

Acts of Justice

Risk and Representation in Contemporary American Fiction

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Abstract

Spectacles of justice preoccupy contemporary American culture. Legal culture—including the Watergate trials, the Lewinsky scandal, and OJ Simpson’s trial for alleged murder—assumes a central place in the American imaginary. Configurations of the law are not limited to media reportage and televised docudramas. Nor are arbitrations confined to law faculties and the spaces of formal courts. Working through depictions of due process in different ways and in different zones, contemporary American writers point up the prevalence of legality in everyday life. Whether on college campuses, in TV studios and suburban homes, or at theatres and racetracks, justice mediates interpersonal relations. Personal narratives proliferate as modes of self-justification. Everyone has a right to represent her side of a story. As interpretations of reality, however, none of these stories can claim absolute justness. No one has a monopoly on the law or victimhood.

This dissertation inspects how Jonathan Franzen, Don DeLillo, and Jane Smiley present the inconsistencies of the law. These American novelists emplot global escapes into their work as a means to inform notions of liberty and jurisprudence. For these writers, freedom requires the recognition of contradictory—and unanticipated—narratives. “Justice Theory” emerges where media, gambling, performance, and suburban studies intersect with ethics, globalism, and narratology. In Franzen’s novel *The Corrections* and essay collection *How to Be Alone*, self-validation requires the appreciation of the stories of others. In DeLillo’s later works, particularly the plays *The Day Room* and *Valparaiso*, justice materializes in terms of isolation and the will to alter personal stories. For Smiley, as construed in her long novels *The Greenlanders* and

Horse Heaven, dynamic responsive actions attend risky, unpredictable encounters in competitive milieus like the racetrack. These authors reveal that executions of justice and the perpetration of injustice involve varied consequences. The law is not only about punishment and recompense. Rather, legality directs the consequences of its applications toward the ideal of justice, which evolves alongside the subjects that it serves and the stories that they relate.

Résumé

La culture américaine contemporaine est préoccupée par des spectacles de justice. La culture légale—comprenant les procès Watergate, le scandale Lewinsky, et le procès d'OJ Simpson pour des allégations de meurtre—prend une importance globale dans l'imaginaire américain. Les configurations de la loi ne sont pas limitées au reportage des médias et aux documentaires dramatisés. Même les arbitrages ne sont pas limités aux facultés de droit ou aux espaces des tribunaux judiciaires. Afin de représenter des procédures équitables de manières différentes et selon des zones différentes, les auteurs américains décrivent la prédominance du droit dans la vie quotidienne. Soit sur des campus universitaires, dans des studios télé et des maisons de banlieue, soit aux théâtres et aux champs de courses, la justice négocie toutes les relations interpersonnelles. Les récits personnels prolifèrent comme modes d'autojustification. Chacun détient le droit de représenter son côté d'une situation. Toutefois, comme les interprétations de la réalité, aucune de ces situations ne peuvent réclamer une justesse absolue. Personne n'a un monopole sur la loi ou la victimisation.

Cette thèse examine les façons dont Jonathan Franzen, Don DeLillo, et Jane Smiley présentent les responsabilités de la loi. Ces auteurs américains incluent des évocations globales dans leurs œuvres afin de clarifier des notions de la liberté et de la loi. Pour eux, l'agence libre est démontrée par la juxtaposition de plusieurs récits uniques et plusieurs approches à la fiction. «La théorie de la justice» surgit des médias, du jeu, du théâtre, et des études urbaines qui s'entremêlent avec la narratologie. Dans le roman *The Corrections* de Franzen, et dans le recueil d'essais *How to Be Alone* de ce dernier, la

validation individuelle exige l'appréciation des histoires des autres. Dans ses oeuvres postérieures, particulièrement les pièces de théâtre *The Day Room* et *Valparaiso*, DeLillo localise la justice en termes d'isolement et de la volonté de changer son histoire personnelle. Pour Smiley, comme interprété dans l'ensemble de ses longs romans *The Greenlanders* et *Horse Heaven*, des réactions sensibles et dynamiques sont suivies par des rencontres risquées et imprévisibles. Les exécutions de la justice et la perpétration de l'injustice, comme ces écrivains décrivent, impliquent des conséquences diverses. La loi dirige ces conséquences vers l'idéal de la justice, qui évolue à côté des sujets et des histoires que ces individus partagent. Ceci n'est pas limité aux aspects de la punition et la récompense.

Introduction

Ends and Odds

Performances of justice and narrative have a lot in common. As an ideal that necessarily evolves, justice requires narrative in order to be debated and implemented. Acting sometimes as arbiters of laws and legal apparatuses, narratives put justice into practice. Accordingly, narratives at once facilitate and problematize jurisprudence. They enact the processes that define the legal method. In textually inscribing legitimacy, however, they compromise the dynamic principle of justice by administering it in a particular way. Legality therefore exposes its pronouncements to supplementary intercession. In order to remain just, justice must risk conceding that its previous verdicts—its actions, its precedents—demand correction. As a matter of praxis, justice puts itself on trial through narrative acts.

Complicating a fixation on justice in the United States, as illustrated through the cultural pervasiveness of what might be called “spectacles of justice,” contemporary American writers repeatedly represent the liabilities of the law. Emplotting the legal method in different ways and in different spaces, novelists and dramatists reflect on conspicuous exhibitions of legality as they work through the repercussions of its domestic execution. American culture obsesses over public mediations of justice. In the aftermath of President Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, an investigative commission published a contentious twenty-six-volume encyclopedia of evidence, accusation, and victimhood. Prosecutor Kenneth Starr’s multiple cases against President Clinton sparked comparable

civic controversy; the Republican attorney took over the investigation into Clinton's involvement in the Whitewater Scandal in the mid-1990s. Moving from real estate transactions to sexual indiscretions, Starr also gathered testimony essential to Clinton's impeachment following the Lewinsky Affair. Whether captivated by the chronicle of an injured party or mesmerized by the perpetration of a moral assassination, American culture manifests an overwhelming yet unexamined concentration on justice as scrutinized through different modes of legality. For contemporary American writers, acts of justice emerge in many zones or environments, not just in courtrooms. Dramatization of the legal process happens in such places as college campuses, closed courts, game milieus, TV talk shows, and theatres. These spaces also ironically allow for the suspension of due legal process.

Although my assessment of justice focuses on novels and dramas rather than on critical dispositions to justice, this study involves the intersection of several theoretical approaches to narrative and culture. Investigating selected works by Jonathan Franzen, Don DeLillo, and Jane Smiley, this dissertation presents a narrative theory of justice. As I constitute and lay claim to it, "justice theory" integrates the juncture—at times confluent, at other times divergent—of ethics, performance theory, gambling studies, urban and suburban theory, media analysis, narratology, spatiality, and globalization. The title of this study, "Acts of Justice: Risk and Representation in Contemporary American Fiction," also points towards my principal concerns with justice *per se* and its permutations within the field of literature. For all of its banal usage, or exactly because of these conventions, the word "justice" occupies a fundamental but uncultivated position in the public and individual imagination. As a case in point of the manifold intersections

that justice theory encapsulates, the root “just” can denote prescribed philosophical adjectives like “jural,” grammatical commands like “jussive,” and legal terminology, such as the nouns *jus cogens*, *jus gentium*, *justitarius*, and *juste milieu*. Less formally, “justice” connotes more decipherable nouns, like “jurisdiction,” “jury,” and “judge,” the familiar verb “justify,” along with its synonyms “validate,” “defend,” and “substantiate,” in addition to the words normally interchangeable with the adjective “just,” as in “fair,” “unbiased,” “proper,” and “correct.”

In its simplest formulation, “justice” might be seen as the moral thermometer or collective register for a civil discourse. Notwithstanding the common recognition of the obligations of justice, literary analysts and contemporary cultural theorists have by and large ignored justice as a ground requiring extensive critical examination—not to mention the formulation of a comprehensive theory of justice. Reframing what Andrew Ross calls “the vastly disproportionate attention that broadcast TV devotes to legal culture” (48), I contend that legality, as a means for the application of justice, serves as the starting point for storytelling. Disturbances to justice initiate narrative. Independent of medium, as the consummate handbooks or *mises en scène* for the interrogation of free agency, fictional narratives are inherently embroiled in acts of justice. Representations of legality are by no means “disproportionate” to the interventions of justice in daily life. I contest, rather, that *attention* to contemporary fictional applications of legality proves to be incommensurate with the predominance of legality in contemporary America. Despite its popularity in fiction, film, and television, “legal culture” remains understudied—or studied within unjust parameters. For example, while drafting multiple concordances between classic novels and legal texts in *Law & Literature*, Richard Posner, a trained

lawyer and economist, appropriates literature as a means to refine legality. Yet literature exists in its own representational terms. It is a symptom of neither philosophy, nor theory, nor legality.

Justice is not only the prerogative of law faculties and the producers of television docudramas. Serious contemporary literature reconfigures justice in various modalities. Portraying justice in terms of women, outcasts, depressives, and other socially marginalized figures, contemporary American literature appraises jurisprudence in substantive ways. Discounting clever jargon or specific name-hurling, as well as the *modus operandi* typical of formal tribunal spaces, Franzen, DeLillo, and Smiley cross-examine justice by means of reflection, verdict, punishment, spatiality, and the constellation of consequences that go hand-in-hand with the law. Whereas court documents and legal texts provide expert accounts and certified examples for the institution of new laws and the arbitration of existing laws, Franzen, DeLillo, and Smiley narrativize the manifold aftereffects of these dispensations of justice. Scrutinizing, for instance, the domino effect of victimhood (or how crimes may be caused by predecessive crimes) these authors elaborate upon illegality. Moving beyond the limits of the courtroom, these authors widen the scope for the articulation and interpretation of justice.

Irrespective of my aim to explore justice substantively rather than generally, a word on terminology is required. My decision to use the designation “contemporary” for the major works and writers that I study in “Acts of Justice” derives from a reflection proportionate to the extensive consideration that justice obliges. Not impervious to the work of Linda Hutcheon, Fredric Jameson, and Brian McHale, I resist employing the “not ‘unproblematic’ aspects of the term ‘Postmodernist’” (McHale 3) for a few key reasons.

Aware of Hutcheon's Derridean understanding of "postmodernism," which she defines as "a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts [that] it challenges" (3), and equally sensitive to Jameson's elaborate thinking on the subject of postmodernism, as manifested in his compilation *The Cultural Turn* and his tome *Postmodernism*, I adopt the catchword "contemporary" to steer clear of this debate about the meaning of "postmodernism." Despite my indebtedness to it, this deliberation would only sidetrack readers from my main concerns. When the term postmodern arises in this investigation, as it seldom does, I defer to Allan Hepburn's unequivocal annotation in *Intrigue*, namely that postmodernism concerns the ability to hold "conflicting opinions and values simultaneously" (197).

Published between the mid-1970s and the present, the crucial "contemporary" novels, plays, and essays explored in "Acts of Justice" are released throughout a thirty-year period that comprises responses to the Kennedy assassination, Vietnam, the Space Race, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the close of the Cold War. This era encompasses the troubled administrations of Reagan, Clinton, and the Bushes, in addition to the post-9/11 epoch, which includes the War on Terror. Although I refrain from alluding to all of these incidents specifically, they provide background for what I portray as contemporary culture, an age that I variously describe as oriented towards images, media, markets, suburbs, technology, and information. Along with other less prevalent usages, I incorporate phrases like "the image age" or "market culture"—almost interchangeably electing one or another as a more reliable indicator of the tendency that I am exposing. Synonyms, after all, provide for a modicum of slippage that fosters greater degrees of precision and nuance. As I move between different descriptors for contemporary culture,

I pinpoint diverse facets of this current way of life. In the same way as legal argumentation and narrative demonstration can often draw their efficiency and persuasion from scrupulously elected terms and meticulously crafted expressions, literary analysis also exploits the specificities of this formalistic process. In contradistinction to a reductive or flippant mismanagement of language through unsophisticated formulations and appendages, the diligent micromanagement of language can educe the fine-tuning or descriptive elegance that discrete contemplations of justice compel.

In keeping with my focus on substantive issues instead of general ones, the three American authors whom I investigate do not write about justice and its costs exclusively or overtly. For example, in the fiction of Don DeLillo, who is one of the most studied writers in the US, there is a clear absence of legal drama or courtroom procedure. In *White Noise*, *Libra*, and *Underworld*, his most celebrated texts, DeLillo avoids staging recognized varieties of due process. A similar pronouncement can be made about Franzen and Smiley. Neither of these two authors fictionalizes justice in its courtroom form. Along with DeLillo, these writers inspect the underdetermined prevalence of justice, as well as its application by way of the limits of legality, in the lives of everyday Americans. By not writing about legality *qua legalitas*, but rather *qua naturalis*, they illustrate the commonness of individual concerns with justice.

In the estimation of novelist and essayist Jonathan Franzen, who evaluates narrative as contingent upon containment and manipulation, justice takes the form of self-correction. In his work, especially the novel *The Corrections*, personal senses of freedom, sanity, and happiness work in conjunction with the personal will to change, not to mention the will to accept the changes adopted by others. According to DeLillo, who is

both a novelist and playwright, justice also concerns the individual. Particularly in his dramas *The Day Room* and *Valparaiso*, characters turn inward to escape the constraints of culturally enforced codes and to reassert their respective claims to independence. In her two longest fictions, *The Greenlanders* and *Horse Heaven*, Jane Smiley contemplates justice in terms of neither self-correction nor self-rediscovery. Instead, she enlarges the compass of justice by configuring it in terms of random interpersonal relations. She represents free agents by means of their independent responses to unplanned social interactions, relations based upon the incalculable conditions that gambling and odds establish. All three of these writers envision justice as part and parcel of the compromises that can redetermine individual fates.

Developed through three two-chapter sections, this dissertation progresses from Franzen, through DeLillo, to Smiley for the sake of clarity and coherence, not priority or import or other valuative resolves. None of these writers presents justice in a more just way than another. With their distinctive translations of narrative control (Franzen), spatial constraints (DeLillo), and haphazard circumstance (Smiley), all three writers illustrate that justice is about debate and execution rather than about being right. Justice entails prolonged narrative acts, not verdicts. Widening their considerations of justice as implicit to contemporary life, each of these authors assimilates a global understanding of the limits of representation while considering traditional concepts of justice. Taking into account the rights and viewpoints of other nations, Franzen, DeLillo, and Smiley work through and inform domestic versions of justice that implicate vigilantism, revenge, escape, precedence, creativity, and risk. Influenced by international events, they address and update local applications of the law.

As the form of my dissertation illustrates, Franzen, DeLillo, and Smiley revitalize their conceptions of justice in the course of their separate careers. Franzen reexamines *The Corrections* and the media event that followed its publication in his book of essays *How to Be Alone*. DeLillo reworks his novelistic depictions of agency by focusing on drama in the latter half of his career. In the course of her *oeuvre*, Smiley increases the geographic range of her narratives. She departs from American regional spaces to international settings. By incorporating two chapters into all three of my author-specific sections, I illustrate how each author reconstitutes his or her personal position toward justice and its spatial determinants. As prolongations, the second chapter of each section acts as an amendment, qualified resolution, or, I hope, persuasive finale to a lengthy survey of a performance of justice. Embodying the stipulations that “justice theory” promulgates, all three sections provide evidence for the rectifications that analyses of justice entail. A pluralistic and agonistic place as influenced by global perspectives as it is important to them, contemporary America must recognize that every enactment of justice can be reopened, reinvestigated, and corrected. Never definitive, always inconclusive, justice cannot be instituted unilaterally. Nor can it be used to any absolute end, save one that is categorically provisional. Upholding differentiations rather than universals, disputes in lieu of agreements, exceptions instead of constants, the law serves and protects on a case-by-case basis.

Although legal precedents—or stories—initially determine the limits of due process, no case is exactly proportionate to another. For this reason, juridical procedure accommodates evolving understandings of criminality and punishment. These shifting conventions are performed in particular spaces of ceremony and rule. Acts of justice

thereby occur in zones that resemble the spaces where games are played. Still, at first glance, the dynamism of jurisprudence contradicts the circumscribed rules that normalize game spaces. Marking an unambiguous distinction between the set confines of play spaces and the open parameters of the everyday world, Roger Caillois describes the domain of the game as “a pure space,” as “a restricted, closed, [and] protected universe” (7). “The confused and intricate laws of everyday life,” Caillois asserts, “are replaced, in this fixed [game] space and for this given time, by precise, arbitrary, unexceptional rules that must be accepted as such and that govern the correct playing of the game” (7).

Precise rules aspire to direct game play in its different forms. Rule offenders, if caught in the act of taking advantage of another player or bending a set guideline, are immediately penalized. For instance, in *End Zone* Don DeLillo accentuates rule violation and punishment in college football. In the middle of *End Zone*, protagonist Gary Harkness, carrying the ball for the Logos squad, steps out of bounds because two opposing players have “the angle” on him (123). Notwithstanding his tactical departure from the zone of play, he gets “hit and dropped and hit again” (123). Impassioned by the illegal collisions, he retaliates. He comes “up swinging” before being grabbed, pulled down, and kicked (123). As a result of these altercations, the Telcon team obtains a fifteen-yard penalty for “roughing” (123). Within the dictates of the game, a translation of justice plays out immediately. Dissimilar to the everyday world, where “trusting to autonomous and complete [and instantaneous] justice is futile” (Roos 157), the offenders receive their punishment, while Gary, the original victim, with his attempt at revenge clearly overlooked and forgotten, refocuses on the game. With these problematic depictions of discretion and judgment, *End Zone* presents a reflection upon strictly

regulated violence and the conditions of justice. The title refers to the two ends of the playing field, thereby signaling the sidelines and boundaries of the game. The narrative, however, questions these limits. Even though “play and life are constantly and universally antagonistic to each other” (Caillois 63), games are not completely separated from the everyday. Like player injuries, of which *End Zone* contains an encyclopedia (145-7), the “ethical creativity of limited and regulated conflict” (Caillois 169) cannot be restricted purely to play spaces.

In terms of its title, as well as by means of its emphasis on motion, regulation, and spatiality, *End Zone* clearly alludes to Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*. Whereas Beckett refers to the micromovements, ponderings, and attacks of the final stages of a chess match, DeLillo repositions these militaristic orchestrations to the West Texas desert. Amalgamating the emptiness of the “*Bare interior*” and the stillness of the “*Brief tableau*” that open *Endgame* (92), DeLillo transfers Beckett’s characteristic *anomie* to the archetypal American zone of justice: the desert. DeLillo includes deserts in most of his fictions. In *End Zone*, the author condenses three different spatial determinants for the allocation of justice. He places the football field, where arbitrary rules swiftly manage offenses, at the core of the college campus, where symbolic rules sanction assorted social interactions. As a space of overlapping, complementary, and conflicting regulations, the campus sits at the center of the bare desert, where outlaw justice encodes *mano a mano* clashes. With these concentric demarcations of justice, DeLillo commemorates the institutionalization of empty space, as the underdetermined rules and limits intrinsic to the names *Endgame* and *End Zone* imply. Like *Ground Zero*, which rests in the awful vacancy left in the absence of the Twin Towers, endgames and end zones are the spaces

where activity stops. Yet, in paradoxically inaugurating endings that compel epochal embellishment, DeLillo observes how serious play, in its multiple varieties, transcends its own prescribed limits. Though models for the lawful assignment of recompense, play zones incorporate the questionable arbitrations that define domestic distributions of justice.

Even when allegedly irrefutable, as in the “arbitrary” precincts of play that Caillois emphasizes, performances of justice are never indisputable. In the same way as legal processes rely upon narrative, and specifically on dissimilar renditions of a joint story, courtroom judgments corroborate the devices of narrative. Inextricable from storytelling, justice provides local applications, not universal answers. Combined with narrative portrayal, the law also integrates theories of ethics and literary analysis. Respectively, James Phelan, Martha Nussbaum, and Robert Eaglestone prop up Shirley’s Heath’s claim that good literature, like religion, proves “substantive” because it provides neither “answers” nor “closure” (in Franzen, “Why Bother” 82). Implying a connection between active disagreement and disinterested consideration, between doubt and ethics, Phelan contends that “The activity of discussing the values of texts is ethically more important than getting it right” (95). In parallel fashion, Nussbaum encourages readers to “applaud and investigate” the different ethical judgments of a given text (71). Eaglestone makes a related intervention when he concludes, “criticism too must fail, must always be open to interruption. There can be no final reading, no last word” (179). Nonetheless, in contrast to the endless ethical elaborations that Phelan highlights, it is the job of justice to endorse its procedures by implementing absolute pronouncements. Though court cases can last for protracted periods of time, they must, like novels, come to an end—at least

temporarily.

Debated, deliberated, and delivered by means of the legal method, just decisions leave themselves open to supplementary contention. Understood as signposts along the way to justice, rather than as definitive destinations for the would-be proper institution of justice, courtroom judgments—or findings—endorse dispute at the macro and the micro level. In the same way as a legal precedent can be overruled, a judge's ruling can be appealed by the guilty party. The right to appeal prolongs the negotiations of due process. In a related form of above-board intervention, accusers and defendants can exercise the right to settle a case out of court. When faced with malpractice suits, hospitals and their affiliated physicians customarily opt for this alternative in order to safeguard against the establishment of precedents that would further increase liability. Appeal and settlement therefore redirect the courses of justice. The former prolongs formal conclusion. Upholding the mandates of justice, appeals call for additional presentations of narrative. Dependent upon added detail, extended appraisal, and recalibrated assessment, appeals exaggerate the devices of justice. Aiming to cancel out an initial ruling, appeals call attention to reconsideration, to rereading. Though officially conclusive, legality applies its means to its end. Investigating and addressing acts of injustice, jurisprudence incorporates the reinvestigation of its own conclusions.

In out-of-court settlements, justice sanctions a procedure that disallows the creation of new regulations and, by extension, new understandings of illegality. In prohibiting the institution of new legal precedents, justice paradoxically maintains its track. In order to be just, justice must prohibit its own abuse. Obstructing the overuse of just recourse, legality tempers its own control over the citizens that it governs and serves.

In discouraging the creation of laws and bylaws, justice discourages unjust increases in personal accountability. As the starting points for the exacting of justice, precedents clearly encourage self-professed victims to resort to lawful or unlawful tactics for the redeployment of justice. In the contemporary repertory of American fiction, the rising status of the “victim”—whose specter is visible in the allegations of President Clinton’s sexual misconduct with White House intern Monica Lewinsky—legitimizes spectacles of justice. Precedents suggest constellations of events, much like the curious or discomfiting incidents that serve as the starting points for fictional narratives. Precedents permit so-called “victims” of putative “crimes” to link themselves to comparable acts of justice. Novel applications of the law amplify interpretations of victimhood and criminality.

In checking the introduction of laws, the legal method restricts the limitations that a culture can place upon itself. Cultures certainly adapt and evolve on account of the realization of new laws and freedoms. Yet overly regulated societies, like overly permissive ones, impose limits on the freedoms of their citizens. Akin to too much legality, too much liberty can arrest personal agency. As contemporary American fiction by Franzen, DeLillo, and Smiley shows, surpluses of legality, like shortages, alter the boundaries of everyday life. Justice, in other words, ought not to be the *leitmotif* of anyone’s personal story. A crevice divides the ideal of justice and applications of the law. Narratives correspondingly emplot exclusive endorsements of justice. Disparate acts of justice surrender the ideal to local appraisals and usages. In or out of court, justice cannot be dispersed in one way. As it applies and revises itself, justice limits itself.

Not fashioned in order to establish personal limitations, justice articulates and approves the appreciation of individual limits. Regulating while it complies, justice also

orders as it answers. As one of its inbuilt ironies, justice manifests itself by remaining half concealed. Too visible, it constrains the people that it guards. Invisible, it ignores the personal narratives of certain individuals by disrespecting the differences and complexities of US culture. In *Way of the World*, Franco Moretti argues that everyone has a right to a story, and these stories, as personal testimony, are implicated in systems of justice (205, 213). Moretti's consideration of the *Bildungsroman* from Fielding to Dickens implies that all novels "back up an ideology of justice" (213). In order to clarify this "cooperation of literature and law" (212), Moretti emphasizes that fiction "introduces" and "strives to prove, in explicitly egalitarian fashion, that everyone—bastard child, woman, drunk, fugitive, pauper—has the right to tell her/his side of the story, to be listened to, and to receive justice" (213). In Moretti's estimation, these representative subalterns have been "deprived of the right to have rights [and] restoring it to them is nothing more than an act of justice" (205). Therefore, the history of the novel from its inception is, in some ways, a form of justice.

Nonetheless, contemporary American narratives concern the legal arbitration of justice. Modern European novels, as Moretti appreciates them, do not support the meting out of legal or financial rewards. Rather than dwell on heavenly rewards, the works of Smiley, Franzen, and DeLillo, among others, concentrate on the apparatus that attributes justice on earth. Unlike Fielding's hero Tom Jones, who receives a socially arbitrated reward (he marries the squire's daughter after his urban experiences), in the US justice gets mediated through the processes of legality. In Joyce Carol Oates's campus novel *Nemesis*, published in 1990, a composer-in-residence accused of abusing a male student, who does not file criminal charges, receives a buyout from the conservatory as a result of

his alleged crime. Narrative adjudicates the situation not as a dispensation of right and wrong, nor even as a compensation for being a decent person. The ethical implications fall on the apprehension of legal rightness as determined by a particular tribunal, notwithstanding a person's evasions of the law. Though canonized occidental novels and recent American narratives configure the distribution of justice in divergent ways, both make a virtue of how justice revolves around storytelling.

American fiction has a long history of representing injustices in order to redress them. In Melville's masterwork, *Moby-Dick* (1851), the narrator, who invites readers into the text with the opening request "Call me Ishmael" (3), delivers his self-justifying story alongside accounts of the actions and gestures of the almost impenetrable yet eminently admirable and "affectionate" Queequeg (28), a heavily tattooed black man of unclear origin. At once a human symbol of the unvanquished sea, an individual without equal, Ishmael's lifesaver, and Ishmael's proxy audience, Queequeg plays multiple parts in Ishmael's narrative. These roles indicate that free agency requires the sharing of personal stories. Marking a movement from divine justice to the grim justice of naturalism, Frank Norris likewise emphasizes individual narratives. Published in 1899, *McTeague*, a landmark of naturalistic fiction, features an eponymous dentist whose mounting passions overwhelm his small refinements, eventually leaving him destitute in a desert fighting a friend-turned-foe to the death. In the vast expanse of Death Valley, McTeague finds himself as entrapped and doomed as the "half-dead canary" that he carries around in "its little gilt prison" (324). Though McTeague escapes his cramped apartment in overcrowded San Francisco, his fate is sealed when his former friend, in a last-ditch effort to orchestrate McTeague's fate, handcuffs himself to his murderer as he expires.

Contemporary writers engage in acts of justice by complicating relations between identity, performance, and freedom. In light of the trajectory of individual stories as depicted in the American literary tradition, Frederick and Steven Barthelme demonstrate the flexibility of justice systems in their memoir *Double Down*. Like some of their contemporaries, the brothers work within notions of victimization, theatricality, and risk as they extend representations of the problems of justice and independence. For recent American authors, characters access freedom by endangering their conceptions of this lack of restriction. Like the legal method, self-justification by necessity remains open to risky questions, actions, and decisions.

Double Down documents the two-year gambling addiction of the Barthelme brothers. Their splurge, which is funded by an inheritance, ends when they are prosecuted for complicity in cheating a casino. Remarking that the law is “awkward” and “remarkably unsupple” (169), Frederick and Steven style *Double Down* as an appeal that prolongs the deliberations of due process. They evoke connections between narrative and liberty as they cross-examine justice in its courtroom form. In their estimation, “The law wasn’t about finding the truth. It wasn’t about guilt or innocence. It was about telling the jury a story. And whoever told the best story won” (172). Fashioning their book as a delayed legal testimony, the Barthelmes insist that prevailing legal narratives cannot reflect the ambiguities and complexities of the everyday world: “[The court] did not want reality. [It] wanted a picture you could draw with a child’s marker” (176). They put forward that justice—as protocol—materializes as both a game of reduction and a high-stakes gamble. Storytelling in a courtroom, as a modeling of truth for the purposes of approaching a just verdict, entails serious play with serious consequences.

As an extension of the tribunal that scrutinizes the justness of the Barthelmes approach to gambling, *Double Down* puts the justness of justice on trial. In doing so, the narrative acts as an alibi for the brothers, who present themselves as thrifty academics in the everyday world and high-rolling gamblers in the play space. “At home,” they plea, “you might drive across town to save a buck on a box of Tide, but at the [blackjack] table you tip a cocktail waitress five dollars for bringing you a free Coke. You do both of these things on the same day” (25). Entreating readers to identify with them by using the pronoun “you,” Frederick and Steven argue that they are guilty only insofar as the law needs to be reconsidered. Narrative thereby restores a balance of justice—an impartiality executed through legal acts, not through merit or providence. After all, the brothers are “hooked on risk,” not luck (102). Furthering the formal limits of justice and freedom, narrative invites justice to risk re-justification.

American literature contains the prevailing sentiment that the law is a set of stories. Since this is the case, any interpretive construct can be correct, or at least arguable. In contemporary American fiction, the dimensions of this ethical problem increase because felony always comes in concatenated stories. Illustrating the *raison d'être* for laws, which supersede vengeance with justice or vigilantism with stories, the consequences of criminal acts can justify, cancel, extend, or duplicate the so-called “original” crime. Acts of justice and injustice alike take into account prior provocations and actions. Notwithstanding its multiple formulations, justice is never enacted in a vacuum. Commensurately, novelists and dramatists construct specific zones for the circulation of justice.

Whereas the Barthelmes engage in awkward acts of justice in American casinos

and courtrooms, Joyce Carol Oates represents justice in regional milieus. Perhaps the most productive serious writer in the US, Joyce Carol Oates has published over eighty books. Principally a realist, like Smiley and Franzen, Oates positions herself in the naturalist tradition by frequently incorporating revenge motifs and the employment of retribution in her novels. In her *roman à clef* titled *Nemesis*, which she writes under the assumed name Rosamond Smith, a name change that protects any “potentially libelous author” (McHale 206), the simple expression or so-called demonstration of the will-to-revenge transforms victims into suspects. Set at the Forest Park Conservatory of Music, which is a fictional substitute for Princeton, where a sex scandal led to the discharge of a tenured professor in the late 1980s (see Rabinowitz [1989]), *Nemesis* concerns events surrounding the alleged rape and beating of gauche and creepy student Brendan Bauer by Composer-in-Residence Rolfe Christensen. Judged by a campus tribunal made up of his colleagues, Rolfe, who is known more for his rap-sheet of sexual indiscretions than for his musical scores, receives a counterintuitive sentence: relief from his teaching duties with full pay. Maintaining his eminent title and proportionate salary, albeit with the perquisite of additional spare time, Rolfe appears to be rewarded for his dubious actions, a recompense that implicitly renders Brendan’s claims questionable, even defamatory.

After Rolfe’s death by chocolate (he receives a mysterious gift-box delivered through campus mail), Brendan becomes the prime suspect in the police case. Brendan’s putative rape, never proven in a legitimate court, not least on account of his refusal to press formal charges and to submit to a medical exam, therefore alters from an underinvestigated heinous crime perpetrated upon an unsuspecting young man to the same young man’s motive for committing murder. A crime can turn a victim into a

suspect, particularly when a graver crime follows the initial one. In this case, victim equals victimizer once victimizer equals victim. More than ever, when an initial offense appears to be dealt with unjustly, criminal acts compound criminality.

The recollective narrative style of *Nemesis* further complicates the reader's appraisal of Brendan as both a suspected victim and a suspected murderer. Oates consistently refers to terrible events only to delay elaborating on them. Such is the case, for instance, after she reveals a third felony, the bloody murder of young professor Nicholas Reickmann, Rolfe's substitute literary executor. Instead of presenting a description and analysis of this episode and its pressing implications, Oates turns to different narrative events. As a backdrop to each murder, she presents a constellation of mysteries and details that may or may not be directly pertinent to the cases at hand. She thereby compels her readership to integrate legal investigation with narrative representation. Rather than immediately describe criminal acts through the eyes of an impartial, third-person witness, she depicts these activities through testimony and hearsay founded in a series of interwoven, disordered stories. Playing off the mythological term designating divine punishment for misconduct or presupposition, *Nemesis* explores how unjust actions affect the lifestyles and the futures not only of those involved in a case, but also of those peripherally involved in a crime. Because of professional or personal or regional ties to extenuating circumstance, acts of injustice and their prosecutions have unpredictable and irrevocable aftermaths. As manifested through the legal method, Oates shows that it is the job of justice to allocate impartial reconciliation, not only punishment. Mere penalties, themselves always open to debate and presumption, cannot fulfill the demands of justice.

Oates investigates the same ends and odds of justice in her most famous work, *We Were the Mulvaney*s, an Oprah-approved regional epic about the dissolution of an all-American family. In this traumatic 1996 novel, Zachary Lundt rapes his popular, virginal, cheerleading classmate Marianne Mulvaney. Following the deferred exposure of her exploitation, Marianne's model-citizen father, aptly named Michael, takes it upon himself to confront the assumed abuser at his father's home. Vengefully, he bloodies the boy's face and manhandles his father. Legally obstructed by a deal that would embroil him in a counter-suit for assault should his daughter press charges against her persecutor, Michael turns to drinking, his long-abandoned habit, in order to suppress his alignment with Marianne's victimization. Complicating and widening the compass of these feelings of oppression, Marianne, who was drunk for the first time when allegedly violated, betrays her family by refusing to cast any blame upon Zak. Moreover, she does not even acknowledge his abusive actions. Notwithstanding her inescapable focus on his self-incriminating command "*Don't play games with me*" (71), a behest that recalls Rolfe's flagrant "JUST DON'T PLAY GAMES: I WARN YOU" in *Nemesis* (46), Marianne, to the agony of her father, devotedly reiterates versions of "*I was drinking. It's so hard to remember. I can't swear. I can't be certain. I can't bear false witness*" (*Mulvaney*s 142, 143, 145, *et seqq.*). Since she feels disinclined to embroil herself in a legal trial that would expose her to the inspection of the public, her father's compensatory actions cannot openly be justified. Because Michael's illegal maneuvers are verifiable—they were witnessed—he, also a victim, assumes the municipal burden of Zak's guilt. By association, all six members of Michael's family likewise assume culpability to various degrees.

Within a year, the family is no longer the well-respected Mulvaney's of "High Point Farm." Incapable of bearing the circumlocutory form of injustice that his daughter perpetrates upon him and his family, Michael, a dipsomaniac in decline, sends Marianne to live with a distant relative. In response to Michael's growing impertinence, Michael, Jr, the oldest son, quits roofing for his father and moves away. Patrick, the family brain, departs for Cornell University on a scholarship. With only Michael's long-suffering wife Corinne and their preadolescent son Judd left to manage the farm, the property falls into disrepair as the malingering Michael progressively loses roofing contracts. Squandering the family savings on abandoned legal cases filed against a rising number of so-called victimizers, the justice-obsessed Michael finally declares bankruptcy.

Purposely disassociated from the locus of the Mulvaney's irredeemable loss of the American Dream, Patrick thrives at college, amassing awards and praise. Yet an unpredictable event disrupts his academic accomplishment. One evening while uncharacteristically attending a rock concert, he encounters a young man he mistakenly identifies as Zak. The misrecognition prompts Patrick to develop a Michael-like fixation on "executing justice" upon the real Zak (253, 255, 257, 267, 272, *et seqq*). Compelled to restore a long-overdue balance of justice to his banished sister and to his wounded family members, Patrick devises an intricate plan of retribution over several months. Initially typified as incurably unhappy, Patrick claims an unprecedented sense of extra-academic purpose from his detailed recourse to the employment of reprisal.

Although he does not leave Zak to die at the culmination of his carefully orchestrated and perfectly performed plot, Patrick's actions reestablish a sense of justice. As a matter of fact, he works out the problems of and his personal preoccupations with

justice because he ultimately identifies with Zak's vulnerability. As a result of his alignment with his victim, Patrick rescues the repentant Zak from a sluggish drowning in an isolated swamp. Patrick reclaims personhood and contentment—or the principle ends of justice—through the contemplation of a risky revenge, not the complete execution of a plan that, against expectation, proves to be less than risky. In *We Were the Mulvaneys*, Oates illustrates how fashioning, rather than completing, payback corrects a previous injustice. When Zak candidly admits to his perpetration of an unlawful act, he upholds a fundamental process of just reconciliation. Necessarily ironic, justice in this novel takes the form of emplotment (an unjust kidnapping), admission (a confession of guilt), and identification (an empathetic susceptibility). Acts of justice do not require reciprocal counterbalancing. In Oates, as in Smiley and Franzen, justice concerns plot making—or narrative—not an impetuous settling of scores.

Configuring justice in different ways than Oates, Toni Morrison, who is also an Oprah-approved author, interrogates social relations instead of interpersonal ones. In her criticism and fiction, victimization manifests itself in terms of race and concatenated stories. In her celebrated novels, all of which embrace the spiritual realm of magic realism, as well as in her introductions to the collections *Birth of a Nation' hood* and *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power*, Morrison excavates storytelling as both a mode and a theme. Merging technique and subject, she works out self-justification in terms of narrative, which combines communal stories and their literary interpretation. As she says in her essay on Clarence Thomas, "To know what took place summary is enough. To learn what happened requires multiple points of address and analysis" (*Race-ing Justice* xii). Incorporating back stories and stories-within-stories into her discursive and fictional

work, she makes a virtue out of problematically legitimating the outwardly inexcusable actions of her “characters.” Extracting OJ from his iconic media image, a public exposure that swiftly altered from “affable athlete” to “wild dog” (*Birth of Nation’ hood* vii), Morrison justly redistributes a roundness to Orenthal J. Simpson in her consideration of his “breaking story” (xiii). As she interrogates the openly contrived nature of legality in his less than private trial for multiple homicide, she provides Mr. Simpson (as DeLillo does Lee Harvey Oswald) with a justness that the “shotgun wedding of the commodified, marketplace story and the official story” (xv) did not administer: the integrity of three-dimensionality.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison’s first novel, Cholly Breedlove rapes and impregnates his daughter Pecola. The novelist forewarns her readers of this delayed narrative event in the second prelude to the novel, a brief account of the explicit plot of *The Bluest Eye* with a chilling close: “*Cholly Breedlove is dead; our innocence too. The [garden] seeds shriveled and died; [Pecola’s] baby too. // There is really nothing more to say—except why? But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how*” (9). Earmarking the devices of narrative, the *précis* of Pecola’s horrible destiny reconfirms the confounded nature of the first prologue, a Dick and Jane story rendered increasingly impractical by means of Morrison’s accelerated narrative reruns. Originally, she presents the one-hundred-and-fifty-word textbook primer in simple declarative sentences: “Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door” (7). Morrison twice replays it, first removing the patriarchal punctuation, then the spacing altogether. Her focus on representation and re-representation runs through *The Bluest Eye*, which is narrated by a preadolescent named Claudia who does not entirely understand the events

that she reports. Alongside her incomplete accounts of the stories that surround Pecola, several descriptions of and letters from the past likewise eradicate any easy assessment of Cholly's actions and their outcomes.

Quite late in the novel, another narrator, this one third-person and gossipy, relates a horrifying and unshakeable event that overrules the awfulness of Pecola's rape, not to mention Cholly's double abandonment by his father. As immobilized witnesses, readers are treated to a scene wherein two white men, one holding a "spirit lamp," the other aiming a "flashlight" (116), convert Cholly's first erotic act, consensual sex with a teenager of his own age in an empty field, into a horrifying episode of spectacular consumption. Guns cradled, aimed beams "racing" all over the couple, the gleeful hunters coerce the "nigger" to "Get on wid it," "get on wid it," transforming Cholly's love into "hate," his tenderness into "violence," and Darlene's "sweet taste" into "rotten fetid bile," her soft hands into "baby claws" (117). Cholly's eventual rape of his daughter turns around the hostility and voyeurism of his formative sexual experience. The father's appalling maltreatment of Pecola neither materializes itself as an enactment of revulsion, nor objectification, nor racism. Though performing an incestuous and a manifestly abusive, not to say illegal, action, the drunken Cholly gives Pecola a version of the formerly unfeasible friendship and recognition that she desires. Forever the circumvented ugly duckling of the small town of Lorain, Ohio, Pecola finally becomes a figure of admiration, in her own estimation anyway. Interpreting public disapproval of her pregnancy as a form of covetousness, Pecola determines that the new attention being lavished upon her is the effect of her "successful" request for a pair of blue eyes from the strange mulatto medium Soaphead Church (also a child molester). As a consequence of

her father's exploitation, Pecola notionally gains the perfect blue eyes that grace Barbie dolls, popular schoolgirls, motion picture starlets, and other objects of longing.

Morrison's spotlight on stories furthermore occupies a telling place in the novels *Jazz* and *Beloved*. In *Jazz*, where she examines justice as implemented by a nation-within-a-nation (a black community in New York City, called "The City" in order to intimate a world-center of urbanity, culture, and justice), fifty-something Joe Trace shoots his eighteen-year-old paramour Dorcas out of jealousy. She dies. In order to avenge herself on the young lady who turned her husband inward, thus changing him from a loquacious man into a reticent one, Joe's wife Violet, thereafter known as "Violent," disfigures Dorcas' corpse with a pocketknife. Having no recourse to local authorities, on account of an inherent distrust of certified lawmakers and preservers of justice, the black community exposes the implications of these acts of vigilantism by their own devices. Using what Maxine Hong Kingston describes repeatedly in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* as the "talk-cure" of "talk-story," the involved members of the neighborhood work out their problems through conversation. In the transitional spaces of stoops and doorways, everyone talks about Joe's grief and Violent's attack. Working through the upshot of her actions, Violent visits Dorcas' legal guardian. Although Joe maintains what readers identify as an aberrant silence, his personal plight gets revealed through sustained flashbacks. An abandoned figure, like most of Morrison's protagonists, and the son of a woman nicknamed Wild, Joe spends much of his youth seeking his elusive, homeless mother.

Crafting a narrative of smaller narratives, each of which positions its central figure both as prey and as predator, Morrison investigates the disparate yet interrelated

stories of Dorcas, her aunt, her lover, his mother, and his wife, among a growing assemblage of side-line characters. Escalating the complications of unjust acts, Morrison's audience finally learns (along with Joe and Violet) that Dorcas did not die strictly because of Joe's gunshot. Rather, she bleeds to death. This slow demise is the product of Dorcas' unwillingness to visit a white hospital and also the result of the ambulance drivers who refuse to respond to the emergency call with urgency. This terrible fate substantiates African-Americans' distrust of white people who exercise control and influence. The actions of Dorcas' best friend, Felice, whose name connotes praise or happiness, also mollify Joe's guilt and responsibility. As the close of *Jazz* suggests, Felice acts as the vehicle of reconciliation for the husband and wife by spending time with them, thus gradually reintroducing the emotionally estranged couple. In *Jazz*, narrative restores the balance of justice without recourse to tribunals or juries.

Morrison presents a comparable assessment of justice through acts of telling and recounting in her most popular novel, if not the most popular work of fiction in America, *Beloved*. As much a gravemarker, as a dead baby, an invasive ghost, a bizarre visitor, a repository for the legacy of slavery, and an indicator of an odyssey towards liberation, the name and title "Beloved" encodes an incomparable human sacrifice on the part of Morrison's protagonist Sethe, a runaway slave from "Sweet Home" in the Deep South. Sometime after her getaway from Kentucky, and her reunion with her family in Ohio, Sethe batters her newborn baby Beloved to death in order to protect her from the "four horseman" recently arrived to reclaim their human property (149). Despite the fact that Morrison's free indirect narrator delays relating this unthinkable event, she attunes readers to the impending episode from the very beginning of the novel. Though Sethe

knows that an outside force renders her house “spiteful” (4), she never blames or accuses or reprimands the interloper. As a variant to the narratives that in due course problematize Joe’s alleged vigilantism in *Jazz*, Morrison similarly tempers and justifies Sethe’s martyrdom of *Beloved* with early events presented in chronological disorder. Morrison’s deliberations on justice *vis-à-vis* acts of the imagination and stories-within-stories on the home front, and particularly within the black community, incorporate the same issues that I investigate at the international level in works by Franzen, DeLillo, and Smiley. Narrative maintains the central role in my analysis of justice in recent US fiction.

“Acts of Justice” looks at the ways in which contemporary American writers articulate the predominance of justice in the everyday lives of US citizens. Incorporating global perspectives, which neither Oates nor Morrison uses, Franzen, DeLillo, and Smiley work through alternative models of justice and assess why and how individuals enact, question, and correct these proposals. Justice, as this project illustrates in a number of distinct yet commensurate ways, materializes as an end that can never be reached nor attained. Exploring the ramifications of unjust acts, Franzen, DeLillo, and Smiley present mandates about the directions in which justice ought to move. Justice concerns debatable directions, not one direction; justice allocates contentious results, never a result. The implications of justice and injustice alike are changeable. To claim that justice can be instituted in only one way is to discount the active developments of social and cultural interchange and evolution. To allege that any dispensation of justice is itself wholly or universally just—or correct—is to enact an injustice upon justice. Justice theory proposes that each just decision occupies an instrumental position in an unrelenting activity that stipulates argument, recollection, and projection, not to mention an obligatory acceptance

of counter-argument. If anything, justice materializes as a *de facto* argument that, by definition, allows its provisional conclusions to be challenged *de jure*. Justice, therefore, never ends. It starts in the middle of things. Never starting *ex nihilo*, never employed *ex parte*, never considered *conclusio*, legality insists on continuation through successive acts of justice.

Justifying Franzen's Fiction and Essays

Chapter One

Defending Franzen, Defending *The Corrections*

Jonathan Franzen writes about walls, laws, failure, and correction. The walls or borders that he includes in his three novels are permeable, fractured, and even toxic. The laws he represents are on occasion mainly decorous and at other times officially prescribed. Falling into the province of decorum or manners are the routines observed between individual family members, the codes adopted between particular coworkers, and the arbitration that encourages conformity in the suburbs. Instances of formal law in Franzen's fiction consist of the specific legal restrictions that sanction or disallow certain corporate strategies, stock-market manipulations, terroristic acts, counterterroristic operations, revenge plots, and social upheavals and advancements, not to mention faculty-student relations. As a predominant theme in Franzen, failure tends to be sudden and surprising rather than inevitable and reasonable. In the novelist and essayist's most recent and most recognized novel, the 2001 bestseller and National Book Award-winner *The Corrections*, each of his feature characters takes personal risks and fails in one way or another. Though unique, each of these personal mistakes, letdowns, or disintegrations can be evaluated as a perpetuation of an initial injustice. In *The Corrections*, Franzen thereby implements multiple meanings of correction in order to illustrate how unjust acts can compound other injustices, despite specific attempts at correcting wrongs. Yet corrections, of course, do not solely uphold unjust processes. As Franzen demonstrates, correction can take the form of a market amendment when the marketplace lowers so as

to correct inflated prices. Though the will of capitalism cannot be corrected, a last child offers parents the opportunity to make corrections to the others. Additionally elucidating intergenerational association or mentoring, professors also correct the academic papers and theoretical articulations of their students. Always attentive to representation itself, Franzen furthermore correlates correction to surveillance, pharmacotherapy, imprisonment, capital punishment, illness, and retirement, as well as *vis-à-vis* writing and reading.

Indicating his concern with literary and non-literary forms of production and consumption, Franzen routinely configures various versions of information transmission in his fictions and essays. His work integrates maps, graphs, transcripts, corporate logos, handwritten notes, daily clippings, radio spots, TV news, and emails. As manifestations of the detritus of culture, these mediated and usually impersonal sources of intelligence and communication are often the only links connecting the five estranged Lambert family members in *The Corrections*. Extending the distinctly urban-American parameters of his first two novels to an international setting, *The Corrections* depicts order, fraud, collapse, and escape, all at the end-of-the-millennium, as the narrative moves back and forth through Philadelphia, New York City, Western Europe, and Vilnius, Lithuania, en route to the well-veiled Midwestern suburban somewhere of St. Jude. Home to the elder Lamberts, St. Jude turns out to be a fictional adaptation of the St. Louis satellite where Franzen spent his boyhood. Though merely insinuated in his prize-winning novel, this impression figures prominently in his next book, a collection of essays titled *How to Be Alone*, and promises also to feature in his forthcoming memoir, *The Discomfort Zone*. In returning to St. Louis, which is likewise the setting of his first novel, *The Twenty-Seventh*

City, Franzen can thus be seen to trace or demarcate the evolution of his views on representation. Especially in the wake of *How to Be Alone*, a non-fictional postscript to the near six-hundred-page work, Franzen's *The Corrections* corrects certain understandings of cities and shake-ups depicted in his first two novels.

