieser writes, “as Rowlandson discovered in her encounters with Algonquian food, texts are not only written things,” and “hunger and mourning are both still unsatisfied longings at the moment of the telling” (11, 143). Dawn Henwood views the Psalms as “emotional sustenance” for Rowlandson; they are the basis of her “spiritual survival” (170). Rowlandson draws the connection herself when she writes, “if the Lord bestow his blessing upon” even the most desperate types of food “they shall refresh both Soul and Body” (350).

²⁴ Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) writes movingly of her reading practices in an undated letter to her children. She writes, “in my younger years, about 6 or 7 as I take it, I began to make conscience of my ways, and what I knew was sinful, as lying, disobedience to parents, etc. I avoided it. If at any time I was overtaken with the like evils, it was a great trouble. I could not be at rest ‘til by prayer I had confessed it unto God. I was also troubled at the neglect of private duties, though: too often tardy that way. I also found much comfort in reading the scriptures, especially those places I thought most concerned my Condition, and as I grew to have more understanding, so the more solace I took in them (4). Her poetry and prose can be considered

another contribution of Puritanism to the orthodoxy of feeling, though her work is outside of the scope of this chapter.

²⁵ In *Reading the Romance*, Janice Radway describes women's reading (and rereading) of romance novels as a "kind of tranquilizer or restorative agent" (62). As a concept, restorative reading echoes Sedgwick's reparative reading, characterized by the fear the subject feels that "the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self" (149). The difference between reparative and restorative reading is, in short, that restorative reading is always religious. It deals with what are taken by the reader to be sacred texts and acknowledges a supernatural authority.

²⁶ Downing gives the most detailed account of Rowlandson's typology. He demonstrates that Rowlandson identifies most closely with King David (as I have mentioned, the Psalms are the point of reference in the majority of her restorative reading), Job, Joseph, Samson, and Daniel. He notes the relative scarcity of New Testament references, given that Christ was at the center of the Puritan faith, and explains that the Puritans "saw themselves prefigured in the Old Testament, God's Chosen People building a nation out of a wilderness and pitting their faith and strength of will against an unpromising land" (255). For an analysis that attends to the gendered dynamics of this typology, see Kohn and Campbell, who argue that "Rowlandson strives to elide the issue of her gender from her role as writer by mapping her authorial voice onto the words of Old Testament men" (125).

²⁷ Rita Felski describes what I take to be the same situation in a different way when she writes, "critique is contagious and charismatic, drawing everything around it into its field of force, marking the boundaries of what counts as serious thought. For many scholars in the humanities, it is not just one good thing but the only conceivable thing" ("Critique"). Sedgwick calls this the "paranoid consensus" (144).

²⁸ To date, *A Prayer Journal* has not received critical attention beyond its initial reception in book reviews.

²⁹ In Aquinas, O'Connor found her most significant Christian interlocutor. His influence on her is well-documented; she called herself a Thomist in her letters, and mentioned his work frequently (81). It should be noted that O'Connor's personal copy of the *Summa* was an abridged version. She writes, "I have found a lucky find for me in St. Thomas's sections of the *Summa* and the *De Veritate* on prophecy. I haven't seen them in the original because that section of the *Summa* is not in the Modern Library volume I have and I don't have the *De Veritate*; this is only from a commentary of Victor White, O.P." (*Letters* 367).

³⁰ For detailed accounts of Maritain's influence on O'Connor, see John Desmond, "Stalking Joy: Flannery O'Connor and the Dangerous Quest" (2010) and Rowen Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (2005).

³¹ Per Davies, Aquinas wrote for an audience of "believing Christians," focusing on "what he takes to be the core of Christian belief" (18).

³² The external acts, which are beyond the scope of this chapter, are the adoration of God through the mobilization of the body to worship; material offerings; and the acknowledgement of things created by God as already belonging to God, never entirely to humanity (1534). For Aquinas, all of these devotional activities are secondary to the internal acts of religion.

³³ There are three aspects of this to consider: the use of words in prayer helps to excite contemplation; the application of the body as well as the mind is appropriate (though, he clarifies, not necessary) for prayer; and the overflow from the soul into the body through an excess of feeling (1547). All of these effects of spoken, rather than silent, prayer, are beneficial and positive, according to Aquinas.