In each of his early books, Franzen introduces a particular family and focuses on actions within a select city that occur in the space of less than a year. Published in 1988, *The Twenty-Seventh City*, which considers corruption and success in America's most decentralized city, concerns the Probst family in St. Louis. Published four years later, *Strong Motion*, a fiction about an earthquake-threatened yet ever-listless Boston, presents the Holland family. In *The Twenty-Seventh City* and in *Strong Motion*, as in *The Corrections*, Franzen's main family invariably drifts apart only to reunite by the end, albeit incompletely. From fiction to fiction, he insinuates this family disconnection in two ways. His families get bigger by exactly one member and older by about a decade. Barbara and Martin Probst, in their early forties, have a seventeen-year old daughter named Luisa. Eileen and Louis, children of the late-fifty-something Hollands, are twenty-seven and twenty-four, respectively. Septuagenarians Enid and Alfred Lambert, from *The Corrections*, have two sons, Gary and Chip, and a daughter, Denise. In order, these youngish adults are forty-three, thirty-nine, and thirty-two. With number as with time, Franzen's *oeuvre* indicates, the threat to the stability of the family unit increases. As individual family members age, they develop their own personal narratives, unique storylines that frequently counteract the cohesiveness or shared narrative of the traditional family.

Franzen's fictional rendering of cities likewise presents an unambiguous trajectory

towards the unstable. He always ruptures cities. He includes a map of St. Louis at the onset of *The Twenty-Seventh City*, the twenty-seventh largest city in the US in terms of population. This number and title poetically downplay the escalating tally of “small municipalities” and “fragmented neighborhoods” which make up St. Louis, the most atomized city in America (Sandweiss 7). As map lines get more and more complex, like the branches of a family tree, bisecting and connecting segments and contours split up rather than unite. Acting as borders or walls, map lines make clear distinctions between localities. The plot of *The Twenty-Seventh City*, which begins in late 1984, stresses this separation and divisiveness. An ironic version of Big Brother, the new police chief from Bombay, India, who aims to capitalize on the blighted real estate of the downtown core, fails in her bid to unite the two defining factions of St. Louis: Municipal Growth and Urban Hope.

With *Strong Motion*, which is a seismological term designating the stress release of tremors and temblors, Franzen moves to subterranean markers. Integrating a number of geological maps, *Strong Motion* shakes up and ravages Boston by way of unnatural earthquakes. These induced plate slips are the result of a corporation’s illicit disposal of toxic chemicals into concealed injection wells. The final city-shattering tectonic-slide takes all but three or four of Franzen’s Bostonians by surprise, largely because dominant media players and powerbrokers thwart and redirect the attempted admonitions of a vocal seismologist modeled on Henry James’s Verena Tarrant, an avant-garde feminist in *The Bostonians*. A pro-choice activist, Dr. Renée Seitchek defends the rights of women. Similarly in conflict with contemporary forces corresponding to the social conditions that the progressive Verena initially challenges in 1870s Boston, Renée also frankly points out

that Boston's "twisted crime," "overt racism," "elevated cancer rates," and "harbor full of sewage" counteract the public notion that the city is "a center of culture and education" (120).

Notwithstanding Franzen's sustained focus on families and cities, *The Corrections*, in which there are no maps, reconsiders these motifs. In *The Twenty-Seventh City* and *Strong Motion*, the individual constituents of the two main families play roles, but not exclusive ones, within essential plots. Both of these five-hundred-plus page novels incorporate extra-familial characters, such as police chief Jammu and seismologist Renée, among others, who are of vital importance to the development of these city-specific stories. As social novels about cities, both books incorporate urban histories, are "highly plotted," "extensively researched," and "markedly political" (Green 91). *The Corrections*, by contrast, is "emotionally charged" (Ribbat 562). In this novel, each member of the Lambert family is central to his or her own very personal and fundamentally unique narrative. Enacting narrative in traditional arcs, every individual Lambert has his or her distinct big high and bigger low. Demonstrably, save for frequent flashbacks, some reaching back an entire generation to the 1960s, these stories rarely intersect. An explicit partition, age separates characters in *The Corrections*. Further exemplifying that age signifies severance and independence, even old-timers Enid and Alfred, who inhabit the same suburban home, live widely dissimilar lives.

The disconnection of the Lamberts, in fact, almost resists novelistic representation. Characterizing the manifest individuality of all Lamberts, *The Corrections* splices back and forth through time in two brief framing chapters and five principal chapters of equal length, respectively devoted to Chip, Gary, Denise, Enid and Alfred,

and the Christmas vacation. These divergent stories, and their international interludes, to places like Québec, the Baltic States, and Bavaria, pull the narrative apart. Franzen ties these disjointed plots and places together, however, when the Lamberts reunite for the holiday season in St. Jude, a final family Christmas that refashions the conclusion of Frank Capra's classic, the seminally suburban 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life*. As well, the long-anticipated Lambert get-together recalls the Angstrom Christmas that begins *Rabbit at Rest*, the last book of John Updike's *Rabbit* quartet, a series mostly positioned in a suburb of Brewer, modeled on Reading, Pennsylvania.

Capra situates his weird post-World War II picture in a small-town location, where Savings and Loan manager and principled good-guy George Bailey unselfishly supports his clients' upstart-housing purchases in the nascent suburbs, all while the old and devilish town-villain, Mr. Potter, compels his ill-fated customers to rent degenerating property closer to an emerging downtown area. Almost predictably, *It's A Wonderful Life* ends with a Christmas celebration after George misplaces his money, attempts to commit suicide, and is physically saved by a guardian angel named Clarence, before a group of generous friends and patrons tallies up the total required to keep George's altruistic cooperative afloat. Satirizing the facile conclusion to this unsubtly ideological anti-urban Christmas film, the final full-length chapter of *The Corrections* is ominously titled "One Last Christmas." Equally discomfiting, this extended holiday scene takes place in a neighborhood named after "St. Jude." Franzen therefore supplants Capra's timely *deus ex machina* Clarence with the patron saint of hopeless causes. Perhaps similarly taking a page from Updike, who starts *Rabbit at Rest* with a sad and representationally unseasonable Christmas episode in Fort Myers, Florida, Franzen sardonically remarks on

the enforcement of family togetherness and happiness under the banner of Christmas by calling the epilogue of his novel "The Corrections." Christmas in no way closes or resolves the divergent narratives of *The Corrections*. Seemingly as standardized as the formulaic suburban surrounding, even Christmas can be corrected.

Although landscapes and cultural trends are no doubt intricately related, aesthetic consistency need not be a *prima facie* indicator of current, or a harbinger of eventual, behavioral conformity. As in any suburb, an inactive army of identical zombies cannot convincingly inhabit St. Jude, over Christmas or any time. Foregrounding the altering land and architecture around his characters, in *The Corrections* Franzen illustrates that suburban figures can change for the better, even after decades of relative changelessness. This is a welcome demonstration of correction, given that by "1990 there were more suburbanites than city and rural dwellers combined" in America, an "alarming" statistical rise when one considers that "in 1920 the census had revealed that the United States was officially an urban nation" (Jurca 160). As he refines the suburban environment, Franzen addresses the conventions of suburban fiction. In terms of American literature about the suburbs, a genre inaugurated by William Dean Howells' 1871 novel *Suburban Sketches*, and sustained by Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt* in 1922, as well as James N. Cain's *Mildred Pierce* in 1941, suburban characters tend to be as unvarying as their living spaces are negatively coded.

Nonetheless, Franzen refreshes this American literary heritage. One of the manifold meanings of his indefinite title is that correction can lead to improvement. Not only showing up failure, correction can be supportive and affirmative. Irrespective of the all-consuming onward walling-up of suburbanization, Franzen ultimately invests *The*

Corrections and its characters with a modicum of hope, progress, and even success that has so far been largely ignored by his literary critics. Nor has he been recognized as a suburban writer, much less as a revitalizer of this realist genre. As a matter of fact, Susanne Rohr is the sole critic to remark persuasively on the suburban qualities of *The Corrections*. Yet she fails to note that above and beyond the “stereotypical” suburban “ingredients” he depicts, such as “conformity, conservatism, [and] narrowness” (103), Franzen likewise represents a sympathetic depiction of both the suburb and the city. In so doing, the novelist moves away from earlier practitioners of the suburban fiction legacy.

Departing from definitive motifs in F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Cheever, and Gloria Naylor, for instance, Franzen’s suburbs are not mainly “symbolic spaces” undercut by “forces of insecurity, disintegration, and loss of familiar structures of experience” (Rohr 103). As an inheritor of this American genre of fiction, Franzen also refuses to dismiss the city. Diverging from his literary forbears, neither does he treat urban areas as dirty, dangerous, dreamlike, incredible, or mysteriously absent. In other words, he does not reserve his realism exclusively for the suburbs. Franzen’s suburbanites do not merely escape to the suburbs or simply long to flee from them; they are not restricted to these places physically and novelistically. Every Lambert, current suburbanite or not, however, has immutable ties to the suburbs. Franzen declares as much in the essay “Meet Me in St. Louis” from *How to Be Alone*. Summarizing the plot of *The Corrections*, which he often does, and always differently, he describes it in this piece as “a family novel about three East Coast urban sophisticates who alternately long for and reject the heartland suburbs where their aged parents live” (289). But these city cats invariably come back. And these returns, no matter how brief, illuminate the inevitable positively charged modifications

and corrections Franzen makes to the typical American suburb. As he exemplifies in *The Corrections*, a suburban center can be a risky, evolving, and interpersonal setting. Thus staged or represented, the suburbs can be read as places that emplot their own systems of justice, systems that, like all just implementations of legality, forever move toward dynamic redress and reconciliation.

While paying particular attention to Franzen's sophisticated techniques of representation and his underexamined methods of narration, I will explore the conventions and tropes Franzen manipulates in order to locate him in the American suburban literary tradition, as well as the innately legalistic literary field of academic fiction. A strange version of the unsafe suburb, the sexually scandalous campus raises the problem of a parajustice system (in colleges) at loggerheads with a public justice system (formalized in laws by governments), as my first chapter, "Defending Franzen, Defending *The Corrections*," illustrates. In my second chapter, called "Surveillance and Success in the Suburbs," I clarify how Franzen, in an act without fictional precedent, depicts what can justly be called a cosmopolitan upgrading of the archetypal satellite community. Though I will make reference to his complete body of work, in both of my Franzen subdivisions my main focus will be *The Corrections*—his most important, rewarding, and misread text. If I may cite Oprah Winfrey, whom Bonnie Greer, among others, describes as the woman who "control[s] the publishing world" ("Magnum Oprah" 31), *The Corrections* is "Funny, familiar, insightful, and disturbingly real all throughout. Not a false note in all 568 pages of the book. When critics refer to 'The Great American Novel,' this is it, people" (qtd. in Epstein 33).

Although I have so far resisted bringing up Oprah and her frequently restructured

book club, any serious discussion of Franzen and his work requires a preliminary look at the cultural event that followed hard upon the publication of *The Corrections*. As a few critics have noticed, the affairs surrounding Franzen's overt ambivalence toward and eventual exclusion from the Oprah Book Club are decidedly germane to "the subject of *The Corrections* itself" (Lehmann 40). As my first chapter introduces and my second develops, Franzen hails readers into his big novel. He intentionally fragments his text in a number of ways so as to invite readers to engage with his work ethically, socially, and, above all, critically. Franzen sets up these always corrective, always compelling engagements by way of "The Failure," an opening section devoted to his narrator's experiences as a cultural critic at a college in Connecticut. Albeit, in spite of Franzen's democratic style of representation, as an arbiter of justice Oprah has induced many reviewers and readers away from the cultural critique and assessment that his narrator encourages. Undermining what should be conceived as a democracy of reading, Oprah's institutional correction of *The Corrections* and its author provides an undeniable case in point of how the celebrity's book club—and the media age that it concurrently supports and symbolizes—contributes to unjust, not to mention anti-novelistic, reading practices.

In correspondence to the processes of just recourse, however, Jonathan Franzen appears to take action against Oprah Winfrey in his coda to *The Corrections*, *How to Be Alone*. The title of the book may be an ironic allusion to Oprah's curiously confidential yet divulged life story, a widely published personal "literacy narrative of progress" (Hall 649) that always begins with an endorsement of reading as cure to "being alone" (qtd. in Hall 649). Complicating the simple paralegalistic terms of the Oprah Book Club, some of the essays in Franzen's nonfiction book recoup the array of ethical conditions, difficulties,

and engagements essential not only to *The Corrections* but also to literature. In light of Oprah's televised evaluation of him, an appraisal that perpetrates the author against his own work, Franzen reasserts his original repudiation of the promotion of a biographical and therapeutic model of reading, a model in turn sponsored by pharmaceutical and corporate interests. As my opening chapter elucidates, Franzen reclaims *The Corrections* as a critical judgment of capitalism in *How to Be Alone*. Though we cannot correct free enterprise, we must critique it, for we are not all capitalist subjects to the same extent. Despite the fact that individual American citizens are governed by similar official legal structures, not everyone has the same economic leverage as, say, Oprah.

Beginnings

In the midst of the media's sustained focus on fear and trembling and loathing and war after the terrible attacks in New York City and Washington, DC, in the late summer of 2001, Franzen "entered the history of literature and publicity simultaneously" (Edwards 75). Within the same month he at once took home the National Book Award and an invitation to the Oprah Book Club. The extensive enthusiasm surrounding the author just over forty was short lived. In a move without precedent, the woman who fights difficulty officially withdrew her invitation: "Jonathan Franzen will not be on the Oprah Winfrey Show because he is seemingly uncomfortable and conflicted about being chosen as a book club selection" (qtd. in Lehmann 40). Franzen's attempts to explain his disinvitation from the self-made billionaire's popular show (even though book club segments are her least popular) only made matters worse. Visibly flustered by his newfangled role as overnight icon, and exhausted by the countless interviews attending

his book tour, he made the mistake, as he himself puts it, of “conflat[ing] ‘high modern’ and ‘art fiction’ and use[d] the term ‘high art’” in order to explain his literary influences (“Meet Me in St. Louis” 300). Describing this incident, critic Joseph Epstein points out that “An artist can say almost anything he wants as long as he manages not to commit the cultural sin of elitism” (34). In the image age an elitist is a paper tiger indeed.

Unsurprisingly, the popular media aimed their reviews and stories at the author himself. Franzen the man became the dominant narrative, in lieu of his actual work. His fame as a fiction maker was soon replaced by his infamous “cultural arrogance” (Ribbat 558). Generally disparaged for his distrust of corporate emblems—i.e., the Book Club logo—and his undiplomatic, honest, all-too-honest estimation of Oprah-endorsed selections—i.e., some good books, enough one-dimensional, schmaltzy ones—Franzen was hailed as, among many other things, “The Snob Who Dissed Oprah” (Freund 59). No friend to the author, Freund goes on to patronize America’s latest villain for his unrehearsed statements: “Poor Franzen, that’s as close to the role of Judas as the culture offers” (59). Fittingly, what gives birth to this biblical mark is a return to “St. Jude.” In other words, Franzen’s fast fall from repute to ill repute has its source at the real source of the fictional St. Jude, where *The Corrections* begins and ends.

In “Meet Me in St. Louis,” Franzen recounts his experience with Oprah’s B-roll footage personnel in St. Louis after his nomination into the book club. In spite of his avowal that St. Louis has nothing to do with his present life, he was informed by one of Oprah’s producers that these preplanned B-roll filler-shots (as what he dubs a “dumb but necessary object,” a “passive supplier of image” [288]) were to be spliced with A-roll footage of him speaking. As the essay begins, Franzen finds himself looking west over

the Mississippi River from rundown East St. Louis where he and the Oprah team are seemingly “plotting by the side of a road” but actually “doing nothing more dubious morally than making television” (287). Their goal, Franzen clarifies, is to capture the former St. Louisian driving to his boyhood home of decades ago in Webster Groves via the Poplar Street Bridge, with stops at the Old Courthouse and the Arch along the way. Franzen’s role is to appear “what? writerly? curious? nostalgic?” (288), while he dutifully “pretend[s]” to “reexamine his roots” (287). Adhering to a script and coached by B-roll producer Gregg, Franzen only half succeeds at looking “contemplative” (297; 298; 299) in a number of locations in his old suburban neighborhood, including under the Oak tree commemorating his father. Unable to emote justly beneath his father’s tree, he at last informs the crew that this sentimental TV moment is “fundamentally bogus” (298). Yet, unable to go on, the difficult author goes on. For the next hour he is captured contemplating trains at the Museum of Transportation, his first visit to the place. Franzen’s unresolved impromptu remarks about the Oprah Book Club followed not long after this stylized day.

In his book *Late Postmodernism*, Jeremy Green offers an extensive scrutiny of Franzen’s run-in with Oprah. He starts off his analysis of this media exhibition by pointing out that there is “something almost Franzenesque in the comic desperation of this drama” (79). “[A] brilliant success,” Green continues, “gives way to disaster because of a few ill-chosen words, and the mess grows more intractable with every attempt the protagonist makes to extricate himself” (79). Green is not alone in this detection. Chris Lehmann and Christoph Ribbat likewise provide variants on the connections between the fictional makeup of *The Corrections* and its non-fictional fate in the media market.

Lehmann sees Franzen as the victim of a “pathetic spectacle” by “a newly apprehensive, war-torn nation [that] was repairing to the bracing, morale-boosting tonic of cultural warfare” (40). Going on to speak more generally about literature, Lehmann laments that the “somewhat complicated response to his Oprahfication that Franzen tried to voice was not a permissible attitude; never mind that this very sort of ambivalent self-questioning is among the signal qualities that define good literature (popular, ‘high art,’ and anything in between)” (40). Ribbat, for his part, likens what he calls Franzen’s “programmatically statements,” that is, his “self-positioning in the American literary tradition” through “essays, interviews, and public statements” (561), as a non-fictional illustration of the character-centered un-ironic modernist realism that drives what has variously been called new conventional or late postmodern or post-postmodern fiction. Ribbat makes clear that the author of the “post-postmodern” novel *The Corrections* (558) plainly “places the ‘protagonist first’—i.e., Jonathan Franzen” (561). The aftereffects of the Franzen-Oprah breakup are at once comedic, misfortunate, and telling.

Whether he calls it a desperate drama, a pathetic spectacle, or an example of self-placement, each of these three defenders of Franzen focuses on the staginess at the heart of the Franzen-Oprah entanglement. The set-up nature of his appointment to the club, so Franzen later implies, was apparent from the beginning. If the essay title “Meet Me in St. Louis” is not indication enough, the author’s twice-expressed desire to be filmed in New York instead of St. Louis (where he hadn’t lived for twenty-four years) should be. That the unremarkable Midwest milieu of St. Jude featured in *The Corrections* comes to be equated with a particular area in suburb-beset St. Louis intimates what can be characterized as the autobiographical-confessional, redemptive-therapeutic aim of the

Oprah Book Club. After all, in terms of Franzen's fiction, the sole evidence suggesting that St. Jude may be situated in St. Louis is tenuous at best. The Meisners, who live next door to the Lamberts in *The Corrections*, initially show up as minor characters in his first novel, *The Twenty-Seventh City*. They are Franzen's lone intertextual figures.

Complicating matters, though, is the fact that Chuck and Bea Meisner are exceptional only insofar as the location of their home in *The Twenty-Seventh City* is conspicuously left unrevealed, a fact that works against the tendency in this novel for characters to be presented in respect to where they live exactly. In terms of their lack of explicit setting, the Meisner couple stands alone—with the exception of the Lamberts, of course. That is, until Oprah's patently naïve reading, anyway.

Ominously staging the "we" of the club against the "you" of the author, the Oprah people, when they first contacted him, told Franzen that his novel was "a difficult book for us" ("Meet Me in St. Louis" 289). Still, right after this admission, and probably even before it, and perhaps even before reading the book, the Oprah team as usual removed the "difficulty" from the novel. Given the sorting classification that heads the first edition of *The Corrections*, this may have been a simple open and shut case. According to the Library of Congress logging data, *The Corrections* is about married women, Parkinson's disease, parents and children, and the Middle West. Such a "cataloguing note," Thomas R. Edwards remarks, "sounds just right for Oprah's club" (78). Appropriately, the directions in which Franzen was stage-managed, both to St. Louis and in St. Louis, all as part of what he was advised were the "responsibilities of being an Oprah author" ("Meet Me in St. Louis" 289), also play right into "the talk show's therapeutic vocation" (Green 88). The author and his work, to put it plainly, are systematically co-opted into the

ideological contrivance of the Oprah show. Marketing campaigns led by Oprah's book club correct the satirical author and harness him to the will of capitalism. No matter what he says, no matter how he resists "branding" in the marketing sense of the term, he is recast in particular media roles after Oprah corrects his market value as a novelist. Irrespective of Franzen's fictional and personal efforts, capitalism cannot be corrected, much less criticized, it appears. Once drafted into the club, a club that unjustly brands or positions the novel, the author, and the audience as aligned subjects of a curative market culture, Franzen is roundly reprimanded (even by usually savvy critics) for exerting artistic individuality and difficulty as his own justice—in addition to his own justification. A badge of honor, the self-autonomy he willfully exerts counteracts the group-reliance Oprah's show deliberately venerates.

Green spells out the plain link between book club picks and talk show topics. He explains how the "sentimental and melodramatic works of fiction" that Oprah typically chooses are "novels that turn around the kinds of problems dealt with on a regular basis on her show—spousal abuse, racism, overeating, bereavement. The narrative focus of these texts informed the content of the discussions featured on the show, wherein the sufferings of characters were likened to the sufferings of Book Club participants" (82). The ethos of the show, of course, focuses on the connection between confession and identification. Adamant about the biographical nature of fiction, Oprah sets up sappy pans and zooms of authors ostensibly emoting under oak trees. These shots aim to encourage the situating of book clubbers within selected books in the same way that they position respective authors within their own books. As Green recounts, Oprah pushes her viewing and reading public either into "confirming the shape of experience ('my life is just like

that') or [into accepting] a model to emulate ('my life should be more like that')" (84). With her "para-social" strategy of "imagined or *constructed* intimacy" (Hall 650), Oprah in effect pathologizes identification, therefore ensuring the continued popularity, not to say success, of her series. On the talk show scene personal problems are played out on a public stage. Actors spell out their tribulations knowing that the audience is prepped to commiserate as they spectacularly consume. The problem then enters the public domain, no longer shouldered by one single Sisyphus. Always jostling, actors and audiences forever return, knowing they will identify to no end and hoping they will be emulated against all odds—just like Oprah.

As he was being filmed over and over under his father's tree, a tree bordered by his mother's ashes (he was wise to "make [him]self forget" ["Meet Me in St. Louis" 297]), Franzen may also have envisioned himself and his latest novel being bandied into an even greater would-be plan of Oprah's. Tactically promoted as a novel about illness and homecoming, about healing and redemption, *The Corrections* could very well be packaged into a predictable agenda of post-9/11 therapy. Incongruously espousing providence, Oprah could simply brand and dismiss *The Corrections* as "the great American novel arriving just in time to heal our troubled nation," or something like that. This style of one-dimensional purpose-directed reading epitomizes the Oprah approach to fiction, an anti-novelistic method that "promote[s] [Oprah] herself" (Hall 652) while at the same time overlooking or disallowing "other ways of reading" (Hall 661). An extract from a transcript of Toni Morrison's fourth appearance on the show illustrates how Oprah reduces refinement and range into a take-home recipe. Also disquieting, a contemporary iconoclast could theorize that the television transmission featuring *Paradise* concludes

with the jaded joviality of a cynical autocrat. Effectively disregarding the last remarks of her notable visitor, who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1987 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993, among a host of other literary distinctions, Oprah endorses her own personal celebrity as the standard of literary authority. She does not only inform her viewers about what to read. As a TV icon, Oprah also tells them, as well as her guest in this instance, how to read:

Ms. Morrison: You have to be open to this—yeah, it’s not just black or white, living, dead, up, down, in, out. It’s being open to all these paths and connections and ...(*unintelligible*) between.

Winfrey: And that is paradise!

Ms. Morrison: That is paradise.

Winfrey: And that is paradise. Marvelous. That’s great. Paradise is being open to all the places in between. (in Green 86)

Taking the full installment of this book club show into account, Green summarizes what he sees as “the problem [Oprah’s] medium has in dealing with such intricate [literary] matters”: “Morrison’s speculative comments are translated into a slogan, rather as if the discussion must close with a pithy formula that the viewer might take away from the show, without regard for the preceding difficulties and elaborations” (86). Green finishes with the declaration that the Oprah project eschews “cultural dialogue” in favor of a purported optimism that solicits the personalization of the “textual encounter” (89). In spite of Franzen’s obvious effort to correct his would-be host, and Morrison’s delicate attempts to correct her actual host, Oprah’s gullible therapeutic reading model confuses the distinction between the curative and paying lip service to the

curative. Whether chastising Franzen or abridging Morrison, Oprah shuts down any semblance of productive critique or discourse. Without aspiring to “correct” capitalism or racism or chauvinism or egotism, the “teacherly” and “preacherly” book club (Hall 658-9) makes life simpler and easier, an improvement arguably acquired by way of merely buying into Oprah’s commercial telecasts, both emotionally and monetarily.

Considering Franzen’s most popular work before the publication of *The Corrections*, a long 1996 *Harper’s* essay first titled “Perchance to Dream,” later edited and mordantly renamed “Why Bother?,” the author’s candor with Oprah’s B-roll producer after he was obliged to gesture like a *faux*-Beckettian mime under a tree almost seems like the stuff of an overwrought narrative. Before the orchestrations of the Oprah team, the figure makes public his strong motion against what he sees as “the therapeutic optimism raging in English literature departments,” an indictment that probably includes the debate-free salve of a televised book club (“Why Bother?” 78). In the same essay, he discloses his personal anxiety over what he as a novelist sees as the “hyperkinesis of modern life” (63). According to him, this almost time-lapsed *Zeitgeist* integrates “mass suburbanization,” “at-home entertainment,” “virtual communities,” and “Zoloft” (70-71), all of which compromise the place of traditional “*linear* reading” (63). A champion of the low-tech, the figure also looks back to the technological prints that signal his overt malaise with modernity: “Just as the camera drove a stake through the heart of serious portraiture, television has killed the novel of social reportage” (67). So when this same figure gets a chance truly to engage with popular culture (and, all the better, with the “average” wife or husband, the bachelorette or bachelor “whose life is increasingly structured to avoid the kinds of conflicts on which fiction, preoccupied with manners, has

always thrived” [70]), he accepts in good faith.

Jonathan Franzen, however, soon found himself being drafted into the very “technological consumerism” he satirized (68). After a day of being bullied around a setting that was no longer his, he came to dread the end product of the theatricalized images the TV camera attributed to him personally. Sensing that his engineered image was undergoing a process of “extraction, reduction, and recombination,” as Michael Sorkin might describe these media machinations (393), Franzen realized that he was unexpectedly sponsoring the cultural conditions he aimed to challenge. As an Oprah author or un-ironic citizen-subject, he was recruited to relay a “tight connection between self-realization and pure consumerism,” to appropriate David Harvey’s phrase (*The Urban Experience* 254). Yet when Franzen made these discomfiting concerns public, for the second time as it were, he was met with scorn by the media, by past Oprah authors, and even by some literary critics. Such was the case after he voiced his uneasiness with the Oprah emblem, never mind that a major trope in *The Corrections* details the pervasiveness of the Mid-Pac logo, an abbreviation for the restructured Midland Pacific Railway, a subsidiary of W— Corp, owned by the invisible Wroth brothers, who appear to have actual and imagined vested-interests in everything from pharmaceutical production and distribution, to high tech industries, to university endowments, to prison building, to hallucinogenic drug culture, to the video gaming of children’s literature. This novel-length critique of the unchecked sway of a corporation, a control that can trickle down and out to every strata of culture through a popular logo alone, ought to be word enough to readers that the author might himself distrust the motives behind a corporation’s sponsorship—especially for those readers and critics who prove incapable

of distinguishing the divide between a narrator and his creator.

In “Surfing the Novel,” essayist Joseph Epstein levies what can be seen as one of the more customary attacks upon Franzen following the author’s “run-in with Oprah Winfrey,” a woman Epstein describes as “the nation’s most powerful literary critic” (33). Though he admits that Franzen is a “talented writer” (35), Epstein takes him to task for two principal reasons. First, he looks back at the *Harper’s* article and dismisses it as a “great clown’s baggy pants of an essay, [where] Franzen pulls out every rubber chicken, toy trumpet, and whoopee cushion of literary snobbery of the past forty years” (34). Afterward, Epstein moves through a few of the elements in *The Corrections* that he finds unappealing—the “grotesque family” (34), the “flimsy clothesline” of a plot (35), and “the depth of [Franzen’s] disdain” for his characters (36)—before he settles on what he labels the vital “element that is entirely missing from *The Corrections*: a moral center” (36). Although Epstein begins by charging Franzen with literary snobbery, a cursory look through some of the critic’s own essays, found in *Life Sentences*, *Partial Payments*, and *Plausible Prejudices*, for instance, reveals that he too appears to be a literary elitist. Not even one of the authors who shared the bestseller list with Franzen appears in Epstein’s discursive work. No Robert Ludlum nor Danielle Steele; no Mary Higgins Clark nor John Grisham. Moreover, a perusal of Epstein’s recent book *Snobbery* (2002) indicates the same trend. While Epstein accommodates noteworthy figures from Henry Adams to Philip Ziegler, includes celebrities between Rodney Dangerfield and Andy Warhol, and also mentions Walter Cronkite, Dan Rather, and other media personalities, not once does he refer to a writer of typical bestseller status. To be sure, popular authors manifest a modicum of social discernment as well, whether in their work or in person.

After close inspection, furthermore, Epstein's reading of Franzen closely resembles the undemocratic and perfunctory readings of many post-Oprah Franzen critics. Like reviews by Nicholas Blincoe, Bonnie Greer, and James Wolcott, not to mention the first half of an appraisal by Valerie Sayers, the ex-girlfriend to whom *Strong Motion* remains dedicated, Epstein's estimation of *The Corrections* reads more like a judgment of its author. Like everyone, he wants to correct Franzen. A markedly candid arbitrator, Epstein admits to having "ceased reading *The Corrections*" halfway through, "before [he] knew [he] was going to write about it" (35). This sincere gesture, however, incriminates the judge himself. With his apparently impromptu confession, Epstein sheds more light on his own reading practices than he does on Franzen's actual novel. Paired with the complaint that *The Corrections* lacks a moral center, Epstein's approach to literature begins to convert into a weird variant of the Oprah approach. Outwardly unable to locate a succinct statement that might sum up the message of the text, he quits it. Subsequently, he rereads the novel in its entirety in order to dismiss it in a few words.

Additionally, aside from his proclamations against the *Harper's* essay, which clearly suggest that he has read it, Epstein overlooks how Franzen counteracts Oprah-style therapeutic optimism with what he describes as "tragic realism" ("Why Bother?" 91). Near the end of his well-known essay Franzen writes, "I hope it's clear that by 'tragic' I mean just about any fiction that raises more questions than it answers: anything in which conflict doesn't resolve into cant. (Indeed, the most reliable indicator of a tragic perspective in a work of fiction is comedy)" (91). Perhaps exposing Oprah's approach to fiction as dictatorial, the serially corrected novelist and essayist continues, "The point of calling serious fiction tragic is to highlight its distance from the rhetoric of optimism that

so pervades our culture. The necessary lie of every successful regime, including the upbeat techno-corporatism under which we now live, is that the regime has made the world a better place” (91). When Epstein attacks *The Corrections* for what it lacks, he really seems to be demonstrating what his understanding of *The Corrections* lacks. *The Corrections* has no moral center because its author decries resolving novelistic conflict by means of a humbug dictum. Franzen, to put it differently, refuses to incorporate markers by which a character’s correctness can be calculated. What *The Corrections* does not lack, but Epstein’s vision of this particular novel does, is an embedded awareness that the tragic can be viewed through a comedic lens, a view that makes ambivalence and difficulty and conflict all the more sophisticated and stirring. Epstein’s overstated disdain for what he highlights as Franzen’s disdain for his characters, blinds the critic from one of the more refined representational constructs of this novel: its mode of narration. Even though *The Corrections* is Jonathan Franzen’s novel, it is not his individual story. The complicated fictional sequence of events belongs to Chip Lambert: Franzen’s narrator.

Difficulty

In an essay from *How to Be Alone* titled “Mr. Difficult,” Franzen scrutinizes the increasingly difficult and angry fiction of William Gaddis as a means to articulate the distinction between what he himself terms the “Status model” and the “Contract model” of how literature relates to its audiences. According to Franzen, the former model designates “great works of art” (239). The latter, by contrast, specifies “a sense of connectedness” (240). Whereas status novels exist “independent” of “enjoy[ment],” contract novels “entertai[n]” as they uphold a “compact between the writer and the

reader” (240). Though this acknowledged discrepancy can be made tenuous or even be seen to disappear altogether from one text to the next and from one reader to another, Franzen clarifies that the status model “invites a discourse of genius and art-historical importance” while the contract model encourages an engagement epitomized by “pleasure and connection” (240). With Gaddis in mind, Franzen insists that the difference between the two proposals emerges most palpably when readers judge a work to be “difficult” (240).

The significance of Gaddis and his evident “status,” nevertheless, is not the major focus of “Mr. Difficult.” Instead, in this discursive piece Franzen sets up subtle indices for the reading of *The Corrections*, a strategy that helps solidify *How to Be Alone* as a defense of and justification for his commonly misinterpreted novel. In the same way that “Why Bother?” problematizes a plain link between his first two novels and his third one, and “Meet Me in St. Louis” complicates the easy association of St. Jude with a suburb in St. Louis, “Mr. Difficult” troubles the simple identification of Franzen with the narrator of *The Corrections*. In other words, with each of these essays Franzen urges readers away from the professed assurances and substantial entrapments of autobiography. *The Corrections* is not motivated by the same theory-minded social critique evident in both *The Twenty-Seventh City* and *Strong Motion*. St. Jude is not definitively set somewhere in or around St. Louis. *The Corrections* is not Franzen’s half fictional, half personal memoir. With or without the publication of *How to Be Alone*, *The Corrections* exists as an autonomous fictional narrative.

“Mr. Difficult” begins with a retrospective look at one of the more delicate difficulties faced by Franzen a short period of time after the publication of his award-

winning novel. As he describes, he received a number of angry letters from perfect strangers, strangers most certainly affronted by the media exposure attendant to the Oprah affair:

For a while last winter, after my third novel came out, I was getting a lot of angry mail from strangers. What upset them was not the novel—a comedy about a family in crisis—but some impolitic remarks I'd made in the press, and I knew that it was a mistake to send more than bland one-sentence notes in reply. But I couldn't help fighting back a little. Taking a page from an old literary hero of mine, William Gaddis, who had long deplored the reading public's confusion of the writer's work and the writer's private self, I suggested that the letter writers look at my fiction rather than listen to distorted news reports about its author. (238)

At first, Franzen does not take these very personal assaults to heart. Still, in contrast to Oprah's inaugural disinvitation policy, he refuses to ignore the women and men behind these confrontational missives. Deflecting his detractors from the smooth-rolling machinery of the media, he encourages them to aim their criticism at *The Corrections* itself. Notwithstanding his self-placement in the media, and the way the media controls this positioning, Franzen indicates that he wants readers to evaluate his work, if nothing else. In this manner, he essentially distances his public self from his published work. Wanting *The Corrections* to be approached independently rather than resentfully, he requests a democratic reading of his novel, a juster appraisal that privileges neither the status model nor the contract model.

A few months after redirecting a number of angry letter writers to a reading of his

novel, Franzen received a second correspondence from “one of the original senders” (238). In her riposte to his recommendation, the woman he identifies as “a Mrs. M— in Maryland” begins taking him to task by including a list of “thirty fancy words and phrases from [his] novel, words like ‘diurnality’ and ‘antipodes,’ phrases like ‘electro-pointillist Santa Claus faces’” (238). The woman’s detailed catalogue, so she doubtlessly calculated, introduces what Franzen calls her “dreadful question”: “Who is it you are writing for? It surely could not be the average person who just enjoys a good read” (239). Though the surprised author mostly discounts her consequent accusation that he is an immoral “elite of New York” and therefore “a pompous snob and a real ass-hole,” he admits to finding himself “paralyzed” in face of the “hostility” accompanying her uncomplicated yet incisive inquiry (239). Addressing the awful query, Franzen then acknowledges that he subscribes to both the status model and the contract model of a reader’s rapport with fiction, before he obliquely answers the Marylander three pages later.

In the same way that Mrs. M— initiates her second personal assault on Franzen with a critique of his coinages, Franzen frames his roundabout response to Mrs. M— as a set-up to his study of Gaddis. Intimating that he disliked the creative processes behind and the overall results of his first two status-oriented novels, Franzen’s indirect reply appears to stage *The Corrections* as a corrective to his early work:

I read *The Recognitions* as a kind of penance, back in the early nineties. During the previous year, while my father, in a different time zone, was losing his mind, I’d written two treatments and four full drafts of an “original” screenplay. In lieu of actual dollar payments, I had the enthusiastic support of a Hollywood agent who, out of pity or negligence,

never mentioned that my story bore a fatal resemblance to *Fun with Dick and Jane*, which I hadn't seen. My story had double and triple crosses and characters who used prosthetic makeup to impersonate other characters. I lived in that state of rage that comes of doing sustained work that you know to be shoddy and dishonest. (242)

As an honest rejoinder to Mrs. M— in Maryland, Franzen insinuates that he enjoyed writing *The Corrections* because it was neither motivated by an elitist agenda nor directed to any select audience. After these biographical specifications and implications, “Mr. Difficult” explicitly considers the developing rage that eventually dominates the life and work of William Gaddis. For Franzen, who titles *The Corrections* “partly in homage to it,” *The Recognitions* confirms a personal faith in literature (248). Though Gaddis’ encyclopedic novel is “quintessentially difficult” (242), it is uniquely gratifying (268). Franzen deems *The Recognitions* rewarding, that is, testing, moving, and memorable, on account of the enormous travail its reading entails. The novels released after Gaddis’ first publication, on the other hand, grow increasingly embittered and difficult and status-minded in Franzen’s estimation. Much to his disappointment, he surmises that these subsequent six texts require more work to “decipher” than they did to “assemble” (267).

In a review of *How to Be Alone* called “Advertisements for Himself,” James Wolcott assesses “Mr. Difficult” as “a prop to measure the progress of Franzen’s own development” (36). As the commentator’s title advises, Wolcott indicts Franzen as a “pious opportunist” whose work reflects an incorrigible self-centeredness: “It’s always about him” (36). With respect to *How To Be Alone* in its entirety, and possibly “Mr. Difficult” specifically, Wolcott’s judgment may be warranted, as far as it goes anyway.

Franzen's essays, always in first-person, always confessional, invariably work toward placing their outspoken author within the culture that he writes about. This practice of self-positioning, however, is standard for *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, and the other American publications to which Franzen contributes. First-person belletristic essays, moreover, offer cultural specificity and situadness. As a defense against charges of universalizing, which is now thought to falsify any position, the "I" functions as a recognition of individual limitations. Like Joseph Epstein, who consistently writes in the first-person singular, Franzen utilizes the "I" as a rhetorical strategy for personal integrity. Naturally checked and balanced by editors and their associates, the personal tone of his nonfictions proves to be less than idiosyncratic. True to the form of most critiques of Franzen, Wolcott's resolve to correct the author of *The Corrections*, if not to correct *The Corrections* as well, distracts his reading of Franzen. Though "Mr. Difficult," as a case in point, is clearly about its writer, it is also about making a distinction between this particular writer and his fictional narrators.

In his answer to Mrs. M—, Franzen establishes a discussion of Gaddis in terms of the rage that previously delineated his own personal life. On the surface, he outlines that his overruling temper was in most part due to his labors on an uninspired film script. He reveals that Gaddis' initial work rescues him from his yearlong mental agitation. Franzen recognizes the relation between phoniness and unhappiness, a relation that informs his differentiation of literature and life. When he finishes "Mr. Difficult" with the testimony that "Something went haywire" with Gaddis, that the man stopped trying to connect with the world after it ignored him, that the man never let go of his anger, that the man's sad life story is the stuff of fiction, Franzen suggests that Gaddis lived his literature, that

Gaddis was his literature (268-9). In making this claim, Franzen indicates that he aspires toward an alternate fate. Dramatizing neither life as clue to fiction nor fiction as clue to life, Franzen proposes that what makes the break between life and the bits and pieces of literature possible is the ability for an author to feel that she appeals to an audience, an audience that in turn feels free, if not in fact compelled, to engage with the work on its own terms. As a reader and a writer, feeling good about a textual encounter, despite its level of difficulty, legitimates the time and effort that an individual can devote to conventional linear reading.

Franzen's appraisal of literary production does not preclude the implementation of biography into fiction. Unmistakably, the events that contour a life likewise shape the literature affiliated with this life. Still, Franzen cautions authors and readers to evaluate *bona fide* facts only in terms of the representational parameters in which they are depicted. Although this counsel may appear self-evident, given that picking up a novel is one and the same as adopting a fictional stance, and that discerning the partially made-up from the wholly made-up tends to be unfeasible for a reader, this has not been the chief response to Franzen's most recent fiction. Nearly every consideration of *The Corrections* is colored by the impressions of an author made popular by the media because of his resistance to being made popular by Oprah. Franzen's edifying advice, however, is self-directed too. As Wolcott reveals, Franzen measures his development as an author against Gaddis' progress. Whereas Gaddis falls apart, Franzen seems to say, he comes together. Self-hype aside, this admission highlights the author's newfangled approach to narrative in terms of *The Corrections*. His third novel contains neither the ironic anger that drives the plot of *The Twenty-Seventh City* nor the obvious anger that forces the action of *Strong*

Motion. Franzen furthermore elects not to incorporate a significant character clearly modeled on himself into *The Corrections*, a self that he describes in the introduction to *How to Be Alone* as “very angry and theory-minded” in the past (“A Word About this Book” 4). Discarding rage and frustrated cultural rebuke, he learns to prefer writing “for the fun and entertainment of it” over writing for the reason that it satisfies his “sense of social responsibility” (4).

With this discovery, Franzen makes the transition from what might be called the realm of creative social critique to the realm of fictional entertainment. This measurement of Franzen’s evolution as an author, though, does not insist nor imply that social and cultural theorists are angry. Notwithstanding the reactions of Mrs. M—, Franzen’s development illustrates that he now aims to delight his readers in lieu of instructing them. Although fiction can be as informative as theory (or more so) and theory can be as entertaining as fiction (or more so), writers and readers have different reasons for investing themselves in each of these enterprises. Much like his creator, character Chip Lambert also comes to this realization in *The Corrections*. Originally characterized by anger, Chip openly resembles his author in a number of ways. Yet in spite of being theory-minded and manifestly difficult, as a fictional figure Chip can be appraised wholly in terms of the narrative in which he features. Akin to his maker but not a mere translation of him, Chip tells his own distinctive story.

Representation

The first chapter of *The Corrections* details Chip’s final months as a tenure-track culture critic at D— College, in small-town Connecticut. Titled “The Failure,” Chip’s

section follows a brief prologue called “St. Jude.” As a framing device, and a telling diversion to Chip’s early career, the novel begins and ends in the suburban setting that Chip’s elected occupation criticizes and corrects. In “St. Jude,” the narrator introduces readers to an old woman named Enid and her ailing husband Alfred. Enid can no longer keep house; even her issues of *House Beautiful* and *Good Housekeeping* are in disorder (6). In an effort to conceal the fact that he can no longer follow full sentences, Al spends most of his time “underground” in the basement (10). Following the epigrammatic suburban opener, Chip’s narrative commences outside New York City at LaGuardia airport, where the cynical son stands “just beyond the security checkpoint” watching the couple he considers “killers” amble very slowly towards him (15). Enid and Alfred are set to depart on an autumn cruise to see the colors of Québec later in the day, as the Nordic Pleasurelines bags they shoulder indicate, and Chip, who until recently deconstructed corporate ads professionally, is there to collect the couple, feed them, and deliver them to the pier.

At this stage of Chip’s life, only his pain and suffering are important to him. His original gesture in the narrative is to grab and pull the wrought-iron rivet in his ear. He does this to buck himself up for the lunchtime visit. Conscious that he must remain composed as he longs to swallow a “hoarded Xanax” (20), Chip’s self-punishment momentarily repels his attention from the other four major pains he seems unable to correct. These established throbbings, readers soon learn, are the result of (i) the loss of his post as an associate professor in “Textual Artifacts,” because of a misdemeanor involving an undergraduate girl that fell “just short of the legally actionable” (17); (ii) the more than twenty-thousand dollars he borrowed from his younger sister, for the purpose

of writing a screenplay beginning with a turgid, academic, six-page opener that not even eighteen months of correction has made readable; (iii) the free articles he writes for the *Warren Street Journal*, an arts monthly that subverts the ideals that his mother praises, illusions she thinks he also supports, since he has not corrected her half mistaken belief that he works for the *Wall Street Journal*; and, (vi) the status of his affair with an undivorced woman whom he has neither seen nor heard from in nearly a week despite his many voice mails and emails.

Chip's want of confidence only heightens his growing catalogue of failures. He understands, for instance, that just as he lacked the verve to resign from his position when he was given the chance, a step which would have made college tenure somewhere else possible, he also lacked the nerve to amend his screenplay when he knew he had to, a move which could have made his present post-submission mind-frame less insufferable. Chip is likewise all too aware that his inability to disabuse his mother of her misconceptions, not to mention his incapacity to inform his girlfriend of his pennilessness, simultaneously corroborates and exacerbates a two-year period clearly defined by his lack of courage. Rather than actually confronting his personal weakness of the will, he takes the less difficult course of disguising it. At the age of thirty-nine, he has a quarter-inch rivet hammered onto his ear. In addition, he takes to wearing leather "like a second skin" (18). Predictably, Chip's midwestern parents comment on his physical modifications not long after the threesome's preliminary hellos.

Chip's introduction recalls the opening of John Updike's 1990 novel *Rabbit at Rest*. The last novel of the Rabbit quartet begins in the waiting area of an airport, where middle-age parents Harry and Janice collect their thirtyish son, his wife, and their two

children. Just after they meet on Boxing Day, Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom notes that his badly dressed son’s earlobe “bears a tiny white earring” (13). Barely controlling his signature irritation, Harry’s frustration swells when he then realizes that Nelson’s recent haircut involves “one of those tails, like a rat’s tail, uncut and hanging down over the boy’s collar” (15). With this beginning, Updike initiates the two adjacent themes that run through his narrative. Like its three precursors, *Rabbit, Run* (1960), *Rabbit Redux* (1971), and *Rabbit is Rich* (1981), *Rabbit at Rest* draws attention to aloneness and independence. Yet for the first time in his thirty-year tenure as a suburban character, Harry winds up living alone, an isolation that foreshadows his death. Throughout the succession of novels, he at one time or another lives with his wife, with a prostitute, with a rich teenage hippie and an ex-con, and with his wife and her mother. In spite of his many movements, however, Harry never remains alone. Furthermore, save for the young father’s short term with the prostitute Ruth in *Rabbit, Run*, Harry keeps the suitably insecure Nelson by his side.

Significantly, in *Rabbit at Rest* the grownup Nelson at last seems capable of living independently, despite several unsteady (to say the least) starts. Following his discharge from a treatment center for drug dependency, Nelson has his own business plans, plans that exclude his father. Similarly, Harry’s wife Janice also desires independence. With little warning, she unexpectedly embarks on a year-round career as a realtor, leaving her inflexible husband to winter by himself in their Fort Myers condo, or so it would seem. Largely unprecedented in the quartet, these extra-Harry stories suggest a generational shift. By including ample narrative on grandma Janice and father-of-two-with-one-on-the-way Nelson, the prolific Updike restructures the character focus of the Rabbit novels,

thereby setting up a credible prolongation of the series. Even following grandpa Harry's death near the end of *Rabbit at Rest*, a renamed "Angstrom" compilation proves conceivable. Intentionally suspect from the start, the original name of the suburban series craves correction, after all. Ever since *Rabbit, Run*, only the narrator consistently calls Harry "Rabbit." Illustrating the ironic nostalgia typical to the genre of suburban fiction, "Rabbit" was Harry's nickname when he was a high school B-league basketball star, six years before the events that begin the earliest "Rabbit" novel.

While Harry gravitates toward his expected final rest in the fourth novel, Updike's third-person narrator drafts a relation between independence and narrative. Akin to his mother, Nelson attains a measure of individuality when his unique narrative warrants supplementary attention and development. Perhaps influenced by Updike, whom he mentions once in *How to Be Alone* (62), and describes as a "reliable thunderhead" of "commercially viable literary fiction," along with American novelists Stone, Roth, Morrison, Smiley, and Oates, in an angry 1996 article ("I'll Be Doing More of Same" 36), Franzen likewise forges a link between autonomy and personality in *The Corrections*. With Chip as protagonist and narrator, albeit a narrator whose identity remains undisclosed until late in the novel, Franzen demonstrates how acts of narratological separation reinforce individual identity.

Although *The Corrections* starts with a focus on the half estranged Enid and Al, the spotlight shifts when Chip enters the narrative. After the taxi ride to his prewar building, the elevator ride to his apartment floor, and the short walk to his door, the family-visit ends abruptly. Chip's girlfriend materializes at his door with the personal belongings that she has just reclaimed from his apartment. In the same way that she

clandestinely left her Lithuanian husband, a dissident-turned-politician named Gitanis, she tries to discard Chip in secret, not least because the final edit of his original screenplay, an ill-masked cinematic *roman à clef* with figures named Bill, Mona, and Hillaire, brings up “breasts” an offensive number of times (26). Julia dodges Chip’s pleas for her to stay and talk by slipping into the elevator. As he fumbles at the lift door, she descends. Without a word to his parents, he follows. Once he reaches the rain-drenched street below, he notices Julia escaping in a cab as a beautiful, well-dressed woman descends from another. The attractive woman happens to be his sister, arriving from Philadelphia in order to lunch with her brother and parents. He informs her that he needs to get to his producer’s office and make some last corrections to his film script. Unable to convince him to stay, Denise advises him to hurry, since “Dad is sick” (32). Chip looks at a cab. A quick decoder, Denise straightaway says, “I can’t give you any more money,” before she rhetorically asks, “Because where does it end?” (32). In answer, Chip turns and stomps away in the downpour, “smiling with rage” (32).

Subsequent to this additional tense encounter, the chapter splices back and forth between his journey to producer Eden Procuero’s office and the back story describing the failures that began at D— College, with short looks at the Lambert lunch occurring in Chip’s absence. We learn that the ex-professor’s offenses at the small campus in Connecticut involved sleeping with, taking club drugs alongside, plagiarizing a paper for, and eventually stalking his former student Melissa. When Chip, who was very lonely that term, first resists the undergraduate’s overt sexual advances, he gives “himself an A for correctness” (51); after all he “co-chaired the committee that drafted the college’s stringent new policy on faculty-student contacts” (37).

Chip's ironic resolve fails after his greatest supporter, the college provost, suffers a stroke and his archenemy, a competing colleague, publishes a book. With his pending tenureship now at risk, he can no longer repress his rising despair and loneliness, a depression intensified by his spontaneous summer trip to Scotland. Consequently, he spends most of the weeklong Thanksgiving holiday in a grungy motel with Melissa before the psychotropic "Mexican A" that she provides runs out and Chip's shame grows unbearable (60-61). Unwilling to deal with his *ressentiment* and conflictedness, she leaves him all alone. When the semester resumes, Chip fails to duplicate her unequivocal actions. He calls her. He follows her. As a result, she makes the entire affair public. The accused professor then refuses to resign, a decision that goes against the lone counsel of the acting provost of the college. After the obligatory college hearing, Chip gets fired.

His unwillingness to resign from his faculty post seems to be based on principle. Chip, however, downplays this position when he pretends that he has no real justifiable reason to discount the advice of his colleagues, not to mention take legal action against his former employer: "He borrowed ten thousand dollars from Denise and hired a lawyer to threaten to sue D— College for wrongful termination of his contract. This was a waste of money, but it felt good" (87). The act of lawful revenge on the part of the indicted calls attention to the maneuvers of two other contemporary fictional figures who are similarly prosecuted by university paralegal systems. In J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, which won the Booker Prize in 1999, the Technical University of Cape Town, South Africa, adjudicates an official complaint against David Lurie, a Romantics professor allegedly guilty of sleeping with a student and doctoring her marks. Without reading his former student's plea, David informs the committee of inquiry that he is guilty. When a colleague

formally inquires “Guilty of what?,” the accused resolutely counters with “Of everything Ms. Isaacs avers, and of keeping false records” (49). Following further statements, the board of review requires David to issue a statement wherein he repents his unlawful actions. The Romantics scholar refuses this public show of contrition on philosophical grounds. The appeal for repentance, he summarizes, is beyond the compass of legality: “I won’t do it. I appeared before an officially constituted tribunal, before a branch of the law. Before that secular tribunal I pleaded guilty, a secular plea. The plea should suffice. Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world” (58).

Referring to Josef von Sternberg’s 1930 film *Der Blaue Engel*, which features a disgraced professor nicknamed “Unrat” (garbage or rubbish), Francine Prose’s recent novel *Blue Angel* features an instructor named Ted Swenson who also faces charges of sexual harassment. But whereas David Lurie objects to his lay tribunal on theoretical grounds, Ted Swenson disapproves of his entire indictment on the bases of veracity. In *Blue Angel*, student-accuser Angela cunningly frames the writer-in-residence. Though the plaintiff and the defendant did have proscribed yet consensual contact, the gifted undergraduate novelist reformulates the purported facts of the certified proceedings for the purpose of marketing her forthcoming novel, which obsessively integrates tailored aspects from both Ted’s personal life and his lone novel. An exasperated objector, Ted crudely and unwisely attests, “I didn’t make this girl sleep with me in exchange for pimping her novel” (245). For obvious reasons, however, Ted’s counterclaims are legally indefensible. In spite of any details that might support his acquittal, the beginning of Prose’s narrative establishes that Ted will be guilty as charged. In the second chapter of *Blue Angel*, faculty and staff of Euston College, isolated an hour away from Montpelier,

Vermont, in the “Northeast Kingdom” (13), attend a compulsory meeting on sexual harassment policy. As host, the dean’s “Sermon” accentuates “the current zeitgeist” of Puritan “warfare” indicative of latter-day “witch-hunt[ing]” on American campuses (21-3).

As with Chip and David, Ted’s inadequate consolation results from the fact that his bold contrariety will play up the theatricality affiliated to his unjust hearing. While Chip hires an attorney for the sole purpose of playing a phony legal game, neither David nor Ted considers legal representation because neither wants to promote participation in a pseudo-courtroom drama. While at the mandatory meeting, for instance, Ted meditates upon the fact that given Euston’s “alarmingly tiny endowment,” the college cannot risk litigation (22). In these campus scandal novels, each “guilty” professor recognizes his involvement in an un-winnable open and shut case. In all three instances, what is really laid bare is the review board’s plan to make a distinction between the institution and the accused. Orchestrating its own blamelessness, each university engineers its own defense against indemnification. Like some twisted Athenian democracy, the academics who sit in judgment of their colleagues merely pretend to gesture towards the just implementation of legality. Rather than impartially review the positions of their respective defendants, intramural tribunal boards avoid the potential ramifications of justice and legality.

Faculty-student contact hearings are not staged in courts of law. The indicted party therefore receives neither the assurance of due process nor the guarantee of Miranda rights, both of which are constitutional liberties mandated by US law. Whether within America or not, other issues complicate the manufactured minimalism of these self-styled trials. David Lurie, for one, reveals a discordance between sexual mores and natural

inclinations when he mentions “intimacy across the generations” (*Disgrace* 52).

Cogitating the inapplicability of clear culpability in milieus characterized by inequities of power, Ted Swenson contemplates “desire” and “Mutual seduction” (*Blue Angel* 245).

Correlating sexual desire, authority, and transgression, Chip finds false relief in the fact that “There’s a code” of faculty-student conduct in the first place (*The Corrections* 51). In an essay that examines particular American academic novels published or planned in the Clinton-era, Jesse Kavadlo investigates what he poetically configures as the “parasitic relationship that exposes the carnal heart of darkness beating beneath supposedly cerebral pursuits” (11). In his discursive piece, Kavadlo elaborates on how each fictional representation of a campus scandal “reiterates the boilerplate of sexual conduct codes that demonstrates how even consensual relationships betray imbalances of power, authority, age, and frequently, gender” (15).

Kavadlo continues by identifying that for the indicted fictional figures in Prose’s *Blue Angel*, Franzen’s *The Corrections*, Edward Allen’s *Mustang Sally*, and Philip Roth’s *The Dying Animal* (all of whom are sympathetic men teaching in English departments typically located in the New England area) “academic freedom contradicts, rather than corresponds with, the terror and mortification vital to eroticism; they find, and exploit, one of the only ways in which a tenured professor may be fired. And it should be clear that these formulations of power, eroticism, and taboo apply to Bill Clinton, who apparently discovered one of the only ways a sitting President could be impeached” (16). As the literary theorist intimates, these novelistic depictions of the accrued tensions between Puritanism and predation, prudery and power, and publicness and privacy (all of which are largely unique to the decade or so between the Cold War and the War on

Terror) “provide psychological insight into both academic and political crises in ways that nonfiction has not, and perhaps can not [sic]. They attempt to include yet transcend their immediate subject matter to provide the ambiguous character and narrative determinations and ambivalent morality that has eluded partisan politics and mainstream journalism” (13).

Notwithstanding his focus on American fiction, a focus that could include Joyce Carol Oates’s *Nemesis* as a counterpoint, given that in Oates’s 1990 novel a male composer-in-residence, whom the review board eventually acquits, allegedly rapes a male music student, Kavadlo’s insights bear a strong resemblance to those of David in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*. Though living and working in South Africa, David exposes his entrenchment in an academic climate of ambivalent morality. As a male professor, he instantly recognizes his *de facto* guilt, the guilt that Coetzee problematizes by characterizing the student-victim as at once disinclined towards and disposed to her recurring physical engagements with the teacher-perpetrator. The illicit *liaison*, however undefined, never precludes Melanie’s free agency. Always-already liable on account of his profession, David has no reason to verify the plaintiff’s testimony. Mere allegation, in other words, entails criminality. From the beginning of the scheduled proceedings, David therefore plainly acknowledges the affair with his student Melanie, an affair that he refuses to mitigate by means of a plea proclaiming a simulated “spirit of repentance” (58).

Though a mock trial may offer illusions about justly delineating the complexity and the correctness of an entire affair, David makes plain that a review board cannot in the same false spirit determine and thereby reduce the suitability of the putative remorse he ought to feel at the end of the affair. As the Romantics scholar asserts, “Repentance

belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse” (58). This extra-legal discourse belongs to the universe of fiction. Whereas the numerous formalities of the quasi-courtroom and the actual courtroom are put in place to ensure that the legal process paints a clear picture of reality, novelists are free to represent “reality” in all of its ambiguity, complexity, and even indecipherability.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, David, Ted, and Chip turn to writing fiction once they are dismissed from their academic positions. After a “few years” of “playing with the idea of a work on Byron” (4), David finally approaches his opera to be titled *Byron in Italy* in earnest. Eventually, he abandons the project because of his lack of “musical resources” (214). At the conclusion of *Blue Angel*, Ted finds relief in the fact that he no longer has to teach. This reprieve hints that the once-published novelist will return to writing his unoriginal *The Black and the Black* following a two-year hiatus. Irrespective of this respite, Ted’s future success looks doubtful. He has the makings of a one-novel man. Comparatively, Chip works on his Lewinsky-inspired film-script after his dismissal. This equally dubious writing project plays up what Kavaddo calls the “tragic irreducibility” fundamental to the predictable plots of academic novels (18), as well as the sacrifices to privacy that accompany any position of authority open to the scrutiny of the public.

Additionally, Chip’s commitment to his movie script emphasizes the rudimentary connection between reprisal and legality. When Chip looks back, he admits that he conceived his screenplay as a “form” of “revenge” “that would expose the narcissism and treachery of Melissa Paquette and the hypocrisy of his colleagues; he wanted the people that hurt him to see the movie, recognize themselves, and suffer” (87). In correspondence

to other narratives about “the sexual misadventures” of morally ambiguous professors, a group of academic novels that also includes Roth’s *The Human Stain* (2003), which features the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal as both subtext and context, Chip’s failed writing project restricts him from the logic of “redemptive possibility” (Kavadlo 18). Well, at least in the Oprah sense of novelistic salvation, anyway. Her corrective reading likely concludes that Chip could never write effectively. For Oprah and the Oprah reading team, Chip might emblemize the stupid smart-person, the delinquent male professor perfectly suited to spectacular consumption.

Kavadlo and every other published “critic” of *The Corrections* likewise overlook Chip’s key function in Franzen’s novel. Because Kavadlo tailors *The Corrections* to fit into his attentive reading of recent campus fiction, he intentionally disregards Chip’s ongoing presence in the work. Purposely finishing prematurely, his analysis of *The Corrections* ends with an annotation of what happens “after the academic section” (18). In his succinct estimation, Chip merely “finds his life deteriorating further, from petty shoplifting to international monetary fraud” (18). Kavadlo therefore deduces that Chip cannot correct the despondent conditions that define him in “The Failure.” In order to appear at Eden’s office in timely fashion, Chip certainly steals petty cash from the tip jar of a waitress. Shortly following his arrival, Chip definitely consents to defraud stupid American investors via an Internet scam based in Lithuania. Before the chapter closes, furthermore, Chip boards a plane headed for Vilnius with his new colleague-in-crime, Gitanis Misevičius, the free-party politician he has been cuckolding, in theory at least, for almost two years. This second trip to an airport in the space of a less than a day, however, does not signal the figure of failure’s departure from the narrative. Conversely, Chip’s

primary role in Franzen's third novel commences where the academic section concludes.

At once marking and missing Chip's intricate responsibility in *The Corrections*, critics who comment on the method of narration in the novel customarily exhibit clear frustration. Robert L. McLaughlin, for example, disapproves of the uneven "narrative voice" throughout the fiction: "the narrative voice continually shifts—and asks its readers to shift along with it—its attitude toward the social world [that] it's representing and its attitude toward the process of representing that world. This could be interesting if one had the impression it was being done intentionally, but here it seems the result of an author in flux, unsure of how he relates to the world and his art form" (63). Along the same lines, Brian Phillips questions the effectiveness of narratorial awareness in *The Corrections*. In his essay on the representation and development of character in contemporary fiction, he integrates part of a scene in which Enid acquires the hallucinogenic Aslan Cruiser (a.k.a. Mexican A) from a quack doctor peddling illicit pharmaceuticals aboard the Québec-bound cruiseliner. Phillips elaborates on this doctor-patient transaction as a case in point for unintentional and confusing narration. He wonders, "Whose thoughts are these? They are certainly not Enid's. When Franzen gives us a look at her consciousness, we see her sniffing at the doctor for mistaking her name: 'Her name was Enid. E-NI-D' [sic]. This is not someone who would consider, in the given language, 'the givens of the self,' or 'a newly scored drug.'" (641). Phillips goes on to say that "the confusion is complicated by the fact that another character in the book, Enid's son Chip, does think in terms of scoring drugs and the givens of the self, so that one has the bizarre and surely unintended sense that Chip is narrating this passage. In reality, of course, the irruption is Franzen's own, and there is no mediating narratorial consciousness" (641).

In their respective analyses of narration, both McLaughlin and Phillips talk about the notion of intention, whether in the form of a lack of intention or in the shape of a sense of un-intention. Tellingly, each scholar also alludes to Chip, albeit to different degrees. McLaughlin appears to reference the former cultural critic when he bemoans the flux and uncertainty of the voice behind Franzen's narrative. After all, despite Chip's banal assertion that "the structure of the entire culture is flawed" (*The Corrections* 31), "he is just as messed up," as Peter Filkins observes (231). Time and again in his chapter "The Failure," Chip illustrates his trademark instability and indecision. Following his last full semester of lecturing, for one, the diehard Foucaultian doubts "even the most abstract utility [of] his criticism" (45). Vacillating over a pair of costly avocados at a trendy market, Chip simply cannot "pull the trigger" (93). Chip's hesitant yet pervasive influence, an adroit control extending the length of *The Corrections*, appears to be the voice that so aggravates McLaughlin, even if the critic fails to distinguish this narratorial tactic. Phillips, by contrast, recognizes Chip's frequent novelistic incursions. Though Phillips second-guesses his own impressions, he realizes that Chip narrates certain passages of the novel. With this detection, he approaches an understanding of Chip's sophisticated part in *The Corrections*.

An aspiring screenwriter, Chip Lambert does not merely invade and momentarily take over the narration of the novel. While en route to yet another airport, only on this occasion in hopes of returning to Christmas in suburban St. Jude for the first time in nearly a decade, he finally reveals that he narrates *The Corrections*. Exerting his own justice, an act of justice he initially envisages as "revenge" in the "form" of an imminent "movie" designed in order to oblige his treacherous and hypocritical tormentors to

“suffer” (87), he illustrates how justice likewise necessarily concerns itself with the correction of victims. Not only about the trial, sentencing, surveillance, and correction of the criminal, just compensation likewise involves the reparation of the victim, a recompense that Chip discovers in the telling of his narrative, a unique narrative that redeploys his awareness from his perpetrators to himself. This shift in focus elucidates that individual victims and criminals alike have their own personal reproofs and claims and judgments, all of which can contribute to the ongoing development of justice—an evolving process always moving towards restitution rather than retaliation.

Chapter Two

Surveillance and Success in the Suburbs

Walls

Inspected as a whole, Franzen's fiction advances from the categorical map (the increased divisiveness of St. Louis), through the erased map (the crumbled Boston area atop its seismological survey), to the literally unmapped (the fictional St. Jude). Formerly a Midwesterner, the author incorporates several actual locations in *The Corrections*. The plot of Franzen's third novel progresses through known or mapped places while advancing toward the Christmas holiday in St. Jude, the suburb situated somewhere in the vast Midwest where *The Corrections* begins. Setting up the purported placelessness of St. Jude, Franzen includes a focus on foreign spaces in *The Corrections*, a move that adds the world outside of the US to his depictions of American cities and their peripheral communities. In contradistinction to the recognized cities that Franzen normally represents in his work, "St. Jude" could be almost anywhere. The "Midwest" designation accentuates this anyplaceness ironically. Typed as paragons of similarity, America's Heartlanders are routinely perceived as hardworking, honest, devoted, and, of course, bored and boring. Franzen thereby intimates that in terms of the limits of the suburbs, the home state, never mind the home city, may be of little consequence. Just as "individual" houses in these bedroom communities lack distinction, so too do "singular" suburbs lack differentiation.

In her book *White Diaspora*, Catherine Jurca examines the unsettling

repercussions of the suburban phenomenon. Underscoring what she calls “the unprecedented homogeneity associated with the paths of suburbanization since World War II,” Jurca quotes Richard Rodriguez for the purpose of translating the innocent inquiry “Where am I?” (13). Appropriating Rodriguez, she wonders, “How to tell if one is in suburban Atlanta or Denver or Houston?” (13). Before she poses this clearly discomfiting question, the urban theorist appraises the escalating mass-production of houses and neighborhoods, of families and lifestyles, as a development “associated with homelessness” (12). In order to clarify her introductory assertion, Jurca relates the impression of homelessness to a feeling of unoriginality, arguing that the “association comes through the undesirable multiplication of such houses and furnishings, interiors and exteriors, that look exactly alike” (12). Discussing the postwar “expansion” or “explosion” of suburbia in similar ways, Robert Beuka contends that the “proliferating sense of placelessness and in turn the perceived homogenization of American life . . . immeasurably alter[s] the ways Americans think about place and their individual and collective relationships to it” (2).

Mike Davis, however, reveals a quantifiable consequence of this alteration in a certain segment of the American population. While elaborating on the rising number of insular “residential enclave[s] or restricted suburb[s]” in the US, he cites a documented example of how the “white middle-class imagination,” a suburban imagination usually “absent from any first-hand knowledge of inner-city conditions,” amplifies alleged “threat through a demonological lens” (224). Intimating a correspondence between suburban living, broad ignorance, media embellishment, inculcated paranoia, security mobilization, and social control, Davis confirms, “Surveys show that Milwaukee suburbanites are just

as worried about violent crime as inner-city Washingtonians, despite a twenty-fold difference in relative levels of mayhem” (224-5).

Throughout his fiction, Franzen concerns himself with the representation of these modern tensions and anxieties between individuality and place. In *The Twenty-Seventh City*, for instance, the Probsts lose their Webster Groves suburban home to fire, which is an instantiation of Martin’s loss of cachet as a real-estate developer, his unproductive political maneuverings, and multiple personal failures. In *Strong Motion*, Melanie Holland inherits a suburban estate outside Ipswich, near Boston. This legal acquisition acts as the touchstone that actualizes the breakup of her marriage, while likewise eradicating the near-lifelong estrangement of the two Holland children, at least momentarily. With all of their losses and mergers, properties and politics, departures and intersections, separations and reconnections, these narratives are tied to specific places on the edges of particular cities. Fixated on unequivocal suburban settings, Franzen propels his first two novels in the direction of tricky delineations of real estate, capitalism, politics, and individualism. As a critic of contemporary culture who stages his pre-millennial fictional works within presumably safe, secure, and banal middle-class communities, Franzen implicates the suburbs in the systems of justice that classify urban centers. Neither as zones of sentimentality, nor as precincts of traditional family values, his suburban milieus are supplied with the inner-city difficulties and predicaments that they were originally designed to correct. Almost as cities-in-small, these spaces are replete with crime, accusation, retaliation, reproach, physical danger, personal surveillance, and uncommitted compromise, none of which credibly brings his families members any closer to candor and justice.

In his first two novels, Franzen adjudges the suburbs as finally incorrigible. Like the majority of his contemporaries and predecessors, in the fields of both urban theory and novelistic depiction, Franzen finds little to commemorate or leave uncorrected from these particular yet placeless environments. Nevertheless, he departs from this general assessment when he modifies his previous spotlight on precise suburban sites by integrating a mythic, unspecific place into *The Corrections*. Even in its literary beginnings, the Lambert home is given no real, precise, findable setting. “Chez Lambert,” a short story published in 1996, and a draft of the prologue to *The Corrections*, opens with “St. Jude: that prosperous midwestern gerontocracy, that patron saint of the really desperate” (29). Actually the patron saint of lost causes, St. Jude the suburb is nearly anonymous. Its inhabitants define it, not its location. By observably parodying the resemblance of all St. Judeans, a semblance that normalizes their so-called uniform wealth, age, and mental health, Franzen problematizes the portrayal of this place.

Most places, if not all of them, Franzen’s understated amendment to suburban representation seems to advocate, cannot help but be home to some degree of diversity. Despite the poignant findings, apt projections, and valid fears of urban theorists (the critical voices of a fashionable interdisciplinary field moving more and more towards suburban theory, as works by Soja [1989], Harvey [1990], Marshall [2001], and Spigel [2001], among many others, illustrate to varying degrees), where one lives does not necessarily shape how one lives or how one wishes to live. As Chip Lambert ascertains over the course of his visit to Midwestern St. Jude, a temporary homecoming effectively preceded or introduced by his twenty-year critique of mass culture, as well as his two months of felony and leisure in the capital of Lithuania, the suburban neighborhoods and

communities of the US need not be understood as irredeemable hubs of placelessness, supervision, conformity, and fear. Like the urban centers that these suburban peripheries have been replacing all through the American Century, these still-developing spaces can be evaluated as distinctive, vibrant, and cosmopolitan.

After a half season of lucrative wire fraud for a sham corporation based in so-called “Free-Market Vilnius” (438), a job that ensures “the more patently satirical the promises, the lustier the influx of American capital” (439), and a life that includes a twice weekly “therapeutic (trans)act(ion) on the massage mat” at Club Metropol (441), Chip must flee the Lithuanian capital due to sudden civil unrest. Mere days before the Lambert family’s “One Last Christmas,” as the novel’s final chapter title forebodes, Chip awakes to the sounds of a noisy crowd. The growing group gathers just outside the “U.S.-embassy-quality fence” surrounding the ex-Soviet stronghold that the expatriate shares with Gitanis and a handful of bodyguards (440). Chip promptly learns that because of some well-timed political hatemongering the general population of Lithuania holds Gitanis fully answerable for the country’s current wireless “communication silence of nineteenth-century proportions” (451). The American soon discovers that all of the bodyguards, save Gitanis’ two cousins Aidaris and Jonas, recently absconded.

Exacerbating their delicate state of affairs, the four fenced-in men only have one means of escape, the Ford Stomper, regrettably a clear symbol of Gitanis’ unfair affluence. The former official advises his partner and friend to leave the Baltics without delay. After little hesitation, Chip prepares his lone travel bag. The two men agree to reunite one day. Equipped to return home, Chip climbs into the seat alongside Jonas, the sentry at the helm of the SUV. Without incident, Jonas delivers Chip to the small,

understandably busy airport. Chip gets in line. Impatient, he changes queues. Using his pack to secure his place, he telephones his mother with a credit card on a landline. He tells her he will be in St. Jude for Christmas. Elated, Enid replies, “Oh, wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful! (458), an enthusiastic reaction that recalls the final sardonic words of John Cheever’s single suburban novel: “wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful” (*Bullet Park* 245). Following his phone call, Chip returns to his lineup. A tank then rolls onto the airport runway. As expected, incoming and outgoing flights are cancelled. Dramatically, the lights go out.

After hearing about the airport’s closure over the radio, Gitanis, Aidaris, and Jonas, who were halfway to safety in Ignalina, near the Belarus border, return to Vilnius determined to “rescue the pathetic American” (533). Jonas navigates the Stomper on back-roads toward Poland. As they near the frontier, Gitanis calls the disorder and posturing and calamity in his country “A tragedy rewritten as a farce” (534). Seemingly on cue, they pass a jeep fleet headed the opposite way. The convoy turns around. Jonas speeds up. Mishandling an elbow curve on the uneven road, he loses control. The SUV “trie[s] out several versions of the vertical” and crashes (534). Though unhurt, the four escapees are stripped of cigarettes, greenbacks, electronics, and American leather at machinegun-point. Mission accomplished, the masked muggers, who are sporting “police” uniforms, abandon the scene (536). Aidaris observes, “*Truck fucked up*” (536). Chip openly blames himself for his friends’ losses. Shrugging, Gitanis quickly attempts to assuage the American: “We might have got shot on the road to Ignalina. Maybe you saved our life” (536). Smiling, Aidaris repeats, “Truck fucked up” (536). Chip decides to hike the fifteen kilometers to the checkpoint by himself, thereby enabling the amicable trio to

make their way home without further delay. Alone, he walks away at ease, partly because a sweater, jeans, and sneakers have replaced his neck-to-toe leather. Equally comforting, he still holds his un-stolen passport and an unfound two thousand dollars. Hours later, he recollects Gitanis' curious appraisal of the chaotic climate in Lithuania: "[a] *tragedy rewritten as a farce*" (537). A flash of insight in the predawn dark, Chip applies this reading to his film script. He suddenly realizes how to correct the multiple scenes he knows *memoria ad verba*. Almost running to the barely visible border-hamlet ahead, a hamlet that designates the safe proximity of the Warsaw airport, he reiterates aloud "Make it *ridiculous*. Make it *ridiculous*" (538).

Separated by one hundred pages, the Chip-centered scene occurs over two singular episodes in *The Corrections*. The running sequence of events and details therefore interrupts two different chapters in the novel. Chip's great escape not only disrupts the section devoted to Denise Lambert, "The Generator," but also suspends the section devoted to the Lambert family, "One Last Christmas." In the same way as Chip's personal voice often takes over the narrative, his individual story at times takes over the narrative. Notwithstanding his plain placement outside of the mainly discrete stories of distinctive Lamberts, Chip makes regular inroads into these stories, narratological inroads that surpass his infrequent calls to Enid and his irregular emails to Denise. These narrative interventions are neither purely invasive nor merely unintentional. As Chip's breakthrough revelation on the road to the protective lights of Poland illuminates, just as the screenplay about Bill and Mona transforms the story of Chip and Melissa, so too does *The Corrections* modify Chip's initial screenplay. When Chip grasps that his "tragic" hero is a "comic fool" (537), he reveals his own role within *The Corrections*. With *The*

Corrections as a comical or farcical translation of his affair with his former student, academic-*cum*-author Chip counterbalances his story of failure with other concurrent narratives of failure, all of which are fictional adaptations of his theoretical interests.

Demonstrably, Chip's iterations of the terms "tragic," "comic," and "ridiculous" recall the sketch of tragic realism outlined by Franzen in his *Harper's* essay, a piece that undercuts present-day Western-world myths of therapeutic and corporate optimism. As Franzen forewarns his readers, and Chip reminds them, the comic and the ridiculous provide a means of articulating the difficulties underneath the alleged ease of current pharmaceutical cures and technological escapes. In terms of representation, comedy and ridicule likewise illustrate the difficulties inherent in any critique of contemporary American life. Making reference to David Foster Wallace's "E Pluribus Unum," which discursively examines the climate of irony in postmodern USA, McLaughlin emphasizes that "In a culture of irony and ridicule no assertion goes unmocked, and if no assertion can be sincerely uttered and heard, nothing positive can be built" (65). McLaughlin goes on to reword Wallace when he dubs this strained and unproductive modern-day atmosphere as "essentially conservative," for the reason that it "negate[s] the possibility of change at the same time as it despairs of the status quo" (65).

McLaughlin then examines recent appraisals of the modern social world with a half covert allusion to both the drug and play themes in Foster's *Infinite Jest* and the drug and travel themes in Franzen's *The Corrections*. The literary critic finishes his article by stressing "the role language plays in constructing" and mediating these recent novels: "Post-postmodernism seeks not to reify the cynicism, the disconnect, the atomized privacy of our society nor to escape or mask it (as much as art, serious and pop, does),

but, by engaging the language-based nature of its operations, to make us newly aware of the reality that has been made for us and to remind us—because we live in a culture where we're encouraged to forget—that other realities are possible" (67). Restrictive clauses and awkward syntax aside, McLaughlin once again touches upon yet fails to grasp the narrative voice that Franzen utilizes in *The Corrections*. Ever the instructor (he teaches primary school as the novel ends), Chip makes his own reality available to us in *The Corrections*. In doing so, narrator Chip reminds his readers continually to revise and to correct their estimations of the characters in the novel in the same way that he himself constantly revises and corrects his evaluations of the characters in his screenplay (he continues revising it as the novel ends). In this manner, Chip highlights a brand of the comedic that does not simply dismiss, and a brand of the ridiculous that does not solely disdain. Just as his D— College students second-guess his critical analysis of the corporate advertisement campaign "You Go, Girl" (39), a reader can second-guess or complicate the comedic aspects and the tragic value of his fictional depiction of the Lamberts. Inviting others to join him, but not necessarily to concur with him, Chip enables readers to engage democratically and correctively with an evolving narrative about late-twentieth-century American culture.

Poignantly, the Lithuanian scene wherein Chip finally experiences his revelation, a revelation prompting him to reformulate his script, a reformulation indicating a corresponding reappraisal of the disjointed stories of his American family members, a reappraisal that undoubtedly required his exit from the US, harkens back to his original departure from *The Corrections*. As a matter of fact, Chip's journey from the walled garrison in Vilnius, Lithuania, to the "unfenced world" of St. Jude, USA (540),

unmistakably refashions his earlier getaway from the main setting of the narrative. Sitting on a plane on the other side of US customs, Chip closed “The Failure” with the line “Different kind of prison” (135). Shamefaced, he utters the half pitiable phrase in reply to Gitanis, who has just labeled him a “pathetic American” on account of his single, self-administered cigarette burn (135). At the end of Chip’s academic chapter, this topic of conversation arises after Gitanis explains that Julia left him because she was sick of his cigarette burns, burns he acquired as a dissident under torture in a Red Army barracks in 1990, the same quarters he and Chip eventually share in newly sovereign Lithuania. The Julia topic, in turn, arises because Gitanis wants to clear the undercurrent of tension between himself and his new coworker while they are in still in the Americas. He has on the handy laptop before him, surveillance data from the bedroom of the New York apartment he still owns. Secured on his lap are digital images from the bedroom his wife often shared with someone other than himself. Remembering the “strangely complicated smoke detector” above Julia’s bed, Chip has reason enough, inexpressible reason enough, not to want Gitanis to view these shots contemptuously styled as maybe “interesting,” maybe “hot” (134).

Bitter, awkward, funny, and forgiving at the same time, the chapter that concludes somewhere over the North Atlantic introduces the narrative technique employed throughout the four remaining mostly Chip-exclusive sections of *The Corrections*. When Gitanis confronts Chip about the extra-marital affair with Julia in sideways fashion, the scene inverts the weird pleasure Chip takes from his prior performance of this adulterous relationship. Earlier in “The Failure,” Chip admits that he adores Julia’s status as an undivorced woman, a status he unreservedly publicizes. An illustration of complication

and incongruence, the ex-professor reveals how the marital standing he embellishes advertises his modern tolerance while confirming his traditional prejudices:

Down at the offices of the *Warren Street Journal*, where he sometimes felt insufficiently transgressive, as if his innermost self were still a nice midwestern boy, he took pleasure in alluding to the European statesman he was ‘cuckolding.’ In his doctoral thesis (“Doubtful It Stood: Anxieties of the Phallus in Tudor Drama”) he’d written extensively about cuckolds, and under the cloak of his reproofing modern scholarship he’d been excited by the idea of marriage as a property right, of adultery as theft. (90)

These manifold transitions from the theoretical to the actual include interrelated transfers and exchanges of performance, power, and visibility. At once doing and pretending, Chip’s tangible excitement contradicts his notional detachment. A victimizer and a victim, Chip “steals” as Gitanis spies on him. Up-to-date and old-fashioned, Chip authorizes the affairs he considers criminal.

In “The Failure,” Chip essentially foregrounds the personal incentives behind, as well as the theoretical motivations within, his PhD dissertation by way of his focus on the aftermath of his disastrous *liaison* with a former student. The repercussions of these unsanctioned relations incorporate the triangulation that occurs between Julia, Gitanis, and himself. After all, the first chapter of the novel begins with Julia leaving Chip, and ends with Chip leaving with Gitanis. Moreover, in the same way that Chip appears to reconfigure his understanding of his doctoral thesis in light of his actual (or real) situation with a woman tellingly named Julia Vrais, Chip translates all of his activities with Melissa Paquette, activities that include instructing her, dropping hallucinogens with her,

sleeping with her, and drafting a bitter screenplay about her, to the proceeding sections of *The Corrections*.

The exclusive variant to this narratorial technique concerns the article "Let Us Now Praise Scuzzy Motels," which Chip writes for the *Warren Street Journal* (17). By title alone, this piece makes reference to the rundown place with the obese clerk where his short-term affair with Melissa ripens and expires, namely, the "Comfort Inn that had lost its franchise and now called itself the Comfort Valley Lodge" (56). Nevertheless, "Let Us Now Praise Scuzzy Motels" likewise addresses the budget motels where Alfred sleeps on his business trips two generations earlier. As disclosed in a back story of the chapter "At Sea," which relates events surrounding Enid and Al, the regimented Schopenhauerian patriarch aptly displaces his clear sexual frustration into barely restrained rage when he habitually hears women "ululating" and couples "osculating" through the thin walls of his inexpensive rooms (246-7). Beyond this multileveled example, however, Chip articulates the immodest baggage of his own proscribed relationships *vis-à-vis* the diverse stories of his family members. As the narrator, he sets up these assorted yet connected storylines not so much as a persuasive case for the ordinariness of some of his own actions, but rather as a sympathetic critique of some of the commonplaces in American culture.

Utilizing a narrative intervention that ratifies the banality of his Melissa affair by downplaying its severity, Chip's other *Warren Street Journal* contribution, simply titled "Creative Adultery" (17), prefigures the section of *The Corrections* devoted to Denise. In "The Generator," Chip's sister has a series of affairs, affairs that can be labeled as increasingly exceptional or incomparable. Over the course of her sexual development, in

other words, her adulteries become progressively more creative. From the start of her sexual life, Denise sleeps exclusively with married men, the first of whom is a Vietnam veteran employed by her father's subordinate's subordinate. Following her early withdrawal from college, the young woman marries her workplace mentor, a short, middle-aged French-speaking chef from Montréal. She then leaves him for a woman with whom she argues and fights nonstop. Not long after this unhealthy romantic rapport predictably concludes, a nouveau-riche entrepreneur retains her, with an inflated salary, to run the kitchen of an ambitious new restaurant to be situated in the tower of a decommissioned power plant. The chic eatery is called The Generator. Succeeding one year of concentrated preparation, which includes two months of paid food and wine reconnoitering in Europe, a near affair with her cool boss Brian, and a nascent affair with his un-hip wife Robin, Denise creates a menu with "twenty winners on it" (413). The delectable "three-way conversation between Paris and Bologna and Vienna" generates fame for both the unique restaurant and its young chef (413). While The Generator, as the *Philadelphia Inquirer* describes it, "single-handedly" puts Philadelphia "on the map of cool" (415), Denise makes the front page of *The New York Times*, among other stamps of gastronomical repute (422).

Her personal stardom, nonetheless, is short-lived. Subsequent to a wordless breakup with Robin, whom she truly loves, Denise sleeps with Brian, whom she purely likes. The next day, Brian discovers her double duplicity, as it were. Before he fairly judges the drives and upshots of these three deceptions in an effort to understand them, if not somehow to correct them, he holds the principal generator of his restaurant's notoriety entirely responsible. Consequently, he fires head chef Denise. Like Chip before her,

Denise gets implicated in a succession of events that lead to her discharge from a successful occupation. Instead of addressing or correcting an assortment of questionable motivations and actions, however, both of these dismissals perpetuate a string of unjust recriminations and conclusions. Just as Chip's expulsion from D— College fails to address sexual indiscretion on the college campus, Denise's firing from The Generator fails to correct the problematical characteristics of Robin and Brian's marriage.

The multiple senses of generator in "The Generator" correspond to the many meanings of correction in *The Corrections*. In the same way as *The Corrections* presents a picture of America, complete with an ironic manipulation of unfair foreign investment, "The Generator" presents a picture of the Northeastern US, and Philadelphia in particular. A cultural critic, Chip undeniably appreciates the historical-contextual resonance of The City of Brotherly Love. As a case in point, Chip proves to be as keen on Foucault's theses on power and prison as his young father was on Schopenhauer's ethics of will and pessimism. When Chip trades all of his texts at the Strand in order scarcely to fund his bourgeois relationship with Julia, his Foucault books are among the last that he exchanges (92-3). Discernibly, Chip introduces and sustains an allusion to the ties between Philadelphia, prison, and Foucault, not to mention Schopenhauer, with a skillful narrative maneuver unique to the section he reserves for his brother, Gary.

Rooms

In distinction to the other four subsections leading to the family reunion in "One Last Christmas," the chapter titled "The More He Thought About It, The Angrier He Got" integrates a lengthy sequence wherein the dissimilar narratives of two independent

Lambert members intersect. In the midst of Gary's suburban segment, he and Denise meet in Central Philadelphia for the purpose of attending the promotional proceedings of the Axon Corporation, a biotech company reportedly on the way to correcting progressive brain and nervous system degenerations like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Al Lambert suffers from both of these illnesses. The septuagenarian likewise suffers from clinical depression. Albeit, in keeping with its comprehensive agenda and title, the Axon Corporation alleges that the Corecktall Process will prompt the auto-correction of clinical depression as well. In another observable coincidence, it turns out that Al, who may be an ideal preliminary client for Corecktall, contributed his own original research to the formulation of this innovative process. Before he retired from all varieties of work altogether, Al committed himself to being a railroad superintendent, a practicing pessimist, and an amateur scientist. As a chemistry hobbyist, the five-thousand-dollar patent that he obtains from his basement experiments with "electrical anisotropy" and "ferro-organic gels" place his work at the "*center*" of Axon's projected \$200 million jackpot process, according to Gary the opportunist (192). Unlike Denise, who reasons that her father's health may well ameliorate, Gary merely attends Axon's public showcase under the cover of concern for his father's debilitated physical condition, a bill of health which he judges incorrigible. A banker, Gary takes in the corporate endorsement session in order to assess his own investment opportunities. In terms of money, the first-born child plans to capitalize where his father failed.

As the venture-campaign-promoted-as-medical-forum continues, the CEO reveals the strangely Ludovican nature of her company's groundbreaking procedure. Recalling the ghastly "Reclamation Treatment" first outlined and then executed in Anthony

Burgess' utopian satire *A Clockwork Orange* (94), Merilee Finch casually notes that Axon's technique not only treats bodily ailments but also corrects social diseases. Without irony, she insists, "It's Corecktall or prison" (208). In her speedy rejoinder to the obvious cry for the Eighth Amendment by a very small group in the audience (this meeting is for investors after all), the CEO mentions the Eastern State Penitentiary, which happens to be only three blocks away from the unrestricted convention. "World's first modern prison," she pointedly emphasizes, "opened in 1829, solitary confinement for up to twenty years, astonishing suicide rate, zero corrective benefit, and, just to keep this in mind, *still the basic model for corrections in the United States today*" (209). Triumphant, she concludes her unconcealed sales pitch by defining Axon's Corecktall Process as the reverse of "cruel" and "unusual": "This is the liberal *vision*: genuine, permanent, voluntary self-melioration" (209).

By including a patent reference to the Eastern State Penitentiary, the "model" penal complex situated in the heart of Philadelphia, narrator Chip indicates the ultimate carceral place for adults surveyed by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. As the cultural historian's equally catchy subtitle makes clear, his seminal study scrutinizes "The Birth of the Prison." Speaking of the "absolute isolation" first administered in the Philadelphia security unit, Foucault clarifies that "the only operations of correction were the conscience and the silent architecture that confronted it" (239). This punishing method of internment wherein the secluded prisoner faces his conscience alone, institutionalizes the form of introspection wherein the subject faces his will alone, an ethic of asceticism advocated by Arthur Schopenhauer. Within the same historical period that saw the first modern prison conceived and opened, the nihilist ran counter to the

rationalism of his colleague Hegel and developed a metaphysic privileging will over reason and sensation. As Chip shows the reader by way of his father's much-read copy of the German's work, Schopenhauer saw "*this world as a penitentiary, a sort of penal colony*" (256). According to the philosopher, one of the principal "*evils of a penal colony,*" the young Al's disciplined underscoring illustrates, "*is the company of those imprisoned in it*" (258). Chip, however, contests the iconoclastic viewpoints that his father fervently supports and observes. Taking a page from his preferred cultural analyst, Chip makes a case for the personal and social benefits of bad company over those of true isolation. As Abel Blouet sums up in his 1843 work on cellular seclusion, "walls are terrible and man is good" (qtd. in Foucault 239).

Throughout *The Corrections*, Chip returns to the Blouet conclusion that Foucault defers to in the middle of his analysis of the Pennsylvanian prison. Without fail, Chip represents how the individual and collective advantages of difficult relations outstrip the so-called personal improvements attending an absence of relations. Lonely, doubting his possible tenureship, cognizant that an illicit affair will further risk his job security, Chip succumbs to Melissa's physical advances. Irrespective of potential disadvantageous consequences, Denise forever flees to riskier *liaisons* in lieu of facing aloneness. Analogous to the risks taken by her two youngest children, Enid compromises her prized probity by turning to a quack doctor when Al's dementia overwhelms her at sea. In *The Corrections*, Chip falls into affairs, Denise relies on affairs, and Enid flirts with drugs. As Chip insinuates, both his father and his brother suffer from dementia because they categorically refuse to engage in similarly risky social activities. Unlike the other three immediate members of the Lambert family, neither Al nor Gary elects to break away from

his private instantiation of steadfast solitude. Whereas Enid, Denise, and Chip find escape hatches from the various walls or social precincts that surround them, the determined Al (abetted by his reading of Schopenhauer) and the principled Gary (abetted by the demands of his wife) avoid any form of flirtation with risk, and by extension, its concomitant corollaries of interpersonal exchange and the feasible amelioration of personal circumstance. Rather than attempt to correct their individual feelings of entrapment and *anomie*, the Lambert father and his oldest child essentially build more walls or barriers around themselves.

Notwithstanding their respective allegiances to forms of seclusion, Al and Gary are never really alone. Both have families. As such, each husband and father finds himself doubly confined within “the prison of his [own] angry thoughts,” a phrase Franzen uses to describe the effects of his mid-nineties theory-mindedness and writer’s block in *How to Be Alone* (“A Word About This Book” 5). Al and Gary also appear to situate themselves within the “Hell [that] is—other people,” a line that demarcates the *leitmotif* of Jean-Paul Sartre’s Schopenhauer-inspired dramatization of anguish (*No Exit* 45). In keeping with Chip’s sustained interrelation between risks, affairs, walls, sickness, and the heritable, just as a restriction to certain rooms (motels, the basement, bathrooms, the bedroom, a hospital) defines Al’s character, a constraint to particular spaces (a darkroom, the kitchen, an elevator, the bedroom, a closet) delimits Gary’s character. In point of fact, given the unpromising events depicted in “The More He Thought About it, The Angrier He Got,” Chip intimates that his brother will suffer from the same fate as his father before him, should Gary prove so lucky, that is. (His wife Caroline turns out to be less than half an Enid: though a bossy warden, Caroline is no loving caregiver). With anger as his only

muse, suburbanite Gary moves from a position of professional success towards a condition of household surveillance. With work as his only refuge, he eventually develops into a detainee in his own safe neighborhood. His residence in Philadelphia's trendy Chestnut Hill transforms from a house of security into a "house of certainty," to appropriate a Foucault expression in *Discipline and Punish* (202). Over the course of *The Corrections*, Gary's personal space, his Big House, becomes its colloquial equivalent: Da Big House.

If Chip's chapter exemplifies academic fiction, then Gary's instantiates suburban fiction. Correspondingly, the last full section of *The Corrections* likewise provides a case in point of realist fiction situated in the suburbs. Not exclusive to "The More He Thought About It, The Angrier He Got" and "One Last Christmas," Chip's emphasis on satellite communities occurs all through *The Corrections*. In his two brief framing sections and his five long chapters, Chip demonstrates his overriding concern with America's principal family setting. Even when he finds himself physically farthest from the culture that he critically assesses, he cannot help but remind his readers of the leading lifestyle in the USA. For one, Chip's intrusive Vilnius segment originally interrupts and eventually replaces the Denise section, which is the only section in *The Corrections* that conspicuously resists suburban portrayal. By way of the emails from Denise3@cheapnet.com that exprof@gaddisfly.com first answers and then ignores (431-6), the seemingly random report of the wireless communication failure in Lithuania acts as a substitute for the unfinished account in "The Generator." Furthermore, the last half of the Lithuania disruption tears readers away from St. Jude only to build up Chip's long-avoided return to this place. Identifying with Chip, the individual reader suddenly and

unexpectedly longs to revisit the suburbs.

In an earlier narrative orchestration that functions as a harbinger to Chip's continuing focus on different suburban lifestyles, his academic critique of corporate America in "The Failure" sets the stage for the subsequent section devoted to his investor brother. In yet another compelling, as well as corrective, representative narrative move, the main features of Chip's Baltic work-holiday (431-458; 533-539) recast the leading themes originally portrayed in Gary's Chestnut Hill chapter (137-238). In fact, when Chip glosses what he sees as "the main difference between America and Lithuania" (444), he includes a *précis* of the second chapter of *The Corrections*. He spells out that "in America the wealthy few subdued the unwealthy many by means of mind-numbing and soul-killing entertainments and gadgetry and pharmaceuticals, whereas in Lithuania the powerful few subdued the unpowerful many by threatening violence" (444). Half facetiously, Chip then concedes, "It warmed his Foucaultian heart, in a way, to live in a land where property ownership and the control of public discourse were so obviously a matter of who had guns" (444).

On account of these theoretical and practical overviews of order and power, Chip likewise calls to mind the last class of his last complete term as a professor, a final meeting that catalyses the sequence of events prompting his ultimate dismissal from D— College eight months later. With all of these associated admissions, recollections, and revisions, Chip highlights "The More He Thought About It, The Angrier He Got" as a fictional rendition of his theoretical breakdown of the corporate ad campaign "You Go, Girl." As he does throughout *The Corrections*, Chip turns to narrative as a means of self-justification, a mode of self-justification that also propels him toward self-correction. In

reconceptualizing his story, a personal story that extends to the stories of the people closest to him, he engages in ongoing acts of justice, just acts that compel him to review rather than to dismiss, to reformulate rather than to forget.