³⁴ O'Connor touches on this in her short story "A Temple of the Holy Ghost." She describes a twelve-year-old character in worship: "her prayers, when she remembered to say them, were usually perfunctory but sometimes when she had done something wrong or heard music or lost something, or sometimes for no reason at all, she would be moved to fervor and would think of Christ on the long journey to Calvary, crushed three times on the rough cross. Her mind would stay on this a while and then get empty and when something roused her, she would find that she was thinking of a different thing entirely, of some dog or some girl or something she was going to do someday" (244).

³⁵ She continues, "It is so easy to say I hope to—the tongue slides over it. I think perhaps hope can only be realized by contrasting it with despair" (17). My next chapter will demonstrate that this is precisely the central theological distinction upon which Martin Luther King, Jr.'s ministry was constructed. Asked for her thoughts on King, her contemporary, O'Connor responded, "I don't think [he] is the age's great saint but he's at least doing what he can do & has to do" (*Letters* 580). Literary critic Mark McGurl is not alone in justly characterizing O'Connor as "hardly a passionate critic of racial segregation," noting that she viewed "that fact of Southern life as being doubled, internally, by a segregated cognition" (167). In keeping with the argument I have been pursuing throughout this chapter, we might add that a segregated cognition resulted for O'Connor in a segregation of feeling; of the many religious concepts she finds herself unable to fully feel or understand, one of them is hope.

³⁶ The discussion of religion and privacy recalls a line from O'Connor's short story "Good Country People," in which she writes that the woman took care of her prosthetic leg "as someone else would his soul, in private and almost with her own eyes turned away" (288).

³⁷ In a series of letters to a student named Alfred Corn at Emory University, who wrote to O'Connor after attending her lecture there in 1962, she writes, "I don't know how the kind of faith required of a Christian living in the 20th century can be at all if it is not grounded on this experience that you are having right now of unbelief. This may be the case always and not just in the 20th century. Peter said, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." It is the most natural and most human and most agonizing prayer in the gospels, and I think it is the foundation prayer of faith. (*Letters* 476). Aware that he is struggling with doubts about his religious beliefs, she advises him that faith "is more valuable, more mysterious, altogether more immense than anything you can learn or decide upon in college" (*Letters* 478). Yet she credits doubt as a source of strength, and encourages him to balance his intellectual inquiries with his devotional practice.

³⁸ The recognition of religious concepts is important to O'Connor in the reception of her work. Of *The Violent Bear It Away*, she commented in her correspondence, "if the modern reader is so far de-Christianized that he doesn't recognize the Devil when he sees him, I fear for the reception of the book" (*Letters* 361).

³⁹ The title of the novel is taken from Matthew 11:12. It serves as an epigraph to the novel, reprinted in the Catholic Douay-Rheims translation, which reads: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." O'Connor explains the title in a letter, writing that "the violent are not natural. St. Thomas's gloss on this verse is that the violent Christ is here talking about represent those ascetics who strain against mere nature. St. Augustine concurs" (343).

⁴⁰ Tarwater goes on to have one final, violent encounter with the Devil. He is sexually assaulted by a stranger who, O'Connor tells us in her letters, is the embodiment of the voice that has mocked and tempted Tarwater throughout the novel (*Letters* 457). Tarwater departs from his victimization with the knowledge that "he could not turn back now. He knew that his destiny forced him on to a final revelation" (*Violent* 233). He joins the communion of saints, apparently finding salvation in his return to his family property, Powderhead. But Rayber's story, which will be the focus of my analysis, ends with Bishop's death.

⁴¹ Srigley goes on to argue that O'Connor reserves a place, in the character of Tarwater, for a productive religious asceticism "done out of love." She writes, "O'Connor dramatizes how Tarwater's struggle *evolves* as he moves toward finding a meaningful connection between his individual desires and the curbing of those desires for the sake of others" (191). While Tarwater is outside of the scope of my arguments here, I would note that I do not see evidence of Tarwater pursuing actions for the sake of others at any point of the novel; it seems to me that this part of Srigley's claim is far less persuasive than her reading of Rayber's asceticism.

⁴² Many other notable accounts of hopelessness after King's death could be cited. In a recent article on race and affect, literary critic Aida Hussen revisits William Grier and Price Cobbs's 1968 *Black Rage*, quoting their observation of the "waves of hopelessness that engulfed black men and women when Martin Luther King was murdered" (305). And theologian James Cone asks in *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969), "after King's death who can hope?" (3).

⁴³ For an extensive discussion of theodicy as it relates specifically to racial violence, see Pinn.

⁴⁴ At issue is whether the black church or the white theological canon and academy were more formative for King. Early reception history granted importance to the latter, an interpretation now considered racially biased. Keith Miller, whose article both provides a concise overview of that early discussion and reshapes the debate, maintains that "the black church provided King with the foundation for *all* the theological ideas he discusses" in his intellectual autobiography, "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," which are also the ideas that inform his public theology (71). Miller cites the arguments of James Cone and David Garrow, who insist upon the black church as central to King's intellectual development. Garrow contends that the "two traditions which actually exerted the greatest formative influences on King's thought and action" were in fact "the

biblical inheritance of the story of Jesus Christ, and the black southern Baptist church heritage into which King was born” (“Intellectual Development” 5).

⁴⁵ In part, such an interpretation would be problematized by the well-documented plagiarism in King’s academic work; for a detailed account of uncited borrowing in papers he wrote at Crozer Theological Seminary and in his doctoral dissertation at Boston University, see Carson. In light of this, David Garrow advances “a significant reinterpretation of King before the Montgomery bus boycott,” which re-characterizes him as pursuing academic credentials in a “rather immature and insecure” manner, and subsequently being transformed by his experiences in Montgomery (“King’s Plagiarism” 90). This view aligns with James Cone’s understanding of King as a theologian of action, and reiterates the centrality of the black church in King’s thought.

⁴⁶ King uses this term only once in the sermons, in a critique of the “type of church” that, “reducing worship to entertainment, places more emphasis on volume than on content” (*Strength* 47). I am extending his specific use of “emotionalism” to a general application for the purpose of distinguishing between the two classes of emotion in King’s work.

⁴⁷ This runs counter to the dominant perspective in contemporary affect theory, best articulated by Brian Massumi, Lauren Berlant, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. For these theorists, affect is interesting and productive for literary and cultural studies precisely because it is separate from cognition. For a summary of their work in relation to this separation, see Leys.

⁴⁸ Romans 15:24 reads, “I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while” (*NRSV*). King’s main purpose in referencing this verse is to note that Paul does not ever travel to Spain; it is an example of an unfulfilled hope.

⁴⁹ James Cone provides a concise definition of the term “Black Power,” which was “first used in the civil rights movement in the spring of 1966 by Stokely Carmichael to designate the only appropriate response to white racism.” He continues, “it means complete emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deem necessary” and demands “black freedom” and “black self-determination” (*Black Theology* 5).

⁵⁰ The term “optimism” originates in Christian theology; the Oxford English Dictionary notes that the first instance of the term can be found in Leibniz in 1710. He proposes that “the actual world is the best of all possible worlds.” God’s creation is defined by a compromise; it is a world, he argues, “in which the most good could be obtained at the cost of the least evil.” His theory does not account for inequity in how the cost is shared, or exploited, across racial and other identificatory lines. In this sense, debates on racial theodicy indirectly respond to it.

⁵¹ For a compelling and well-received critique of optimism in American culture, see Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (2011). For secular perspectives on hope in contemporary affect theory, see recent writings on utopia, particularly Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* (2005) and Jose Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009). Theophus Smith reads King as a “utopian dreamer,” a characterization with which I disagree. King’s

consistent emphasis on man as inherently sinful seems to place utopian visions, which are defined by their realization of perfection, firmly beyond reach (89).

⁵² Of course, one of the most often quoted lines from King's public life is: "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." This line, in the context of his 1965 speech at the Selma to Montgomery march, attributes the design of the moral universe to the Christian God. King calls upon his audience to "remain committed to this struggle and committed to nonviolence," emphasizing the importance of taking action toward the goal of racial equality. That the ultimate historical outcome will reflect God's perfect justice is the argument, rather than that a primary inclination toward that justice is reflected in the human heart ("Address").

⁵³ Further reference could be made to Brennan's elaboration of social contagion theories of the emotions first developed in the field of psychology; Julie Ellison's work, in *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (1999), on the emotions as emerging from gendered political histories brokered by social expectations; and the anthropological study of the emotions, exemplified by Catherine Lutz's *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and their Challenge to Western Theory* (1988), which compellingly argues for an understanding of affective experience and its interpretation as constructed by social norms. Finally, the field of the history of the emotions, in which the writings of Peter Stearns and William Reddy figure prominently, is defined by its claim that the emotions are formed as much by social rules as by the interior lives of individuals.