In order to conclude his two-semester-long theory course called “Consuming Narratives,” Chip unsurprisingly chooses “to test his students’ mastery of the critical perspectives to which he’d introduced them” (39). To this end, he screens a six-part ad-campaign wherein four women in a small office struggle with the news that one of them—Chelsea—has breast cancer. Within the series, which the *Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* style as “revolutionary,” not least because after many “tear-jerking” scenes Chelsea actually dies in spite of the fact that her beneficent boss pays for all her treatment, the once “technophobic” ladies use the W— Corporation’s new Global Desktop Version 5.0 so as to “hook Chelsea into support networks and the very best local health care providers” (39). Predictably, after a final “rapid montage [in which] women of all ages and races are smiling and dabbing away tears at the image of Chelsea on their own Global Desktops,” the series ends with the W— Corp’s “sober” testimony that they have donated over “\$10,000,000.00 to the American Cancer Society to help it Fight for the Cure” (40). Although Chip doubts whether his class as a whole will be capable to stand firm against the seductiveness of the slick campaign, he feels certain that Melissa Paquette, far and away his best young student, possesses the correct “critical tools of resistance and analysis” to evaluate this over-the-top example of mass culture (40). All the same, in a classroom gesture without precedent, Melissa sides with the peers she habitually derides. Instead of bluntly taking any one of the students in her cohort to task, she openly chides her professor.

Foregoing her customary classroom deportment as an active cultural critic, complete with an erect posture, a seat in the front, and always-cogent, always-concise commentaries, she simply utters “Yes” from her slumped position at the back when Chip inquires whether she concurs with the class’s consensus that these wholesale advertisements “are good for the culture and good for the country” (41-2). When he calls on her to qualify her unusual accord, she second-guesses his claim to care about the opinions of his students. Similarly out of character, she proceeds to question his established method of instruction. In answer to her remarkable contrariety, he plays off a stock reply about critical distance: “This is about learning to apply critical methods to textual artifacts. Which is what I’m here to teach you” (42). Still intractably indicting her professor in a way that augurs Oprah’s denunciation of Franzen, Melissa avers, “I think you’re here to teach us to hate the same things you hate” (42). In Melissa’s callous estimation, Chip thereby relies on the same representational techniques that he professes to challenge, specifically, repetition over receptivity, and agenda over argument.

Moreover, just before the semester-ending bell rings, his star student concludes her unparalleled professional and personal assailment by implying that his course syllabus and seminar tutelage lack originality and clarity: “It’s one critic after another wringing their hands about the state of criticism. Nobody can ever say what’s wrong exactly. But they all know it’s evil. They all know ‘corporate’ is a dirty word” (44). Surprised, stifled, and shown up, Chip’s minimal motions designate that “Consuming Narratives” is over and done with. He does not lay eyes upon his once-prized pupil again until the following autumn, whereupon she enters his office in D— College’s Wroth Hall and swiftly begins to redefine the parameters of their affiliation with untimely and initially unwelcome

apologetic advances. Less than a week later, after learning about the provost's inconvenient stroke and his colleague's inopportune book, a dejected Chip makes dinner for the student he once described as "jailbait" (37). He then pursues sexual congress with Melissa on the chaise longue in his staff housing, a condominium located in a cinderblock complex across the creek from a derelict property owned by the Connecticut State Department of Corrections.

Because of Melissa's classroom immobilizations, while in his professorial role Chip loses the opportunity to argue why American audiences ought to interrogate the motivations behind "You Go, Girl" and other less-than-sincere consuming narratives. Certainly, he explains how corporate machinations engineered the presumably brave campaign as "a surefire publicity coup," a media blitz made all-the-more-successful by virtue of its Nielsen weekly rating, the Internet rumor that Chelsea is a real person, and Beat Psychology's timely posting of Chelsea's phony personal and medical histories online (41). Describing the W— Corporation's ongoing involvements in damning litigation, Chip points out that the main backer of the campaign "is currently defending three separate lawsuits for antitrust violations" (42). In addition, he declares that the W— Corp's "revenues last year exceeded" the GDP of Italy, that W—'s ad "exploits a woman's fear of breast cancer," and that W— patently conceived of "You Go, Girl" for the purpose of selling merchandise, exercising stock options, and promoting a certain lifestyle (42-3). According to Chip, W—'s marketing of mass culture and celebration of conspicuous consumption aims to cultivate a general desire for bigger and bigger houses and bigger and bigger SUVs (43). He plainly reproves the emblematic corporate campaign for the reason that it endorses an optimism founded on an infantilized craving

for the superlative. Chip, however, rebukes this brand of material culture for a personal reason too. In condemning the lifestyle that W— encourages, he likewise denounces his brother's lifestyle. Although he utilizes "You Go, Girl" as a means to critique mass culture, he could just as well have presented Gary as his case in point. In spite of everything, when Chip underscores the material artifacts that W— shareholders prize, he forces himself not to reveal that Gary and Caroline own "a great deal of W— stock" (41). Likely signifying that he cannot disassociate the pair from the consuming narratives he professionally deconstructs, this is the first time he alludes to his insufferable brother and his even more insufferable sister-in-law in *The Corrections*.

Foregrounding his affiliation of passive spectatorship to conspicuous consumption, the last words of Chip's academic culture section encapsulate the primary theme of Gary's market culture section. At once recalling his trials in Connecticut and New York City, anticipating his difficulties in Vilnius and the Lithuanian countryside, and delineating Gary's torments in Philadelphia's Chestnut Hill, Chip closes the curtain on the first chapter of *The Corrections* with the phrase "Different kind of prison" (135). As the second chapter of the novel begins, Gary sits alone stewing in what readers soon learn is his characteristic resentment and insecurity. In the opening scene, while Caroline plays soccer with the couple's two oldest boys, Caleb and Aaron, Gary prints photos, a task he submits to twice weekly for his wife's sake, in his personal darkroom, which was a pricey, unwanted, hobby-making birthday gift. He arrives in this secluded space by leaving his "big schist-sheathed house on Seminole Street and cross[ing] his big back yard and climb[ing] the outside stairs of his big garage" (139). Again confined to this place, again performing an unsought, disliked pastime, Gary doubts his mental health,

decries his father's financial incaution, on top of the old man's neurochemical aloofness, and suspects his own wife and elder sons of perpetually mocking him. What comes to be his top rancor on this day, and for months thereafter, however, results from a photographic image he fails to capture. As Jonah, the youngest of his biblically named sons, and his only solace, visits him, he peers out a windowpane through a lens. Training the zoom on his wife, he catches her pinched brow and limped run, only to turn away without snapping a picture in the name of aesthetics. This aborted shot turns out to be a big mistake for Gary's soundness of mind, his fatherly authority, and his husbandly presence, or what little of these he ever actually had.

Just after he stops focusing his camera on Caroline, the telephone rings and she hobbles toward the house. When out of Gary's sight, she trips and screams. Naturally, she has injured her back again. She then maintains that her bad back (an old college injury allegedly "reactivated" by her slip on the un-shoveled lane in St. Jude nine Christmases before [148]) and coincident limp result from this phone call, a call for Gary from Enid. Gary knows, and repeatedly maintains, otherwise. He fixates on his only proof: the lost photo. His mantra-like iteration of correctness ("I am right") soon disintegrates his home life, for Caroline, a pop-psychology buff, "ex-lawyer, eavesdropper, and truly awful domestic tyrant" (Edwards 81), reacts by systematically sabotaging her husband. Her blatant betrayals begin when she tells the kids that their dad suffers from depression, just like their grandpa. In another curiously significant correspondence between St. Jude and Chestnut Hill, in the same way as the officious former-patron of a Lambert house in a white suburb of a black city in the Midwest was always right, the moneyed matron of this big Lambert house in a white suburb of a black city in the Northeast is never wrong.

Caroline's remedial books, Caroline's spoiled boys, and Caroline's affluence authorize Caroline's judgments. As Gary well feared, her clinical D verdict straightaway overrides his already restricted claim to household control (*The Corrections* 161).

Likewise connecting events in Chestnut Hill to other incidents in the narrative, Caroline's weird bond with her boys modifies Melissa's strange preoccupation with her parents. In "The Failure," the spoiled Melissa speaks to her mother and father on the phone for hours every day. She calls them her "best friends" (59). In "The More He Thought About It, The Angrier He Got," Caroline plays pre-adolescent games with her spoiled sons for hours a day. She calls them her "best friends" (141). In an equally bizarre modification of particular narrative details to the Chestnut Hill setting, two of Caroline and Gary's boys appear to be named after the two faithful bodyguards in Vilnius. In the chronology of *The Corrections*, however, brothers Aaron and Jonah appear as precursors to cousins Aidaris and Jonas, given that the suburb-specific chapter antecedes the broken-up Lithuania-specific segment. Yet when a reader confronts the secure villa in Vilnius, she recalls and reconsiders her understandings of events in the safe suburb of Philadelphia. With this procedure of revision, and other similar strategies that employ a combination of analogy, disruption, and recollection, Chip reinforces a corrective reading of *The Corrections*.

Perhaps Chip implements a counteractive narratorial *modus operandi* as a result of his commitment to Shakespeare, the sole writer whom he refuses to remove from his bookshelves and exchange for petty cash at the Strand (93). As war breaks out in Elsinore at the end of *Hamlet*, for example, Horatio discloses that with his "wounded name," that is to say, his title of *oratio*, of orator, of *auctor*, of author, he has already done justice to

the dead prince by “tell[ing] [his] story” (5.2. 326-331). In the developing action of play, Prince Hamlet likewise does justice to his mentor, the dead King Hamlet, by telling his story. Chip appropriates a similar technique when he departs civil war-torn Lithuania. As he realizes that he must reformulate the conceptualization of his screenplay, he tells readers to reassess their earlier conclusions about *The Corrections*. By informing his readership that he himself must necessarily refashion his “tragedy” into a problem play by making it “comic” and “ridiculous” (537), he insinuates that readers must necessarily reevaluate their initial impressions of his already comic and already tragic narrative. Just like Chip, readers therefore look back to Chestnut Hill, among other places, while they look forward to St. Jude.

Chip also borrows his incorporation of the backward-looking glance from the genre of suburban fiction. From Howells’ *Suburban Sketches*, through Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life*, Cheever’s *Bullet Park*, Oates’s *Expensive People*, DeLillo’s *White Noise*, and Coppola’s *The Virgin Suicides*, to Mendes’ *American Beauty* and Smiley’s *Good Faith*, fictions and films chiefly concerned with suburbia tend to be framed as self-reflective, recollective narratives. As Eleanor Perry makes obvious with her screenplay adaptation of Cheever’s “The Swimmer,” suburbanites cannot help but reminisce. Reflecting the nostalgia of Ulyssean hero Ned Merrill, who is “swimming home” by means of the backyard pools in his prosperous neighborhood, director Frank Perry frequently intercuts *The Swimmer* with long, outlandish, soft-focus montages of wild animals, green trees, and noisy creeks. Illustrating the conflicted longings of archetypal suburbanites, suburban figures alternately crave urban life and rural life, while their amalgamated recourse to nostalgia complicate their realizations that by living in

suburban environments they threaten the survival of the sophisticated city while they concurrently crush the pastoral idyll.

Demarcating his brother as an ironic suburban figure from the start, Chip commences Gary's chapter with an obvious recollection. Gary's role in *The Corrections* begins "three weeks earlier," as the first clause in the first sentence of "The More He Thought About It, The Angrier He Got" accentuates (139). With a move that evokes the clearly satirical tone throughout Cheever's *Bullet Park*, Gary describes the suburban setting he eventually dubs an "enchanted arboreality" (226) as "The Land That Time Forgot" (143). As sardonic as Sinclair Lewis' "vaguely frightened" suburbanite Babbitt in the eponymous 1922 novel (*Babbitt* 317), Gary clarifies these sober labels to himself while he walks across his yard to answer Enid's telephone call: "Century-old maples and ginkgos and sycamores, many of them mutilated to accommodate power lines, grew in giant rot over patched and repatched city streets bearing the names of decimated tribes. Seminole and Cherokee, Navajo and Shawnee" (*The Corrections* 143). Appropriately, these are the community lanes Caroline's oversized Ford Stomper erodes en route to her quarter-time *pro bono*-work for the Children's Defense Fund; the very commuter roads Gary's luxury Swedish sedan bumps over on the way to his full-time job as vice president of CenTrust Bank. Furthermore, in an incongruence that delineates the tragedy, comedy, resentment, and ridiculousness of Gary's suburban story, he wishes that his agreeable downtown job was triple-time because of his increasingly less tolerable home life, the very home life he cannot curtail, on the basis that "his entire life was set up as a correction of his [overworked] father's" (181).

In lieu of correcting his father's lifestyle, nonetheless, the eldest Lambert child

replicates it. Gary reproduces Al's failures too. In fact, early in the Chestnut Hill chapter Gary appears to concede that his personal failures as a father will emerge as even greater than Al's own fatherly failures. At the onset of what comes to be a protracted *mêlée* against his wife and her "allies in the house," the paranoid Gary outlines his ineffective parenting abilities (160). His thoughts converging on his wife, his father, his mother, his present self, and his childhood self, he reveals that Caroline's "sons would protect her from her husband. Her husband who was a shouter. Like his father before him. His father before him who was now depressed. But who, in his prime, as a shouter, had so frightened young Gary that it never occurred to him to intercede on his mother's behalf" (160). With his transgenerational breakdown of fatherhood and collapse, of motherhood and collaboration, Gary likewise anticipates the fates of his sons. Although a classically cold and stern authoritarian, Al's example worked to instill signature midwestern qualities, like diligence, hard work, and integrity, into his children. In spite of everything, Chip and Denise appear quite successful before they are both fired unjustly. On the other hand, Gary's considerations and assessments insinuate that the Caroline paradigm of unconcealed permissiveness portends a less than successful future for his spoiled sons, an estimation bolstered by later events in the chapter and the novel.

By virtue of these recollected failures and fears, as well as these projections of forthcoming troubles and trials, Chip represents fathers Al and Gary as sympathetic figures. Though disregarded by all critics of *The Corrections*, Chip's ability to commiserate with his father and his brother proves to be at once noteworthy and commendable, especially given the Foucaultian's avowed lifelong disaffection for his male Lambert counterparts. Chip tactfully encourages this corrective reading when he

admits that with but a modicum of revision, refocus, and overstatement his “tragic BILL QUAINANCE” can transform into a “comic fool” (537). With this eye-opening disclosure, Chip refers not only to his BILL, but also to his GARY, and to his AL, in addition to his CHIP. The Lambert women, by contrast, are always likeable in *The Corrections*. Despite their similar penchants for nagging and bossiness, Chip identifies with ENID and the nearly anagrammatic DENISE from the start of his narrative. As he turns away from stories in which he attacks Gary and Al in order to turn toward stories wherein he shows concern for them, he makes his diplomatic or ambassadorial responsibilities as a storyteller quite apparent. When he reestablishes his plot-driven “thriller” as a character-driven “farce” (537), Chip redistributes the initial aspirations of his fiction. In making these revelatory concessions and corrections, he stops writing for the select audience comprised of individuals whom he endeavored to attack and thereby avenge, and begins writing for a general audience whom he endeavors to apprise of typical American impediments and failures. With his demonstratively self-corrective writing process, Chip replaces an act of vengeance with an act of justice, an intrinsically legalistic act that implements a cautious form of deliberate contemplation rather than an all-too-easy reversion to rudimentary accusation.

Stories

On account of his corrective revelation near the sanctuary of the Polish border, purposeful Chip counteracts a story based on revenge with a series of interconnected stories founded upon reflection, in all the senses of this activity. In terms of just or nonpartisan narratives, any act of reflection requires an integrated understanding of

similarity, deliberation, and recollection. Coupled with its narrativization, this multileveled act of consideration, a weighing up that prompts the adjudicator to look back as well as forward, outlines the legal process. Earmarking the neutrality or nonalignment obligatory to the official performance of legality, Chip can only reflect upon the justness of his cultural critique once he removes himself from the immediate setting of this selfsame critique. Indicatively, the most pointed revisions to Chip's original estimations of American mass-culture arise in respect to the representation of Gary, and by association Al. After all, these clinically depressed fathers epitomize the culture that Chip evaluates and corrects. Perhaps likewise illustrating their less than progressive or dynamic lifestyles, Gary and Al are the two members of the Lambert family who do not leave the USA over the course of *The Corrections*. At the behest of Enid, Al does embark upon the cruiseliner destined for Québec City. Al does distinguish what he incorrectly describes as the Gaspé Peninsula. Following his mistaken map reading, Al falls from the ship in a perilous attempt to pee over the edge of the top deck. Though he incredibly survives this unpredictable plunge into the icy Atlantic, the voyage-ending micturation emphasizes his confinement to small rooms. Whether in the cellar of his suburban home or in the cubbyhole of a floating retirement community, as Al progressively deteriorates he spends more and more time detained in washrooms. In a skillful redistribution of similar topics, the unhappy Gary feels increasingly entrapped or incarcerated while things fall apart for him in Chestnut Hill.

Likewise associating corrective narrative representation to the precedents that inform just courtroom deliberation, the two getaways that bracket Chip's cross-Atlantic excursion, combined, of course, with the events that occur during Chip's stay in this

strangely familiar place, condense the major themes of *The Corrections* in general, and Gary's chapter in particular. Beyond the indicators that compare Chip's online defrauding to Gary's investment banking, Gitanis' Ford SUV to Caroline's Ford SUV, and cousins Aidaris and Jonas to sons Aaron and Jonah, Chip integrates inbuilt ties between the ex-Soviet barracks in Vilnius and the schist-sheathed house in Chestnut Hill. Versions of each other, the garrison and the home collectively compress motifs of power, violence, prison, and correction. Turning around the progression of Gitanis' story, Gary's residence essentially transforms into his personal prison. As the depression of the failing patriarch deepens, and his family life degenerates, his big, Big House gets smaller and smaller. In other words, just as Gitanis' former torture chamber eventually converts into his living quarters, Gary's current household eventually changes into his prison chamber.

The evolution of Gary's dwelling from a secure house into a house of security commences on the traumatic day that he neglects to photograph Caroline with her unbecoming grimace and prominent hobble. That same afternoon, Gary's middle child, Caleb, informs his father that he has yet another new hobby. With the addition of a camera, a microphone, and some controls, the eleven-year-old boy wants to convert all of his unused photo, video, and CPU equipment into a surveillance system to be installed in the kitchen. Before the dubious Gary cynically notes that the disused accumulation of techno-gear in Caleb's room has "an aggregate retail value possibly exceeding the annual salary of [his] secretary" (158), he instantly seeks to maintain the privacy of his own preferred "hobby." Quick to protect his clandestine form of daily escape from Caroline's household tyranny, he reminds himself that the "*The liquor cabinet is in the kitchen*" (156). Though he delays his ironic fatherly disallowance of the supervision project, after

first vainly debating the issue with Caroline, who dotes on the principles of a book titled *The Technological Imagination: What Today's Children Have to Teach Their Parents*, by Nancy Claymore, PhD (158), and then secretly swigging two ounces of Bombay Sapphire gin, Gary vetoes the invasive scheme. "Hate to break it to you," he announces while bearing his now-modest drink aloft as a symbol of his temperance, "but surveillance is out. It's not appropriate as a hobby" (163). Rather expectedly, however, Caroline summarily overrules her husband in front of their assembled children. "Gary, it doesn't matter," she theatrically broadcasts, "he's got his own money. He can spend it however he wants. Right, Caleb?" (164). Subsequently, the conspiring mother and son trade hand signals and glances, the colluding codes of intra-familial alliance that Gary cannot quite follow as a result of his stealthy drunkenness, which is his post-five pm ritual.

By way of his free indirect narrator, Chip demonstrates the customary nature of puerile conflict *chez* Gary Lambert. The original gang-up on Gary establishes the tone for the remainder of Gary's gradually more upsetting story. In the aftermath of Enid's early chapter telephone call, Gary sets himself three interrelated missions of reciprocal consequence. For one, he endeavors to get his wife and kids to the Midwest for a final Lambert family Christmas, a delicate task given his pledge nine years earlier that he would never again request that Caroline visit St. Jude during the busiest holiday season. Once Enid apprizes him of Al's small patent remuneration, Gary likewise covets the opportunity to collect what he sees as the patent's actual market value. As the oldest child, as the individual *de facto* accountable for his parents' welfare, he owns the rights to the exclusive megabucks. At any rate, he convinces himself of this personal entitlement to multiple Axon stock options. Furthermore, given that he discovers the incorrigible

Caroline listening-in to his private conferences both with Enid (149) and with Caleb (157), not to mention the fact that he catches her exaggerating if not concocting her professed back injury more than once, Gary wants her to acknowledge her repeat offences.

Notwithstanding the casuist advantages of Gary's self-appointed market privileges, he finds himself unjustifiably embroiled in an infuriating dilemma. He cannot exercise his stock options without ample financial backing from his wealthy wife, the "Unfuckingbelievable" wife who eavesdrops on his personal conversations (149), the unalterable wife who derides him if he challenges her (166), the unforgiving wife who calculatingly labels him a "depressed old man" (184), the antagonistic wife who childishly disregards him for the disobliging reason that he calls a travel agent instead of a psychologist the morning after Enid's ill-timed call (185). As an infantile yet tactical figure who represents "even more punishment" than the "professionally and personally dishonest" Gary "deserves" (Edwards 81), wife Caroline can be read as an ironic replication of the American "symbol of the new domesticity" (Beuka 152). Elaborating on "a formula that marked the new suburbs as a prescriptive ['child-centered'] environment" (151), Beuka describes what he calls "the double bind of the suburban housewife in the 1950s": "Positioned amid the interlocking discourses of entertainment and consumer-product marketing, the married woman of suburbia was at once a highly visible, even 'targeted' social phenomenon, while at the same time being conditioned to accept a role characterized by confinement and estrangement from the world outside the home" (153). With her unjust strategies of ridicule, indignity, permissiveness, and household coalition, as well as a number of other premeditated persecutions and prosecutions, Caroline

deliberately displaces an embellished translation of conventional suburban “confinement and estrangement” upon her victimized husband.

The terms of the suburbanite’s unhealthy and unreasonable home life alter the morning after Caroline records five voice mails on his machine in the space of his lunch-hour, her first sympathetic contact with Gary in over a month. His secretary apprizes him of these multiple messages while he continues to recuperate from a particularly unpleasant elevator ride. Moments before, Gary “bounded out of the elevator . . . taking big cool lungfuls of centrally processed air” in order to counter the jam-packed and germ-laden attributes of the tiny space (223). Troubling the characteristically ill-at-ease father and husband, the claustrophobic lift included the young, redheaded estate-planner who has been smiling at him suggestively for months, like the “dozen” of other “secretaries and female pedestrians and sales clerks who in any given week took note of his height and his schist-gray hair” (221). Since Gary fears “add[ing] yet another disapproving woman to his life” (221), a life where he already feels “surrounded, imprisoned, by disapproving women” (221), he persuades himself that his principled loyalty to Caroline provides him with an “erotic kick” (223). Because of his less-than-enviable predicament, Gary “pump[s] his fist in triumph” when he determines that Caroline’s unplanned communications indicate “desperation” (223). Collecting himself, he coolly rings her: “What’s up?” (223). A big, old, manned station wagon, she shakily cries, has been parked in front of the house for an hour. The SECURITY BY NEVEREST placard, moreover, has been stolen “again” (224). Correlating his quickened sexual zest to Caroline’s need of his physical safeguarding (224), as well as the “Vital signs of the rambunctious American economy” flashing across the office monitors (225), he leaves the bank prematurely,

calling to mind his first unchaste date with Caroline.

Arriving home, he notes the nonexistence of an additional Neverest sign, the fifth this year. Following his first-time Alfred-like urge to sleep in his parked sedan, he gaily bangs on the interior garage door, which is “locked and chained” (227), as he unproductively seethes over his “flooding [of] the market with worthless signage,” his “diluting [of] the value of SECURITY BY NEVEREST as a burglary deterrent” (226). Gainsaying his mid-afternoon anticipations, a cold yet unquivering Caroline barely registers his presence from her usual station before the TV with Caleb. Without looking at Gary, much less thanking him for his early return home, she tells him to nail the next home-security sign to a tree. Caleb then drowns out his father’s advisory observation on projected “classiness and subtlety” by turning up the television (228). Overridden by the volume of the “galactic rerun” (227), Gary grabs another placard from the basement. In his thirty-second absence, Caroline re-bolts the door, refastens the chain, and resets the alarm. Incredulous, grumbling Gary goes through the necessary disarmament, leaving the front door wide open. A minute later he returns to the bolted, armed, and chained entrance. Before Caroline finally appears, he almost bashes the door off its hinges. “Gary,” she infuriatingly condescends, “just knock” (228). So progresses Gary’s particular performance of *No Exit*. Exacerbating home-front matters, when he opens the liquor cabinet for the fourth time that evening, after making dinner, washing the dishes, and trying to trim the hedge, he detects Caleb’s proxy eye inspecting him from the kitchen ceiling. Surveillance takes the dignity, not to mention the victory, out of Gary’s gin. Even Jonah, his solitary house-of-certainty consolation, comments on his drinking. The next morning, after one more sleepless, neverestful Chestnut Hill-night, he

surrenders. Only a coalition of the willing need visit St. Jude for Christmas, Gary concedes to his wife.

The internecine conflict and counterfeit reconciliation within Gary's secure suburban home satirically reposition the supposed insecure sociopathic wheelings and dealings of inner-city life. Commenting on what he calls the "security-driven logic of urban enclavization," otherwise known as the massive movement toward gated and passport communities in Los Angeles, and the rest of America by extension, Mike Davis asserts that a "loss of freedom" acts as the true payment of this fêted "security" (244). In the book *City of Quartz*, which ironically establishes LA as a perfect place, an unpleasant place, and a no-place all at the same time, Davis investigates what he sees as the balkanization and militarization of American life. He elucidates that just as the "Berlin Wall was being spontaneously dismantled, the LAPD extended [its] barricades" (277). The Orwellian tenor of Davis' cultural appraisal of LA—and the USA—as "a Gobi of suburbs" (47) similarly finds its way into Chip's interconnected narratives.

As Filkins remarks, *The Corrections* incorporates "meditations on Orwellian social controls over huge chunks of the citizenry fostered by the big drug companies" (231). Still, Chipper's creator does not limit his narrator's Orwellian allusions to American implementations of pharmaco-culture and -control. Nor does Franzen restrict his allegiance to Orwell's cultural critique to his third novel. He depicts insidious supervision and invasive forms of power in all of his fiction. As his *oeuvre* develops, the sustained threats to personal privacy and agency that Franzen represents grow increasingly local. In *The Twenty-Seventh City*, for instance, "Safety's cheap" (284). Privacy, on the other hand, is not. Gary-Lambert-precursor Martin Probst finds bugs

planted by police chief Jammu in the walls of most of the suburban homes of his Municipal Growth colleagues. Unconstitutional infringements upon personal privacy develop into substantive threats to personal safety in Franzen's next work. In *Strong Motion*, taciturn CEO David Stoorhuys, who attempts to murder young seismologist Renée before she can expose that his corporation induces a cycle of Boston-razing quakes, lives on an ordinary suburban street. Not coincidentally, David invests heavily in earthquake insurance, a veritable rarity in metropolitan Boston. In addition, he supplies gas masks, detailed instructions, and food preserves, along with other disaster-relief devices, in the "carton of emergency equipment" conveniently stored in his kitchen (458-60). Though he endangers his family as he provides for them, he imperils Renée, his neighbors, every Bostonian, and the environment. In respect to *The Corrections*, Chip's examinations of social order lay emphasis upon Gary's home almost exclusively.

Once Gary discovers the Caroline-endorsed undercover work of his three sons, his Chestnut Hill bastion transmutes into an adaptation of Orwell's Victory Mansions in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As a weird variation of protagonist Winston's neighbor and coworker, Gary's initial enthusiasm about family life rivals Parsons' dedication to informer life. Emblematically faithful to Big Brother's bylaws, Parsons heartily encourages his wee nipper of a daughter to spy. Truly dedicated to the Party, Parson's organizes the Hate Week bonanza in his building with gusto. Driven by equally charged social mores, Gary loyally coordinates all of his family meals. Also aiming to secure a model family life, Gary optimistically envisions the entire Lambert clan living as neighbors in Philadelphia. In their respective ardent attempts to ascribe to a particular social condition, though, each of these characters loses his small claim to "individualism

and eccentricity” (Orwell 74). Recasting Parsons’ denouncement at the hands of his heedful seven-year old, a vigilant brotherhood made up of Aaron, Caleb, Jonas, and Caroline frustrates Gary’s liberty. Instead of being promptly relocated to and imprisoned in the Ministry of Love, like Parsons and Winston and others in Orwell’s abject cast, the admittedly “depressed” Gary finds himself forced to forfeit his fatherly and husbandly judgment, a “surrender” he seals by making “euphoric” love to Caroline, their first union in more than a month (237-8).

Upon reevaluation, Gary’s undeserved emasculation at the hands of Caroline similarly redeploys the premises of Gitanis’ atrocious stage-management by a Belorussian “puppet government” (445). One year after his birth, “new Communist administrators” displace Gitanis and fifteen thousand comrades from several scattered border towns to a small, modern, cinderblock city, “for reasons of safety” (445). Within ten years of this mass relocation, a transfer ironically devised as an asylum from two looming nuclear power plants, “*everybody’s*” mom or dad contracts cancer as a consequence of the radioactive pitchblende pooling radon in the breezeblocks of the people’s “brand-new, fully modern” refuge (445-6). Gary’s particular life-altering trauma, of course, results from a different form of institutional maneuvering and direction. As a boy, Gitanis endures an emotional trauma because of the “deliberate strategy of recycling low-grade nuclear waste in building materials” (446). Recontextualizing a local variety of severe Soviet incompetence to a general paradigm of pernicious suburban culture, Chip presents Gary as the exaggerated dupe of an American ideology founded on merchandise and commerce.

As Michael Moore insinuates all through his popular feature-film length

documentary *Bowling For Columbine*, and Franzen underlines near the end of *Strong Motion*, “In a decadent society people can slowly drift or slowly be drawn by the culture of commerce into yearning for violence” (470). In *The Corrections*, Caroline and her sons essentially consume Gary in the same way as they spectacularly consume television. Tellingly influenced by the fear and gadgetry that sponsor TV programming, these four “children” of a “child-centered” universe focus their acquired fears and gadgets directly upon Gary. As a handy at-home translation of the urban hostility the suburban home apparently guards its potential victims against, Gary turns into a repository of infantile and unjust revenge. Just as the dictatorial Caroline trains her “best friends” to fear old cars on city streets, she drives them to shame their old-fashioned father. Surveyed rather than respected, Gary feels confined in a house of unproductive correction.

Given his midlife capitulation to the consuming narratives in his Chestnut Hill home, Gary flies solo to the last Lambert family Christmas in St. Jude. Conceivably less than surprising as well, when the eldest son arrives to his boyhood home he immediately draws attention to two protracted contemplations of fear and violence. In the weeks leading to the long-awaited holiday, both senior Lamberts relive their respective premature exits from the oceanliner in unique ways. Enid cannot escape the shame that descends upon her after she exhausts her supply of Aslan. Endlessly returning to the multiple apprehensions that the hallucinogen superseded, Enid fears that her fellow passengers aboard the Scandinavian-based *Gunnar Myrdal* felt communally infringed-upon by her and Al’s eccentricities, Al’s voyage-rerouting fall, and her irresponsible drug abuse. Enid’s utmost paranoia, however, develops from her inescapable recollection that prior to leaving the ship she failed to say an affable word to her new confidante Sylvia

Roth, a secretly distressed Delawarean whose daughter was first tortured then murdered by a gun-less black man to be executed in Pennsylvania over the course of the cruise.

Sylvia admits to embarking upon the *Gunnar Myrdal* for the purpose of avoiding media reportage of the convict's lawful death. While at sea, Sylvia also confesses that after being apprized of the facts of Khellye Whithers' bestial crime she became a clandestine gun artist. A Penelope who obliterates her labors, Sylvia paints guns by day and destroys them by night. Notwithstanding this compulsive activity, or perhaps as a corollary of this cyclical undoing, Silvia fails to "escape" her "crazy thirst for revenge" (310). Despite her "M.D./ Ph.D.," her confidence in the "randomness of the tragedy," and her conviction that capital punishment pleases the conservatives who covet "permission to ignore social injustice," Silvia "want[s] [Whithers] dead" (306-7). Neither strictly about personal edification nor individual belief nor political allegiance, Silvia's dilemma illustrates the inimitability of unjust acts, not to mention the sustained deliberation and innovation that acts of justice obligate. Yet incapable of comprehending, much less accepting, Whithers' criminal motivations and actions, Silvia craves the closure that she refuses to condone on ethical grounds: a murderer's state-sanctioned execution. Bereft, embittered, and injured, she desires the revenge that she cannot sanction. Just and unjust actions alike promulgate a succession of consequences, consequences that expand beyond the individual case involving the original "victim" and the original "victimizer." To be dealt with justly, an injustice must instantiate an attempted evolution towards justice, not a professed resolution of justice. Any claim to the contrary, any claim to the exactness or perfection of just legal procedure, obstructs the due diligence justice must always endeavor to deliver on a case-by-case basis.

Foreshadowed by Silvia and the complicated resolution to the Withers case, in the aftermaths of their discontinued cruise Enid and Al both chronically relive past events in hopes of appreciating the impending Christmas visit. Whereas Enid regrets her interpersonal *faux pas*, Al rebukes himself for “instinctively” grasping “the orange flotation device” (465). In other words, he “reconsider[s] the wisdom of surviving” (465). Irrespective of his many maladies, he rebuffs the picture of himself as “an idiot, a lad, a demented person” worthy of a “nursing-home future” defined by “phony solicitude” and “thinly veiled contempt” (465). At once a poignant indicator of his chagrin, his poise, and his hardship, when he monitors the unfired shotgun tipped against his old workbench, he condemns the pain and profound breach of privacy his violent act of self-murder would bring upon his family members. Knowing he could have drowned with dignity, Al bewails not surrendering to the sea’s unfeeling and unseeing undertow.

Chip integrates numerous versions of hostile activity into *The Corrections*. Without fail, he fragments his representations of violence. In the article “Oprah’s Choice,” Thomas R. Edwards appears to accuse Franzen’s narrator for these calculated fragmentations: “In *The Corrections* people and stories and intimations of meaning can irritatingly vanish without a trace” (83). Although the critic neglects to mention this curtailed depiction of violence specifically, Edwards intimates as much when he makes reference to Sylvia Roth, to Billy Passafaro, and later to Lithuania for the purpose of proving his reported frustration. Edwards, however, overlooks the underlying pattern to these compelling vanishings. In *The Corrections*, every immediate Lambert experiences a form of violence, whether the violence manifests itself as local or general, actual or imagined, autonomous or dependent, just or unjust. Revealed but not refined, introduced

but not concluded, none of Chip's accounts of violence receives a modicum of narrative roundness or resolution.

Reflecting the violent undertone of the glossy commercials that subsidize a TV show and the giant billboards that finance a state highway, as well as the patent violence of the bad news that marks the top of every hour, Chip presents a series of incomplete stories, incomplete jumbles of products, facts, events, and newsworthy features. He thereby insists that his readership not consume these details passively. In the same way as he refashions his personal understandings of his family members while building their individual cases, he encourages his readers to reconsider and to narrativize the consequences of conspicuously disjointed forms of violence. Democratically hailed into *The Corrections* as a literary detective, the active reader can make connections between the violent acts that Chip fragments and their repercussions upon the characters that he develops fully. With an emblematical narrative technique, the increasingly sympathetic Chip associates every Lambert to a variety of violence. Once he empathizes with Gitanis' torture chronicle in the midst of his Lithuanian escape, he reviews how Gary might endure surveillance, how Al might regard his gun, how Enid might remember Sylvia, and how Denise might face Billy's story.

The adoptive brother of Denise's lover Robin, Billy receives a twelve-to-eighteen-year prison sentence for utilizing a two-by-four to bash in the face of a young PR representative for the W— Corporation. While at a "ribbon-cutting ceremony for a Community Computing Center," the guilty party commits this premeditated crime in the name of his indictment that the bourgeois mayor of Philadelphia and the imperialistic W— Corp are methodically merging "American business and American government" in

order to make possible the cooptation of urban children into “technoslavery” (344-5).

Given the viciousness of Billy’s vigilantism, his recriminatory act fails to correct, or even address, the injustice perpetrated by the iniquitous coupling of the mayor and W—.

Because Billy so blatantly disregards the tenets of legal formulae, rather than expose and police the alleged injustice perpetrated upon the children of Philadelphia, his two-by-four attack proves self-incriminatory. Naturally, acts of justice often incorporate irony, a telling example being the “kidnap[ping]” of accused Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann in Argentina and his ensuing transport to Jerusalem for the purpose of “stand[ing] trial for his role in the ‘final solution of the Jewish question’” (Arendt 4-5). Given the visceral nature of Billy’s approach to justice, however, he ultimately distracts the public and those closest to him from the injustice that he aims to correct. While the media concentrates on Billy’s brutal actions, and his committed-socialist father Nick (who similarly agrees that W— sells “phony violence to children”) falls ill after he peruses pictures of the PR man’s indented face, Billy’s sister Robin pays extended visits to the hospitalized victim and his devastated parents (346). Illustrating the unpredictable developments that just and unjust acts perpetuate, Brian sells an invention to the W— Corporation for twenty million dollars, a business deal that destabilizes the couple’s marriage, thus facilitating the husband’s and the wife’s separate *liaisons* with Denise.

Chip’s deliberately abbreviated instances of violence indicate that no representation can do justice to the enduring aftereffects of criminal actions. The unkind and depressing events surrounding Gary’s unaccompanied arrival in St. Jude likewise reveal some untold consequences of injustice. To her great disappointment, when Enid fervently opens her front door eager to see her least favorite child with her favorite

grandchild (no other Chestnut Hillians are expected) Gary stands alone on the front step. Prepared to face Enid's anticipated displeasure, Gary promptly enlists his "courtroom kind of voice" and informs his mother that a "disappointed" Jonah could not embark on the two-day trip because of a high fever (476). In spite of Gary's rehearsed declaration, his eight-year old son is not unwell. Moreover, Jonah himself "freely" elects not to visit his grandparents, ostensibly "in accordance with the terms of Gary's surrender to Caroline in October" (486).

Notwithstanding the would-be diplomacy of his justification for Jonah's absence, Gary clearly realizes that the boy has no real choice but to circumvent the Christmas stopover in St. Jude. For one, Caroline baits him by buying tickets to see both a magician and a stage-show on the days that he may be in the Midwest with his father. As well, she "more and more openly encourage[s] the older boys to laugh at their grandparents and to tell stories about Alfred's cluelessness ('He called it Intendo!') and Enid's puritanism ('She asked what the show was *rated!*') and Enid's parsimony ('There were two green beans and she wrapped them up in foil!')" (486-7). By virtue of her cruel contrivances and her relentless machinations, Caroline also places her husband in a similar position to Jonah. Following the mid-autumn capitulation, Gary feels obligated to participate in his wife's juvenile lambasting of the Lamberts too. In an attempt to correct his increasing sense of alienation, Gary halfheartedly admits, "Grandma is funny, isn't she?" (487). As the *pièce de résistance* in her methodical anti-Lambert-Christmas scheme, Caroline purchases a fashionable videogame, which she insists that Jonah play on the eve of his scheduled departure. A young version of the susceptible Gary, Jonah decides to forego traveling with his father, not least because *God Project II* "entrance[s]" him (487). Jonah

finally succumbs to what Chip labels “the tyranny of Cool” (487), the tyranny that the conniving Caroline orchestrates in her avid and uncritical support of market culture. Just as she unjustly disallows her husband’s dissenting views on family life, she unreasonably rejects Jonah’s compassionate vision of his grandparents, an impartial project she arguably instigates when she introduces him to online videogame translations of C.S. Lewis’ Narnia novels (203). In order to correct Jonah’s fondness for outdated linear reading, she initiates him to the hip tyranny of television, gadgetry, gaming, and the Internet.

Despite the alarming nature of Jonah’s speedy consumer-culture makeover, Gary’s midlife transformations at the hands of Caroline emerge as equally disconcerting. Certainly, at the opening of “The More He Thought About It, The Angrier He Got” Gary already sponsors corporate culture and already celebrates many of the cultural artifacts that Chip devotedly critiques. In these early stages of the novel, Gary furthermore proves to be less than sufferable on a number of other material and personal levels. Still, at this juncture Gary does not exhibit the idiotic and childish tendencies that eventually characterize him and his role in *The Corrections*. After all, Gary holds a Wharton School MBA, occupies an elevated position at a bank, persuasively supports his convictions, and sardonically appreciates “the crisis of moral duty in a culture of consumer choice” (488). Superficial or not, these markers of mainstream American success disintegrate once Gary surrenders to the punishing conditions stalwartly enforced by his wife. On the morning before the Withers execution, the morning his father plummets from the *Gunnar Myrdal*, the morning he and Caroline engage in conciliatory conjugal activity, the morning he regains the capital to invest in Axon stock, Gary does more than relent to

Caroline's autocratic stipulations (235-8). With his pivotal concession at a pivotal time, he endorses a standardized form of violence, a domestic violence wherein he will be surrounded and imprisoned by a disapproving brotherhood, a brotherhood that will include his son Jonah once the brotherhood in turn surrounds and imprisons him. In conjunction with his personal submission, Gary likewise relinquishes his self-styled function as "Federal Reserve Board Chairman Gary R. Lambert" (162), as suggested by his refusal to go to work on this fateful day.

Chip indicates Gary's adjustment from self-appointed Chairman to representative fool in the last two sections of the narrative. In the interim between the early-October in Chestnut Hill and the late-December in St. Jude, Gary seems to assume his "I'm-a-jerk" face habitually, a face formerly reserved solely for tricky business transactions (195, 211). When used sparingly, the self-conscious gesture designates humanity, humility, and apology. When utilized regularly and reflexively, though, the delicate gesture converts into a standard of insecurity, humiliation, and confusion. Recasting his pathetic and telltale "Grandma is funny, isn't she" (487), Gary twice employs the grimace within his forty-eight St. Judean hours (493, 541). Demonstrably, on neither occasion does he have a real, discernible reason to do so. The first time he fashions the foolish leer he has no audience, no subordinate or coworker to whom he owes a show of contrition or a simple excuse. Even the abject, angry, ailing, and attacked Gary of three months previous would denigrate the ridiculous idea of routinely adopting this imbecilic front. Albeit, by incorporating this transformative depiction of Gary, a progression that implies a regrettable decline in his mental fitness, Chip at once corrects and complicates his critique of the American "middle class," a dominant "sociological" group Franzen

himself identifies as “suburban” (“First City” 192).

Over the holiday sequence and the brief epilogue, Chip illustrates Gary’s increasing inability to manage difference and difficulty. In distinction to the aged Enid and Al, the comparatively young Gary rebuffs divergent opinions and unforeseen occurrences. When articulating that Gary regards St. Jude’s shopping “poor people” as a “dumber, sadder, fatter” and “Diseased underclass that he really, really liked to keep away from” (484), Chip recalls Gary’s previous evaluations of the same people in the same place. In his everestless chapter, an aggravated Gary elucidates his *angoisse* in respect to the sudden sophistication of the Midwest: “all the restaurants in St. Jude were suddenly coming up to European speed (suddenly cleaning ladies knew from sun-dried tomatoes, suddenly hog farmers knew from crème brûlée), and shoppers at the mall near his parent’s house had an air of entitlement offputtingly similar to his own, and the electronic consumer goods for sale in St. Jude were every bit as powerful and cool as those in Chestnut Hill” (198). The ex-Midwesterner’s growing opposition to adjustment likewise manifests itself after he collects Denise from the airport somewhere beyond his parent’s suburb. In little time, Gary exhibits frustration over the fact that “people could so easily drop out of the world of conventional expectations” (491). With an altered Denise in the seat next to him, Gary feels “especially galled that the latest defector to the ‘alternative’ was not some flaky Other from a family of Others or a class of Others but his own stylish and talented sister, who as recently as September had excelled in conventional ways that his friends could read about in the *New York Times*” (491). Rather than reflect upon the reasons that prompt these modifications, Gary sees what he fails to anticipate as a personal attack. According to him, unpredictable developments “undercut the pleasure he

t[akes] in his home and job and family” (491). In Gary’s apprehensive estimation, irregular alternatives “fe[el] like a unilateral rewriting, to his own disadvantage, of the rules of life” (491).

Incorrectly connecting the general “rules of life” to the recent requisites of his controlled home life, Gary arrives in St. Jude armed with his courtroom voice, a staged legalistic tool engineered to lend authority to his preplanned defense and accusation. Given his victimization in Chestnut Hill, he prepares to be acknowledged as the “villain in St. Jude” (485). Repositioned at the other end of the law, the desperado of St. Jude strategically adopts ex-lawyer Caroline’s decisive last-word say-so. When Gary assumes this performed variety of elementary legality, he ratifies his resistance to unexpected versions of progress as he confirms his tendency towards a lamentable personal regress. Bossy and incorrigible, he behaves like a spoiled child as he becomes increasingly childlike. While readying himself for sleep in his boyhood bedroom, his strange, powerful longings insinuate the onset of psychological malady: “he was gripped by an ancient excitement at the prospect of running trains through mountains of papier-machée, across high Popsicle-stick trestles” (498). The next day, after Denise alerts him to the model railroad supplies stored in a basement box, Gary basically echoes his youngest son’s amazement at the “cool” *Prince Caspian* CD-ROM “stuff” he was “very much looking forward” to “order[ing]” and “playing with” (203). “I’m having a great time with this railroad stuff,” Gary later declares, “There are some truly neat things that you can buy” (523). Stressing his brother’s imbalanced neurochemical defenses, Chip reformulates Jonah’s acquired admiration for the technological as Gary’s nostalgic approbation for the mechanical.

When the last Christmas scene materializes, Chip additionally fashions Gary's unique reversion to childhood as a peculiar allegory of suburban America. Once Chip eventually assumes his long-awaited chair at the Lambert dinner table following his train of truck rides and airline flights, Gary symbolizes a bankrupt version of suburban USA. A degraded, mismanaged, or abused suburbanite, Gary comes complete with a model railroad, a replication that signifies the daily commuting necessary to suburban fiction, as Howells envisions the genre in his classic *Suburban Sketches*. Nevertheless, Chip inspires a sympathetic view of Gary and the popular culture that he ironically epitomizes. Now stateside, Chip restyles the deleterious indicators of Gary's suburban lifestyle as degenerative symptoms of a psychosomatic syndrome. After Gary holds court at table, a Christmas morning trial in which he indicts his siblings for irresponsibility, his mother of misapprehension, and his father of incompetence, a trial wherein Alfred crashes to the floor and Enid weeps, a trial that reveals Gary's actual motivation for visiting St. Jude, a trial after which Gary quickly leaves the Midwest while his formal, hollow words still hum in the air, Chip notices that "his brother was afraid" (542-7). With this clear judgment, a ruling presumably sustained by his half-private fireside chat with Denise (549-550), Chip reminds readers that Gary's case can be read as distinctive rather than representative. Combined with his juvenile actions, his frustrated parenting, his compulsory capitulation, and his domestic custody, Gary's thwarted aspirations are not necessarily the products of a decadent culture. Neither Gary nor America can claim solitary culpability for the terrible events that demarcate the Chestnut Hillian's awful existence. Though the violence that Gary encounters and endures must be put on trial, a trial that Chip arbitrates all through *The Corrections*, the mitigating circumstances of

Gary's case appear to overrule correction, on the surface at least.

Adding to his signature disappointment, the increasingly distressed, disobliging, intimidated, and contrarian Gary deplorably distinguishes that the inhabitants of suburban-nowhere St. Jude eventually can obtain the indispensable cultural capital that he, a not uneducated urban sophisticate, considers indicative of refinement and cosmopolitanism. As a means of emphasizing the potential citification, if not the uncultivated new-wave modishness, of satellite communities, Chip punctuates Gary's stop in St. Jude with details that correlate his evolving apprehensions to the improvement of suburban spaces. Just as Gary deems as discomfiting the newfangled privilege, *savoir-faire*, and ultra-modern merchandise of the St. Judeans (198), the big brother also remarkably finds silence and aloneness disconcerting. As readers encounter the mock medical term *Garyitis* (512), a less facetious than admonitory neologism Denise quietly coins the morning after a terrified Gary secretly hides in his old closet (498), Chip encourages a reconsideration of the "little parkinsonian" shake that besets Gary's hands in the midst of his solo Internet-surfing a season earlier (171). Perhaps more tellingly, Chip introduces Gary's emerging mental infirmity at the beginning of "The More He Thought About it, The Angrier He Got." The second chapter of *The Corrections* starts with Gary, "(a vice president at CenTrust bank, not a shrink, let's remember)," stationed in a darkroom while he mentally measures his levels of Neurofactor 3, Factor 2, Factor 7, and Factor 1, in addition to his serotonin (139). With the subtle details and reminders included in "One Last Christmas," Chip insists upon a revised evaluation of Gary, as well as his Chestnut Hill home. Neither strictly incapacitated by the embellished limits of his panopticon house, nor exclusively determined by the equally overstated specifications of

his despotic wife, Gary suffers from the same neurological dysfunctions as his father. A tragic fool, DNA disables him, as do CPUs.

By implementing these emendations into *The Corrections*, Chip sadly insinuates that whereas a buoyant Enid, at seventy-five, finally determines to “make some changes in her life” (568), and a nursing-home confined Al, after two years, finally regains his dignity by killing himself in a steadfast refusal to eat (568), Gary may be incapable of making similar voluntary decisions or ameliorations. Despite his wife’s financial backing, he still may not survive the post-millennial market collapse in the lifestyle he endorses. Unlike Enid and Al, whose assets remained “locked” in ordinary “annuities and T-Bills,” Gary takes a “nasty little bath on [the Axon] biotech IPO” (564). Regardless of the two-year interval between “One Last Christmas” and the finale “The Corrections,” Gary illustrates no mentionable improvement to his individual temperament or constitution. On the other hand, Denise, now working at a new restaurant in Brooklyn, “look[s] so much happier” in Enid’s estimation (564). By the same token, Chip, a recent father and husband, “seem[s] almost miraculously transformed” (565). Even before her planned corrections, Enid likewise changes. In a secret show of solidarity with her daughter, Enid silently discontinues her protracted friendship with Bea Meisner after the unlikable woman labels a famous “‘gay’ actress” “immoral” and “evil” (564-5).

Notwithstanding the physical and genetic traits that he shares with his father, Gary furthermore appears unable to illustrate even a degree of Al’s definitive altruism. Before Al loses his ability to communicate verbally, he reluctantly yet confidentially notifies his daughter that he took his very costly early retirement, much to the chagrin of Enid and Gary, in order to save her “privacy” from the defamations of the blackmailing, blue-

cheeked Vietnam “Fellow” (521-4). Likely influenced by her father’s unselfish loyalty, Denise compels Chip to accept her “forgive[ness]” of the “principle torment of his life”: his \$20,500 “debt” (549-551). Before the close of *The Corrections*, Gary, by contrast, enacts a notable exception to Lambert fiscal munificence. Banking on the alleged “principle at stake,” he continues harrying Enid on account of the \$4.96 she “still ‘owed’ him” for an errand he performed during their last family Christmas (564). Out of “principle,” Enid refuses to reimburse her resolute, grownup son (564). As a futile alternative to looking ahead, like the progressive Enid, Gary prolongs looking back. As a fruitless substitute to listening to the stories of others, like the attentive Denise and Chip, Gary persists complaining about his own story. As an unproductive replacement to appreciating the random and often agonistic relationships that cultivate the evolution of social equality, like the covert Al, Gary continues to condemn the desires, deviations, and decisions that he cannot understand. Yet ruling out Gary’s eventual sense of self-melioration perpetuates the multileveled injustices that he experiences. Merely to dismiss or discard his complex case, with eyes downcast and shoulders slumped, perpetrates yet another injustice upon this big brother—the injustice that disallows additional examination, recognition, and correction.

The Limits of Control in DeLillo's Drama

Chapter Three

Stage-Managing the Individual

Don DeLillo writes about danger and dread insofar as they contribute to the refashioning of individual identity. For this American author and playwright, the self advantageously endures crucial adjustment or correction as it risks its known limits, independent limits that are evermore restricted and inactively ignored by virtue of contemporary American mass-market culture. In other words, in the media age the individual gains a greater sense of self-understanding when she actively elects to challenge the limits of this understanding. In DeLillo's always-political fiction, "a fiction that refuses the opposition of the personal and the public altogether" (Lentricchia 4), when a character endangers her self-awareness, she likewise exposes the dominant narratives of justice of her culture. Self-questioning, then, is not only a feature of personal autonomy but also an aspect of ideological critique. Accordingly, when someone tests her limits, she also tests the laws and restrictions of her immediate milieu. For DeLillo, self-change perpetuates collective change—a personal, social, and legal motif that plays out most predominantly in his disregarded dramatic works. In his plays, which director Peter Brook might describe as "truer" because they center on "doubting," "unease," "trouble," and "alarm" instead of some "noble aim" (50), DeLillo positions women, madmen, the alienated, the inert, the quasi-dead, and audience members alike in strange, controlled, and dangerous settings in order to instantiate the unique payoffs of sustained discomfort.

DeLillo confronts the submissive structures of both marginality and spectatorship in his drama. Modeling his plays on the theatrical tradition that integrates the absurdity and avant-gardism of Pirandello, Beckett, and Pinter, DeLillo sets up his theatrical spaces as carceral, punitive, and liberating. Counterbalancing his celebrated portrayals of novelistic containment, DeLillo's overlooked dramas circle around issues of the body, stillness, identity, and creativity. As in Franzen's *The Corrections*, DeLillo's novelistic figures cannot avoid representation, notwithstanding their global movements and relocations. In DeLillo's plays, on the other hand, disrupted and broken dialogue, palpable haphazardness and improvisation, prone and broken bodies, as well as existential emptiness, accentuate a crucial distinction between drama and narrative. For DeLillo, dramatic figures can escape depiction. By evading the spatial constraints of performance, an avoidance foregrounded with several characters who appear capable of simply leaving the stage, actors enable DeLillo to reconsider specific problems concerning identity and control.

Because they concern the progression from one space to another, inertia and departure invite questions of space and justice. In the theatre, the dictates of the play space forbid—or restrict—movement away from the stage. When a player absconds from this circumscribed locus, she no longer abides by the rules of the game of drama. The same does not necessarily hold true for novelistic narrative. An expansive scrutiny of DeLillo's plays, therefore, will enable further excavations of his novels. A detailed inspection of DeLillo's theatrical work, which consists of four full-length plays, *The Engineer of Moonlight*, *The Day Room*, *Valparaiso*, and *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, in addition to two mini-plays, *The Rapture of the Athlete Assumed into Heaven* and *The Mystery at*

the Middle of Ordinary Life, begins to administer critical justice where justice is long overdue. Not exclusively a novelist, DeLillo has devoted more than half of his literary career to the medium of drama—if not his entire career. As the goal of the legal method, justice demands reparations for particular actions or disservices or crimes. In order to begin to enact the deliberations that direct arbiters towards the fair implementation of justice, adjudicators must avail themselves of as much germane information, as much relevant narrative, as possible. Correlatively, to do justice to DeLillo and his work, not to mention his persistent representations of spatiality and its complex interrelations with control, free agency, and justice, an evaluation of his plays will carry a great deal of consequence, the imperative corollaries that this section of my thesis discovers.

In his substantial canon—his fictional *oeuvre* currently numbers fourteen novels, including one written under the pseudonym Cleo Birdwell, and one feature-film screenplay—DeLillo constantly situates his lead characters in opposition to their cultural narratives. His protagonists, in fact, are always outsiders. A theorist who utilizes the forums of novelistic and dialogic discourse, DeLillo should be evaluated as an anthropologist and as a social critic. His oppositional characters also can be seen as reflections of DeLillo himself. From the beginning of his career, he has maintained a modicum of protected privacy and controlled distance from the American literary and media establishments. As Thomas LeClair says in his breakthrough 1979 interview with the writer, an interview that took place eight years after DeLillo's first novel, *Americana*, was published, "DeLillo has not joined the literary auxiliary: he does not sit on panels, appear on television, judge contests, review books, or teach creative writing. He travels and writes" (3). In the meantime, DeLillo has budged, albeit, given his great success, not

by much. Vince Passaro, after a 1991 meeting with the author, gently remarks, “DeLillo is a star now, no longer the shrouded, elusive figure he had been when he was first interviewed by LeClair. He does readings from time to time; on rare occasions, he speaks to the press” (76).

In a marked contrast to DeLillo’s personal self-positioning outside the spotlight of the popular culture he critiques, his publications have been received with floodlights of critical acclaim and evaluation. He has won numerous literary awards, including the National Book Award and the Jerusalem Prize. Accordingly, assessment of DeLillo’s fiction features in tens of books and hundreds of critical articles. Distinct from the comparative dearth of scholarly response to the work of the very public Franzen, DeLillo criticism is an industry. Animated responses to DeLillo’s prose, by supporters and detractors, originated after the release of his 1985 novel *White Noise*. Following the popular eminence of his two encyclopedic epics, *Libra* (1988), a conspiratorial skeleton key to the Warren Report starring JFK-assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, and *Underworld* (1997), a Virgilian underground history of Cold War America, interest in DeLillo continues to escalate. This wide reaction makes him mandatory reading for any student or aficionado of the contemporary literary scene. Irrespective of the expansiveness of this criticism, though, it proves to be less than exhaustive.

Missing from this considerable critical analysis is a comprehensive look at DeLillo’s work as a dramatist. Though DeLillo habitually highlights his predilection for the theatrical—he includes dramatic conventions in his novels, he engineers the movements of his limited public life, he has written plays—less than five percent of DeLillo criticism takes his drama, not to mention his penchant for the performative, into

account. As Klaus Benesch points out in a 2003 article, “DeLillo’s dramatic texts are still conspicuously absent from academic criticism of his work” (133). Moreover, no single article within this limited body considers the evident connections between his different plays. Each of his theatrical pieces makes up a part of what could be called his dramatic project, a project that culminates with his most recent work, the play *Love-Lies-Bleeding*.

DeLillo’s dialogic works limit his novelistic considerations to personal impositions and constraints. In *White Noise*, he locates suburban USA as the pop-culture and commercial capital of the American (or Consumerist) Century. *Libra* and *Underworld* respectively move outward to the world-scene so as to reconfigure problematic understandings of consumption, correction, and justice in America. In DeLillo’s drama, by contrast, players devise games with justice. As checks and balances, these games refocus attention inward. They have consequences only for the players themselves—at first anyway. In *The Engineer of Moonlight*, *The Day Room*, *Valparaiso*, and *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, unique interchanges bespeak a tradeoff that surpasses the stage setting. Just as an actor plays her part on the stage, adjusts to the unrehearsed shifts that occur onstage, and performs different parts on different stages, so too does she reposition herself in terms of the evolving limits of her culture. Acting, if nothing else, teaches its adepts to contend with and to aestheticize change. After all, as Antonin Artaud implies, no two performances of the same drama are alike: “the theater is the only place in the world where a gesture, once made, can never be made the same way twice” (75). According to Artaud, successful theatrical gesturing eschews routine. Unlike the untheatrical, the performative obliges its adepts to evolve, to develop their roles during the course of a play and over a series of productions of a play. Though counterintuitive

because scripts demarcate the parameters of staged characters, the performed celebrates the transformation that the everyday can suffocate. As with justice, revision and correction distinguish theatre.

The Body Artist, DeLillo's shortest novel, emphasizes an exchange between the staged and the stages of the everyday. Though not a play *per se*, *The Body Artist* is set in a Big House, incorporates but a few characters, and centers on protagonist Lauren Hartke's stage performance, one of only three or four events that takes place beyond the walls of her home. Lauren's physically exacting and visibly tiring slow act of contortion, of practiced resistance, of personal conversion, speaks to DeLillo's persistent theatrical focus on the linkages between the private and the public. Her progress from home to stage also draws attention to DeLillo's ongoing movements from the privacy of his writing desk to the publicness of the theatre. After stressing the delicacy of independence, he acknowledges that the role of the playwright offsets that of the novelist: "I think it's precisely because a novelist lives in a world of fragile autonomy that I welcome the chance to work with other people. It's certainly not something I would want to do exclusively, and for me there is an element in which each form is an antidote to the other" (in Feeney 170-1).

Also embedded in DeLillo's privileging of the group work associated with the production of his plays is his admiration of audience reactions to the performances of his plays. In the same way that rehearsal compels him to "los[e] a sense of the customary reference points" (in Rothstein 21), "the presence of an audience" obliges him to appreciate "A sense of the play's strangeness" (in McAuliffe 175). As Mervyn Rothstein's and Jody McAuliffe's separate interviews with the playwright illustrate,

whether DeLillo aligns himself with individual actors or with a collective audience, he appreciatively reconsiders the limits of his work. These fresh gazes extend to directors as well. Akin to the dramatist who rethinks his conceptions of a play, and the actor who reacts to the changing nature of a play, a director likewise alters his outlook of a play when surrounded by actors and audiences. Brook explains, “any director will agree that his own view of his own work changes completely when he is sitting surrounded by people” (142). As an extension of acting, spectatorship entails a form of misplacement, repositioning, and revision.

In her short article “A Novelist Finds the Bare Bones of a Play,” Joyce Carol Oates likewise accentuates the logic of lostness associated with dramatic performance. Oates avers that “To experience the play, the playwright must become part of the audience, and this can only happen when there is an actual stage, living actors, voices other than one’s own” (3). DeLillo effectively elaborates on Oates’s appraisal of dramatic stimulation in his talk with Marc Chenétier and François Happe. Underscoring ambiguity, and maybe the centuries-long text-versus-performance debate among certain Shakespeare scholars, DeLillo closes his 1999 interview by confirming the lack of narrative closure in drama:

There is such a delicate balance necessary between text, performance, direction and even eventually lighting and sound that at some point in the process you realize that you’ve come full-circle and that the novel is going to be the antidote to the play, and all you want to do is go back in your lonely room and experience the classic solitude of the novelist. This is the cycle for me of plays and novels. The excitement of theatre is palpable but

the frustrations, and the complete absence of a definitive evening—the play as text means nothing in a way—, there’s no particular performance that is definitive in the way a novel is a solid object you hold in your hands and here it is. You can’t say that about a play. If the novel gives us a sense of throbbing consciousness, theat[re] is pure soul, beautiful and elusive. (111)

Though DeLillo purposely reconfirms that he initially sees theatre as a remedy to the novel, and once again substantiates his pressing need for the traditional seclusion of novel writing, in the latter half of his literary career dramatic discourse appears to be his top priority, as his writing history since the mid-eighties intimates. Shortly following the publication of *Valparaiso*, for instance, DeLillo joked, “It seems I do a play every decade” (in Feeney 169). Taken at face value, his observation pinpoints the plain fact that *The Engineer of Moonlight* was published in 1979, *The Day Room* in 1986, and *Valparaiso* in 1999. Nevertheless, later on in the interview Feeney clarifies that DeLillo’s third play first took root not long after the release of *Libra* in 1988: “DeLillo began work on what is now *Valparaiso* in 1991. Dissatisfied with the results, he soon abandoned it for what would turn out to be *Underworld*. The novel took five years to write, and when he was done DeLillo found himself looking at what he’d done on the play” (170).

Mark Feeney goes on to remark that DeLillo directly “went to work and had a finished version within five months” (170). DeLillo’s post-*Valparaiso* publications, if anything, emphasize his preoccupation with drama over two decades. Although *The Body Artist* (2001) is not a play, it develops by virtue of the events prompting Lauren to prepare and present her piece “Body Time,” a performance virtually ignored in DeLillo

criticism. Subsequent to Lauren's incorporated stage-performance, DeLillo publishes two more short works, both of which buttress his fascination with theatre. Released in 2003, but occurring over a single day in April 2000, the novel *Cosmopolis* acts as a coda to both *Underworld* and *Valparaiso*. As it observes the unities of time, space, and action, *Cosmopolis* at once problematizes the epilogue of *Underworld*, called "Das Kapital," and supports the finale of *Valparaiso*. Whereas *Underworld* concludes with the word "Peace" (827), as though the author condescends to tolerate if not to bolster the international cyberworld (or network economy) that closes his modern rendering of Karl Marx, *Cosmopolis* ends with less prevarication. Reformulating the televised murder that finishes *Valparaiso*, DeLillo terminates *Cosmopolis* with an underground assassination that compresses the main threat of the technoworld (or media economy): the end of individuality. In DeLillo's three-act play *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, first performed in 2005, and published in 2006, he caps off his prolonged dramatic analysis of the body and identity with a focus on stillness, isolation, and autonomy. Slotted into this twenty-year period is his novel *Mao II* (1991), which best embodies DeLillo's career-long fascination with creative men confined to "lonely rooms," the theatrically coded spaces that DeLillo associates with escape, seclusion, creativity, and independence. Similarly instrumental to the second half of DeLillo's career are the two two-minute plays *The Rapture of the Athlete Assumed into Heaven* (1990) and *The Mystery at the Middle of Ordinary Life* (2000).

Yet Don DeLillo's complicated fixation on the aesthetics of drama, as I start this section of my dissertation by showing, also reaches back to the very foundation of his literary vocation. "The Limits of Control in Don DeLillo's Drama" proceeds in two

chapters: “Stage-Managing the Individual” and “Lost in *The Day Room*, Locked into *Valparaiso*.” In the first chapter, I will investigate his major themes as I navigate through some of the principal responses to his work. No study of the celebrated writer can be complete without a consideration of DeLillo’s place in the culture that he appraises. In addition, this chapter explores the theatrical nature of DeLillo’s strategic move into a limited public life while it likewise scrutinizes the filmic and theatrical dimensions that he features in his earliest fictions, fictions that establish the dramatic emphasis that comes to govern his literary production.

In the final half of my DeLillo investigation, I endeavor to do critical justice to DeLillo’s dramatic project. Paying particular attention to his two most famous plays, *The Day Room* and *Valparaiso*, this analysis considers the constellation of themes developed throughout DeLillo’s dramatic canon, a canon increasingly devoted to the fate of the spectator in the media age. Taking the work of Brook and Artaud into account, as well as some pieces by DeLillo’s main cinematic, novelistic, and dramatic influences, “Lost in *The Day Room*, Locked into *Valparaiso*” closes with a look at DeLillo’s capacity to manipulate his audience members into his dramas. DeLillo thereby shows the affinity between plotting, writing, directing, acting, and witnessing, all of which call upon the individual to orchestrate her own sense of identity and freedom—a liberty that reconstructs the limits of social control, that is, the structures of representation, identity, freedom, and justice.

Film

One decade into a writing career that currently spans over thirty-five years, Don

DeLillo stealthily outlined his literary objectives in a feature story for *Rolling Stone* magazine. In the 1982 article “American Blood” the reclusive author discussed what he saw as a shift in American consciousness, a shift activated not by the Kennedy assassination itself, but rather by the collected minutiae on the murder—an epic of detail DeLillo sees as the novel that James Joyce could have written (DeCurtis 62). Popularly known as the Warren Report, and officially titled *Hearings before the President’s Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy*, the twenty-six volume encyclopedia comes to challenge the “sense of coherent reality most [Americans] shared” (22), according to DeLillo. He underlines the literary nature of post-Kennedy, or post-Oswald, America: “We seem from that moment [22 November 1963] to have entered a world of randomness and ambiguity, a world totally modern in the way it shades into the century’s ‘emptiest’ literature, the study of what is uncertain and unresolved in our lives, the literature of estrangement and silence. A European body of work, largely” (22). In the wake of the JFK assassination, and particularly the catalogue of doubt that this unjust incident prompts, “America” adopts the expansiveness and alienation of high modernism.

The fact that DeLillo forsakes some of his secrecy and separation in order to detail these same topics is nothing short of deliberately dramatic. After all, the *New Yorker’s* confidentiality in the early stages of his career rivals that of J. D. Salinger and Thomas Pynchon. Even by 1982, “after having already published six novels to great critical acclaim” (DePietro viii), DeLillo had only granted two interviews, and these reluctantly. He does not submit to another one for five more years, after which he agreed to participate in a relatively small number of interviews, given the magnitude of his novelistic success. Yet his audience address upon the reception of the American Book

Award for *White Noise* in 1985 proves even more telling than his adopted silence.

DeLillo arrived at the podium armed with but a brief apology: "I'm sorry I couldn't be here tonight," after which he quickly yet coolly returned to his seat (qtd. in DePietro viii). Instead of either showing up or not showing up at the New York Public Library, DeLillo manages to coordinate both maneuvers. Deadpan and shielded like the inscrutable rocker Bucky Wunderlick in his 1973 novel *Great Jones Street*, DeLillo publicly protects his privacy. At the same time, he publicly vacates his public life. In like manner to the writer Bill Gray of *Mao II*, who is a later version of Wunderlick, DeLillo exposes himself to scrutiny only to maintain his privacy. He reveals his character with actions, not words.

As the prolific novelist and playwright divulges in his first interview, "It's my nature to keep quiet about most things. Even the ideas in my work. When you try to unravel something you've written, you belittle it in a way. It was created as a mystery, in part" (in LeClair 4). In answer to LeClair's opening inquiry about the dearth of information about himself in reference books (these are limited to book titles and publication dates), DeLillo deflects the question. Resisting autobiography, he discusses the difficulties of elaborating on his own work, the difficulties of restructuring his own restructuring, and the difficulties of matching the vocabulary of the author with the vocabulary of the author as self-critic, before he half facetiously, half wearily concludes, "But here I am, talking" (4). This DeLillo performance, stage-managed as at once candid and tactical, follows the first phrase of his first answer as an author offering himself to the depictions of the academic and the public arenas. In the beginning, DeLillo sets up his media image or civic self by citing the cerebral Stephen Dedalus: "Silence, exile, cunning, and so on" (4). Expanding upon Dedalus' memorable phrase, DeLillo adds the

equivocal “and so on,” which pertains to his avant-gardism. He aims to lead, not follow. By adding “and so on,” DeLillo likewise moves towards the sense of quiet alarm or distraction that characterizes the drama of Samuel Beckett. Whereas Joyce endeavored to say everything, Beckett labored over saying anything at all.

Though perhaps cryptic, DeLillo’s stylized entry into public life should not be interpreted as exaggeratedly surprising. He highlights *A Portrait of the Artist* out of a sense of straightforwardness and frankness, rather than in an attempt at elusiveness or evasiveness. By invoking James Joyce and his intertextual writer *manqué*, a would-be artist who conspicuously does not appear in *Finnegans Wake*, DeLillo discloses a cautious measure of personal information, while simultaneously hearkening back to his earlier work. As he draws attention to Dedalus and Joyce, DeLillo points to his own main literary influence. He also directs attention towards his first novel, the Warren Commission Report, and his approval of difficult fictional discourse. DeLillo refers to Joyce in later interviews with Passaro, Begley, Howard, and Remnick as well. These references suggest that DeLillo models himself as a theorist of contemporary culture, as the writer configuring the details that Joyce would have collected.

DeLillo’s earliest novel features commercial-, TV-, and film-making, and a prolonged road trip. Deliberately titled in order to distinguish DeLillo as an American and not as a second-generation Italian-American, *Americana* (1971) evokes two late-fifties classics: Franco-American Jack Kerouac’s first successful novel, *On the Road*, and Russian-American Vladimir Nabokov’s first American novel, *Lolita*. As Nabokov stresses in his afterward to *Lolita*, he invested the work with “suburban lawn[s]” and “mountain meadow[s]” and “American motels” because he was “trying to be an

American writer and claim only the same rights that other American writers enjoy” (281). During his cross-country drive in *Americana*, first-person narrator David Bell makes frequent allusions to *Ulysses*, the one-day epic wherein Dedalus is ironically consumed by the night, instead of being smoldered by the sun, like his Greek predecessor. From what turns out to be his final day as a TV executive in New York, where David learns that his college friend will be marrying his third wife in “old Dub [so he can] pretend she’s Molly Bloom” (95), through the recounting of his days as a film-studies student at a liberal arts school in the Southwest US, where he wanted to be called “Kinch. The knife blade” (145), to one of his final car rides, where the talk-radio jockey goes off on the jocoseriousness of “Buckmulliganism” (368), David’s US tour recasts Dedalus’ day in Dublin. In *Americana*, as in *Ulysses*, each complex protagonist leaves a particular tower, be it a gleaming skyscraper or the rundown Martello. Both obsess over media forms. Just as Dedalus intones theological tracts, David reiterates for-profit slogans. A contemporary adaptation of Dedalus, David furthermore meanders in the sand, although he drifts in an Antonioni-inspired empty desert rather than upon a St. Augustine-textured dirty beach.

Unlike Dedalus, however, David does not strangely withdraw from his respective narrative. Neither overshadowed by a half-father figure, nor forgotten in the predawn dark, David does not more or less disappear by the middle of *Americana*. Certainly, the *prima facie* argument for David’s sustained presence in *Americana* derives from his role as narrator. In *Ulysses*, by contrast, Dedalus is one of three or four key figures. In this encyclopedic text, which could have been titled *Irlandia*, the stories of the Jewish Leopold and the Spanish Molly satirically overrule Dedalus’ personal narrative. Compellingly, David successfully resists disappearance because he reclaims artistic

individuality, a self-recovery that Dedalus' specific sort of resistance appears to disallow. Fixated on the language and culture of his English oppressors, in addition to his penury, Dedalus cannot escape his immediate circumstances in order to actualize his artistic ambitions. Distinct from the exiled Bloom and Molly, as well as Joyce himself, Dedalus cannot tell his story. Confronted with different sorts of equally stifling contemporary dilemmas, David, on the other hand, fulfills this aspiration. In asserting his personal freedom, which works in tandem with his art making, he avoids being consumed by the corporate culture of the USA.

Notwithstanding his problematic understanding of the type of art that he fashions, David's artistic creation affirms his renewed sense of personal identity. In *Americana*, the twenty-eight-year-old David (the son of a marketplace tycoon who "move[s] the merch" with consummate proficiency as he "collect[s] reels [and reels] of TV commercials" [84]) initially sees himself as a television *wunderkind*. "Dave Bell's my name; TV's my game," he industriously proclaims into his ringing office telephone (96). He later changes this occupational qualifier after he finally informs his three road companions (who are accompanying him to the set of a TV-special on the Navahos) that he has abandoned his cushy job for the purpose of directing "a long unmanageable movie full of fragments of everything that's part of my life, maybe ultimately taking two or three or more full days to screen and only a minutely small part of which I'd like to do out here" (205). Once David begins his *cinéma vérité* in a dingy hotel room situated somewhere in the Midwest, he alters his telephone theatrics: "Dave Bell's my name; cinematography's my game" (222). In spite of the fact that he ultimately completes a book and not a movie, however, he never alters this revised career descriptor. At the close of the novel, David describes

himself as a wordsmith, ostensibly crafting his American narrative on an unnamed isle. Taking this final narrative turn into account, Stuart Hutchinson argues, “the proposition that the whole book is a movie or movies remains as notional as his eventual existence on an island. *Americana*, after all, exists in prose, and we cannot see any movie David makes” (120).

With this transition from film to fiction, David can be understood as a version of the young DeLillo. They are both first-time novelists. David’s age reflects DeLillo’s when he originally conceived *Americana*. Moreover, like David, who sees himself as a “child of Godard and Coca-Cola” (269), DeLillo acknowledges that “the movies of Jean-Luc Godard had a more immediate effect on [his] early work than anything [he]’d ever read” (in LeClair 9). Moreover, just as David’s cinematic and literary allusions solely relate to innovative men (Eisenstein, Bergman, Hitchcock, Antonioni, Kafka, Kerouac, and Beckett), so too are the novelistic forbears that DeLillo eventually highlights in his first interview exclusively male creators. “The books I came back to,” DeLillo offers, “seem to be the ones that demonstrate the possibilities of fiction. *Pale Fire*, *Ulysses*, *The Death of Virgil*, *Under the Volcano*, *The Sound and the Fury*—these come to mind” (10).

In the same decisive talk with LeClair, DeLillo also demonstrates that he privileges the old spirit of print over the new vigor of the image. Indicating an affinity between earlier forms of cinematic representation and the enduring nature of novelistic depiction, a kinship that contemporary film-makers and –audiences apparently distort or neglect, DeLillo stresses that “It’s movies in part that seduced people into thinking the novel was dead. The power of the film image seemed to be overwhelming our little world of print. Film could do so much. Print could only trot across the page. But movies and

novels are too closely related to work according to shifting proportions. If the novel dies, movies will die with it" (9). DeLillo asserts the primacy of the written. Like his first protagonist, David, he places fiction before film. Though film indeed sways fiction, as David's artistic development emblematically suggests, in DeLillo's personal estimation films cannot supersede literature. With his first novel, DeLillo styles himself as above all an American writer—"I'm a novelist, period. An American novelist," he later reemphasizes in an interview with Nadotti (115). As well, in *Americana* he sets himself up as a novelist who will not be overwhelmed by the increasing force of the image, a captivation and capitulation that David's business-mogul father typifies. Though interested in, if not mesmerized by, film, TV, and the product placements that finance these rapidly shuffled stills, DeLillo implies even in his first major work that he will write against the "Multinational corporations," as he describes them thirty-years later, that "have come to seem more vital and influential than governments" ("In the Ruins of the Future" 33).

As DeLillo illustrates all through his novelistic and dramatic work, he sees creation as individuating. A manifestation of self-creation, plastic or literary creation differentiates the individual from the mass-mentality typically targeted, not to say generated, by consumer culture. As a preliminary case in point of DeLillo's career-long association of human distinctiveness with artistic conception, in *Americana* the learned David manages to create. His hero Dedalus never accomplishes this creative act, this self-fashioning of identity. DeLillo vests his understanding of the individual *qua* individual in artistic design, whether in the form of film, fiction, theatre, visual art, or body artistry. As DeLillo consistently theorizes in his fiction, and maybe most movingly in his drama, in a

contemporary world wherein “we’re all,” so he posits in his interview with Begley, “one beat away from becoming elevator music” (97), original creation enables a person to actualize herself as distinct, as an inimitable, evolving self. To be an individual, namely a self fully aware of personal liabilities and private freedoms (especially in an age wherein DeLillo sees even lone TV viewers as silent members of the crowd, as a “crowd broken down into millions of small rooms” [in Begley 101], as what Guy Debord calls “the lonely crowd” [22]), agents must controversially lead rather than half-consciously pursue. In the same manner as the risks duly assumed by novelists, terrorists, actors, and actors’ audiences constitute the developing facets of production, novelty, and critique, individuals must take an active stake in self-construction and –correction.

In a 1996 letter to Franzen, whom at the time was suffering from a depression commensurate with his inability to reconcile the competing demands of writing a big social novel that is at once poignant and popular (i.e. a novel enjoyed by the culture that it criticizes), DeLillo comforts the distressed New Yorker by outlining what he sees as the historical and contemporary role of the novelist. DeLillo writes, “The writer leads, he doesn’t follow. The dynamic lives in the writer’s mind, not in the size of the audience. And if the social novel lives, but only barely, surviving in the cracks and ruts of the culture, maybe it will be taken more seriously, as an endangered spectacle. A reduced context but a more intense one” (in “Why Bother?” 95). DeLillo then outlines a connection between autonomy and writing, and, by extension, any form of artistic formation: “Writing is a form of personal freedom. It frees us from the mass identity we see in the making all around us. In the end, writers will write not to be outlaw heroes of some underculture but mainly to save themselves, to survive as individuals” (95-6).

Although the postscript to this letter fills Franzen with a “strange” “surge of hope” (96), it first appears to convey a sense of imminent danger, if not doom. Almost nostalgic for a phenomenological sensitivity to identity, DeLillo ends his epistle with an off-putting paean to criticism and individuality: “If serious reading dwindles to near nothingness, it will probably mean that the thing we’re talking about when we use the word ‘identity’ has reached an end” (96).

The edge of expectation that Franzen finds here, in spite of his concerns over the decline of “serious reading” and Silicon Valley’s would-be potential to “plant a virtual-reality helmet in every American household” (“Why Bother?” 96), rises out of his newly professed appreciation of “human limitation” (96). With DeLillo’s help, the younger author realizes that difficulty signals a “fixture of life” (96), a condition of constraint that can inculcate the will to discover mystery in the commonplace and to create comedy out of the tragic. To close his most popular essay, Franzen draws attention to the fact that the world, just as a generation before, is “ending still” (97). Accentuating the oddly comforting nature of this putatively discomfiting actuality, Franzen ends “Why Bother?” with unanticipated sanguinity: “I’m happy to belong to [the world] again” (97). Just as the tragic realism of *The Corrections* expresses a comedic and therefore human or compassionate perspective, so too can a unique sense of individuality be located in its alleged opposite—a threat to this same individuality. The difficulties attached to this imminent danger justify distinctive identity. Recognizing novel intimidation implies an awareness of difference, a difference that the endangered agent wishes not only to protect but also to substantiate. While justifying individuality, the self engages in acts of irreproducible rejuvenation, which entail unpredictable transformations. Personality

adapts as it reestablishes itself through creative acts.

Fiction

In his fiction, DeLillo excavates the connections between danger, difficulty, mystery, comedy, performance, and identity. As he says in a 1988 interview with Anthony DeCurtis, this thematic inspiration results primarily from what he “consider[s] the great era of European films: Godard, Antonioni, Fellini, Bergman” (67). DeLillo makes a point of highlighting that these directors “seem to fracture reality. They find mystery in commonplace moments. They find humor in even the greatest political acts. They seem to find an art and a seriousness which [he] thinks[s] was completely unexpected and which had once been the province of literature alone. So that a popular art was suddenly seen as a serious art” (67). Speaking for DeLillo, David Firestone proposes why DeLillo’s fiction unwaveringly commemorates the mystery and seriousness that define the continental films of the 1950s and 1960s. Also suggesting how television, gadgetry, and the media usurp the strange and the weighty from the public imaginary, Firestone writes, “It is mystery that feeds the imagination, and it is mystery, [DeLillo] believes, that is being drained from the public arena, with its multiple camera shots, instant replays and snap moral judgments” (153).

DeLillo’s focus on the mass cultural backing of certainty over mystery and repetition over reflection recalls his estimation of television as put forth in a 1993 talk with Adam Begley. DeLillo clarifies that—as he illustrates in his early novels *American*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names*—in contradistinction to film, “TV has a sort of panting lust for bad news and calamity as long as it is visual. We’ve reached the point where

things exist so they can be filmed and played and replayed” (105). In another interrogation four years later, DeLillo refines his understanding of the relation between the general focus in the popular media on “bad news, sensationalistic news, overwhelming news” and a loss of creative critical dialogue between individual Americans: “It seems to be that news is a narrative of our time. It has almost replaced the novel, replaced discourse between people. It replaced families. It replaced a slower, more carefully assembled way of communicating, a more personal way of communicating” (in Remnick 143).

As a consequence of the image age, an impersonal, collective identity appropriates familial and individual identities. Instead of cautiously reading isolated violent acts and their attendant sources and costs, the TV viewer “consume[s] these acts of violence” until they are eventually replaced by equally violent, equally mass-marketed, equally overlaid images (in Remnick 144). Rather than discern difference, the manipulated viewer witnesses a narrative wherein divergence receives inadequate attention. On account of this negligence, “the display of violated bodies gives an imaginary body to the noncorporeal crowd of television watchers and newspaper readers, while at the same time vouchsafing the reassurance that the suffering physical body is elsewhere” (Green 167). Just as distinct acts get replicated as one endless stream of images forging a “palpable link” between the lone perpetrator and the faceless consumer (167), so too is the independent viewer treated as one accumulated viewership that is systematically prohibited from any clear sense of individual peculiarity. In the same way as the corporate sponsors of this ongoing violent narrative endorse a “cultural fixation on female thinness [that] is not an obsession on female beauty but an obsession about female

obedience” (Wolf 187), the body of indistinct viewers can never personally identify with what it submits to devour spectacularly. As Debord, who defines “The spectacle” as “*capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image” (24), theorizes, “Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its separateness” (22). In accordance with the female body, a dynamic body reduced to a specific undifferentiated image, the viewing body entertains a parallel treatment. The lone spectator gets condensed into a particular, indistinguishable crowd, a crowd passively obsessing over a stream of like images. Comprised of endless spectacle as commercial consumption, the media age therefore complicates affiliation. Viewers are all united in their sense of aloneness. Viewers consume as a weirdly congruous one, each lonely one convinced that she is not the lonely one that she is watching.

LeClair opens the first DeLillo interview by describing the novelist’s work as a “precise and thorough anthropology of the present, an account of our kinship in myths, media, and conspiracies” (3). In retrospect, LeClair might also have indicated that DeLillo similarly appears to be an accurate anthropologist of the future—had he DeLillo’s tested predilection for prognostication, that is. As Jesse Kavadlo says in the first sentence of his book on the popular writer, “We live in DeLillo-esque times” (1). (Consider for instance the front cover of *Underworld*, which may, or may not, have been selected by the author. Published in 1997, the face of the tome encompasses the twin towers of the World Trade Center obscured by mist—or noxious smoke—from two thirds up, with a giant bird, presumably a symbol for a second aircraft, swooping into the haze, all fronted by the crucifix of St. Michael’s Church, which resembles both a tombstone

and a set of crosshairs). After he describes the telling toxic spills detailed in *White Noise*, the conspiracy and bureaucratic incompetence of *Libra*, and the Middle-Eastern terrorist activities in *Mao II*, Kavadlo lists other members of the *literati* who likewise comment on the author's eerie prescience: "Pizarro suggests that [in the wake of 9/11] DeLillo's insight, long noted as one of his most striking features by book critic Michiko Kakutani, novelist David Foster Wallace, and scholars Frank Lentricchia, Charles Molesworth, and Mark Osteen, now bordered on the uncanny" (2).

Yet the poignancy of these allegations of foresight has nothing to do with the most telling elements in the DeLillo canon, as Kavadlo swiftly attests. In the end, judging an author in terms of his prescience or "street cred," a standard under which one "imagines DeLillo would do quite well," proves "absurd" in Kavadlo's estimation (3). Though DeLillo certainly maps present trends, and often anticipates future ones (a forethought that develops part and parcel with his avant-gardism), the successful forecasting of future events does little to validate the vitality of literature. Nor does correct conjecturing authenticate the social work or justice and imaginative interchange that important literature encourages and executes. Rather, for DeLillo and his combination of contemporary archeology and anthropology, cultural appraisal, personal discomfort, and individual correction demarcate the cultural resonance of fiction.

In his meeting with LeClair, he sketches what turns out to be a career-long fidelity to difficulty. Evoking mystery and marginality, DeLillo pinpoints the differences between the media and the novel, the glib and the serious, and the crowd and the individual:

You want to dare readers to make a commitment you know they can't make. That's part of it. There's also the sense of drowning in

information and the mass awareness of things. Everybody seems to know everything. Subjects surface and are totally exhausted in a matter of days or weeks, totally played out by the publishing industry and the broadcast industry. Nothing is too arcane for the treatment, the process. Making things difficult for the reader is less an attack on the reader than it is on the age and the facile knowledge-market. The writer is driven by this conviction that some truths aren't arrived at so easily, that life is still full of mystery, that it might be better for you, Dear Reader, if you went back to the Living section of your newspaper because this is the dying section and you don't really want to be here. The writer is working against the age and so he feels some satisfaction at not being widely read. He is diminished by an audience. (12-3)

DeLillo connects difficulty to difference, and difference to individuality. For him, apartness is a prerequisite for creativity and critique. Just as the writer can lead via her interest in inscrutable communication, the reader can lead by way of her unremitting assessment of these mysteries. A solo exercise, the act of reading ensures a variety of cultural *refuse*. Like the writer, the reader frees herself from the mass identity in the making all around her by engaging in a complex interpretive act that counteracts the flight from self-awareness perpetrated by what DeLillo labels the "mass anesthesia" of consumerism ("American Blood" 24).

Several critics comment on DeLillo's emphasis on the tie between mass culture and mass identity. Observing "DeLillo's people," and particularly his depiction of *Libra* hero Lee Harvey Oswald, Ann Arensberg remarks that "sanity and integrity appear to

depend on each one's remaining outside the mainstream of a society that is clearly dangerous, even fatal, to the individual" (41). Also underscoring *Libra*, as well as DeLillo's membership among writers who "yok[e] together [the] terror and wild humor" of current America, Frank Lentricchia highlights DeLillo's "desire to move readers to the view that the shape and fate of their culture dictates the shape and fate of the self" (2). In the same vein, David Cowart refers to *Underworld*, wherein protagonist Nick Shay (a "murderer, thief, sexual predator, waste executive, survivor)," proves to be "sufficiently aware to hold his own against social, biological and historical determinism" (202). Redeploying his assessment towards the dangers and the dispensations of the media age, Cowart cites John N. Duvall: "An awareness of one's alienation is the last best hope to construct an opposition to the forces of consumer culture" (202).

These claims, and others like them, have a dual purpose. Though they evidently explore how DeLillo construes the individuality of his male protagonists and of his readers, they also act as overt defenses of DeLillo and his work. Ever since the publication of *White Noise*, which lambastes white-American suburban-culture, while featuring an idiotic yet appealing professor of Hitler Studies, and increasingly after the publication of *Libra*—a novel that his *Rolling Stone* article predicts—DeLillo has been under siege by the right in the American media. Going against what eventually turns out to be the communal view of journalists Bruce Bawer, Gary Will, James Wood, Jonathan Yardley, and B.R. Meyers, in "American Blood" DeLillo glosses a shift in consciousness essentially subsidized by the Warren Report. Exposing the commission's researchers as conspiracy-minded or Oswald-like, DeLillo states that "We have been educated in skepticism, Europeanized, by reports of official mistakes, half-hearted investigations,

willful omissions. The valuable work of the theorists has shown us the dark possibilities, prodded us to admit to ourselves the difficult truths of the matter. No simple solution, no respite from mystery and chronic suspicion. Conspiracy is now the true faith" (28).

In "American Blood," DeLillo then clues his readership into what he aims to accomplish with the book that he eventually titles *Libra*. Tipping off conscientious interpreters of detail, he delineates the ways in which he will manipulate the possibility, mystery, and difficulty of the Warren Report: "Give good minds an opening and they will create a conceptual masterwork, a gleaming four-faced idol much more beautiful, fearful and intriguing than the facts as we know them could conceivably yield" (28). *Libra*, as its title implies, endeavors to deliver a balance of justice, at least representationally, to unlikely protagonist and perennial outcast Lee Harvey Oswald. Allan Hepburn explains this pioneering move from the traditionally iconic (public Kennedy; JFK's Dallas motorcade) to the essentially legalistic (private Oswald; Lee's criminal defense): "In *Libra*, DeLillo innovates on literary representation as a form of legal representation. The novel neither gives voice to the president nor directly depicts him. In this regard, DeLillo defies the iconic tendencies in American fiction. He effectively shifts emphasis away from the indeterminacy of an iconic event and towards the principles that underlie justice" (285).

Given DeLillo's impartial depictions of outsiders and his razor-sharp critiques of the media establishment, the fact that old boy members of this journalistic guild summarily paint him as un-American proves less than startling. An alien to irony, a stranger to satire, Bawer dismisses DeLillo's fiction: "It's better DeLillo seems to say in one novel after another, to be a marauding, murderous maniac—and therefore a *human*—

than to sit still for America as it is, with its air-conditioners, assembly lines, television sets, supermarkets, synthetic fabrics, and credit cards. At least when you're living a life of primitive violence, you're closer to the mystery at the heart of it all" (qtd. in Remnick 141). Predictably, Will's condemnations are quite comparable to those of Bawer. Where Bawer labels *White Noise* as "Philosophy McNuggets" (in Remnick 141), Will hails *Libra* as "sandbox existentialism" (in Remnick 141). Still, Will takes his easy variety of rational objectivism much further than his likeminded associate. Also misconstruing DeLillo's iterated equation of the writer to an outsider, while likewise overlooking the novelist's repeated depictions of individuals tracking other individuals, Will typifies DeLillo as a perilous madman, and indicts him and his "sophomoric self-dramatization" with "literary vandalism and bad citizenship" (141-2). Incapable of appreciating DeLillo's cultural criticism, legalistic deliberation, and configuring of justice, not to mention his justifications of fictional discourse as an investigation and a reevaluation of both policing and criminality, these defenders of American principle easily dismiss his literary production by attacking his presupposed intentions. Their accusations of DeLillo the man are doubtlessly defamatory. DeLillo, however, openly welcomes these facile denunciations and others like them.

His response to these charges manifests itself as at once wonderfully emblematic of DeLillo himself, historically telling about writers in themselves, and, most of all, evocatively discomfiting for the individual readers of this literary delinquent. In his interview with Remnick, DeLillo accepts Will's allegations as a tribute to the considerable influence of novelists: "We ought to be bad citizens. We ought to in the sense that we're writing against what power represents, and often what the government

represents, and what the corporation dictates, and what consumer consciousness has come to mean. In that sense if we're bad citizens, we're doing our job" (142). Unsmiling, as his tone indicates, he continues to address Will's incriminations, "Will also said I blamed America for Lee Harvey Oswald. But I don't blame America for Lee Harvey Oswald, I blame America for George [sic] Will" (142). Lentricchia, the adherent whom, with his work on *White Noise*, chiefly introduced DeLillo to scholarly study, appraises the stern "censorious reflections" of Will *et al* as a "backhanded testimony" in support of the cultural clout of fiction. Incorporating DeLillo's trademark pokerfaced humor, he states, "Not wanting to say so, the media right has nevertheless said in so many words, against its Will, that fiction does not have a private address and that DeLillo does to Oswald what we, for good or for ill, do every day to our friends, lovers, and enemies: he interprets him, he creates a character" (5).

Lentricchia's review of DeLillo's bad citizenship, an evaluation that bonds the author to "canonical American writers," writers who were always "adversarial critics" of US culture, writers who were always "antinomian, suspicious, even 'paranoid'" (5-6), furthermore calls to mind some of DeLillo's earlier comments on the role of the author as notorious arbiter of dominant mores and trends. Privileging both the determined apartness and the willful resistance of the contemporary writer as cultural critic, DeLillo tells Ann Arensberg that

The writer is the person who stands outside society, independent of affiliation and influence. The writer is the man or woman who automatically takes a stance against his or her government. There are so many temptations for American writers to become part of the system and

part of the structure that now, more than ever, we have to resist. American writers ought to stand and live in the margins, and be more dangerous.

Writers in repressive societies are considered dangerous. That's why so many of them are in jail. (45-6)

Since he voices these views on the traditional dangers of fiction in 1988, DeLillo's timing could not be more appropriate. Shortly thereafter, on Valentine's Day in 1989, the Ayatollah issued his *fatwa* or death sentence on writer Salman Rushdie in the months following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, an East-meets-West blend of "documentary realism, literary allusion, and magic" (Scanlan 230).

Taking the unsubtle nuances of Rushdie's media image into account, Margaret Scanlan describes the Rushdie Affair as an "enormous political and media event that threate[ned] to swallow" up the author and his work (230). Instead of summarily executing the difficult author, the Ayatollah advertises his will-to-execute. He therefore issues a general public threat rather than a particular personal threat. In other words, the Ayatollah does not merely mark Rushdie as an iconoclast. In her article, Scanlan goes on to connect this vast political and media event to DeLillo's next novel, *Mao II*, which stars an author who discards his twenty-year self-exile in order to offer himself for human hostage-trade in Bosnia. Scanlan argues, "the questions the Affair raises about the enmeshment of contemporary writers with electronic journalism, fundamentalism, and terrorism provide DeLillo's novel with its most pressing themes" (231). For all intents and purposes, DeLillo underlined these affinities just before the publication of *Mao II*. In his discussion with Passaro, DeLillo describes Rushdie (who, like himself, once worked as an advertising copywriter for Oglivy and Mather) as "a hostage" (84).

Drama

While holed up in the Washington, DC, apartment of self-styled *savant* Christopher Hitchens, Rushdie played the part of a jailed writer. Considered dangerous and marginal and terroristic, he found himself confined as a result of oppressive ideological forces. Taking the limits impressed upon jailed and hostages into account, DeLillo drafts a linkage between fiction-makers and terrorists: "In a repressive society, a writer can be deeply influential, but in a society that's filled with glut and repetition and endless consumption, the act of terror may be the only meaningful act" (in Passaro 84). Earmarking the force or power of performance, DeLillo prolongs his elucidation of creativity and cultural manipulation: "People who are powerless make an open theater of violence. True terror is a language and a vision. There is a deep narrative structure to terrorist acts, and they infiltrate and alter consciousness in ways that writers used to aspire to" (84).