⁵⁴ The work of French sociologist Émile Durkheim, and his concept of "effervescence," a social-emotional theory of the origins of religion, is occasionally cited in affect theory; one example is Ahmed's introductory note, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), that turns to Durkheim to substantiate a claim that "emotion is not what comes from the individual body, but is what holds or binds the social body together" (9). But detailed studies of religion are scarce in affect theory. An important exception to the oversight of race is the theorization of shame, an area of study most notably shaped by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work on queer identity. She writes that the term "queer" itself "might usefully be thought of as referring in the first place to this group or an overlapping group of infants and children, those whose sense of identity is for some reason tuned most durably to the note of shame" (63). Sedgwick's analysis is explicitly inclusive of black queer identity. Finally, Sara Ahmed discusses the deployment of affective economies in racialized public discourses by hate groups such as The Aryan Nations, whose recruitment texts she analyzes in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

⁵⁵ To take just one example from *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois writes, "the Negro church of today is the social center of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character" (139). See also *The Negro Church* (1903), a sociological study, in which Du Bois records extensive documentation of each denominational entity operational in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

⁵⁶ Such a project would also necessarily discuss other religious traditions not represented in this dissertation. The Nation of Islam, for example, would be of particular interest to a further study of race, religion, and emotion in the United States.

⁵⁷ The destruction of kinship structures as the basis of the institution of slavery is most clearly described by the term “natal alienation,” put forth by sociologist Orlando Patterson in his classic *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (1985).

⁵⁸ Northup’s narrative has received new attention in response to its recent, critically acclaimed film adaptation. For exemplary scholarship on this point, see the *ALH* Forum in the Summer 2014 issue of *American Literary History*.

⁵⁹ As I noted in the section introduction to these three chapters, “Political scientist Adolph Reed, Jr. argues that *The Souls of Black Folk* is the most influential articulation of the ‘perspective that consolidated among black political elites during the first two decades of the twentieth century.’ This collection of essays, he continues, ‘has largely shaped what has been recognized as black political discourse and practice—including the academic study of black politics—ever since’ (254). The shaping influence of *Souls* extends to the disciplines of cultural and literary studies as well” (4).

⁶⁰ This is a point that can only be fully understood through attention to Hartman’s theory of history and the debates of which is it a part. Here, it will be sufficient to note that Hartman does not accept historical periodization as a method for black studies. She writes, “notwithstanding the negatory power of the Thirteenth Amendment, racial slavery was transformed rather than annulled” (10). She regards “attempts to assert absolutist distinctions between slavery and freedom [as] untenable” and argues that assertions of historical periodization “diminish the reign of terror that accompanied the advent of freedom” (13). The most notable counterargument to Hartman’s perspective can be found in Kenneth Warren’s *What Was African American Literature?* (2011).

⁶¹ The specific scene to which Hartman refers is the torture of Hester, depicted in the first chapter of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. She writes, “I have chosen not to reproduce Douglass’s account of the beating of Aunt Hester in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave’s ravaged body (*Scenes* 2).

⁶² Scholarship on haunting, particularly in relation to slavery, is vast. Two notable starting points are Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997) and Jenny Sharpe’s *Ghosts of Slavery: A Literary Archaeology of Black Women’s Lives* (2002).

⁶³ This also depends upon the theory of history in which one is engaged. For example, cultural historian Saidiya Hartman, whose work I discuss in the previous chapter, argues that slavery has never really ended. However, writers on all side of this debate recognize that violence against the black body has persisted in new forms. Within the past year of the time of this writing, the “Black Lives Matter” movement has come into prominence, and public discourse in the United States is currently focused on the question of such violence.

⁶⁴ Of course, Glaude is not the first or only black studies scholar to stage a departure from mourning. A notable early example is Cornel West’s essay, “Subversive Joy and Revolutionary Patience in Black Christianity” (1984). A lesser known piece is Gina Dent’s, “Black Pleasure,

Black Joy: An Introduction” in *Black Popular Culture* (1992). In contemporary literary criticism, Darieck Scott’s *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (2010) works against the dominant affective framework of sorrow by moving through it toward pleasure. He draws upon critical race theory and queer theory to discuss the political potentialities of oppression. Scott conceptualizes blackness through “what it loses, has lost,” and claims that “in this loss and suffering is the opening to meaning” (269).

⁶⁵ The secularization thesis implicitly relies upon a metaphor of conquest in its assumption that the secular will ultimately overtake and replace the religious. For the details of this argument, see Habermas (26).

⁶⁶ The possibility of distinguishing between happiness and joy is advanced by the Christian apologist C.S. Lewis in his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*. In that book, he defines joy as “an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.” More helpfully, he continues, it “is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure [. . .] Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is” (18).

⁶⁷ Taylor, however, overlooks African American cultural history in his critique of secularization.

⁶⁸ As Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* compellingly argues, even the most mundane moments in the life of the slave were torturous, and those scenes in which happiness is seemingly present elide the violence of oppression that made the institution possible.

⁶⁹ See my discussion of Eliza’s separation from her children in chapter four of this dissertation, “Sorrow: The Slave Narrative and the Memorialization of Black Suffering.”

⁷⁰ Du Bois gives credence to joy as an aspect of the religious traditions in black life, even as he seeks to move beyond religious belief into secularity. He writes, in the chapter “Of the Faith of the Fathers” in *Souls*, “the Frenzy or ‘Shouting,’ when the Spirit of the Lord passed by, and, seizing the devotee, made him mad with supernatural joy, was the last essential of Negro religion and the one more devoutly believed in than all the rest” (138).

⁷¹ Glaude offers this history as follows: “There were three major commemorative celebrations among Northern free blacks prior to general emancipation. Each celebrated, in one form or another, the abolition of an element of slavery. The first of these gatherings was the New Year’s Day celebration located primarily in New York and Philadelphia, commemorating the end of the foreign slave trade on January 1, 1808. These celebrations set the pattern for subsequent commemorations. From the beginning, they were explicitly linked with black churches” (85).

⁷² Glaude’s *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul* (2016) addresses the recent events, from Ferguson onward. See also his 2014 essay in *Theory & Event* “A Requiem for Michael Brown/A Praisesong for Ferguson.”

⁷³ As I note in Chapter four, white readers and their feelings are not my primary concern. My focus is on the feelings produced by black subjectivity, individual and collective. Deliverance, which recalls the hardened heart of the Pharaoh who had the power to end the suffering of the

oppressed Israelites, informs this distinction. The term “oppressed” has been the foundation for much of black theology, beginning with James Cone’s landmark *God of the Oppressed* (1975). Cone writes, “liberation is not a human possession but a divine gift of freedom to those who struggle in faith against violence and oppression. [. . .] This is the meaning of the Exodus and the Incarnation. The biblical God is the God whose salvation is liberation. He is the God of Jesus Christ who calls the helpless and weak into a newly created existence. God not only fights for them but takes their humiliated condition upon the divine Person and thereby breaks open a new future for the poor, different from their past and present miseries. Here is the central meaning of the cross” (139).

⁷⁴ Theologian James Cone makes this point in his book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011). He writes, “the cross and the lynching tree interpret each other. [. . .] When we see the crucifixion as a first-century lynching, we are confronted by the reenactment of Christ’s suffering in the blood-soaked history of African Americans. Thus, the lynching tree reveals the true religious meaning of the cross for American Christians” (161).

⁷⁵ For an example we need look no further than the other sections of the novel; John’s father’s conversion scene foreshadows all of the structural elements of the threshing-floor section (91-93). For a precedent in the academic study of religion, see *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), in which William James argues that all religious conversion and experiences of religious deliverance are similarly structured. He writes, “to be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. This at least is what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring such a moral change about” (210). He observes that deliverance “consists of two parts: 1. An uneasiness; and 2. Its solution. 1. The uneasiness, reduced to its simplest terms, is a sense that there is something wrong about us as we naturally stand. 2. The solution is a sense that we are saved from the wrongness by making proper connection with the higher powers” (552).

⁷⁶ The terms “Holy Spirit” and “Holy Ghost” are used interchangeably in Pentecostal theology. While “the black church” is normative terminology in the study of black Christian traditions, denominational differences productively fracture this expansive notion. Indeed, in at least one account of this sect, Pentecostalism originates in the black church in the early twentieth century, breaking from it to become an independent entity that now claims “some 360 million adherents worldwide” (MacRobert 616-617). The New Testament passage most closely associated with Pentecostal theology is Acts 2:2-4, in which the presence of the Holy Spirit and glossolalia (speaking in tongues) are described. It reads, “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” (NRSV).

⁷⁷ Speaking in tongues, or glossolalia, is one aspect of Pentecostal belief in the role of the Holy Spirit in worship; it is understood to be a visible sign of the presence of God. Later in the novel,

members of the community remark upon the significance of Elisha speaking in tongues during John's conversion; the two are said to be spiritual "brothers" (212).