The theme of terrorism is not new to DeLillo in the early 1990s. As theatricalized manifestations of character completion, terror and conspiracy enter DeLillo's discourse as early as the mid- to late-seventies. Published in 1977, *Players*, which is DeLillo's fifth novel, features husband and wife protagonists Pammy and Lyle. Set up as counterparts (their increasingly divergent stories are narrated in alternating chapters), each engages in a secret, second existence for the purpose of establishing a sense of self-fulfillment in an otherwise desperate and predictable life wherein marital sex materializes as a business transaction involving "perfor[mance]," "service," and "satisf[action]" (35), and television manifests itself as "intimate, able to cause embarrassment" (40). Corresponding to these bizarre inversions, in *Players* the couple becomes estranged on account of their startling

familiarity with one another. Demonstrably, they watch the same TV shows from separate rooms. Just as they both independently fight lunchtime crowds (14), they both singly struggle with the privacy of television (40). Moreover, they both autonomously reclaim themselves by eliminating the inevitable from their everyday lives in different ways.

In this meticulously crafted and compact novel consisting of a prologue, an epilogue, two main sections of like length, and seven principal players, Pammy leaves New York, where autoerotic voyeurs roam in cars (25), to have an affair, eventually, with the suicidal member of the homosexual couple with whom she stays on the coast of Maine. Instead of simply “performing” sex, she re-codifies its so-called restrictions. Lyle likewise refashions limits. He alters his lifestyle when he involves himself with the terrorist group that kills one of his coworkers on the floor of the Stock Exchange. He thereby makes the adjustment from passive spectatorship to active conspirator. In his interview with Begley, DeLillo comments on the double-lives he portrays in *Players* while he elaborates on a continuum between structure, estrangement, terror, and narrative: “The second life is not only the secret life. It’s the more structured life. People need rules and boundaries, and if society doesn’t provide them in sufficient measure, the estranged individual may drift into something deeper and more dangerous. Terrorism is built on structure. A terrorist act is a structured narrative played out over days or weeks or even years if there are hostages involved” (96). To put it as Diane Johnson does in her critical estimation of *Players*, “Terrorist action is not so much an example of lawlessness as a comment on the rules, an aspect of the structure itself” (109).

Not purely a novel about terrorism, *Players* constructs a relation between legality,

narrative, performance, and the self—all of which feature strongly in DeLillo's continuing project as a dramatist. As he suggests in *Players*, his slimmest novel until *The Body Artist*, any sincere query of legality requires a repositioning of oneself in terms of the limits of the law, limits that invariably evolve because of this same questioning. In correlation to this questioning and necessary relocation, when an individual disputes an aspect of the prevailing cultural narrative, she correspondingly reconfigures and reinstates her placement and function within this organic narrative. Like an actor, she steps from the wings into the action of a play, thereby forever altering its already transformative course. The enquirer might also be seen as an audience member who successfully manages to insinuate herself into the action of an ongoing theatrical performance. An above-board or lawful terrorist, the disputer or insinuator or spectator-turned-actor can redefine herself as she alters the structures of her immediate surroundings.

Anticipating the theatrical project that extends to DeLillo's drama, *Players* concludes where David Bell's amateur film begins in *Americana*: in a small room. Suggesting a curiously symmetrical condition to that of Lyle's wife Pammy, whose story ends as she confusedly computes the "functional value" of a "flophouse marquee" reading "TRANSIENTS" (207), Lyle's narrative stops just after he finds himself in a dark space puzzled by "the tendency of motels to turn things inward" (209). Like Lyle and like most DeLillo heroes, the reader also finds herself situated in a similar zone of discomfort. Suddenly and subtly hailed into the text, individual readers are invited to meditate on the motel room as "peculiar invention," as "powerfully abstract," as "the *idea* of something, still waiting to be expressed fully in concrete form" (209). Solidifying this strange,

deferred summoning of the reader into the text, DeLillo twice incorporates plural personal pronouns in the final three pages of *Players*. In “The Motel,” DeLillo transforms his gathering of individual readers into a collection of dynamic spectators. Occupied by a “We” (210) or an “us” (212), the textual space turns into a theatrical arena wherein readers are left to determine their own roles as audience members.

The active involvement that DeLillo calls for in the epilogue to *Players* undercuts the passive spectatorship in his prologue. In contrast to the events in “The Motel,” “The Movie” renders characters and readers alike into positions of passivity or doubly constrained passivity. Confined to the piano-equipped cabin of a jumbo jet, the anonymous reader and the seven unnamed characters view a film in which a gang wielding machineguns and machetes swiftly massacres an apparently innocent party of golfers. Complicating what David Cowart describes as this “Godardesque depiction of suburban terror” (44), DeLillo’s cinematic scenes simultaneously appear as loosely laughable—for the airline passengers at least. By accompanying or even overshadowing the sudden “terror” with live, histrionic show-tunes, DeLillo distorts the overall impression of these unprovoked acts of violence. As his narrator clarifies, “Despite the camera’s fascination for the lush slaughter of these clearly expendable men, the scene becomes confused, due to the melodramatic piano. We’re steeped in gruesomely humorous ambiguity” (9). In “The Movie,” the reading “we” negotiates a fictional regression that slides through a narrative that details awful images, comical notes, and the vague joint-reaction to this unsettling mix. As invasive spectators, readers appear to have little choice but to identify with the fictional “we” of the novel. In this scene, complicity evokes not the available openness of a three-dimensional theatrical space, but rather the

enforced restrictiveness of a two-dimensional visual frame.

Speaking to the form and content of *Players*, Bill Mullen expounds upon the representational limitations of the image. Wrapping up his assessment of *Players*, he insists that “DeLillo’s framing self-consciously refers us only to another series of frames—movies, pictures, television, which are for us as for Lyle the vehicles of cultural ‘discipline’: the prisonhouse of images” (127). Nonetheless, in his reading of the novel Mullen seems incapable of disassociating the imagistic incarceration typified in the prologue from the theatrical possibility illustrated in the epilogue. Mullen theorizes that continued transference and eventual disappearance logically indicate “the end of representation.” He states, “The end of the novel is the end of ‘representation.’ The space of the text itself, this frame which contains the story proper, empties of meaning for ‘we’ the reader just as Lyle evaporates in the last lines of the text” (126). In order to come to this conclusion, he cites the final lines of “The Motel.” These lines run as follows: “Spaces and what they contain no longer account for, mean, serve as examples of, or represent. // The propped figure, for instance, is barely recognizable as male. Shedding capabilities and traits by the second, he can still be described (but quickly) as well-formed, sentient and fair. We know nothing else about him” (212).

DeLillo explicitly elaborates on the end of exemplary representation. He clarifies how the “propped” figure, though “well-formed,” grows increasingly unrecognizable. Furthermore, the fictional narrative literally stops after DeLillo elaborates on the strange and the indefinite. Nevertheless, Mullen fails to note the telling theatrical dimensions of this closing scene. Taken on their own, these lines read much like the stage directions that introduce the opening of a play. DeLillo introduces an inert three-dimensional figure, a

shadowy figure situated in an indistinct or Beckettian space, an uncharacteristic figure of whom we know nothing besides his unclear setting, an individual figure of whom we need to know something. Now as stand-in audience members, readers await the words and gestures that Lyle will enact in order to reposition himself. Mutually rid of past capacities and characteristics, of former limitations and discriminations, the ambiguous actor and his ready audience prepare for forthcoming representation—the imminent drama set to redefine Lyle, the not yet named, not yet circumscribed player.

When Mullen misses this sudden alteration towards the theatrical, a change that refashions the discomfiting consequences of the unforeseen arrival of the golf course terrorists in “The Movie,” he adopts a form of the languor that the original Lyle admittedly espouses when he attends dramatic performances. At the center of *Players*, Lyle dismisses an active commitment with the performative in favor of a lazy surrender to the imagistic. He confesses that “he found himself bored, often, at the theater (although never at movies), even when he knew, could see and hear, that the play was exceptional, deserving of total attention. This kind of torpor was generated by three-dimensional bodies, real space as opposed to the manipulated depth of film” (100). In comparable fashion to Lyle, Mullen privileges “manipulated depth” over stage-managed depth. Mullen might also be said to favor a classically enclosed space bordered by cinematic or novelistic strategies that invariably begin and end when printed images or words do, over the awkward framing devices of drama. As Brook says, the stage can have “a lightness and range far beyond [that of] film and television” (98). On account of the open-ended limits of stage performance (which develops in a zone without the self-evident spatial and dimensional distinctions that separate viewers and readers from movies and books), plays

commence, continue, and conclude under unsettling circumstances.

In the theatrical space, defined by Brook as “any empty space” that a “man walks across” while “someone else is watching” (11), audience members and actors awkwardly share the same venue. At first, the individuals within this zone are differentiated by title. Albeit, these initial markers become more and more tenuous. Given that in every instantiation of theatre “the audience is always the challenge without which a performance would be a sham” (Artaud 70), and that in some types of theatre the stage is designed “without partition or barrier of any kind,” so that “A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle” (96), pre-performance distinctions between actors and onlookers can dissolve over the course of a play. Even with an evident division between the locus of the play space and the locus of the audience, performers and spectators can move back and forth through the *platea*, the in-between space at the nebulous limits of the proscenium arch that enframes the play space. Whether elucidated as “the theater of action” (Artaud 96) or “the rough theatre” (Brook 73), this liminality, actualized by interchanges between actors and audiences, defines the principal condition of the theatre. One cannot help, for instance, but remember Hamlet’s frequent, secretive, audience-directed asides, Rosalind’s restated behests to the shocked audience in the epilogue of *As You Like It*, or Prospero’s insistent entreaties upon the audience-as-jury at the end of *The Tempest*. Theatre always makes demands upon its live spectators, demands that likewise present themselves in theatrical settings wherein a manifest, uncrossed perimeter between stage and seats exists. Play audiences negotiate violent considerations of time and place, especially at the opening and at the close of staged dramas.

As a spectator initially engages herself with the developing action of play only to be forced eventually to extricate herself from this cooperative experience, she traverses performance-inspired borders. Like the orchestra member who reconsiders her actual state of affairs in the pit as she directs the fictional circumstances of the drama progressing above her, the individual audience member moves back and forth between two overlapping worlds. Though she watches from a padded seat in a repertory theatre situated somewhere in hectic Manhattan, she may be compelled to transport herself to the sitting room of a provincial backwater in late-nineteenth century Russia. Simultaneously a resolute weekend theatregoer and an armchair confidante of Chekhov's three restless sisters, the urban sophisticate tenderly longs for her return to busy Moscow. In this case, the playgoer, whether or not she suspends her disbelief to the point of standing up and speaking out to Olga, Masha, and Irina, willfully submits to a form of stage-management. Allied to actors that may movingly look directly to her, momentarily brush up against her, or even imploringly whisper to her, she partakes in an evolving exchange of gesture and sound that can never be reproduced or relived. These profound possibilities, made all the more poignant by virtue of their unpredictability and irreproducibility, combine with the equally discomfiting form of violence that attends the unstylized adjustments that actors and spectators make when performances end. The post-performative act of reintegration into the modern world can be jarring and inimitable, disorienting and transformative.

DeLillo introduces his interest in the unplanned contingencies of performance in *Players*. Evenly enthralled with cinematic and theatrical presentation at this early stage of his career, he carries this fascination into his next novel, *Running Dog*. Published in

1978, the year before the release of his first drama, *Running Dog* should be read as the forerunner to DeLillo's unremitting theatrical focus on what Mark Osteen in time calls "the nature of identity and the permeable membrane between behavior and performance" (64). Osteen remarks on how "DeLillo suggests that the ubiquity of cameras has transformed us all into actors under constant observation, even by ourselves" (64). In *Running Dog*, Lightborne, who collects eccentric art and alternative cinema, outwardly worries about the fact that "the whole world [is] on film" (150). Naturally, as a trusted broker of the strange and the costly, Lightborne actually celebrates the twentieth-century phenomenon wherein "Spy satellites, weather balloons, [and] U-2 aircraft," among other insidious operations, "Tak[e] pictures" without end (150). As Lightborne cannot fail but to appreciate, the impetus towards unauthorized types of duplicitous footage results in supplementary forms of recorded self-preservation. Unjust invasions of privacy provoke the technological prospects as well as the human aspirations to manufacture local filmic documents. This newfangled representational drive culminates in a new artistic genre, a genre distinct from the specialization of cinema: the home movie. These personal narratives merge the theatrical and the nontheatrical.

In Running Dog, Lightborne's story revolves around his approaching acquisition of what he considers to be an invaluable filmic piece of historical and personal narrative: "the people in the bunker under the Reich Chancellery in April 1945" (150). An early version of Gladney from *White Noise*, the professor who teaches an "Advanced Nazism" course centered on "parades, rallies, and uniforms" (25), Lightborne recognizes that the "Nazis had a thing for the movies. They put everything on film. Executions, even, at [Hitler's] request. Film was essential to the Nazi era. Myth, dreams, memory" (*Running*

Dog 52). Nonetheless, Lightborne's true interest angles not toward the exegetical analysis of culture and appropriation, but rather towards the spectacular consumption of fetishism and eroticism. "If it's Nazis," Lightborne insists to a client, "it's automatically erotic. The violence, the rituals, the leather, the jackboots. The whole thing for uniforms and paraphernalia" (52). Still, irrespective of Lightborne's mordant hopes, the fully intact document that he at last procures at the cost of several lives decidedly features dramatic performance in place of its sexual counterpart.

Instead of acquiring a cinematic document in which Hitler is sexualized, he obtains a cinematic case in point of "Hitler humanized" (237). The unedited movie begins as a stationary camera unselectively records and erratically skips through a cast of adults and children setting up chairs as if for a stage performance. They sit before the camera. The camera captures another room where a woman sits at a desk. Static. Ignoring the gaze of the camera, the woman deliberately shuffles through a magazine. Seemingly interrupted or summoned, she gestures toward the door. Another woman enters the room. More static. Back in the original room, eleven people sit, filling the screen. Someone picks up the camera. It peers through a doorway. The doorway of another room frames Hitler, not in Nazi costume. Unlike the camera's eye, his live spectators, waiting, cannot see him. He acknowledges the camera. He steps into the empty space as the camera moves to the wings. He performs. Weirdly, yet aptly, the dictator mimics his mimicker, Charlie Chaplin. A woman smiles along with the children. Distortion.

Appalled that this moving picture has "historical value," and not the speculated "madness at the end. The perversions and the sex" (237), Lightborne only watches the first of two reels. This opening roll stops not long after what DeLillo's narrator describes

as the “*the sole attempt at ‘art’*” in this *Führerbunker* film (237). Under a new setup, “*The camera faces the audience head-on. The members of the audience are attempting to pretend that the Chaplinesque figure is still performing at a point directly behind the camera*” (237). A few lines later, the narrator demonstrates that the spectators are now the actors: “*There is a general shifting of eyes. The members of the audience are clearly being prompted by someone off camera*” (238). Seconds later, the spool ends. Here, DeLillo sets up the central emphasis of his extended dramatic project. He stage-manages his readership, as he will later his theatrical audiences, into a position where spectatorship corresponds to performance. The presentation of the underground film, as Lightborne’s mid-movie stoppage intimates, concerns the actions of its viewers, not the actions of its on-screen actors. As readers watch Lightborne’s small audience watch a film wherein a small audience returns a lost and inquiring gaze, they reconsider their roles as audience members. The individual reader can identify only with versions of herself. Lost, she examines herself looking. Self-regarding, she transforms into the locus of the performance. She relies only upon herself for interpretation and self-justification, a justification with consequences that surpass the limits of the art- or play-house—just as the implications of justice transcend distinct applications of legality.

Chapter Four

Lost in *The Day Room*, Locked into *Valparaiso*

Spectatorship

Don DeLillo's first produced play, titled *The Day Room*, develops from the logic of dramatic potential that concludes *Players* and the sense of discomfiting lostness at the end of *Running Dog*. If nothing else, *The Day Room* stages an ineluctable link between madness, mystery, playing, and survival. Published in 1986, this two-act drama likewise recalls DeLillo's earliest play, *The Engineer of Moonlight*. DeLillo's first formal move into the theatre in 1979, however, remains unproduced. Unperformed, as a piece of theatre it awaits theatrical adoption, correction, and transformation. In terms of performance, DeLillo's first dialogic work occupies a transitional space between the theatrical possibility that finally complicates the novelistic discourse in both *Players* and *Running Dog*, as well as the evolving performances of *The Day Room*. Indicatively, this incompleteness and prospect are manifest in the fact that the book-jackets of his three subsequent plays omit any mention of *The Engineer of Moonlight*. Nor does this first play tend to be included in the numerous catalogues of DeLillo's fictions. Widely understood as his first dramatic work, *The Day Room* supplants *The Engineer of Moonlight's* claim to primacy. Lingering like a ready actor in the wings or an attuned spectator in the audience, the theatrical potentiality of *The Engineer of Moonlight* eventually emblemizes its thematic focus on playing as a means for endurance and patience. Eliciting self-directed forms of fortitude and justice, these themes receive further

examination and execution in *The Day Room*.

Predicting the form of its dramatic successor, *The Engineer of Moonlight* features a version of a play-within-a-play in its second and final act. In both *The Engineer of Moonlight* and *The Day Room*, an embedded, representative play works as a mode of disorientation—and reorientation. On the face of it, DeLillo's first drama has two distinct settings. Act One takes place outside, the action occurring on the top and bottom sundecks of a beachfront house owned by a mathematician named Eric. The piece opens as the visiting Diana, Eric's third ex-wife, and James, Eric's assistant, enact a typical sunbathing routine (shirts off, sunscreen, sprawl, sit up, sunscreen, shift, shirts on) as they converse, while Maya, Eric's fourth wife, and Eric, a once-celebrated mathematician, now and then show up and shuffle around, books and drinks in hand. Nearly invisible and almost inert, Eric tends to remain hidden indoors.

The long, single scene in Act One hinges on Diana's shocked discovery of Eric's seven-week stay in a mental institution, a place Eric later describes as a "classic theater" (39), where nurses and ward officers cart around the frail and sedate, just like in "the better parts of town" (39). At once anticipating Eric's obscure linking of madness to cultural privilege, and elaborating on Eric's cryptic idea that the "True future is the open space" (29), James simplifies the reasons for the theoretical preponderance of madness: "Little by little, the argument goes, the insane are being returned to the streets. This is because we're so preoccupied with violence we no longer see the insane" (29). Intimating a timeworn social preoccupation with exclusion, Eric subsequently situates legislated detainment historically: "When leprosy diminished back whenever, it occurred to people to lock up the madmen. Streets were full of madmen. Suddenly they stood out" (29).

Today, since “Only the violent threaten,” James and Eric agree, “They stand out” (29). Just as the sanatorium replaces the leprosarium by the end of the seventeenth century in Europe (leprosy withdraws as a result of “segregation” and a “break with Eastern sources of infection” after the Crusades, as Foucault clarifies in *Madness and Civilization* [6]), so too does the threat of violence eventually take over from the threat of the insane. A social fixation on imprisonment succeeds the comparable communal anxiety over institutionalization.

Released, as it were, the mad are integrated, and often imperceptibly, into the dominant cultural narrative. In all of their facetious distinctions, “Lunatics of every stripe,” or those whom James and Eric half-jokingly tag as “Maniacs,” “Depressives,” “Compulsives,” and “Hysterics” (29), contribute to an everyday sense of the ordinary. We “learn their language” (29) in the same way that we learn to play the parts we are educated to sponsor collectively. The contemporary individual appropriates putative madness as one of the many aspects of cultural convention. To appropriate Eric, in turn, the “true future” consists of that “open theatrical space” wherein fresh idioms and varying roles are learned and performed. The future likewise involves a diminishing space, an increasingly restrictive space, in which violence receives greater and greater embellishment. As violence gains in prominence by way of media reportage, if not in actual perpetration, its limits lengthen, and its definitions grow. The “better parts of town” that Eric alludes to in his likening of the madhouse to the theatre not only accentuates a link between success and performance, but also underscores a connection between fear and control. Consumed by the inculcated fear of an “epidemic of violence” (29), people in the better parts of town, whether they reside in heavily secured urban

skyscrapers or gated suburban communities, end up confining themselves within their own heavily coded spaces. Success therefore comes to connote isolation, itself a version of internment, of self-internment. Because of a conditioned fear of threat, which manifests itself as a fear of adjustment and readjustment, modern adaptations of the theatricalized Big House segregate select people within particular zones just as lazar houses and mental asylums did in the past. Restricted to these spaces, “inmates” have little choice but to replicate their gestures. Increased security measures effectively limit risk and its attendant insistence on innovation and alteration.

Act Two of *The Engineer of Moonlight* is set in the main space of the oceanfront house. Nevertheless, the borders of this play space shift dynamically. During the closing act, the locus of the drama transfers from the plain frame or proscenium arch signified by the cathedral ceiling in the house to the unclear boundaries of an eccentric board game. The four personal narratives integrated into the drama involve revision, relocation, and mystery as well. In *The Engineer of Moonlight*, Eric’s elected career openly changes. His ex-wife Diana learns that he has abandoned the exactitude of mathematics in order to amass “notes on madness” (33, 37). James and Maya, for their parts, record and transcribe these unsystematic notes, which they want Diana to compile with them. In *The Engineer of Moonlight*, DeLillo originally aligns his audience with the vacationing Diana. At first unaware of absent Eric’s institutionalization, spectators shift in their seats while settling into the events of the drama, much like Diana in her reclining deckchair. Later in the same day, though, Diana engages in a confusing board game that the audience cannot see. As a result, the progressively underprivileged viewers can only associate with her feeling of lostness, which dissolves for her as she acquires the tools

necessary for interactive gameplay. Symbolizing this focus on preliminary connection and ultimate disconnection, when Diana learns something new, such as the name of the game, the ongoing action gets harder to distinguish: the “*Lights go dimmer*” (40).

Diana’s early questioning in Act Two—“Is this the game still?” (40)—also emphasizes DeLillo’s preoccupation with lostness. Akin to Diana, who cannot help but mix up the design of the game (“This is more than inner structure. We approach something utterly strange” [40]) with incidents developing beyond the game (“You can sense when a house yields up its mysteries to the right people” [40]), the audience of *The Engineer of Moonlight* perplexingly conflates the drama with the eponymous game featured within it. Unlike adept Eric, who “doesn’t need the board in front of him” (38), the playhouse spectator requires a visual picture of this play space. Without this traditional theatrical framing device, spectators are lost.

Diana can play, but the audience cannot. Because she immerses herself in the “Engineer of Moonlight,” she concurrently appears to accept the invitation to remain in the house and labor alongside the bizarre, sexually charged 1970s threesome. By means of the game, she reappraises her developing identity. Taking an active stake in risk, intimated by her seeming acceptance of confusion and her resolution to embrace this apparent disorder (a turmoil exaggerated by the presence of an older man, his very young wife, and his young male assistant), Diana deliberately modifies the structures of her life. DeLillo concludes the LeClair talk with an account of the united roles of the game and of Diana in *The Engineer of Moonlight*. In the same elucidation, he also counteracts Diana’s varying attachments in the play with the audience’s imposed disengagements from the play. With his penchant for sentence fragments and a lack of dialogic adornment, he

summarizes, “A game using words and logic used in unfamiliar ways. If we take this game as a play within the play, what we see is that Diana, who has never played before, gradually comes to understand the strange and complex nature of the game—an understanding the audience doesn’t share. Toward the end she is elated; she is saying it all begins to fit, the colors, the shapes, the names. She wants to play” (15). Laying emphasis upon comprehension and estrangement, DeLillo clarifies the division he orchestrates between Diana and his audience. In opposition to the newfound delight that he offers to Diana, he disallows his spectators to fall into similar zones of emergent—and sustainable—comprehension. Lost, the individual audience member has no quantifiable arithmetic, no visible pattern, to subscribe to or evaluate. Though he affords his viewers a delicious set of tense circumstances, they fade away as the invisible game becomes the center of attention.

In his article on *The Engineer of Moonlight* and *The Day Room*, Toby Silverman Zinman takes DeLillo to task for his infidelity to dramatic convention in his first play. Zinman remarks that *The Engineer of Moonlight* incorporates verbal instead of visual images, which contribute to a “static, second-hand quality [that] diminishes the play’s theatricality” (78). Inadvertently recalling the end of the played reel of Lightborne’s *Führerbunker* film in *Running Dog*, Zinman continues by describing the sense of audience alienation that results from the arcane game in *The Engineer of Moonlight*: “it is, after all, just a board game, so the audience is left looking at four people looking at something the audience cannot see, a game they cannot follow” (79).

DeLillo, however, sees a marked potential, a potential illustrative of drama itself, in what Zinman evaluates as his betrayal of theatre (79). Reminiscent of the close of his

first interview, he ends one of his recent talks by hearkening back to *The Engineer of Moonlight*. In his 2001 discussion with McAuliffe, DeLillo explains that his first play, were he to “to go back” and rework it, has the latent possibility of being “more rewarding” than his ensuing dramas (178). When his interviewer wonders why, he charts a relation between mystery, theatricality, and identity: “at least potentially [my first play seems] more deeply rooted in real people and real things. At least that’s the way I would have to gear it if I were to work on it again. But the curious thing about my plays is that they are not nearly as established in the world around me as my novels are. And that, in my own limited sort of outlook on the theater, is an aspect of theater itself. It’s not about the force of reality so much as the mysteries of identity and existence” (179). Although he remains elusive as to how he would refashion *The Engineer of Moonlight* into a richer drama, the interview ends with this vague spotlight on “the mysteries of identity and existence,” DeLillo speculates on his undeveloped excavation of “real people” and “real things.” Perhaps because the play has received so little critical treatment and analysis, because it still exists in the precinct of the unexplained and the unreproduced, its future possibilities have yet to be determined and thereby shut down. In DeLillo’s estimation, *The Engineer of Moonlight* still occupies a zone that combines the refreshment and strangeness of novelty and memory. The play is precisely more real, more tangible, on account of its unexplored representational intersections of character, difficulty, responsiveness, and correction.

DeLillo also includes an intriguing degree of improvisational liveliness in his first drama. He encloses this unexploited prospect in the cycle of movements and entrances of Act One, in the underexposed sexual tensions in Act Two, and in his avant-gardism. *The*

Engineer of Moonlight anticipates the plays, novels, and films about math and mathematicians that flooded culture in the late 1980s and the 1990s. These include, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *A Beautiful Mind*, *Good Will Hunting*, *The Revolutions Tetralogy*, *Arcadia*, and *Proof*, among others. For DeLillo, the players in his first drama are more “real,” and by extension more human or credible, precisely because they give up a calculated search for abstraction (signified by Eric’s abandoned mathematical career) in favor of an inexact scrutiny of uncertainty (illustrated by Diana’s decision to assist compiling the notes on madness). DeLillo suggests that the “force of reality” proves to be its conspicuous incongruity, the manifest strangeness he obliges his audience to experience by virtue of the game “*Engineer of Moonlight*.” Forced to turn inward as the theatrical space darkens and diminishes in size, the individual spectator plays a game with herself, a novel game with unknown rules and limits.

When lost, an individual restructures her relationship with the spaces around her. Given this self-reorientation, the lost individual also reconfigures these surrounding open spaces, as DeLillo illustrates in his second play. As the dramatic successor to *The Engineer of Moonlight*, *The Day Room* reestablishes his leading concern with unsettling his actors and the members of his audience. This exigency extends to the common principles of drama too. Mark Osteen explains the unusual demands that DeLillo makes upon his theatrical audiences. He writes, “*The Day Room* offers a dizzying array of masquerades—actors performing in a play-within-a-play that, we eventually learn, constitutes the play we have been watching—designed both to challenge theatrical conventions and to assess the nature of role-playing itself” (64). In order to test and trouble its actors, audiences, and the genre of drama itself, *The Day Room* manipulates

the tie between immediate environment and individual identity. DeLillo positions his players and spectators in two particular places, which he evaluates as discombobulating due to their obvious forms of virtual indistinctness: a hospital room and a motel room. As DeLillo explains in his interview with Rothstein, these places, the latter of which customarily figures into his fiction, act as sites of spatial slippage and personal disorientation: “A motel is a peculiar reality—not exactly the same reality as a hospital, but it does represent a peculiar form of nowhere, particularly motels in undefined parts of the landscape. You don’t know quite where you are, and for a brief time- [sic] perhaps not quite who you are” (23).

The Day Room opens by subtly discomfiting its audience members. As the spectator adjusts to a leisurely lighted, semiprivate hospital-room for two, where one figure performs “*slow, stylized, continuous*” motions of tai chi and another, sitting up, quietly leafs through a daily, she suddenly feels like an uninvited voyeur (5). After Budge “*climbs*” into bed, and “*Wyatt stops reading,*” “*There is a self-conscious moment,*” an instant wherein the audience likewise turns inward as it sits waiting, before Budge rhetorically ends the silence with the first line of the play. “In other words you’re not a talker” (5). By virtue of this dialogue about dialogue starting in mid-conversation, as it were, the audience is made to feel as if it is insinuating itself into the drama, as if it has missed something, and as if it must play a vigilant game of covert catch-up. This theme of disruption and prying, delicately established straightaway, develops all through the single scene of Act One in *The Day Room*.

Clearly playing up the conventions of performance, Budge sets up the scene by prepping Wyatt on how to act. He points out that they are “here, in a sense to talk” (6),

complete with “Loose-fitting clothes, so [that they] can gesture freely, relax, unwind, unburden [them]selves” (6). He emphasizes that they have “all the essentials” for an “arranged” *tête-à-tête* (6). As his counterpart, Wyatt agrees that the hospital “setting is favorable” to “casual talk” (6), much like the enclosed, formal space of an airplane (7). Their dramatic conversation “mov[es] right along” (8), that is, until Wyatt candidly admits that he finds himself in the hospital for a “[s]tandard series” of tests, an habitual visit designed for the purpose of disturbance free “Rest. Reassurance” (9). Following Wyatt’s adoption of the performative, the closed space punctually transforms into an open theatrical space. Once Wyatt, who is apparently a quick study, learns to deliver his lines, a succession of off-putting interlopers invades the retreat of their shared room.

In fact, Wyatt’s pronouncement of “Rest. Reassurance” acts as the initial cue or prompt for a sequence of Pirandellian characters who, in their searches for individual roles rather than for an author, arbitrarily break into and break down the original limits of this semiprivate setting. After Wyatt’s outwardly offhand utterance of respite, Grass enters the room at an “*exceedingly slow pace*,” dragging a bottle-filled “*metal stand*” laden with an incalculable number of “*intravenous tubes*” running to “*different parts*” of his body (9). Familiar to Budge, who claims that Grass “likes to pay visits. Maybe because nobody comes to see him” (9), Grass explains that the cause of his medical condition and his related “dangling paraphernalia” (9) is “heavy water” (10). Immediately following this unexpected allusion to nuclear reactors, the formerly still Budge and Wyatt sally back and forth with neologisms from the nuclear age—“Alkaline rain,” “Sulfate emissions,” “Thermal inversions,” “Benzene intoxications” (10).

This eerie repartee recalls the jousting that makes up the four-word list of mental

infirmities in *The Engineer of Moonlight* (29). The exchange also brings to mind the four-part inventory of physical infirmities in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. In this 1959 play, McCann and Goldberg (who are for some unclear reason tracking Stanley, who seems to be hiding-out in a seaside rooming-house) engage in a brief game of wordplay. Playing off one another, they banter: "anaemic"; "Rheumatic"; "Myopic"; "Epileptic" (82). Likewise instrumental to numerous interactions in Beckett and Pirandello, among other twentieth-century playwrights, this sort of inventorying draws attention to the impression of spontaneity as a distinguishing attribute of dramatic performance. Certainly, this form of verbal transaction also exists in novelistic representation, maybe most memorably in the six-page, tit-for-tat, bilingual banter in John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (477-82). Nevertheless, these sorts of interchanges manifest themselves as inherently dramatic. As brief scenes, they detail the signal irreproducibility of theatrical performance. When properly played, they come off as spontaneous, not preplanned or contrived. Remarking on the bizarre exchange that DeLillo includes in *The Day Room*, a strange mockery that substitutes the dreaded nomenclature of medicine with Cold War taxonomy, Zinman notes that these Cold War neologisms "spea[k] our condition, and that language, like our condition, is both horrifying and hilarious. DeLillo has factored into his play, as he has factored into his fiction, the technological consciousness of our era and its accompanying paranoia" (82).

DeLillo enhances this sense of mistrust, and what Judith Pastore sees as his focus on the encroaching "impact of technology on modern consciousness" (434), by problematizing the identities of his characters and the legitimacy of their locale. After the unexpected word-trade, Grass takes issue with the validity of Wyatt's character, saying

that his name is but “A promising idea for a name” (11). To Wyatt’s startled retort, “It’s not an idea for a name, it is a name,” Grass tells him that it “Could be improved with a little work” (11). Then he endeavors to expose Wyatt as an affected player rather than an actual person: “Who else have you tried?” (11). This distressing altercation sets off a string of outlandish events, all of which destabilize both the performers’ and the spectators’ understandings of this space. Shortly after Grass’s odd inquiry, his words, like the earlier words of “Wyatt,” act as stage directions. When Grass says, “The nurse walks in the door,” Nurse Walker enters the room. She exposes Grass, the original detective, as an imposter (15). To Wyatt’s ostensible horror, and Grass’s feigned dismay, she summarily undoes his intravenous setup. With the help of the newly arrived Dr. Phelps, she alleges that Grass is a patient from the hospital’s “Arno Klein Psychiatric Wing” (14).

Soon, though, the audience suspects the authority of Walker and Phelps too, for the former frankly “wonder[s] about the narrow scope of the roles we have to play” (21). Sure enough, when Nurse Baker walks in Walker and Phelps get exposed as wandering “inmates” of the Arno Klein clinic (24). Baker, in turn, transforms into a suspicious character following her disclosure that the Klein Wing is “a place called the day room. Painted pure white, coat after coat after coat,” wherein “Lonely monologues bounc[e] off the walls” as patients “watch daytime TV and throw food” (25). Baker admits that her odd acquaintance with these details results from having “snuck over once,” “in disguise, not wearing [her] uniform, so [she] could mingle unannounced” (26). Consequently, Budge and Wyatt, along with the steadily surprised play audience, have little option but to doubt the clout, costume, and character of anyone who enters the room.

Incongruously predictable and unsettling, from this point on Act One of *The Day Room* carries on this dismantling of dramatic convention. In this Act, nothing, it seems, is what it seems. DeLillo reveals each figure in the infirmary to be an imposter, including Wyatt. From a cast incorporating three patients, two nurses, two doctors, and two orderlies, only Budge and the orderlies retain any degree of trustworthiness. These limited instantiations of purported genuineness, however, likewise prove suspicious. As emblems of unsound judgment, the sardonically titled "orderlies" emanate as potential trespassers because of their patent anonymity. Set up as nameless henchmen, they enter the scene but twice (47, 53). Limited to the brief gestures decreed by the stage directions, they say nothing. Though not in surgery, they wear surgical masks. In time, they manhandle Baker from the room, the nurse whom they initially escorted into the scene.

For his part, Budge finally hails Grass from the wings (or the Klein Wing) to center stage. He offers the original pretender his own pillow and blanket, for Wyatt's were stripped away after his exposure. Playing the companion, Budge invites Grass to engage in evocative discourse: "Come. Sit Down. We'll talk" (56). Nevertheless, this tactful summons sounds more like the command of a director than the request of an acquaintance. At the end of the act, Budge appears to be stage-managing Grass in the same way that he stage-managed Wyatt. Given this reemphasis on Budge as director, individual audience members may want to be beckoned into the room before the stage area blackens. Lost like the clients of the psychiatric clinic, the audience craves a center that will hold. With everything falling apart, the audience invests in Budge in order to be told what to do and how to do it, what to see and how to see it. Despite any evident distrust in this deputy director, the spectator needs him to reengineer her conception of

this theatrical space.

This sense of distrust and lostness works on several levels in *The Day Room*. Like his live players and play-audience, DeLillo experiences a feeling of disjuncture by the midpoint of his drama, as he confirms in the Rothstein interview. “Act Two,” he confesses, “is an attempt to explain the first half of the play to myself; in a way it’s the play about the play” (22). Unnerved, the playwright likewise feels placed in a similar position as a theatrical director, which he calls attention to by integrating a stand-in director into his drama. Analogous to Budge, DeLillo assumes a dual function: architect and imposter. Referring to the roles of stage directors, Brook explains an elaborate interchange: “In a sense, the director is always an imposter, a guide at night who does not know the territory, and yet has no choice—he must guide, learning the territory as he goes” (44). Though DeLillo arranges the theatrics of his production, he cannot anticipate and control its organic advancement. To extricate himself from or take directorial advantage of this indirect *impasse*, he establishes an alliance between his proxy director and himself. Budge the actor and DeLillo the dramatist maneuver a cast of characters who insinuate themselves into a variety of improvised roles that play off one another. From the start of *The Day Room*, DeLillo’s actors recognize that they are performing without the use of scripts. As Budge’s promptings show, even their rehearsals remain indissociable from their performances. In this play, DeLillo discovers in Act Two, his players act continually, thereby confusing the differentiation between performativity and identity.

Taking a page from Luigi Pirandello, whom DeLillo judges as his “theatrical guide,” but not the only one (qtd. in Pastore 433), DeLillo begins Act Two of *The Day*

Room before the stage seems ready for a performance. Inverting the tranquil morning scene in Act One, Act Two opens with a literal spotlight on disorder, damage, and distrust. After the time-lapse indicator “Evening,” spectators witness “A large white space flooded in harsh fluorescent light. White furniture is arranged in a pile, chaotically. There is a stepladder. Crayons and drawing paper are scattered on the floor. Streaks of food and other suspicious matter cover the back wall. There is a door at either end of the hall” (59). This appears to be the day room, as described by the animated Nurse Baker of Act One. Accordingly, a “motionless” male in a “straightjacket” sits staring “straight ahead” (59). As a means of stressing the inertia of this figure, the bright room appears distressingly quiet and still, given its messiness and the “lonely monologues bouncing off the walls” that Nurse Baker keenly described (25). The unorganized space calls to mind the atmosphere that opens *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. In Pirandello’s 1922 play, the stage directions indicate that “*The spectators will find the curtain raised and the stage as it usually is during the day time. It will be half dark, and empty, so that from the beginning the public may have the impression of an impromptu performance*” (211-2).

With its coded deployment of disarray, Act Two of *The Day Room* commences by drawing attention to the psychological frustrations that conclude Act One. After all, the characters and the audience are assembled in a mental institution. Yet DeLillo at once sets two of his actors forth to rearrange the disaster and disorder. Returning the drama from a condition of motionlessness to movement, a desk clerk and a maid execute a cleanup of the room. While laboring, they discuss the clerk’s forthcoming trip to “California to help a friend commit suicide” (60), a prelude advising the audience that Act Two will be as unusual as Act One, despite the tidying up. Underlining this nuance,

the pair's dialogue starts in mid-discussion, reminiscent of Wyatt and Budge's opening conversation. Without warning, the desk clerk begins, "Because I won't be here. Now that you bring it up" (59). In little time, the maid and the clerk organize the furniture, beds, blinds, and phone. Before exiting the stage area, which "*We see is a smallish hotel room*" (62), the clerk mentions that his desperate friend is an actor. Playing the prevaricator, he adds, "Acting is dangerous" (62). He then diverts attention from the background only to restore interest in it. On his way out behind the maid, he blocks and lights the set by "*adjust[ing] the position of the straitjacketed figure, which is the room TV*" (62), depositing the remote control on a table, and dimming the lights "*way down*" (63).

The real danger here, as the clerk's gestures imply, is not the hazardous humanness of performance, but rather the passive menace of television, as embodied by the clerk's casual handling of the still figure as a minor electronic device. Zinman clarifies that this uncannily Frankensteinian configuration of man-as-gadget represents the greatest threat to the survival of human beings as responsive agents (85). With unrestrained dedication, Zinman unconceals the underlying features of the inert man as "human TV," "of man as straitjacketed lunatic, of man as talking machine, of man as communication device governed by remote control, of man as information system (the product of his own devising, Frankenstein's monster gone passive), of man as entertainer controlled by an audience entirely random and without any reliable attention span" (85). Nevertheless, throughout the remainder of his drama, which he describes as "form[ing] a kind of unending circular structure" (in Rothstein 23), DeLillo recalibrates the perilous compliance evoked by the straitjacketed madman.

Expanding upon his iterated disregard for dramatic precedent and narrative anticipation in Act One, DeLillo methodically counteracts the obedience and distraction characterized by his man-as-television by way of what Artaud would deem “a sense of life renewed by the theater” (13). Artaud elucidates this feeling of revitalization in terms of its relation to risk, creation, and, above all, improvisation. “We must believe in a sense of life renewed by the theater,” Artaud intones, “a sense of life in which man fearlessly makes himself master of what does not yet exist, and brings it into being. And everything that has not been born can still be brought to life if we are not satisfied to remain mere recording devices” (13). Instead of speaking to radio, TV, and other forms of taped transmission, Artaud’s clear dismissal of recording devices refers to the protean modality of performance. Whereas various forms of print and video media can but reiterate, the stage, by contrast, can rejuvenate. For Artaud, rejuvenation relates to improvisation, which presupposes an ability to defy the limits of control. Acts of defiance provide the checks and balances that refresh legality. Without unplanned gestures of insubordination, everyday implementations of justice, rely on precedent in lieu of actuality. For justice to pursue its course justly, its very course must be challenged and changed. Theatricality and individuality develop by means of similar transitions and transformations. Just as a drama realizes itself on account of the *ad hoc*, not the repetitive, individuals evolve as they respond to unexpected circumstance, not routine situations. Whereas automatons programmatically repeat the same actions, human beings act in response to the unfamiliar, namely the new and the unusual that drama represents—and that legality adjudicates for the protection and freedom of the culture that it answers to and directs at the same time.

Privileging the value of the unforeseen, Artaud adamantly spells out that any theatre limited to what “happens between cues” proves indistinct from the “performed text” (68). He determines the simple repetition of dialogue to be a mere manifestation of recording. He therefore configures a method by which to counter the “subordination” of awkward potentiality to a predictable transcript (41). Stressing the improvisational qualities that define the nature of performance, he envisions an entirely impromptu version of theatre: “The idea of a play made directly in terms of the stage, encountering obstacles of both production and performance, [that] compels the discovery of an active language, active and anarchic, a language in which the customary limits of feelings and words are transcended” (41). Artaud assesses performance in terms of its inherent complication. As he sees it, drama calls for instantaneous reappraisals of its own limits. Theatre undermines itself at its source. Setting up conditions that it cannot stage-manage, theatre evokes would-be potential, not the certainty of a replayed succession of images and words.

Although DeLillo does not compose *The Day Room* directly upon the stage, he takes Artaud’s theoretical envisaging a crucial step further. In *The Day Room*, DeLillo illustrates what Artaud expresses. At its core, *The Day Room* presents an improvised play being produced on the stage, as the integrated mid-play stage-setup illustrates. Likewise demarcating the impromptu nature of Act Two, as well as the piece generally, the actor playing a human TV is the “same actor who is cast as Wyatt in Act One” (58). This conspicuous “NOTE,” which revises the original roster of nine players, encourages the play-audience to connect the nine figures of Act One with those of Act Two. Following Wyatt, these characters all reenter the play under different guises. To put it more

precisely, in the latter half of *The Day Room* the players are always in the process of developing new roles that they never stop playing, improvisational roles that they cannot replay. These multiple evolutions of character draw particular attention to both the transformative nature of drama and the performative nature of identity. Significantly, in *The Day Room* players have no identities distinct from the parts they play. Evoking Jaques' celebrated lines in *As You Like It*, "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players, / They have their exits and their entrances, / And one man in his time plays many parts" (2.7. 139-142), in DeLillo's drama the players are the many parts that they play.

In so doing, DeLillo crafts his performers as variants of Pirandello's actors on the hunt for a dramatist. In *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Pirandello's self-styled "characters" (242) seek a stage upon which to perform those "roles which [they] are given in life" (235), roles that will amount to a performance that someone can take down "while [they] play it, scene by scene" (236). With these dramatic orchestrations, Pirandello refreshes the classic approach to theatre. He gives precedence to the show, not the text. DeLillo likewise invokes a form of theatre wherein the performance takes priority over the playbook. Still, DeLillo's characters are not looking for a place to perform. Rather, they seek a group of performers.

In search not of an author but of a performance, DeLillo fashions his characters as distinctly less "true" and less "real" than Pirandello's, at least in the ironic version of character that Pirandello proposes in his fêted work. In *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, The Father, who unwittingly conflates the novelistic with the theatrical, insists that characters "are truer and more real" than non-characters because their reality

manifests itself as changeless (266). Unaware of the distinction between a written dialogue and a performed one, The Father holds that the immutable reality of the character stands against the shifting nature of actual reality, which invariably transforms into “illusion” by “tomorrow” (265). According to the patriarch, truth and reality grow increasingly less truthful and factual as they evaporate along with the misleading logic of the past. Influenced by Pirandello’s concept of character, which distinguishes between actuality and memory, character and performer, and the written and the performed, DeLillo makes a virtue out of the shifts that define the everyday. These transitions compel his living performers and spectators to reconsider the realness and justness of yesterday.

Once the maid (formerly an orderly) and the desk clerk (also an orderly) exit the “motel room,” a brief silence ensues, much like the self-directed suspension of action at the onset of Act One. Gary (Phelps), travel bag in hand, consequently enters and reverses the final gestures of the clerk: he adjusts the lighting, picks up the remote, and switches on the television. He heads for the restroom “*without waiting to see or hear what comes on*” the TV (63). As the creepy TV emits the sounds of a speech therapist encouraging her patient—“Ooooh,” “Eeeee,” “Eeeee,” “Eeeee,” “Aaaah,” “Aaaah”—Lynette (Walker) enters, stations herself in a chair, and “*gazes at the TV*” until Gary comes out, whereupon she “*turns off the set*” (64). Akin to the suspension of belief confirmed by the maid and the clerk, neither Gary nor Lynette remarks on the fact that the TV resembles Wyatt in a straightjacket. Mimicking the actions of the televised therapist, the figures in the day-room-as-motel-room encourage the audience to overlook the disjunctions from Act One already emergent in Act Two. The action takes place in a motel room, not in a hospital.

The man is Gary, not Phelps. Lynette is not Nurse Walker. A TV stands at center stage, not an immobilized Wyatt. Act One, it appears, ought to be forgotten along with the deceptive sense of yesterday.

Notwithstanding these spatial, private, and temporal assurances, the audience cannot help but recall the rearrangement of the stage. Furthermore, the maid's most memorable and revealing question commands the interest of the conscientious: "Do we have names in this?" (61). Gary's first words in the scene give the impression of taking this representative incongruence into account. He says, "I was thinking the other day. Funny. You never see an old man named Gary" (64). Cued by Lynette, who disregards his meditations on age in order to elaborate upon her trouble with strange beds, Gary abruptly deflects audience-attention from a sustained focus on stable identity: "It's not an old man's name. We don't last that long. But that's not the problem" (65). The immediate problem results from the couple's search for an "Elusive, mysterious, unsettling" theatrical group (67), an amateur performance group Lynette has been unable to observe despite over three years of alleged globetrotting. She misses them in London, Amsterdam, Cairo, and Santa Fe.

After establishing the actors' and the audience's investment in the validity of the motel room and the theatrical troupe, DeLillo calls these assertions into question. Someone knocks on the door. Expecting Manville, Lynette and Gary's link to the evasive actors, the pair are surprised when an unfamiliar, "*wild-haired, intense, rabbinical*" figure "*wearing a shabby dark suit, dark sneakers, [and] thick eyeglasses*" steps into the room (70). Responding to Gary's inquiry, the interloper, whose entrance clearly recalls the histrionics of Grass in Act One, avows, "Just Freddie, I guess, for now" (70). As his

opening line attests, “Freddie” is at once Freddie and not Freddie. By this means, his arrival re-inscribes the “elusive, mysterious, [and] unsettling” nature of the theatrical group to the cast of characters presently center-stage. Lynette bolsters this off-putting reappraisal of the whole scene when she asks Freddie, who is also a friend of Manville’s, if their mutual contact knows the whereabouts of “the Arno Klein group” (71).