⁷⁸ The question of why a just and sovereign God allows human suffering is central to Christian theology. "*Theodicy* literally means 'god's justice.' From *theo* (god) and *dike* (justice), the word emerges from a problem forged by expectations of a good or benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent deity. Such a being is presumed to be committed to what is right—in some reasoning even more, where the being itself is what is right and good—which makes the emergence of evil and injustice a major problem. If the deity has the capacity to eradicate evil, indeed, the ability to have prevented its emergence in the first place, why are there manifestations of evil and injustice?" (Gordon 725).

⁷⁹ For example, Marta Figlerowicz's reading of Kaja Silverman underscores this possibility; she writes, "Silverman claims that to enjoy the process of desiring while no longer believing that any real object is going to fulfill this desire will eventually become useful as a foundation for a better system of ethics even if the exact rules of this system have not yet been articulated" (8).

⁸⁰ Spinoza understands the good as "what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before ourselves. By evil, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model" (115). Tomkins's *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (1962) is organized around the headers "The Positive Affects" and "The Negative Affects," by volume.

⁸¹ Appiah and Dworkin are influential figures in secular moral philosophy, an area of study that might inform further research into ethics to be undertaken by affect theory. The Stoics offer another approach to ethics and the emotions; because this perspective holds that the emotions are a form of knowledge, it follows that they can inform our choices and actions. Martha Nussbaum and Robert Solomon, whose work I discuss in the first section introduction of this dissertation, identify themselves with this tradition.

⁸² Of course, other Christian theologians attend to the topic as well. As I have discussed in especially the first chapter, these orthodoxies seek to control the emotions; they also preserve and theorize them. In classical theological arguments, the emotions are understood to be subject to evaluation in the rubric of virtue and vice. In Augustine, and Aquinas after him, there are no prohibited feelings; instead, specific feelings in context are endorsed or forbidden. Love, which is at the center of Christian accounts of the emotions, is commanded of believers. It can also be misapplied to worldly concerns, in which case it is to be renounced and redirected to worship.

⁸³ A third fundamental relationship that could be posited here would be between man and Creation, which would allow for an analysis of stewardship as a third category of religious life in this tradition.

⁸⁴ Tempted by the serpent in the garden to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve are cursed and expelled from paradise. Augustine and Aquinas, among many other theologians, devote considerable effort to explaining the transmission of sin (human depravity) and its consequences (human mortality) from Adam to his descendants. Augustine writes, "we are subject to the death of the body, not by the law of nature, by which

God ordained no death for man, but by His righteous infliction on account of sin; for God, taking vengeance on sin, said to the man, in whom we all then were, ‘Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return’” (*City* 423). Thomas Aquinas later writes, “it is evident that man’s first sin was pride” (1862).

⁸⁵ The debate emerges from a question of human nature: are we essentially good or evil? Religious studies scholar Ian McFarland explains that Quakers are among the “very few” Christians who see “no truth whatever in the opening couplet of the *New England Primer*, ‘In Adam’s Fall / We Sinned All’” (*In Adam’s Fall* 4). The Quaker Stephen Sims, in a 1741 response to Jonathan Edwards’s critiques of that group’s theology, explains that the light, or goodness, that the Quakers see in man is “no other than the light of Jesus Christ in the heart or soul.” The idea of inner light directly counters the doctrine of original sin.

⁸⁶ In *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards endorses “the Calvinistic doctrine of the total depravity and corruption of man’s nature, whereby his heart is wholly under the power of sin, and he is utterly unable, without the interposition of sovereign grace, savingly to love God, believe in Christ, or do anything that is truly good and acceptable in God’s sight” (432). Literary critic Michael Colacurcio describes a critical consensus around the centrality of the doctrine of original sin to Edwards’s thinking. He writes, “whatever Edwards believed about the strategic importance of his Freedom of Will, a fair number of interpreters have sensed that it is the Original Sin which ‘leads us to the very secret of Jonathan Edwards’ himself. Here is where the whole intellectual system of New England comes to a sort of vexed completion—at a point which is, theologically, fairly appropriate for a latter-day Calvinist trying to rescue the rational validity of God’s sovereign decision to treat with all men in Adam, and at a point which, philosophically, is fairly predictable for an idealist who had begun by discovering that God is the only substance and that His stable ideas and efficient will are all we can ever know our ‘world’ to be” (65).

⁸⁷ See Walter Herbert’s *Moby-Dick and Calvinism: A World Dismantled* (1977). More recently, Jonathan Cook has discussed the influence of this theological tradition on Melville’s life and work based on “evidence found in *Moby-Dick* as well as in what we know of Melville’s ambivalent attitude to the Calvinist God of his religious upbringing” (16). Cook explains that “the most direct attestation of this influence, of course, occurs in Melville’s landmark 1850 review of Hawthorne’s *Mosses from an Old Manse*, in which he noted that the New England author’s deep understanding of evil ‘derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free’” (38).

⁸⁸ It is not immediately problematic that Mapple does not discuss all four chapters of Jonah. As Jonathan Cook notes, it would not be unusual for a preacher to limit his attention to even a single verse; the unit of study in a sermon is not necessarily, or even commonly, an entire Biblical book (58).

⁸⁹ The sense in which pride is understood to be an emotion often opposes it to shame; for example, when a child is told to be “proud” having done something well, or on the contrary, to be “ashamed” for having misbehaved. This is another meaning entirely of pride. For more on this, see Gabriele Taylor’s *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (1985).

⁹⁰ See Nathalia Wright's *Melville's Use of the Bible* (1969), Gail Coffler's *Melville's Allusions to Religion* (2004), and Ilana Pardes's *Melville's Bibles* (2008). For exemplary texts arguing the opposing views of Melville's intentions with regard to the representation of religion, see Howard Vincent's *The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick* (1949) and Lawrance Thompson's *Melville's Quarrel with God* (1952), both of which I discuss here in detail.

⁹¹ There are always exceptions. In a 2011 article, Zachary Hutchins argues that Thompson helped to give the novel a "reputation as a sacrilegious book." Hutchins finds instead "a faith-promoting fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy" in *Moby-Dick*, and claims that the novel demonstrates "Melville's interest in preserving and sustaining biblical structure and content" (20).

⁹² Mariani provides a detailed account of the textual discrepancies between the biblical account and its retelling in the novel (39).

⁹³ See chapter six of this dissertation, "Deliverance: James Baldwin and the Consecration of Black Life."

⁹⁴ Moses is an exemplary figure of (masculine) anger; see Kathleen Woodward's reading of Freud's "The Moses of Michelangelo" (42-43). For analysis of Job as an allegorical presence in *Moby-Dick*, see Cook.

⁹⁵ The wrath of God is an expression of perfect justice, as Augustine concisely argues in the *Confessions* when he writes, "anger seeks revenge: who avenges with greater justice than thou?" (31). And Calvin argues that, because "God justly avenges crimes, we must recognize that we are subject to the curse and deserve the judgment of eternal death" (16).

⁹⁶ See chapter one of this dissertation, "Conviction: Mary Rowlandson and Restorative Reading," in which I discuss the theological approaches of four major Puritan thinkers who influenced the settlers in the new world colonies.

⁹⁷ This is quite different from his most famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741), in which Edwards addresses, as the title implies, those who have not converted.

⁹⁸ For an excellent study in how the Puritan insistence on brotherly love becomes a practice of citizenship and nationalism in America, see "Agonizing Affection: Affect and Nation in Early America" (2002) by Peter Coviello.

⁹⁹ Twain scholarship has often attended to the question of the author's religious belief or unbelief, and while this is not the topic of my chapter, these debates should be acknowledged when discussing Christianity in his work. Tracy Fessenden gives the most nuanced account of Twain's relationship to the "limited rhetorics of religion available to him." She argues that the binary between belief/unbelief is not a stable one, making his "vaunted antipathy toward 'religion' much harder to track than assessments of Twain as simply an agnostic or atheist would suggest" (*Culture* 142). See also Allison Ensor, *Mark Twain and the Bible* (1969).

¹⁰⁰ Of course, the logic persists beyond the institution of slavery; to take just one example from the novel itself, see Pap's tirade against the free black man in the north and his outrage that the man was free, educated, and well-off (37).