From this point on, DeLillo executes a dismantling of the motel room as motel room. Like the hospital room, its limits are tenuous. Like the actors in both rooms, its uniqueness stems from its adaptability. Highlighting DeLillo’s mysterious overlap of motel and madhouse, after Freddie concedes that he lives “Just along the hall,” and Gary qualifies the statement with “In the motel,” Freddie reiterates the mutability of names: “If that’s what we’ve agreed to call it” (76). Freddie associates this unreliability to distinctions of place, as well as to a form of inertia: “One place is as good as another. How different can two places be if we use the word ‘place’ in both cases? We can change places without changing words. We don’t even have to change places. We don’t have to move from the room” (76). With this monologue, Freddie turns around the typical association between a person and her setting. As an actor, his theatricality proves to be as unmistakable as his routine references to playing. He tells the performers and spectators around him that this shared environment, this open space, derives from the people within it. He implies that self-awareness and self-understanding can work independently of locale. In challenging and changing oneself, one can alter the world around oneself. In Freddie’s deceptively subtle estimation, responsive agency originates in creative self-inscribing, not in cultural allotment or social determination.

Freddie’s emphases on place, performance, and identity likewise jar the audience

into the insight that the actors onstage are active members of the Arno Klein group. As spectators grasp that they have been in the single, mutable day room all along, they recognize that have been engaged in an evolving Arno Klein performance. Manville's entrance solidifies this detection. He arrives as Lynette (now alone, for the men have left in search of food) performs what seems to be an endless series of unevenly spaced channel changes (78-80). Interrupting her apathetic TV session, which concerns her clicking instead of her watching, as explicit in the fact that the audience sees her movements instead of any mediated image, Manville tells her that he "sent [Gary] on a mission with Freddie. To locate a contact of mine. A key figure in this whole affair" (80). Manville's reaction to her eager query about curtain time makes it quite clear that the whole, unscripted "affair" exists in a permanent state of production. In reply, he at once rhetorically and sincerely wonders, "Is there a starting time?" (80). Manville erases any unproblematic distinction between the formal requirements of performance and the ongoing nature of performance.

In the day room, as in *The Day Room*, characters and audience members consistently find themselves in the middle of a performance, an unsettling and unending performance that centers not on the passive and confining spectatorship typified by "the straitjacketed medium of television" (Zinman 84) but rather on an active negotiation of the three-dimensionality of theatre. Marking difficulty and displacement, DeLillo counteracts any specialized compliance to the laws and limits of particular social settings. In *The Day Room*, as DeLillo divulges in stylized yet impromptu measures, the mental patients appear to survive precisely because they do not see themselves primarily as mental patients. In recreating themselves, they undermine the patent restrictions of their

daily lives. Because they act, they are not merely locked into a room at the Arno Klein clinic. Because they actively take part in what amounts to a continuous psychodrama session, they regenerate themselves day after day.

In a related example of non-fictive theatrical rejuvenation, Brook explains the rationale of renewal in respect to actual psychodrama sessions. He insists that when participating mental patients leave the assigned, dramatic room, “they are not quite the same as when they entered. If what has happened has been shatteringly uncomfortable, they are invigorated to the same degree as if there have been great outbursts of laughter. Neither pessimism nor optimism apply: simply, some participants are temporarily, slightly, more alive” (149-50). Given this sense of rebirth, Brook then likens drama sessions to oases (150), a comparison DeLillo effectively elaborates in *The Day Room*. The patients in the Arno Klein clinic transform their actual living space into a refuge that they do not merely visit for occasional refreshment.

As the conclusion of *The Day Room* illustrates, the psychodrama-inspired theatrics practiced in the institute tend to be as interminable as they are inconclusive. After the routine food fight that Baker outlines in Act One—“They watch daytime TV and throw food” (25)—the play folds back to its beginning. *The Day Room* ends with the maid and clerk resetting the open space as, lights dimming, the human TV changes channels on its own, and Klein, just arrived, steps into the washroom. The room goes black. The spectator then readjusts to a silent, leisurely lighted, semiprivate hospital-room for two, wherein a figure performs “*slow, stylized, continuous*” motions of tai chi (101). At the same time itself and not itself, at once a place of dread and hope, the reconfigured stage assures the audience that they were never lost. Rather, like the actors before them,

they were in a period of stimulating transition.

Action

DeLillo's plays set in the Cold War trouble the restrictions of physical confinement and inactivity. Developing his theatrical project, his post-Cold War plays question liberty in American culture. Just as the feeling of being lost compels ongoing re-creation in DeLillo's early drama, the sensation of being locked-in fosters enduring re-positioning in his later drama. New understandings of spatiality and mass identity differentiate his later drama from his early drama. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, DeLillo's players are no longer ultimately represented in terms of their detention within cell-like spaces, whether manifested as a motel, a bunker, a holiday home, a board game, a hospital room, or a proxy stage. His post-Cold War formulations of captivity prove far more pervasive, and therefore more dangerous, than his earlier depictions of clear spatial limitations. Gone is his reference to security measures in the better parts of town. Gone is the blank TV screen that talks independently of human remote control as "Wyatt" regains the voice of his own agency.

As devised in *Valparaiso*, and sustained in *The Body Artist* and *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, detention extends beyond established perimeters. Throughout these works, restriction proves to be general rather than local, common rather than specific. After the completion of his Cold-War epic *Underworld*, DeLillo's theatrically motivated fiction emphasizes an individuality that calls for actual physical displacement. Escapes reassert identity in terms of aloneness. As is the case with DeLillo's depiction of Lee Harvey Oswald in *Libra*, in addition to the delineation of all his unique heroes, "sanity and

integrity appear to depend on each one's remaining outside the mainstream of a society that is clearly dangerous, even fatal, to the individual" (Arensburg 41). Increasingly since the publication of *Underworld*, protagonists in DeLillo break away from the social collective in order to frustrate what Jeremy Green describes as the "superficiality, passivity, and information overload that undermine the reflective capacities of the citizen-subject" (8).

As DeLillo's focus on inert figures intimates, however, these select departures become more and more difficult for "citizen-subjects" to accomplish in the global world. In *Valparaiso*, DeLillo shows that leaving does not merely concern relocation. Given the commonality of individual limitation and agency destabilization in the millennial era—a consumer age bolstered by a corporatism that commemorates "the individual hooked up to various forms of technological devices, everything from phones, fax machines, televisions, and personal CD players, to computer monitors and the Internet" (Green 8)—elusion entails an escape without any discernible escape hatch. Increasingly, leaving is just another version of hookup or lockup. Leaving therefore incorporates a Kafkaesque (perhaps Sisyphean or Ulyssean) effort to arrive at a half romanticized somewhere that seems to recede perpetually, despite its apparent attainability. And the "spectacle," as Debord poetically states, "is the epic poem of this strife" (43). As "technoculture," or the "fusion of culture and technology" (Green 8), evolves into spectacular techno-internationalism, individuals find it less and less possible to challenge the limitations placed upon them. As a result, free agents have a gradually harder time asserting their claims to autonomy.

Marking what he problematically postpones in *The Day Room*, DeLillo opens

Valparaiso with a series of representations that dispute notions of individuality and difference. Like *The Day Room*, *Valparaiso* integrates nine characters. Yet in multiple contrasts to its theatrical predecessor, the later play features a single roster of *dramatis personae* instead of two. Of the nine figures listed, only four have names: Michael Majeski, Livia Majeski, Delfina Treadwell, and Teddy Hodell. The five remaining players embrace little semblance of individual distinction. “Two actors, one male, one female,” the overture to the two-act drama clarifies, “play all the Interviewers in Act One” (7). “The three members of the Camera Crew,” the explaining note concludes, “double as Chorus” (7). Moving from character to space, replication and similitude furthermore demarcate the backdrop to Act One of *Valparaiso*. Employing his customary succinctness and satire, DeLillo maps out his stage setting: “Living room to the Majeski house. A large uncluttered space, bare-walled except for a large TV set in a wall unit upstage. The room is largely achromatic but not stylishly so. It is a representation of a living room, more or less anyone’s” (11). Before moving to Scene One, DeLillo likewise collapses other forms of spatial disparity: “In several scenes a sector of this playing area functions as office space or as interview space in a broadcast studio” (11). This three-dimensional play space accommodates all “representational” space.

DeLillo’s opening stage directions reinforce the performative depth and inclusiveness accentuated in his preliminary descriptions of character and place. To set Scene One into motion, DeLillo adds yet another dimension to the stage area. Presented with short-lived half-light, the audience barely witnesses a female figure “*pedaling steadily*” on an exercise bike as she faces downstage (13). But attention swiftly shifts along with the lighting and the implementation of an “*intense and electronic*” digitalized

“*roaring wind*” (13). In a move that restages the curiously violent film in the prologue to *Players*, while at the same introducing the audience to another model of the inert or the stagnant, “*a deep pulse image and sound*” redeploys attention to the back wall whereupon a single videotape image is being projected. As the statically kinetic Livia industriously pedals in the flickering video beam, spectators witness “*a high-angle shot of a man in a tightly enclosed space*” (13). “*There is a plastic bag on his head,*” the directions outline, “*fastened about the neck. He is seated, a forearm braced against the wall to either side of him. The plastic is thick and frosted, obscuring the man’s features*” (13). After detailing the “*digital display*” that registers “*the fleeting seconds and tenths of seconds*” inset at a lower corner of the tape, the “*crude and marked visual static*” of the recording, and an unclear “*interval of agitation,*” the wordless, twenty-five-second scene ends with a description of “*the man*” slowly raising “*his head toward the camera*” just before the image, shaking madly, abruptly stops (13).

The man’s final gesture towards the camera, an undeniably disturbing look cut short by a pronounced disturbance, introduces DeLillo’s audience to a number of disconcerting issues regarding the intertwined natures of performance and spectatorship. In contradistinction to the enforced compliance and identification highlighted in the opening of *Players*, the play audience of *Valparaiso* receives no indication about how to interpret the brief, opening film. DeLillo repudiates providing a narrative “we” or group identity for the purpose of alignment, uncomfortable or not. Rather, he offers onlookers various open considerations. Given that the veiled man gazes at the camera, he may in fact be aware of the camera. Therefore, he may be performing for the camera and the audience behind it. Since the scene centers on death, though, the unidentified man may be

attributing his demise to the presence of the camera. Maybe he blames the camera for invading his privacy. Perhaps the actor confines himself to a cramped space under a camera in order to embellish his sense of spectacular violation. Above him, the recording device entraps him, positioning him as a public article of consumption. As a man without any sense of privacy, he may feel exposed. A public, indistinguishable everyman, he feels dead already.

Equally troubling, the man may be unaware of the invasive camera. In other words, he may not be performing. He may simply be a man, any interchangeable man, enclosed in a tight space and captured on a candid camera, while he commits the violent act that ends all responsive acts. His self-murder, however, fails to be captured fully. Cut short, the brief film concludes before the man's life does. This interruption may prompt viewers to refocus on the camera itself. Favoring camera over man, we might wonder why the film stops, why the camera falls short of copying oncoming self-erasure. Moreover, as audience members we may individually marvel at the makeshift quality of the recording, a coarseness that compresses the intersection of unstable form and uncertain theme. Shaky and abrupt, pausing just before a life might end, the clip ultimately leaves us cogitating on the operator of the camera, on the machinations behind the camera, the machinations that include our own weird witnessing.

Whether or not the spatially sequestered man intentionally performs for the almost-still camera, the statically dynamic Lydia, and the similarly unmoving play-audience, the recording now exists for public consumption. An audience watches the tape. Scene One of *Valparaiso* places its viewership in the role of literary detective. Like the protagonist of Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow Up*, which is based on a short story by

Julio Cortázar, the individual audience member is invited to fabricate a narrative out of an unclear image. In *Blow Up*, Thomas suspects the true substance of his romantic shots of a couple in the park when the photographed woman demands that he relinquish his undeveloped film. After shrewdly swapping rolls in order to appease her, at least momentarily, he develops and enlarges the suddenly mysterious film. In due time, he discovers that his increasingly blurry blowups contain the evidence of a murder, putatively making him a deferred witness of the crime. In *Valparaiso*, as in *Blow Up*, unclear images compel the construction of narrative, a production that always implicates the viewer as an actor. As with a criminal action and its attendant courtroom deliberation, witnessing involves a form of complicity. Only the formulation of narrative allows the witness to extract herself from the prolonged deliberations of these legal proceedings.

As Antonioni's influence upon DeLillo exposes, the manifold complications associated with distorted forms of visual technology embellish the crudeness that DeLillo has long held to be a distinguishing aspect of mystery and narrative. In a 1988 interview with DeCurtis, DeLillo argues that the amateur video covering "the time [Kennedy's] plane landed in Dallas until the assassination itself [utilizes] extremely crude footage [that is] all the more powerful because of it" (61). DeLillo qualifies what he evaluates as the prized value of apparently flawed footage in his assessment of the lone recording of the pennant-winning Bobby Thompson homerun at the Polo Grounds on 3 October 1951, the baseball game between the Giants and the Dodgers that he features as the prologue to his novel *Underworld*. In his talk with Firestone in 1988, DeLillo emphasizes the American imaginary. He expounds upon the contrast between availability and longevity, in addition to the close affinity between picture quality and productive uncertainty.

DeLillo states, "In the days of Thompson and Ralph Branca, there was no videotape. The home run could not be shown repeatedly, it could not be exhausted by midnight of the first day. I think that in part accounts for the longevity of that ball game, because it was not consumed so instantly and readily. The newsreel footage looks like something out of World War I and there's something precious about this fact" (153). A reconsideration of his article "The Power of History" spells out what DeLillo means by "precious." In this 1997 piece, he writes, "Newsreel footage of Bobby Thompson's home run resembles something of World War I vintage. But the shakier and fuzzier the picture, the more it lays a claim to permanence" (62). The ball game, DeLillo proposes, maintains a special degree of stability in the American imagination because it must be left to imaginative reconstruction.

As America's signature game, baseball, like nothing else, represents America, especially in the middle of the American Century. Thompson hits his game-winning homerun in the bottom of the ninth when his team has all but sealed a season-ending loss; the game, therefore, in all of its excited rooting for an underdog, expresses the American Dream. Furthermore, given that the Soviets launch their second successful nuclear test on the same day as the unforgettable homerun (a test ensuring that they no longer need to test), the game takes place on the factual eve of the Cold War. In spite of these marvelous coincidences, which he explores in *Underworld*, DeLillo's point is that the game and its climax never get played out by virtue of the multiple camera angles and the unfortunate replays that literally remove the mystery from recorded events. The bad quality of the recording further inflates a sense of inscrutability that calls for creative imagination, not precise technology. Even with the interventions of modern digitalization, the game tape

still makes particular demands upon its viewers. Its mystery, its greatness, cannot be turned into a mathematical formula. Bat and ball contact cannot be clearly isolated, enlarged, and frame-advanced. The flight of the homerun ball over the outfield wall cannot be undoubtedly captured, blown-up, and digitally advanced frame-by-frame, a technique that turns motion into a still, movement into a picture, and an irreproducible event into a series of minor, static ones. Because the game retains its precious indistinctness and doubt, it lives in the imagination.

In an interview following the publication of *Valparaiso* in 1999, DeLillo elaborates on his unremitting critique of the image age, the contemporary epoch wherein empty spectacle and effortless consumption outperform lasting mystery and lively engagement. Diffidently marking a disparity between his conceptions of the Cold War and the post-Cold War eras, he underlines the main themes of *Valparaiso*: “You know, I never thought of this play in terms of *Underworld*. But, in a way, that’s about Cold War America, and this play seems to be about the post-Cold War period in which we now find ourselves, a period of personality, celebrity, fame, scandal, enormous wealth, and empty spectacle. There seems to be no difference between substantial news and insubstantial news” (in Feeney 172). Perhaps blurring any distinction between his latest drama and contemporary culture, DeLillo then drafts a correlation between news-obsession and melodrama. Reviewing *Valparaiso*, he avers, “Nothing is allowed to remain unseen and nothing is allowed to remain unsaid. There’s a tendency of the characters to think of everything as potential footage. Things exist in order to be recorded in one manner or another” (172).

DeLillo implies that as footage replaces privacy, sensationalism supplants

personality. Existing to be recorded and therefore unable to resist being recorded, an individual manufactures her image, a characterization that the media in turn remanufactures until the public figure gets played out and replaced by yet another embroidered leading story. This preplanned exhaustion of embellished character, DeLillo's chronology of empty spectacle suggests, usually establishes itself in documented dramas of mishaps or calamities. A manipulated "personality" leads to a maneuvered "celebrity," which leads to a stage-managed "fame," which, in turn, leads to a manufactured form of "scandal," the inevitable scandal that embodies the pitfall of public life, the inevitable scandal that refocuses media attention onto a new personality, a new personality who is usually, but not necessarily, somehow affiliated with the original scandal.

A near copy of this sequence of events governs Michael Majeski's story in *Valparaiso*. After the strange footage that opens the play, Act One progresses through seven more scenes, all of which feature media interviews of Michael, whom the audience eventually learns is the lone figure in "the world's most famous human-interest story" (Duvall 560). Reemphasizing the replication theme launched in the prologue, Michael's fame results from his unpremeditated journey to Valparaiso, Chile (via Santiago), a plane trip originally scheduled to bring Michael to either Valparaiso, Indiana (via Chicago), or Valparaiso, Florida (via Miami). DeLillo's third drama begins with media interest in Michael's unusual journey, a curiosity that inevitably, and quite quickly, shifts to the circumstances of his private life. Evoking Michael's ultimate lack of control over his media-manipulated image, as well as over his actual life once the media establishment engineers it, the audience discovers that Michael had little command over getting

“Displaced or misplaced” (15) to the presumably incorrect Valparaiso.

Demonstrably, because of a succession of interruptions related to the time constraints of his interviews, technical problems within interviews, and the inclination of interviewers to redirect Michael’s account of travel mishaps to one or another personal anecdote, DeLillo’s audience never learns why Michael lands in Valparaiso, Chile, after his unusual “Miami mistake” (31). In Scene Two, for instance, an interviewer urges Michael to “Tell us everything,” only to inform him in his very next line that “There isn’t time” (17). When Michael consequently offers to “clarify or expand upon” the particulars of his journey, details the interviewer limits to Michael’s feeling of “strangeness” about a “succession of strange and random” “interlocking events,” he abruptly gets cut short (17-18). At once disregarding and reaffirming the ridiculousness of their discussion, the interviewer carelessly concludes the meeting: “I think that does it. When we air, I’ll do a fill-in. Some editing. Some ambient noise” (18).

Correspondingly misdirected by other interrogators, outshone by technological instruments, and subsumed as a product of market culture, throughout Act One Michael dutifully “look[s] at the camera” (21), “Use[s] the present tense” (22), describes preflight, “predawn” sex with his wife Livia (22), “Frame[s]” his previous replies “exactly” (27), “Give[s] [information] faster” (31), promote[s] Livia’s “dentifrice” (34), and “Wait[s], wait[s], wait[s], wait[s]” (55) while being counseled to “Make sense” (57). These endless commands illustrate the imperatives of the media establishment. As the arbiter or controlling mechanism of culture and conformity, the news is fabricated, not discovered, as is the character of the so-called media star. Impugning “stardom” as a “pseudo-stardom” defined by a rarefied form of “pseudo-power,” in *The Society of the Spectacle*

Debord explains that “The individual who in the service of the spectacle is placed in stardom’s spotlight is in fact the opposite of an individual, and [is] clearly the enemy of the individual in himself as of the individual in others” (39). Debord continues his assessment of the impotent media star as the victimized instrument of and perpetrating vehicle for ideological submission: “In entering the spectacle as a model to be identified with, [the star] renounces all autonomy in order himself to identify with the general law of obedience and to the [structured] course of things” (39).

The audience members of DeLillo’s drama get drawn-in to trying to make sense of Michael’s string of incomplete, recorded discussions. Stressing the devices of representation, the locus of these interrupted meetings recurrently shifts between the TV screen, the living room, and other stage spaces. Punctuated by Livia’s stationary pedaling and her customarily silent spectatorship, the media elaborates upon and circles around Michael’s story without establishing its source. In *Valparaiso*, reporters avoid explicating and thereby resolving the comedies that make up what Livia calls Michael’s “breathtaking journey” (30). Associating the elliptical nature of the interviewers with Livia’s “static movement” on the exercise bike, Benesch elucidates that “the repetitious interviews partake in an endless loop of journalistic babble that stubbornly refuses to produce meaning” (141). This denial of transparent meaning, which Benesch describes as a “structural necessit[y] of the media,” expresses itself in interviews that are “monological rather than dialogical” (141). They have no reference points beyond their own “linguistic confines” (141). On the surface at least, the interviews are merely about interviews. Certainly, they turn upon themselves. They are, however, designed as devices of social control, a stage direction of Michael that is all the more perilous because it

presents or parodies him as banal. Like Valparaiso, Michael is indistinct. Interviewers publicly yet falsely disallow and erase a claim to difference, to uniqueness.

Tactfully performing an injustice against Michael, the media resists narrativizing his daylong odyssey. Instead, they build and sanction a fashionable spectacular event. Already in the public eye, interviewers cling to Michael as the source of a new angle, a new lead on a subject that already sells—and controls. Stressing this drafting of the public, as manifested by the conscription of the play-audience into the paradoxically embellished and unexplained story, Michael likewise buys into his appointment within the media. Shortly after doing a “hundred and forty interviews in four and a half days in three and a half cities” (36), he tells an interviewer that “There are just so many hours in the day,” and he needs “some space for a change. Some time to unwind. Too many commitments. Too much nerve-racking travel” (41). When asked if he was therefore “turning down all further requests for interviews,” Michael seriously rejoins, “No. I’m quitting my job” (41).

As laughable as this reply at first seems, it does not come as a revelation. Replete with the prerequisites of visual and print media, including voice recorders (14; 25), glowing microphones (21; 35; 58), a handheld camera (35), a laptop computer (41), and a control booth (54), *Valparaiso* collapses any sense of division between everyday life and mediated life. As a reporter explains early in Act One, Scene Four, Michael’s interrogations require no “formal” authorization: “This is on record. Everything is on the record. Everything is the interview” (25). Michael’s capitulation to the machines and the machinations of the media, a surrender that reanimates the horror of the restrained “Wyatt” as human television in *The Day Room*, likewise manifests itself in Scene Six,

wherein Michael, whose life equates to “footage waiting to be shot,” gets filmed while he, obviously inert, sleeps (38). In the same scene, as Myles Weber details, “a documentary filmmaker suggests shooting a feature-length film of Michael sitting for interviews before competing camera crews” (130). This telling theatrical episode, Weber claims, fashions *Valparaiso* as “fully self-referential” (130).

As in *The Engineer of Moonlight* and *The Day Room*, DeLillo includes a version of play-within-a-play in *Valparaiso*. For the first time, however, his hero appears to be both conscious of and candid about his positioning within a “self-referential” space. This largely unprecedented openness about how the devices of fiction regulate the real might be said to emanate from DeLillo’s own string of interviews following the great success of *Underworld*. Although DeLillo ruminated on *Valparaiso* for many years, a period that began after the celebrity that followed *Libra*, his second major run-in with the spectacular enabled him to dramatize the confinements of this dangerous contemporary process. Reinvestigating the problems he works out in his first two plays, in addition to his earliest novels, DeLillo finally conceives of drama as instantaneously self-referential. Not about subtly disclosed delays and deceptions that earmark the connections between performance and identity, as well as the ties coupling risk-taking to self-creation, *Valparaiso* represents the dangers of a global culture wherein passive agents fail to counteract increasing “hyper-banality” irrespective of their very awareness of this manic-triviality (Weber 130). As an un-ironic journalist in *Valparaiso* refreshingly reveals, “I’ve come into a stranger’s home to do the most superficial sort of dimwit interview. This is the nature of my assignment” (50). In *Valparaiso*, the prevailing will of media culture actively cancels the will towards reestablishing individual senses of free agency.

The recording devices in *Valparaiso* call to mind Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, a drama published in 1958. Yet in contrast to Beckett's compulsive hero, Michael has no control over his "tapes." Michael's final movement in Act One of *Valparaiso* establishes this distinction. Enacting a mere "half gesture," Michael stops in "mid-motion" as he reaches for the imaginary "bedside light" that the distant announcer of "Sunrise radio" advises him to grasp (58). Meanwhile, the minimal stage light emanates exclusively from the "glow" of a microphone resting next to Michael (58). Act One concludes with a troubled focus on inertia, compliance, and instrumentality, not personal agency. Unlike Krapp, Michael never personally fiddles with recording devices in Act One. Instead, as a substitution for a recording device, he responds to the maneuvering of others. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, Krapp, on the one hand, maintains a divide between himself and his tapes, at least visually. Notwithstanding the fact that he ultimately sits "motionless[ly] staring" upstage as his last "tape runs on in silence," the audience can perceive him (223). At the end of Act One, Scene Eight, in *Valparaiso*, on the other hand, the deviation between Michael and his engineered voice disintegrates. The play-audience only sees the still Michael because of the radiance on the table beside him, a glow he never attempts to resist or manipulate. Albeit Krapp's story terminates once he plays his last tape, he dominates his own story. He recorded it as he told it. As well, Krapp plays his story as he listens to it. Onstage, his movements and manipulations appear self-motivated. Playing himself, or the self he elects to present, he stage-manages himself. Michael, by contrast, never exercises these liberties in the first half of *Valparaiso*. In turn, he volunteers for this exhibition of submission.

Act Two of *Valparaiso*, which is engineered as one long scene thrice disrupted by

a Chorus acting as commercial break or corporate subsidy, takes place at what Benesch would call the crux of “media-mad America” (134). Between Act One and Act Two, the *mise-en-scène* of the drama transfers from Michael’s former office, the Majeski home, and other depersonalized spaces, to America’s most public of spheres: the studio set of an Oprah-style TV show (Benesch 140; Duvall 560). In *Valparaiso*, however, the confessional talk show hosted by Delfina and her sidekick Teddy clearly downplays the veiled ideological constraints (and their attendant perils to free agency) set forth on Oprah Winfrey’s show—a dramatic understatement that Benesch and Duvall fail to notice. In DeLillo’s dramatic adaptation of the talk show scene, gone are the *faux* sincerity, fake expertise, and sham sympathy that characterize the Oprah mission. As the Franzen debacle made evident, Oprah steadfastly disallows the expression of views that run counter to her own, even if these dissenting outlooks are already revealed in a novel that she (unwittingly, ironically, worryingly) markets for the American public.

On Delfina’s show, which has no name, thus signifying that the program—like all talk shows—is about its host instead of its visitors, “the shining soul of daytime America” (64) freely elaborates on her wealth, her backing of market culture, her self-absorption, and her treatment of guests as shoppers. Directly upon arising every morning, she telephones “Financial planners” (65). Observing her global renown, she loads her discourse with a surplus of the first-person singular: “I’m live, I’m taped, I’m run, I’m rerun. I’m on all the time somewhere in the world” (67). When she sees Livia, who is “*clearly pregnant*” (70), she concurs with Teddy’s comment that they do not normally televise the unborn because “They’re not consumers. They take up space but do not spend” (72). Given this bluntly satirical set up to *Valparaiso*’s final act, which makes free

use of lines from its precursor, it proves less than surprising that, as introduced early in Act One, the dialogue “leads to the break-down of the *real* as a category of human discourse altogether” (Benesch 134).

In a play abounding with *ad res* repetitions, Delfina, whose “private moments” manifest themselves as “endless[ly] replicate[d]” TV moments (93), resurrects an exact line from the original “superficial sort of dimwit interview.” With this reminder, Delfina betrays the mission of the media apparatus that she bolsters. After Livia and Michael, seemingly happy together, comfortably begin to divulge their reactions to the mistaken journey, the host cannot help but to redirect the talk to an alternate, less public, less tangible, less newsworthy, and less impromptu topic:

DELFINA: Teddy.

MICHAEL: It was hugely and vastly comic.

DELFINA: Tell them to shut up.

TEDDY: Be nice. Ask them about their marriage.

DELFINA: That’s so unsexy a subject.

TEDDY: We have to peel away the outer layers. Don’t you think? One
by one.

DELFINA: I hate these unraveling relationships.

TEDDY: You hate that word.

DELFINA: *I hate all the words in that sentence.*

TEDDY: Because you take them personally. You take everything personally.

(My emphasis; 76-7)

Delfina only “likes” to hear what she in fact orchestrates. Incongruously adding layers to

the story, she and Teddy dominate the studio stage when the interview does not conform to their staged scheme.

This orchestrated monopoly of media space, as enforced through the reiteration of “I hate all the words in that sentence,” highlights the innuendo of the line. In Act One, the female journalist acknowledges the phony nature of her interview and prompts Michael to substitute roles with her. Aping his previous interviewers, he asks her a simple personal question: “Are you having a relationship?” (44). When the interviewer’s phrase returns in answer to the utilization of the same word—relationship—in the live TV studio, Michael has nothing to do with the discussion. Here, Delfina and Teddy have already overtaken the universally televised “discussion.” Interrupted, Michael and Livia are directed not to talk. Thus objectified, the couple gets drafted into a fictive story, a story that Delfina wishes to tell rather than to hear. On her show, obvious fabrication swallows the notion of the real. A kangaroo court or show trial wherein oppositional or nonconformist narratives are suppressed, Delfina’s TV show counteracts the devices of justice. Disregarding a legalistic discourse that integrates accusation, defense, and deliberation, in addition to the consequences of lawful decision, Delfina redirects the course of justice towards her own ends. Silenced, Michael cannot engage in an act of self-justification. As a result, he cannot expose himself to public judgment. Without narrative and its risks, he cannot reclaim the free agency that the media has monopolized.

Stories

Myles Weber takes DeLillo to task for his enduring representation of what might be deemed the collapse of the real within *Valparaiso*. Weber associates DeLillo’s

repeated depictions of unrealistic dialogue with “a lack of dramatic vigor” (131).

Concluding that since DeLillo does not observably parody “pretentious playwriting” à *l’instar de* Harold Pinter and Christopher Durang, he demonstrates an earnestness that reveals his “work” to be needlessly ostentatious (131). Weber, though, does not register how DeLillo integrates “vaguely inhumane dialogue” as a means of ideological critique, not as a “funny” caricature of amateurish theatre (131). In spite of their habitual humor, DeLillo’s masterful monologues and dialogues embellish the theatrical and inherently perilous nature of the media institution itself.

When the media promotes a story, DeLillo intimates, any clear understanding of the distinction between the real and the unreal or the event and the mediated event falls to the wayside in support of a script designed to sway public interest. News exists for the news. The news does not unravel uncertain facts but, instead, proves pre-established ones. Strong-arming the evolution of culture, media manipulation privileges the inhumane—the empty dialogues, the nonsensical views, the penchant for repetition, the obsolescence of memory—over the distinct and the individuating. Michael’s story, as DeLillo illustrates, inextricably intersects with Delfina’s production of his story. Covering his story, she creates his story. Combining the roles of playwright, actor, and spectator, Delfina assumes the dictatorial role of puppeteer while Michael mutates into her handy marionette. To appropriate Franzen’s estimation of his own personal exploitation at the hands of Oprah’s television team, Michael thus becomes “a dumb but necessary object, a passive supplier of image” (“Meet Me in St. Louis” 288). Indistinguishable from Delfina’s drama, the stage-managed Michael only proves serviceable until the end of Delfina’s one-hour show, until the end of her daily segment—

unless, of course, she styles him into an intertextual figure, a figure she wishes to recycle.

Stressing Michael and Livia's cooptation into a living drama that is at the same time not theirs and not not theirs, DeLillo likewise appoints the audience members of *Valparaiso* as the audience of Delfina's TV show. Act Two starts under dim light as Teddy emerges from the wings. Without further ado, he tells the assembled to avoid applauding, for "This is only the warmup" (63). Distorting the distinction between rehearsal and performance, Teddy's instant instructions recall the line that first positions Michael as an object of media management: "Everything is the interview" (25). Always captured, always a means and never an end, in Act One Michael exudes no power over his public image. He cannot compose himself for interviews; the media composes him both before and after interviews. As a human symbol of the personality permutations of media culture, Delfina's subordinate Teddy actively coaches his "live" play-cum-television audience: "Not that the warmup isn't part of the show. The warmup is taped and studied. The warmup is completely crucial to the furtherance of our endeavor. Take my words to heart" (63). Following this simulated pep talk, he details how and when the audience ought to clap. Illustrating that Delfina's spectators are also complicit actors in her drama, Teddy also explains how and when the assembled crowd ought to engage with the "giant monitors" (64). Live spectatorship, Teddy cautions, involves stringent restrictions and responsibilities. As deputy actors, as surrogate props without unscripted reactions, the audience members offer themselves to public consumption.

After Teddy's directives, the play audience is at once live and directed on how to be live. Akin to Michael and Livia, the audience is not what it is and not not what it is. Representation subsumes reality; the limits of representation direct the course and the

experience of reality. In *Valparaiso*, as Duvall says, the “world of the television talk show is represented as Michel Foucault’s panopticon writ large, revealing a carceral society (ironically experienced as fully liberated) where our ability to find instant gratification through image consumption demands only that we be not alienated” (561). Continuing with an exegesis of Delfina’s character, Duvall affirms that “the true goddess of the postmodern in this contemporary Greek tragedy, must kill off alienation by representing it as Michael’s personal pathology, just as Michael must reveal that he is alienated to reassure the viewers that they are not” (561). Duvall articulates that Delfina’s live audience—the manipulated “teentsy-weentsy studio audience” standing-in for the indelibly jealous “Global millions watching at home” (*Valparaiso* 63-4)—also experiences estrangement and exploitation. Cast into Delfina’s show, the gathered audience surrenders to the systems presently governing them.

In *Valparaiso*, the Delphic motto conjured by Delfina’s name alters from the personal “Know Thyself” to the public “Promote Thyself,” an endorsement indistinct from “Let a Version of Thyself be Promoted,” as Michael’s mass-marketed story and the audience’s requisite gestures on the massive monitor indicate. DeLillo’s strange Chorus plays up the limiting impositions broadcast technology places upon the individual in this current version of distorted self-discovery. Recalling the reason for Michael’s celebrity, the three-member choral group wears “*severe, faintly intimidating*” and “*not necessarily matching*” “*civilian*” style “*flight-crew uniforms*” (68). Quite predictably, this half motley, half professional choir, which “*exists in a space separate from the stage proceedings, in another dimension*” (68), mimes and reiterates pre-takeoff safety instructions. The multi-language “*Air Reliance*” (69; 69; 84; 84) commercials, however,

often lapse into claptrap, panic, and poetry. DeLillo thus coalesces technology, travel, news, and capitalism. Reworking the depiction of space in *The Day Room*, he suggests that no matter where we are we are controlled by certain systems—and dependent upon them. Taking his iterations of restricted spatiality into account, the limited legroom of the airplane cabin is not merely conducive to good talk, as Wyatt and Budge originally deem it. Rather, this small space evokes the confining nature of the marketplace. Just as passengers automatically buckle into plane seats, citizen-subjects inevitably buy into the conditions of technoculture.

Michael's celebrated tragicomic journey, to the "deep end of Latin America" (87), as well as the vital core of consumer culture (74; 83), begins as it purportedly ends: with an imposed "submi[ssion] to the systems" (86; 101). After several interruptions in Act One, the play-audience learns that Michael jettison[ed] his Chicago "itinerary" in favor of a Miami "ticket" because the former was merely "typed" while the latter was "computer processed" (55). Nevertheless, he does not publicly admit to his helpless vulnerability to the "force" of "systems" until the midpoint of Act Two (86). Tellingly, once Michael confesses to this total intimidation, the same compliance to systems that later convinces him to board an aircraft for Santiago (86), Delfina instantly discredits his suppressed story. In a move that reminds the monitored audience and the at-home viewer of her Orwellian adage, "Off-camera lives are unverifiable" (83), she breaks off his story: "I don't believe you" (87). In spite of Michael's protestations and Livia's bewilderments, Teddy naturally seconds Delfina's judgment.

At this juncture in the performance, Delfina's TV program lapses into an evident charade of a televised talk show. She roundly rejects, and therefore publicly re-circulates,

the tabloid tedium concerning Livia's love affair with a documentary filmmaker (the *liaison* that leaves her pregnant), in addition to Michael's drunken car accident (the collision that disables the couple's son, who was not wearing his seatbelt). Unveiling the agendas of her show, the host and her helper subsequently lead Michael through product placements—"Close Up" (94), "Wilkinson Sword" (98)—emulated introspection—"Explain me to myself," "Is that what I want?" (95)—ineffectual blather—"Boo," "Ga ga ga ga ga" (97)—and indispensable artificial audience-alignment—"Don't fight the camera" (95), "Don't fight the camera" (98), "Use the present tense" (100). By these at once preposterous and convincing means, Delfina and Teddy persuade their malleable guest to disclose the true essence of his yet-unearthed epic story. Inadvertently handcuffed or straitjacketed by the artificiality of the show, far-fetched invention appears to be his only release from the confines of lunacy.

Thus staged and prepped, Michael delivers a remarkable story. Refusing to disappoint his pushy hosts, live spectators, and TV audience, he personalizes the opening scene of *Valparaiso*. He explains that the shaky and abrupt end of the brief recording in Act One, Scene One had its source in airplane turbulence, the instability and uproar that interrupted his attempted suicide. Because of "The pilot's talking on the intercom" and "the urgent flashing light," Michael declares under Teddy's tutelage, he "Return[ed] to [his] seat" and resumed his role as "a docile traveler once again" (100-101). As he relates this confidential narrative of mishaps, he underlines versions of performance and conformity: "I had to submit to the systems. They were designed to save my life. And I complied gratefully. Returned to my seat. Fastened my seatbelt" (101). In order "to know everything," Delfina and Teddy "need to show everything" (90). For them, "everything's

accessible” because “everything’s replayable” (90). Accentuating this form of spurious consumer-cultural logic, Micheal’s overdramatic “story is verifiable” (101) on account of the fact that “There are video cameras in airline toilets” (101).

Following Michael’s theatricalized confession, Delfina succeeds where her featured guest failed. While Livia rests “*motionless, staring straight ahead,*” like Krapp, and Teddy coolly “*browses in a magazine,*” like a carefree consumer, Delfina strangles the submissive Michael with his own microphone cord (106). In *Valparaiso*, Michael’s own elided motion and voice strangle him. DeLillo constructs a parallel dramatization in *The Rapture of the Athlete Assumed into Heaven*. In the two-minute play, a young tennis player named Bobby, who has just captured his first title, is told by an interviewer, who invents every banal aspect of the new star’s life without letting him intervene, that this is “the last day of your life” (12). A later adaptation of Bobby, Michael gets literally played-up and factually played-out by the manipulation of his image. Condensing the course and illustrating the dangers of spectacularism, mediated privacy erases actual privacy. Once consumed by the public, the individual loses her claim to individuality.

Locked-in with little freedom to move, Michael, like Bobby, first gets entrapped, then strangled by the strictures of media representation. Again reminding the play audience of *Valparaiso*’s opening, the drama ends with what can be seen as a series of epilogues. In the first of these, Delfina compares Michael to “An image aloft in the flashing air” (106). Waxing technological, she goes on to confuse forgetfulness, reality, representation, and replication as she reduces the dead man to a pattern of lightwaves. Before the lights go down, she concludes that Michael amounts to nothing more than “A set of image-forming units, sand-grain size, that shape a face on-screen” (106). When

light returns, the Chorus resumes its contrived repetitions of stock airline commands and gestures. The scheduled corporate recitation, however, meets with an interruption prior to naming its sponsor, a move that makes all of the Chorus' posturing and rhetoric as inconsequential as Delfina's own muddled metaphysics—in the terms of capitalism at least. Implying that the symbolic Delfina herself exists as but an amalgamation of lightwaves (she lives for the camera, she lives to “Melt into it” [95; 98]), the disturbance that suspends the choral routine, while likewise ending the actual play, is a rerun of the violent twenty-second projection that opens *Valparaiso*. Concluding in the same way as *The Day Room*, *Valparaiso* ultimately loops back into itself. The play stops where it starts: with Michael at center stage. According to the terms of Delfina's disquieting logic, Michael therefore appears to outlive the talk show host. In contrast to Delfina, who disappears by “melting into” the camera, an inconspicuous stage exit that plays on Marx's famous avowal “all that is solid melts into air,” Michael leaves a more lasting impression upon the spectators. Though she manipulates his narrative, his image overrides hers.

A main problem with this final reading, however, rests in the fact that in the replay of “*a man in confined space with [a] plastic bag on his head*,” the man's face remains unrecognizable (107). Audience members consequently have no verifiable reason to trust that the obscured face (13; 107) belongs to Michael. Even if the man proves to be Michael, the provenance of the tape is unknown. Perhaps Michael merely performs for a camera. Maybe a double substitutes for Michael in this piece of *cinéma vérité*. Because of the prompting and staging and copying that DeLillo highlights throughout *Valparaiso*, the veracity of the video recording seems dubious. Treated as a

representation and coached into a role, Michael may have had no viable alternative to corroborating with Delfina's embellished version of his story. An emblem of the media-manipulated subject, Michael's complicity with Delfina's televised scheme may be his ironic alternative to committing perjury on a global witness stand. After being co-opted into a sustained media event that he knows must eventually terminate, perhaps he can only do justice to himself by sanctioning the public version of his story. In so doing, he personally lends himself a weird air of legitimacy. By disremembering the past, Michael takes an active stake in his own remaking. In playing his part, in actively reconciling his personal self with his public image, and more notably, in exaggerating or risking the limits of the part that Delfina directs him to play, he regains the claim to freedom that the interrelated "systems" originally seized from him. Whether or not he participates in the production of the video projection, only in acting, it seems, can Michael reassert himself with any degree of liberty—and self-justification.

Nonetheless, Michael's fate at the hands of Delfina and the media executions that she emblemizes complicate the concatenation of performance with freedom. Because he dies, his self-determination and attendant self-creation seem pretty short-lived. Since the media murders him, his liberty is conjectural. This discomfiting conclusion should remind DeLillo's audience of Michael's first unconditional capitulation to the machinations of the media. Rather than simply renounce the media circuit, he voluntarily enlists in this process. In Act One, Scene Seven, Michael quits his job in order to devote himself entirely to media treatment—an illogical contrivance only rendered logical by virtue of the demands of the media. His personal surrender to the public eye thereby heralds the altogether oppositional movements of DeLillo's next protagonist: Lauren

Hartke. In *The Body Artist*, Lauren's unconcealed actions deliberately offset Michael's outwardly typical resignations. She steadfastly resists media representation.

As the first and only woman starring in a lead role in the DeLillo canon, Lauren the stage-performer calls to mind a variety of unforgettable cinematic female characters. Theatricalizing the work of his earliest filmic influences, namely the directors whom he associates with the great era of European movies in one way or another, DeLillo crafts his female protagonist as a composite of several women playing distinct roles. A figure of personal upheaval, Lauren evokes the lone woman with a baby carriage who incites a mass revolt against the attacking "Cossacks" in Odessa's outdoor "theatre" in Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Lauren's actions in *The Body Artist* likewise recall those of the first-time prostitute Nana, who will "parrot anything," in Jean Luc-Goddard's *My Life to Live* (1962). She also reminds readers of the schizophrenic Carole, who locks herself in her "nuthouse" flat and refuses to answer the ever-ringing phone in Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965). Perhaps most notably, Lauren also materializes as an avatar of the self-determining Karin, who, after "see[ing] [her] own confusion and understand[ing] it," makes a virtue of her supposed craziness in order to escape the three men that trap her in a coastal home in Ingmar Bergman's filmic chamber play *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961). Lauren, a self-titled body artist, brings to mind a non-fictional figure as well, the performance artist Orlan.

Most famous for her ten-part surgical performance indicatively titled *Interventions*, Orlan hails from France. In her unprecedented multipart piece, she stays awake as she undergoes a series of operations, spanning several years of the early 1990s, in time acquiring "the chin of Venus, the nose of Psyche, the eyes of Diana, the lips of

Europa and the brow of the Mona Lisa,” among other features of Western femininity (Goodall 159). Stressing the spectacular nature of viewing, the seventh of her plastic surgeries was “relayed by live satellite” to a gallery in New York City, “where the packed audience was filmed watching it, and subsequently interviewed about it for CNN television” (Goodall 159-60). Predictably and intentionally, her live performance was met with “contortionary” reactions ranging from “indignation” that her work gets dubbed art, “offense” at the misuse of science, and “confusion” about the exercise’s function (160).

When interviewed by CNN, Orlan fuelled the frustration of the American public. Making reference to talk show star Cindy Jackson, renowned for her twenty-plus plastic surgeries, all in an attempt to look like Ken’s Barbie, Orlan exclaimed, “I don’t want to be the Barbie Doll” (qtd. in Goodall 160). Naturally, Orlan makes a virtue of her refusal to be “shaped and determined” by what Green describes as “the anonymous public imagery of the mass media” (168). The sway of the mass media proves so strong, in fact, that Orlan appears as more controversial than Cindy Jackson (if not Michael Jackson). Enacting non-conformity turns more divisive heads than does the enactment of conventionality. As she says in another interview, Orlan effectively salutes dissension and confusion: “What’s difficult about my work is that it’s uncomfortable in every sense. So far as the operations are concerned, it is physically uncomfortable for me and for those who look at the images. But it is also uncomfortable to make sense of it” (Ayers 180). Courting conflict, she transposes her discomfort onto her spectators; as such, she prompts them to question the so-called standards set forth and propped up by image culture. Rather than subscribe, like the Barbie Doll, to what Debord theorizes as “official *similarity*” (39), Orlan conceives of spectatorship as a recognition of difference.

Lauren, whose name echoes and contorts Orlan's, literally transforms her physical appearance in order to complicate any telling distinction between identity and its physical construction. She adds to the actions of her filmic precursors. Refashioning would-be naturalistic paradigms, Lauren does more than assert her independence through acts of social rebellion. By way of rigorous and controlled body modification, she creates her self-identity through a process of physical or natural revolution. Revising Plato's *substantialist* conceptions of personal identity, metaphysical notions that Franz Kafka explores in "The Metamorphosis," Lauren willfully corrects her physical makeup. Neither confined to a distinct corporal body nor defined by a particular emotional state, she realigns or morphs her physicality to match her evolving psychology.

Also in opposition to the performance artist Orlan, not to mention her dramatic forerunner Michael, Lauren neither openly challenges the determinations of the mass media nor merely complies with them. Instead, she avoids the media's positionings and representations altogether. Recasting DeLillo's "exfoliation of the state we call marriage" in the one-minute play *The Mystery at the Middle of Ordinary Life*, which is, as he notes, "really two acts in two minutes" (601), *The Body Artist* opens with a slowly paced, twenty-page breakfast-scene incorporating minimal dialogue between a man named Rey and an unnamed woman. It is not until the next scene, an obituary for the once-famous cinematographer Rey Robles (which the narrator slots between the first and second chapters), that readers discover the identity of the woman in the kitchen. Surviving Rey, who dies of "a self-inflicted gunshot wound" (27), is his third wife, "the body artist" Lauren Hartke (29).

In the aftermath of her husband's suicide, Lauren remains in their rented Big

House by the sea and focuses mainly on “Meals, tasks, errands” (33). Customarily disregarding her ringing telephone, she sets aside time daily to watch a live webcam of an empty freeway in Kotka, Finland, reading the local time on the screen’s digital display. As an analogue to “the days that moved so slow they ached” (32), she resumes the painfully measured “methodical contortion[s]” of her bodywork (37). Playing up the oddly indistinct bug-eyed interloper she finds in her home, a madman or Martian (Gerlach 206) of unfixing age who apes Rey’s tape-recorded voice, she integrates echoing sounds and various stylized everyday gestures into her scrupulous body art regimen, such as compulsively checking her watch. She also replicates her invader’s ghostliness by bleaching the color from her hair and exfoliating the pigment from her skin. Expunged, Lauren matches her body to what she terms the “clos[ed] off outlets of [her] self” (97). Erased, she inscribes her traumatic loss onto her blank body.