¹⁰¹ There are many examples of Bennett's influence. Anders Schinkel argues against him, writing, "Huck's inner conflict is not the conflict of a conscience, representative of conventional morality, with sympathy (or the 'heart'), as a force of nature. Rather, it is the result of a split conscience, where only one half has the whole of Huck's moral vocabulary at its disposal. This in turn points to a serious flaw in Huck's moral education: Huck has been taught the moral language of the time, but not with the necessary flexibility. Huck cannot distinguish between moral concepts and their historically and geographically contingent application in the conventional morality he was raised in" (511). Alan Goldman contends that Bennett has too simplified an account of the emotions. He writes, "Huck is morally motivated by his sympathetic feeling toward his friend, the runaway slave Jim" and "In borrowing his moral judgments from corrupt sources, Huck Finn justifiably fails to be moved by them, although he accepts their status as reflecting genuine moral requirements. He sincerely believes in a strict moral requirement to return all stolen property to its rightful owner, and he believes that his friend Jim, a runaway slave, is rightfully owned. He therefore accepts that he has a moral obligation to return Jim to his owner. But having become Jim's friend on the raft they share, when the opportunity arises to turn him in, Huck finds himself unable to do so. He therefore decides to wash his hands entirely of moral requirements as he sees them and risk an eternity in Hell" (2). Bernard Prusak also describes the relationship between Huck and Jim as a "friendship." He argues that the novel "can teach us about conscience, I think, by refocusing our attention on what I have called its formal character. As we have seen, the judgments that Huck attributes to his conscience throw him into anxiety. But this is not the whole story of what his crises of conscience do. More fully, they awaken him to a sense of his own freedom and responsibility" (17). Carol Freedman disagrees directly with Bennett; she "contend[s] that there is good reason to interpret Huck's decision to help his friend Jim as an instance of moral judgment, even though it is also a case of acting from compassion and love" (102).

¹⁰² This love is not in any sense romantic; in *Religious Affections*, Edwards explains, "that which is there rendered *charity*, in the original is agaph, the proper English of which is *love*" (107). The word "charity" has come to mean something like "generous giving," or even "philanthropy."

¹⁰³ If this approach gives pause, note that Bennett also compares both Huck Finn and Jonathan Edwards to Heinrich Himmler, the architect of the Holocaust. But that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

¹⁰⁴ "The critical controversy has focused on the collapse of the so-called fatal ending of the novel," Morrison writes. "It has been suggested that the ending is brilliant finesse that returns Tom Sawyer to the center stage where he should be. Or it is a brilliant play on the dangers and limitations of romance. Or it is a sad and confused ending to the book of an author who, after a long blocked period, lost narrative direction; who changed the serious adult focus back to a child's story out of disgust. Or the ending is a valuable learning experience for Jim and Huck for which we and they should be grateful" (55).

¹⁰⁵ As is the first: in a preface to the novel, Twain warns, “Notice: Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.”

¹⁰⁶ *Gilead* forms the first part of a trilogy set in a small Iowa town of the same name; its other parts are *Home* (2008) and *Lila* (2015).

¹⁰⁷ This understanding of experience, which includes thought and feeling, as fundamentally internal, runs counter to the dominant theories of affect in contemporary thought as I have described them throughout this project. Sara Ahmed’s notion of the circulation of emotions, for example, does not allow for interiority.

¹⁰⁸ Edwards, specifically, has informed Robinson’s thinking; it is not only Calvin with whom she is in agreement on most counts. Robinson has written movingly about Jonathan Edwards. He “provided me with a metaphysics that made the phenomenal world come alive for me again and that seemed to me to undercut every version of determinism,” she recalls (“New Light”).

¹⁰⁹ For a thorough summary of the twelve signs, see the “Editor’s Introduction” to the Yale edition by John E. Smith. To give a brief sense of the signs not discussed in this chapter, I include this partial list: affections can be assessed as evidence of authentic faith when they make a person more loving and therefore more like Christ; more humble and aware of sins and shortcomings; and more desirous of spiritual development.

¹¹⁰ Laura Tanner’s article is the best example of taking an approach to Robinson’s work that does not draw upon theology. While she succeeds in offering a compelling reading of the novel, she accounts for Ames as a character only in terms of the psychic, not the spiritual. Her article turns to neuroscientist Antonio Damasio to claim that “the cultural force of Robinson’s text, I will argue, stems not only from its lyrical rendering of quotidian experience but from its powerful unveiling of how dying shapes the sensory and psychological dynamics of human perception” (228).

¹¹¹ See chapter seven of this dissertation, “Prideful Anger: The Inheritance of Sin in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*.”

¹¹² Literary critic Barbara Newman has tread this path, and her comments on it are worth quoting at length. She writes, “since I am not only a scholar of medieval Christian texts, but also a Christian, the questions that intrigue me tend to be religious and theological. In the world of high theory there was no place for such questions. Minimally, writing about religious texts from a Christian perspective means taking the questions raised by such texts seriously—not simply the questions we can raise about them from the standpoint of language, politics, or psychology. Maximally, it means inhabiting the same tradition of thought and practice as our historical subjects” (281). She then remarks, “along with faith and practice, religion involves affect—as does scholarship, though we are loath to admit it” (292).