Acting as a “counterpoint to the obituary” (Osteen 75), the narrator inserts an interview scene, titled “BODY ART IN EXTREMIS: SLOW, SPARE AND PAINFUL,” between chapters six and seven of *The Body Artist*. In this reportorial interview, an interrogation from which Lauren, the interviewee, flees at the midway point, despite the fact that her college classmate conducts the talk, readers learn that “although the brief run [of Lauren’s performance] is over, she continues to look—well wasted” (103). The body artist, her old friend clarifies, “is not pale-skinned so much as colorless, bloodless and ageless. She is rawboned and slightly bug-eyed. Her hair looks terroristic” (103). As in the early obituary, readers are here apprised of biographical information withheld from the main narrative, like Lauren’s age, her college major, and her father’s occupation.

As well, readers learn that Lauren’s solo piece, which “sneaked into town for

three nights, unadvertised except by word of mouth,” “begins with an ancient Japanese woman on a bare stage, gesturing” and “ends seventy-five minutes later with a naked man, emaciated and aphasic, trying desperately to tell us something” (105). As Lauren displays with her early departure from the meeting, however, her key point in *Body Time* is to make her spectators walk out of the performance (many of whom do), an exodus she accents when she says that her “slow,” “repetitious,” and “uneventful” show “ought to be sparer, even slower than it is, even longer than it is” (106). Perhaps alluding to Beckett’s idea that “plays should ideally be played in front of empty theatres” (Moran 123), DeLillo’s protagonist goes on to proclaim that *Body Time* ought to be “three fucking hours” (106). In her rigorous recital she pinpoints this alertness to time and emptiness by backgrounding her measured contortions with a video-stream from the lightly trafficked highway in Kotka, a projection equipped with a digital clock, a detail that might remind her impatient audience of the lone piece of furniture, a clock, in the cage of Kafka’s “A Hunger Artist.” Not just “A” artist, but “The” artist, Lauren Hartke finally calls for and shows an expanded definition of performance and its indelible ties to personal identity and temporal experience, when she, acting or not, lapses into the voice of her naked man, “Not taped but live. Not lip-sync’d but real,” before making a getaway to the lavatory (109). Leaving her friend to wait indefinitely, Lauren naturally never returns to the interview.

Her iterated escapes from classical limits of control and representation, whether in terms of the constraints of the body, the demands of the media, or the boundaries of theatricality and identity, furthermore elicit a renewed reading of Michael Majeski’s so-called death at the end of *Valparaiso*. Maybe the orchestrations of the media world do not

kill Michael. A prototype for Lauren, who returns to her empty house by the sea in Chapter Seven, which is *The Body Artist's* closing scene or stage, Michael may perform his death on Delfina's popular show in order to reclaim his personal liberty. By purposely staging his public death, Michael can manage to elude additional mass-market manipulation. Literally dead to the public, and figuratively dead to Delfina, who ironically lives by virtue of the public opinion she herself controls, Michael regains his privacy. By escaping the business and commerce of the spectacular, he relocates individuality in privacy. No longer an engineered or puppeteered symbol of undifferentiated stardom, he locates a unique personality in an act of escape. He walks off the public stage.

Dead to the world as a celebrity, Michael reinstates the sense of aloneness that DeLillo constitutes as the essential feature of free, responsive agency. Like the later Lauren, he plays an active role in effecting his own sea change, which enables him to rest on the cusp of personal risk and change, as intimated by the biblical resonance of *The Body Artist's* seventh and last episode. Whether or not Michael falls from his present-day edition of Edenic retreat becomes his own choice. By acting out his death, he exposes the necessary dangers of self-creation.

DeLillo buttresses this refreshing analysis of Michael's final stake for freedom in his most recent drama. In *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, his first three-act play, DeLillo recasts the seascapes of both *The Engineer of Moonlight* and *The Body Artist* to a remote setting much like the empty spaces he includes at the end of his first novel, *Americana*. Refashioning the desolate atmospheres incorporated in Antonioni's most popular films—the distant barren isles in *L'avventura* (1960), the bleak streets in *Eclipse* (1962), the

depressing waste in *The Red Desert* (1964), the massive sand dunes in *Zabriskie Point* (1970)—DeLillo situates *Love-Lies-Bleeding* in the spare old house of an artist in the middle of a desertscape, as the play's title, the common name of a desert flower, portends. In this slow yet moving piece, DeLillo reconfigures the themes, tensions, and cast of his first drama, *The Engineer of Moonlight*. He incorporates a man named Alex, who is seventy, like DeLillo at the time of publication; Toinette, Alex' second wife; Lia, his fourth wife; and Sean, the son from Alex' first marriage.

The three younger members gather in the desert to discuss the fate of Alex, who, fully dependent in the wake of a second stroke, sits silently “*in extremis*,” irredeemably “attached to a feeding tube” (1). Throughout the play, the trio determines the limits of Alex' life without legal or medical counsel. In Act One, Lia convinces herself, if not the two visitors, that her husband still experiences “awe” (14), that “He's not ready” to die (24; 41), that he should “die in his time” (27), and that “he's not gone. He's there. I can see him there” (30). Setting up a clear contrast to Alex' “persistently vegetative state” (27), Act Two features a flashback to Toinette's visit to the remote house six years earlier, wherein the audience learns that Alex is an environmental artist modeled on Klara Sax in *Underworld*. In lieu of recycling thousands of decommissioned fighter planes into a popular installation somewhere in Nevada like Klara, Alex commences a nameless artistic venture. He aims to build “A room, a cube” in the middle of a mountain barely accessible by road (58). Knowing “It'll never be finished” (61), he explains that after he and his three-man crew “cut a passage in,” they will construct “A chamber, a cubical room. Fashioned out of solid rock. Precise dimensions. A large empty room. Six congruent surfaces” (59). Falling into Heideggerian phenomenology, Toinette likens the

reverse-archeology of this lofty and clinical dig to the sense of danger and release Alex craves. "I know why you're here," she pronounces, "Risk everything. There's no safety here. It's all one thing. The art, the artist, the landscape, the sky" (63).

Influenced by the long flashback in the same way as the play audience, Lia capitulates to the appeals of Toinette and Sean. With the inert, intubated Alex staring on, she consents to their case for applying euthanasia: "I don't want to be here when this is happening. I'll go walking. I haven't done that in a while" (69). More compelling about this gesture than the biomedical ethics and the personal principles that come into play, at least for the purposes of what I have called DeLillo's sustained dramatic project, is the fact that Lia quantifies her claim to liberty in terms of aloneness, the same aloneness that Alex privileges by moving to the lonely desert originally. No longer induced to tend Alex' "intravenous feeding setup" (3), she turns inward. Beyond the limits of the Big House, she exists individually. Offstage, she escapes her increased confinement to the house, an emergent sense of crowding signified by the arrival of Toinette and Sean.

DeLillo's article "Counterpoint," published in Spring 2004, about one year before the first production of *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, confirms this reading. In the piece that he subtitles "Three Movies, A Book, and a Play" one of the films he considers is set in the barren tundra of the Canadian north, a land notorious for its far-flung remoteness and virtual emptiness. The theme to which DeLillo devotes the entirety of his attention in his assessment of this Canadian Inuit film, titled *Atarnajuat: The Fast Runner*, is the contrast between the confinement of the winter igloos and the endlessness of the snowy land, a landscape that mirrors the empty spaces that he always stages.

In the most vivid and memorable scene of the movie, members of a rival clan

attack Atarnajuat and his brother, both of whom are sleeping in a collapsible animal-skin tent under the warmer noonday sun. Woken by his brother's death wail, Atarnajuat, unclothed, runs for his life. Hunted by these men (much like the tracking of Selvy in *Running Dog*, Brademas in *The Names*, Mink in *White Noise*, Oswald in *Libra*, and Packer in *Cosmopolis*, to name but a few instances of chase and vigilantism in DeLillo), "the hero of *Atarnajuat* runs stark naked across miles and miles of broken pan ice" (Atwood 262). DeLillo's understanding of this fascinating, long scene extends primal existence to something more than mere survival. He writes, "In *The Fast Runner*, Atarnajuat, racing, naked, is a man reacting to a primal danger; there are other men who want to kill him. But he may also resemble an individual trying to reestablish his sense of isolation, his natural place in the landscape. Life in the winter dwelling built of snow blocks gets crowded and complicated, and even introspection becomes a group dynamic. The man is running, eyes wild, into the arctic sky" (46).

Related to individuality, survival entails a committed stake in aloneness, for DeLillo. Again and again in his novels, plays, interviews, and nonfiction, in different ways he elaborates on the essential apartness of the novelist, the artist, the cultural critic, the terrorist, the actor, and the audience member. In his estimation, the individual who escapes confinement in order to engage in resourceful operations of introspection performs and thereby actualizes her uniqueness, her individuality. Identity requires the appreciation and active negotiation of these risky, unrepeatable, improvisational actions. These are the unscripted possibilities and responsive movements that instantiate the flexible connections between justice and self-justification, culture and individuality, theatricality and freedom.

The Odds of Justice in Smiley's Fiction

Chapter Five

The End of Legal Process in *The Greenlanders*

Jane Smiley writes about livestock and luck. Best known for her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *A Thousand Acres*, which adapts *King Lear* to the Midwestern farm-crisis in the 1980s, Smiley features the ownership of property in virtually all of her nine novels, two novellas, and several short stories. Her novelistic representations of chance and odds complicate these entitlements to territory. She tends to situate her realist fictions in the American heartland. In her two longest novels, however, she varies this inclination. She moves away from her primary setting—regional USA—in *The Greenlanders* (1988), located in Greenland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and incorporates an international dimension in *Horse Heaven* (2000). Though *Horse Heaven* is centered in the US, it extends its frame of reference geographically to include England, France, Ireland, Lithuania, and Japan, among other places. Writing about farms and property in both novels, Smiley calculates the odds of survival for a medieval civilization in *The Greenlanders* and the odds of success at the racetrack in *Horse Heaven*. These two works likewise foreground problems of luck and fate to narrative, a move that is indicative of Smiley's proclivity to test the limits and devices of representation. As her repeated experiments with novelistic genres suggest, she prizes the investigation and manipulation of storytelling conventions. *Duplicate Keys* (1984), for instance, is a crime fiction, while, to categorize some of her other novels, *A Thousand Acres* (1991) is a contemporary tragedy; *Moo* (1995) a social comedy; *Lidie Newton* (1998) a bellum romance; and *Good*

Faith (2003) a Reagan-era satire.

As a non-fictional coda to *Horse Heaven*, her recent book *A Year at the Races* (2004) reasserts her ongoing interest in stories while at the same time accenting her concern with gambling, odds, women, and luck. The last chapter of this book, titled after the racetrack adage "That's Horses," specifically points up her enduring preoccupation with luck and the many concessions luck can allow. Propelling narrative in unexpected ways, luck changes stories even as it provides them. As a structural device, luck draws out, shifts, and fragments stories. In terms of the narrative of gambling, luck opens up and often shakes up the odds. Luck can lengthen a sure shot in the same way that it can shorten a long shot. Combining skill and chance, a calculated gamble risks adeptness and expertise to the whims and impulses of Lady Luck. Gambling, in its many speculative varieties, is defined by this familiar apprehension of risk. From the law court to the steading (or farmstead) in *The Greenlanders*, and from the stable to the racetrack (or racecourse) in *Horse Heaven*, luck influences all forms of speculation. In other words, chance delimits Smiley's portrayal of the Nordic world in the same way that it typifies her representation of the track world.

Smiley's two big novels, nevertheless, are not merely about risky play within the rubric of unruly chance. In these texts, the author elaborates multiple ways in which to approach and negotiate gambles and wagers in order to show that odds can run a parallel course to justice. Smiley's female characters, for example, normally rely on intuition instead of reason when they gamble. Unlike most of the men in Smiley's fiction, women, and sometimes children, are liable to possess particular qualities, including second sight, prognostication, wish granting, and animal communication, all of which alter the logic of

odds-making and –playing. Though odds can be interpreted and played in terms of intuition, information, or haphazard guessing, so Smiley illustrates, odds can furthermore be evaluated as good or just. Playing out games and legality in multiple ways, she links odds to justice—both of which can at once be pliable and exacting, changing and substantial. Odds, as Smiley configures them in narrative paradigms, can offer an alternative and often an ironic twist to convictions about and implementations of justice.

Interweaving narrative with various applications of gambling and refreshed appreciations of justice, Smiley offers another version of the individuality and freedom that DeLillo develops all through his dramatic project. In *The Greenlanders*, she collapses the free agency that DeLillo attributes to a self-determined or –engineered sense of isolation. Working out spatial limits of liberty and control in a way dissimilar to DeLillo's, Smiley's representation of aloneness and remoteness ends not by enacting a self-awareness that privileges the actions of the individual over the passive nature of the crowd; alternatively, her depiction of seclusion leads to the loss of collective stories, a loss that intimates the end of the Greenland colony. Without stories, without news from other places, without the group storytelling that goes on at their annual public tribunal, the Greenlanders lose not only their individual claims to distinct identity, but also their chance for survival. Asserting that laws and legality change first and foremost by way of public debate, in lieu of through creative forms of personal isolation and risky cultural comment and discourse, Smiley suggests in *The Greenlanders* that the inherent ironies of any legal system necessarily call upon both measured and random actions. Without these risky public redirections of legality, these risky public maneuvers that are suppressed once the Greenlandic legal system is abandoned, these risky public interventions that tie

personal and communal existence to the evolving devices of storytelling, legality, and justice, the colony cannot endure. As I will show in “The End of Legal Process in *The Greenlanders*,” life ends along with transparent legality and shared narrative.

Smiley counteracts the breakdown of narrative as manifested in the literal isolation that closes *The Greenlanders* with a focus on unrestricted movement and expansive stories in *Horse Heaven*. Neither constrained to particular spaces, nor limited to select storylines, a major portion of the growing cast of characters in *Horse Heaven* routinely confronts and negotiates with tensions or even antitheses between stories and laws. The various interconnecting yet always inconclusive stories in this novel, I argue in “Big Stakes in *Horse Heaven*,” position narrative beyond the law, in a realm where odds rule. By incorporating characters that take advantage of odds, characters that actively respond to the risky repositioning that odds solicit, Smiley implies that justice may function at an individual level instead of a collective one. Freely migrating all over the global map, rather than ultimately trapped in a very specific place on a diminishing colony on a regional map, Smiley links movement and luck to justice and narrative. In this novel, individuals can take real stakes in fashioning their own identities by attentively incorporating themselves and their changing stories into the intersecting narratives around them. In *Horse Heaven*, narrative, identity, and personal forms of justice increase as characters position themselves in evolving storylines, storylines that they in turn contribute to and alter in the same way that they influence odds by playing either with them or against them. In other words, fate can function at individual levels, individual levels that can demarcate the necessary inconsistency—and unpredictability—embedded into any speculative, legal, or representational system.

I will start the development of this section of my dissertation with an examination of Smiley's depiction of the ill-fated Nordic colony. I begin with a chapter on *The Greenlanders* for two reasons. For one, the saga comes first chronologically in Smiley's *oeuvre*. Secondly, her encyclopedic novel *Horse Heaven* is her most complex, skillful, and far-reaching work of fiction. In contrast to the technique she implements in *The Greenlanders*, a method that finally shuts down the novel's single narrative, she integrates a strategy that expands the flow of multiple narratives in *Horse Heaven*. This later work, as my second chapter on Smiley shows, articulates some of the more subtle problems with justice, risk, luck, and representation initially introduced in her Greenlandic saga.

Legality

The Greenlanders, Jane Smiley's masterwork, illustrates the link between the law and survival in Greenland between 1345 and an indefinite period sometime after 1415. Smiley concedes that her saga was inspired by the singularity of the Greenlander's decline: "One of the first things that intrigued me about [the fate of the colony] was that it was the only attested case of an *established* European civilization or culture falling apart and vanishing" (Nakadate 106). In this chronicle of a people she earlier describes as "fall[en] through a hole in history and disappeared" (106), Smiley's narrative technique seems to be as merciless as the Greenlandic way of life is harsh, not to mention curiously unlucky. At a talk in 1996, eight years after the publication of *The Greenlanders*, she congratulated herself for the remorseless style of her novel-length version of the saga, while at the same time disclosing her narrative influence: "After writing *The*

Greenlanders, I rather prided myself on my cruelty to my characters. I was pleased at how readily I could sacrifice them to principle. Sudden, accidental death, for example, is a prominent feature of the Icelandic saga” (“Shakespeare in Iceland” 171).

Unpitiful, she is also true to the stylistic conventions of Scandinavian sagas. As Nakadate points out, “the dominant mode of the sagas and chronicles was a direct and dispassionate ‘plain style’” (104-5). For instance, Smiley uses parataxis (clauses linked by “and”) in order to create a biblical feeling. The “plain style” that she employs for almost 600 pages—incredibly “the manuscript exceeded 1,100 pages” (Nakadate 110)—reflects the Nordic lifestyle she represents: measured, repetitive, tiring, and bleak. This flat, steadfast form, a form that includes reiterated indexes of time (paragraphs linked by “now”), also intimates what the *Greenlanders* see as their luckless decline. Almost from the beginning, their days seem numbered. Speaking at the “5 Voices, One Place” symposium held in Lincoln, Nebraska, in Spring 2001, Smiley construed what she saw as the Scandinavian condition. Stressing qualification while at the same lapsing into parataxis, she explained that

what begins as, let’s say, disconnection and depression ends up as a philosophy and a world view. It’s no coincidence that the Scandinavians were the only society that imagined that when the end came it would come in destruction. Everybody else in the world thought redemption was just around the corner and the Scandinavians thought that the evil guys were going to break their bonds and overwhelm everything and that the Valkyries and the warriors and the gods were going to come up short and that would be it and darkness would fall and that would be the end of the

world. ("It Ain't the Eiffel Tower" 338-9)

Smiley goes on to wonder if "elevating a mood of, let's say, despair into a philosophy of universal destruction" is "the first step to the end" (339). In doing so, she conjectures on the self-fulfilling propensities of a philosophy of despair. Expectations are commonly borne out in Greenland; consequently, a Greenlandic belief in eventual doom overrides the hope of salvation. And this metaphysics, Smiley suggests, can compromise a life or the many lives of a select "society," no matter how secluded the settlements, districts, and steadings of this society happen to be from one another. A general sense of despondency, the author claims, negatively influences the odds of survival for the Greenlanders.

The Greenland colony is comprised of two settlements. One of these, the Western Settlement, is inexplicably found "abandoned [with] all of the livestock dead or scattered to the wastelands" at the onset of Smiley's novel (*The Greenlanders* 6). In the Eastern Settlement, where the narrative takes place, the Greenlanders live on steadings in districts separated by fjords or long, narrow, and deep sea-inlets that divide high cliffs. Society in Greenland is made up of concentric circles, including the clerics in the priestly district of Gardar, the wealthy folk with one or more steadings, the poor folk with small steadings, and the servant folk who insinuate themselves onto steadings in every district by contributing livestock and handicrafts. Like many of the servants who seem at once to belong anywhere and nowhere, women complicate the relations of this social structure. Women do not merely have domestic skills in *The Greenlanders*. Their qualities include second sight and prescience. The men, however, often misinterpret these female features and visions. Moreover, the men in Greenland generally ignore or outright suppress the interpretations, forewarnings, and admonitions of the women.

As a civilization, the Greenlanders also have strained relations with the skraelings or Inuit people, the Icelanders, the Norwegians, and the papacy in Rome and France. Most of the Greenlanders' relations—complex and simple, external and internal—are determined by water. Fjords, for instance, separate their several districts. Skraelings show up in order to trade in canoes. Other visitors arrive on ships. Water likewise speaks to the fluidity of their social system. Due to a variety of factors, most of which the Greenlanders attribute to luck, folk commonly change social ranks or classes in the colony. But the tendency in Smiley's saga, especially for her main characters, is downward. Their luck, as they understand it, is usually ill.

What begins for Smiley as a re-creation of the undoing of Greenlandic civilization turns into what she comes to understand as her social responsibility agenda. She ascribes a social value to the representation of conflict and increased lawlessness. She remarks, "The whole time [she] was writing [the saga], [she] felt very socially responsible" (in Nakadate 106). Continuing with this perception of responsibility, she links narrative manipulation to social control: "There's the sense that if we in our time knew how they in their time somehow managed to let go, somehow managed to lose control, then it would somehow keep us from losing control of our own situation" (106). History, she makes plain, mirrors and checks the present. And since conflict involves debate and fruitful exchange, Smiley credits the imaginative depiction of conflict in narrative as a translation of the confrontations of everyday conflict. Just as the past provides a check and balance for the present, representations of survival and justice provide a model for actual negotiations of survival and justice. In this sense, Smiley's concerns reflect those of her Nordic characters. The Greenlanders value the representation of inconsistency and

divergence, as it is brought to bear in the innumerable oral stories that they share. Conflict likewise defines their legal system, a complex system based in the always-disputed operations of recollection.

Neil Nakadate provides the only scholarship to date on *The Greenlanders* aside from book reviews. In his appraisal of Smiley's ambitious saga, he highlights dissolution: "*The Greenlanders* conveys the bewilderment of a slowly weakening, steadily fraying civilization in which meaningful conviction, civil obligation, and the skills of everyday life endure from year to year but decline over the decades" (112). Though Nakadate's emphasis on dwindling surety, duty, and adroitness is apt, his summary misses out on Smiley's principle strategy. Rather than single out decline—after all, the Greenlanders are quite aware that they live through patterns of hunger, sickness, respite, and bounty (*The Greenlanders* 473)—Smiley reflects on the relation between decline and the law. The Greenlanders lose lives as they lose laws. Smiley links legality to orality—to storytelling, to memory—and the sharing that their legal system entails. All the same, Nakadate finds fault with the oral nature of Greenlandic civilization. Almost as though he rebukes the Greenlanders for idly discarding a written culture that they never had, he summarily condemns their reliance upon the conventions of orality. "The Greenlanders' orality-dependent, highly subjective, and fallible memory," Nakadate writes, "does more to sustain the debilitating enmities of clans than to nurture a sense of shared experience and a productive understanding of the world" (132).

Orality, so Nakadate determines it, is counterproductive for the Greenlanders. Yet Smiley illustrates the virtue and the justness of this "orality-dependent" colony. In *The Greenlanders* fairness requires communal engagement. Their justice system thereby

relies on contrasting memories and different versions or renderings of stories. For the colony, legality consists of productive discussion, which includes disagreement. The Greenlanders are therefore a variety of what H. Patrick Glenn calls a “chthonic” society. They depend on dialogue, on stories, and on debate. Marking the importance of the dialogic over what would invariably be a less public form of transcribed verbal culture, Glenn describes the essentially egalitarian character of chthonic legal systems: “The law is vested in a repository in which all, or most, share and in which all, or most, participate. Transmission of the tradition is through the dynamic procession of oral education, in daily life, and the dialogical character of the tradition is a matter of daily practice, for all ages of people” (59).

The Greenlanders’ type of chthonic legal system, called “the Thing,” enforces deliberation, dispute, and above all communal participation. Though the men have all the say when it comes to Thing “cases,” the law is linked to publicness. Women and men look forward to and depend upon the Thing. Originally a seven-day annual affair, nearly every Greenlander attends the event in order to launch, resolve, jury, defend, or audit legal cases, as well as to organize communal hunts, brandish marriageable offspring, engage in team games, acquire news of other districts, and retell time-honored stories. The undefined title of this legal system speaks to its variation and adjustment. Because it is oral, because it is based on memory, and because it is essentially an open forum, the Thing is a process in constant transformation. Since it continually evolves, the Greenlanders do not know what to call it. For this civilization, the Thing moves far beyond the province of cases and criminal sentences. Prompting change, the Thing influences all facets of daily life. A parochial version of the racetrack in *Horse Heaven*,

the Thing provides a more-or-less equal forum for the acquisition of what sociologists call "social capital." Robert D. Putnam clarifies that this concept of capital refers to valuable and productive "connections among individuals" (19). As he explains, social capital reinforces and extends "the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" within a given community (19).

The Thing is not exclusively what Nakadate sums up as the "fundamental tool for articulating and distributing justice" (120). More importantly, Thing attendance also involves fruitful recreations. These diversions allow for a shared break from the difficulties of day-to-day life in Greenland. At the Thing, songs are sung and stories are shared. Legality, here, celebrates and generates stories. The Thing can also provide a place for regulated competition. It can sanction communal play, which has attendant social benefits. And because nearly everyone goes to the Thing, the legal system likewise widens the scope of play. As members from different districts engage in the play of tale telling, they can likewise participate in game-play. Not simply escapes from daily hardship, these two activities stimulate the Greenlanders in a number of ways. While storytelling encourages interpretation and the exchange of opinions, games allow for relatively safe instantiations of risk, both of which concentrate and reflect upon the strictures of a colony dependent on unending dialogue and defined by the constant threats to the daily lives of its inhabitants. As such, these two representative activities help develop individual senses of selfhood, senses of individuality that both stand apart from and prop up the continued progress of Greenlandic civilization.

In *The Greenlanders*, Smiley illustrates that risky encounters or engagements help in the fashioning of identity. As a contemporary writer, she is not alone in this estimation

of individuality. When DeLillo's narrator argues that "running reveals the clue to being" at the beginning of *Underworld* (13), he also intimates that an absence of risk stifles the self. In *Double Down*, Frederick and Stephen Barthelme make a related point when they say that even when they lose at gambling, "It [still] satisfies the need for excitement, thrills" (109). Near the end of *The Greenlanders*, Gunnar, who is at once unlucky and long-living, a rarity in the colony, may be making a similar claim when he laments that even with "all the dangers of the hunt" the Greenlanders take "pleasure" in "fighting and killing each other" (509). Gunnar suggests that the jeopardy of the hunt is not enough to quell the Greenlanders' human need for peril. He thus points out the logical extension of a community that eventually suffers from a lack of regulated risk. Without the limits of play, the love of hazard goes unchecked. Thrill and excitement also widen to play in its storytelling form: expressing opinions can be as risky and as rewarding as a deer hunt or a swimming contest. Opinions, at certain times and in certain places, need to be checked. The Thing, often less restrictive than the home, also tests, tempers, and develops the delivery of these personal convictions. Like hunting, skillful oration can be a life-saving talent.

In her saga, Smiley represents the interrelations of the law and the social system. For the Greenlanders, the discussion and diversion that define the Thing are instrumental to survival. Despite cycles of great hardship, the Greenland colony survives through six centuries. The community that the Thing fosters makes this improbable survival possible. Community, so Smiley posits, does not simply alleviate the rigors of Nordic life; it functions to perpetuate this life. Without even consulting with one single woman, however, the men of Greenland end up abolishing their traditional legal forum. The social

fabric that holds their civilization together soon follows suit. In the absence of a joint sense of community among the Greenlanders, internal and external forces threaten continued existence. In Greenland, the law betokens a social system and a social system promises survival. Within the colony, in short, the law equals life. Without the legal system, revenge replaces legislated justice.

Compellingly, the conclusion of *The Greenlanders* does not mirror its opening. Smiley does not depict the abandonment of the Eastern Settlement, and thus portray the termination of Greenlandic civilization. Rather, she leaves her Greenlanders in a state of lawlessness. Outlawry best represents this loss of legality. Thing law creates a zone for outlaws—the wilderness—to which laws do not extend. Outlawry is thus at once a place and a state. In Smiley's saga, the whole of Greenland turns into a lawless wilderness. General outlawry ultimately replaces the Greenlanders' fluid legal and vital social systems. Outlawry becomes their story. And outlawry ups the odds against the survival of the colony.

In Nordic Greenland, legal justice is oral in nature. On an annual basis, cases are publicly presented at the Thing after the lawspeaker orally recites the laws. The law therefore passes through the generations only by voice. As Glenn relates, the “most evident feature of chthonic legal tradition has been its orality. The teaching of the past is preserved through the informal, though sometimes highly disciplined, means of human speech and human memory” (58). Glenn goes on to emphasize the indispensability of memory: “The tradition only survives by constant decisions, based on previous decisions, and hence previous information” (73). This reliance on precedence, however, does not limit change. Instead, it allows for change in small measures. Glenn clarifies that the

chthonic legal procedure is always “open to endless debate as to its interpretation and application; it can be rejected in its fundamental teaching and disappear” (73). As a chthonic-based common oral forum, the Greenlandic Thing makes essential demands on the civilization that it governs. At its best, the rigorous demands of public discussion and debate foster community and promote change. Characterized by voiced interchange, the law justly evolves because of communal interpretation and deliberation.

Andrew Ross highlights the evolution necessary to legal systems. He makes the point that the law is “constantly in a state of redefinition” even as it is “already fully formed” (48). Both in definition and in practice, no system of law can remain stagnant. Since there is always a gap between the formation and the institution of the law, its strictures are always in a process of renegotiation. Laws always come from the past, so when they are reconsidered and adapted they are made pertinent to the particular demands upon justice in the present. Remarking on the pluralism, cultural diversity, and historical settings that invariably influence systems of justice, Michael Walzer strongly implies that every implementation of legality is a unique appropriation of justice: “Justice is a human construction, and it is doubtful that it can be made in only one way” (5). Oral legal systems may make this process of human construction and reinterpretation all the more obvious. As the Greenlanders recite and then discuss the laws that they have committed to memory, they reconstruct their understandings of these laws. While engaged in this enduring observance of revision, they put previous laws and applications of legality into practice in newly fashioned ways. Adding to these points, S. L. Hurley stresses that justice is not about regnant views, but in turn about impartial ones. “The mere fact that some normative views are prevalent,” Hurley argues, “does not immunize

them if they compromise the demands of justice” (238). Though Greenland is basically removed from the pluralism and diversity that Walzer and Hurley advocate and describe, the colony is comprised of distinct social classes from a variety of districts, all of which are invited to attend and participate in the Thing. With its open debate, chthonic law can ideally recognize and accommodate the competing and changing claims of what constitutes justice in particular oral civilizations.

Nevertheless, for the mixed colony of Greenland, which integrates people of Scandinavian extraction with *émigrés* from other areas of Europe, the Thing is not a superlative or representative chthonic system. The arrival of Christianity distorts the openness and plainness of the legal method. In “The Greenlanders’ Saga,” which is purportedly reported by Thorfinn Karlsefni around 1010 and orally transmitted until preserved in manuscript form sometime in the thirteenth century, Eirik the Red tells his son Leif the Lucky that the first priest in Greenland is a “shyster” (145). Notwithstanding the fact that Eirik eventually converts to Christianity in this version of the saga, author of *The Norse Atlantic Saga* Gwyn Jones “prefer[s]” the divergent account that Eirik remains a “heathen” to the end (145). Whether or not this legendary figure adopted the teachings of the Catholic Church promoted by King Olaf of Norway at the turn of the first millennium, the effects of Christianity on Nordic law appear deleterious all the same. Speaking not of Western religion specifically, but rather of Occidental establishments generally, Glenn points out that “the massive character of European settlement has generally been debilitating for chthonic law” (78). Harkening back to times predating substantial colonization, Glenn privileges the simplicity of the chthonic tradition: “A tradition which is oral in character does not lend itself to complex institutions. So the

tradition faces less danger of pecuniary and institutional corruption, offering fewer positions of prestige and authority” (60). As he associates increased colonial settlement with growing complexity, Glenn intimates the threat to both the authority and the parity of traditional chthonic law. Chthonic legality values an open, shared understanding of a judicial process relying on stories, not written-down laws. As a prevailing component of increased religious institutionalization, the technology of writing alters the nature of legality for the Greenlanders. When all is said and done, as the mechanics of the oral process are complicated by the arrival of the Church in Greenland, the legal system risks the communal engagements that historically delineate it.

In *The Greenlanders*, which begins three centuries after the arrival of the “shysters,” Smiley accentuates the labyrinthine aspects of the legal system. Her narrator stresses the sway of the Church on legality while also observing the tangled interruptions and gaps that come with this influence:

At this time the Greenlanders had three types of law, The Thing law, the bishop’s law, and the king’s law, of which the last two were sometimes combined, depending on whether the bishop or the representative of the king was living in Greenland. Thing law and the law of the bishop were intended to concern the different matters of secular and Church law, but sometimes the Thing was less powerful, and sometimes the bishop was not in residence, so the men of most of the fjords settled disputes among themselves, and this was a habit the Greenlanders had gotten into since the death of the last bishop and the aging of the lawspeaker Gizur. (47)

The system of law in Greenland loses authority as it loses clarity and organization. This

convergence of legal systems complicates jurisprudence. The self-governance of the Greenlanders may even be evaluated as a juster method with which to determine legality, given that oral exchange can remain unimpeded by the obscurity and contrivance typified by the seemingly *ad hoc* entanglement of three distinct approaches to the law. Their self-settling likewise stresses the shared values of communal life. "Settling disputes among themselves" is socially condoned and therefore *de facto* transparent. That is to say, self-legislature is open to the scrutiny of the community.

Moreover, by doubting and bypassing the aged and incapable lawspeaker Gizur, the Greenlanders paradoxically infer the positive influence of lawspeakers. The control that a lawspeaker holds reproduces the sway that the law holds. Presiding over a thirteen-judge panel, the lawspeaker stands for the values promoted by the Thing. When a lawspeaker is replaced, so too is the law revived. Just as a seasoned lawspeaker exemplifies an essential tie to traditional ideas of legality, a new lawspeaker embodies the needed link to contemporary reconstructions of legality. In order for the law to be the law, it needs renewal and modification. Even in Greenland, where heritage and legacy reign, conceptions of justice inevitably evolve. Smiley suggests that the Greenlanders communally rally behind competent lawspeakers in the same way that they question incompetent ones. Promptly in the saga, her narrator remarks, "Osmund was known as a lucky man, who stepped forward and spoke up in all things. His mother's brother, Gizur Gizursson, was the lawspeaker, but it was well known that Osmund knew the laws better than any man in Brattahlid district" (9). Since Gizursson is without an heir, the Greenlanders thereby elect the well-regarded and legally capable Osmund Thordarson as their new lawspeaker at the Thing that follows Gizursson's death (69).

Regardless of perceived competence, living lawspeakers tend not to be replaced in Greenland. Glenn's moderated explanation of the term gerontocracy is helpful in explaining why. Observing the diversity of chthonic peoples and the assorted applications of chthonic law, Glenn writes, "The most common feature appears to be a council of elders, individual people who, by their assimilation of tradition over a longer period of time, often speak with greater authority. There is no guarantee of this, no process of screening out those faltering with age, but it appears to have been generally held to be true. This has been referred to as gerontocracy, but it may be preferable to see it as an expression of a link with past generations" (60). Elders are the living links to the legends and legalities of the past. Short of a great community destabilizing effrontery, the ruling lawspeaker or legal council deserves a valued place in the culture being governed. In *The Greenlanders*, the lawspeaker, active or not, competent or not, is a reminder of precedents, if nothing else. He discourages any rapid tear from the past. If a lawspeaker's memory of the laws noticeably wanes, his judicial authority gets transferred either to the council of judges or to the community at large. Regardless of whether or not folk attend the Thing annually, as long as the Thing is extant the community respects the conventions of legality that it bolsters. As the major plot event in *The Greenlanders*, Thing law manipulates the course of daily life, an everyday life the men of the colony drastically and irredeemably jeopardize not mainly because they disband the tribunal, but rather because they renounce refashioning it. All in all, Smiley insinuates that the community calls upon itself to address questions of justice when a lawspeaker can no longer competently do so. The community as a whole can assume the role of an incompetent lawspeaker until a new figure assumes this leadership role.

The valuable opinion that supports, questions, replaces, and selects new lawspeakers likewise influences the Church in the colony. As Smiley illustrates quite early in the first of three main sections in *The Greenlanders*, the Bishop and the community appear to influence one another equally: "Bit by bit, the bishop had learned the ways of the Greenlanders, and often judged cases as the Greenlanders themselves would have judged them" (69). Local concerns naturally influence the terms under which justice is understood and invoked. Though rendered progressively more complex on account of Church intervention, legality in Greenland involves ongoing communal consensus. Glenn reveals that in chthonic societies "crime becomes the responsibility of civil society, in the form of the groups, clans or families which make it up. Injury to a member was the responsibility of the group" (64). The community, in no uncertain terms, is responsible for restoring the balance of justice.

In *The Greenlanders*, "civil society" engages with both sides of the law: criminal acts and compensatory justice. According to Glenn, physical violence is the principle social wound in chthonic societies. "There was to all intents and purposes no law of theft or burglary," he alleges, "no law of drugs, no organized crime; no money laundering; no white collar crime; no fraud. The list could go on. Crime was a serious social wound, usually involving physical violence" (64). Though murder is the gravest offence in Greenland, the Thing also commonly presides over other acts of injustice, including cases dealing with rape, foul play, the abuse of servants, driftage rights, land disputes, and squatters' claims to abandoned steadings. The alternative kind of justice that Smiley offers for these crimes almost always appertains to property, in one form or another. Just as folk can lay lawful claim to abandoned steadings, they can be legally divested of

properties. Depending on the magnitude of a conviction, guilty parties customarily lose parts or the whole of their land and livestock as payment to the victims of their crimes. With the exception of a greater outlawry conviction (capital punishment), to judge a case is to consider the rightful ownership and allocation of property. Even an arraignment of lesser outlawry (banishment to the wilderness at the fringes of the settlement and the law [*The Greenlanders* 88]) involves property. Charged with heinous acts but not judged as threats to the survival of the colony, lesser outlaws lose their right to civilized territory.

Smiley nonetheless problematizes what can be called the melodrama of legality. Legal judgments aim to demonstrate right and wrong. Hyperbolically, then, the law distinguishes the heroes from the villains. Yet *The Greenlanders* integrates unmatched cases with unfamiliar results. Therefore, sometimes the Greenlanders do not know how to judge a case or how to evaluate its consequences. As a result of being charged with witchcraft, for instance, Kollgrim Gunnarsson is burnt at the stake (506-7). Following this unprecedented crime and punishment, Kollgrim's father Gunnar Asgeirsson "knew not how to think of it, or to feel it, or, for that matter, to speak of it to [his wife] Birgitta" (509-10). Smiley's narrator never depicts this unparalleled yet eventual conversation. Even so, her narrator relates Birgitta Lavransdottir's ensuing suicide attempt and successive "self-murder" (511). The folk of Greenland are undecided as to whether "shame" or "grief" prompts Birgitta's "sin[ful]" final act (511). With these exceptional cases in point, Smiley suggests that every legal action is singular. Each and every lawful debate or above-board controversy ought to be heard, interpreted, and judged as unfamiliar. Additionally, Smiley implies that the law must always question its application, for every crime sets a causal sequence into motion, a series that precedents or

cases stated can never envisage. On the whole, the job of the law is forever to redirect these sequences toward justice.

Highlighting this process of redirection, Greenlandic law requires the immediate announcement of killings (125). Distinct from murder, a killing can be a lawful compensatory act of justice. But for a killing to be perceived as just, it must immediately be exposed to the evaluative process of the law. In this way, Smiley argues that justice does not stop with an act of remuneration. Just as lawspeakers are liable for their memory of the laws, judges are responsible for their application of the laws, and criminals are accountable for their unjust acts, remunerators are likewise answerable for their compensatory acts. Justice is never a matter of an open-and-shut case. Justice is never entirely comprehensive or utterly complete. Because crimes and judgments alike can have serious repercussions, justice demands ongoing renegotiation. Life on the colony persists because of the checks and balances of unremitting liability. For the Greenlanders, court and civilization evolve as legal precedent is remembered, lawful function is debated, and above all, official parity is privileged. The publicness and seeming impartiality of the Thing can be seen to illustrate Glenna L. Simons and William F. Stroup's contention that a court is always-already a part of the system that it tries to regulate (120). In Greenland, the Thing directs life in the colony as those living in the colony direct it.

Outlawry

Lawspeaker Bjorn Bollason, however, displaces the pattern of transparency and slow shift that defines the Greenlandic legal system. After he replaces the dead Osmund,

he makes untold changes to the Thing. As the narrator clarifies, Bollason initially makes these incomparable alterations with the hope of preserving fairness in the face of slumping Thing attendance:

Bjorn Bollason established a new type of judge, to be known as an at-large judge, and to be appointed by the lawspeaker to sit in on cases when judges failed to come to the Thing, and these new judges were to be appointed from among the most prosperous farmers at the Thing who did not have cases pending, and they were to remain judges-at-large until they should have cases before the Thing, which would disqualify them for that year and two years after that. (328)

Bollason's modifications suggest the prevalence or regularity of Thing cases. Legality, he implies, frequently intervenes in the lives of Greenlanders. His proviso likewise aims to secure continued equality for the Greenlanders. He makes the point that just as everyone is called to the Thing, everyone is alike at the Thing. These changes seem just, for they recall what Ross notes as the changing qualities of the justice system (48), while they also speak to what Walzer sees as the different implementations of justice (5). Still, Bollason breaks with longstanding tradition. Though it is true that "Unlike almost anything else, only the law can change itself," as Ross puts it (55), the Greenlanders depend on the delayed changes that result from open, communal disputation and consensus. In contradistinction to Greenlandic convention, Bollason changes the law in lieu of allowing the law to change itself by degrees.

Bollason therefore devalues the effectiveness of the legal system by obscuring its legislative function, not to mention the merit of his privileged position. The knowledge of

the lawspeaker ensures that traditional customs are preserved as they are reformulated. But by undermining the laws that his position uniquely epitomizes, Bollason second-guesses his own authority. His actions anticipate other changes to the legal system. Instead of merely cross-examining Bollason's competency by means of avoiding him and the Thing, which is the customary way of redistributing a lawspeaker's authority to the community in general, Jon Andres Erlendsson, a respected man in the community, prepares a Thing case against lawspeaker Bollason. Elucidating the lasting demands that justice must make upon itself, Jon Andres accuses Bollason for an injustice that he committed as lawspeaker at a Thing years before. In a case without legal precedent, Jon Andres charges the lawspeaker himself with the murder of Kollgrim. Jon Andres contends that "mercy might have been shown" to his brother-in-law Kollgrim, in the form of the Greenlanders' being incapable of collecting enough wood to cremate him at the stake, but for the lawspeaker's clever notion to "Soak [the accused] in seal oil" (556). Jon Andres alleges that ingenuity, like strength, can kill (556). He then adds that murder is always murder, whether performed by a man or "a man in the guise of a lawspeaker," before he "demand[s] a judgment of full outlawry and deprivation of property against Bjorn Bollason, [a verdict that entails] exile into the wastelands, loss of position as lawspeaker, and any other punishments as self-judgment might allow" (556).

The lawspeaker's response stands against the principles of justice. Bollason reveals that his changes to the legal system were executed under "the shield of pragmatism [so as] to pack a truncated court with his own judges" (Nakadate 114-5). More valuable than the vested personal interests that Nakadate highlights, however, is the fact that Bollason's response outlines what justice is not:

I, Bjorn Bollason, have been lawspeaker of the Greenlanders for many summers, and before that my father Hoskuld had great knowledge of the law. Never in the memory of men has such a case been brought before the Thing, where a man who is a judge has been threatened with outlawry for carrying out the laws as they were decided upon. This action is absurd at the least and dangerous at the most, for in this way every decision of the judges can be challenged whenever and for as long as men wish to challenge it, and that is all I have to say in the matter. (557)

Rather than disqualify himself from the position of lawspeaker “for that year and two years after that,” as his amended laws prescribed (328), Bollason dismisses the lawfulness of the arraignment raised against him.

In so doing, Bollason rallies behind a priority that he revamped, namely precedence, in order to reject the challenge, argument, and consultation that any apparatus of justice ought to demand. With this representational move, Smiley hints at the uneasy and tenuous position of justice systems. Emblematic of any entrenched legal structure, the Thing can only sustain itself by reassessing and annulling the internal inconsistencies that regularly surface and enforce ongoing debate as the apparatus for the allotment of justice evolves. As part of the limits and equities of the cultural milieu it regulates, justice marches forward on account of its inner incongruity. When Bollason disallows the confrontation that Jon Andres proposes and legality itself necessitates, he in effect cancels the justness of the justice structure. As the central plot event in *The Greenlanders*, this outright denial of the contradictions that demarcate the praxis of legality acts as a turning point for the colony. The implacable disappearance of the

Greenlanders, Smiley implies, arises from their failure to maintain the inconsistencies of their justice system.

Bollason's chief judge likewise bucks the dissent that Jon Andres and his supporters at the Thing recommend. On the grounds that the lawspeaker "committed no crime, and indeed, would have committed a crime had he not endeavored to carry out the punishment that had been decided upon," he overrules the case against Bollason (557). Under Bollason's charge, the judge replaces a process of debate with an offhand dismissal. Barely disguising patent partisanship as certified precedence, Bollason refuses to defend his own case. In the same way, the judge neglects to subject the law to its own laws. The judge repudiates reconsidering the dispensation of the law; as a substitute, he simply reiterates its application. Both lawspeaker and judge supplant conscientiousness with a form of autocracy. Andrew Ross's remarks on the politics of legality apply to the masquerading of Bollason's court: "Subservience to precedents and prior decisions—*stare decisis*—reinforces the perception that legal reasoning is subject to its own history of rulings, and is in no way bound to political pressures of the moment" (51). Only thirty pages before the conclusion of the saga, "lawlessness," as Mr. Jenkins says of the influence of the southerners on the American President in Smiley's civil-war romance *Lidie Newton*, "runs right to the top" (97).

A number of the Greenlanders, however, are prepared to fight tyranny with tyranny. Having anticipated and planned for the unlawfulness of "Bollason and his hand-picked judges," John Andres and the backers he has solicited attack the lawspeaker and his allies (557). Because the attackers did not set aside their weapons upon arriving at the Thing, as the law prescribes, a one-sided battle ensues (557-9). By means of their

massacre, John Andres and his powerful group do more than simply disband the unjust partisanship ruling their legal system. The mapped-out assault, as devised over several years, suspends customary legal procedure, a deferment that exposes the immeasurable compass of legality in Greenland. Directly following Jon Andres' *coup d'état*, Smiley's narrator reveals the Greenlanders' regular dependency on Thing standards of due process: "The Thing was broken up without deciding any more cases, and the judges went home to their steadings, as if in flight. Indeed, everyone there went home as if in flight, for they knew not how to regain the normal ways that had been lost through this event" (559). Despite the fact that the specially selected judges are not executed when the Thing is disassembled, the catalogue of victims includes Bollason, his three sons, and a handful of other men and boys, some of whom are attackers, while others are defenders (559). The absence of a lawspeaker, and most importantly the destruction of the legal system that he directs, symbolized by the death of his sons, is utterly foreign to the Greenlanders. Though Thing attendance often wanes, "and such times come and go" (562), the Thing has always delineated the limits of "normal ways," of everyday life. For six centuries, the Greenlanders have had recourse to the Thing. Whether unfailingly attended or not, the forum for justice is invariably current and dependable—that is, until Bollason's refusal to uphold the principles of justice.

The sense of loss or the feeling of getaway attending the dismantlement of the Thing recalls the astute predictions of Ulfhild the widow, who loses a son in what comes to be known as "the great battle of the Brattahlid [district] Thing" (562-3). Playing up the would-be naïveté of an individual in her social position in the colony, she once half-covertly confronts Jon Andres in order to call him to account for his clandestine designs:

“The powerful men of this district have been quiet enough for the last few years. Something is hatching, it seems to me” (540). At this private meeting, she also formulates an aphorism that functions as a version of legal counsel or liability caveat. “The great ones,” Ulfhild forewarns, “will bring us down in the end, and that is a fact” (540). Sooner than observe her admonition or acknowledge her insights that “It is a fact that men love to fight” and that “women can do little enough about it,” however, John Andres avoids partaking in a transparent *tête-à-tête* with the widow. “No one cares to fight,” the conspirer declares in order to deflect the issue (540-1). The fact is that at this time the men are readying themselves for a potential “fight”—love it or not, care for it or not—against the injustice of Bollason’s trumped-up court. At this juncture of the narrative, Ulfhild sees the eventual truth, a certainty that neither the legal system nor the men that eradicate it seem to be able to embody. The law, here represented by the men of Greenland, cannot predict real or true outcomes. In turn, legal process entails a working towards unprecedented and often unpredictable outcomes. Due process entails reconceptualizations of justice.

Despite suddenly being left without their time-honored legal system, most folk on the colony endorse the recent attack on the head of the Thing. The narrator acknowledges that “it was generally agreed that [Jon Andres and his followers] had been strongly provoked in the case, and were not to be blamed too harshly for what had come about, for men must avenge the injuries done to them, if they are strong enough to do it” (559). Pointing up the cultural timbre of legality, the Greenlanders continue to discuss the law after they are vindicated from Bollason’s partisan court. Looking back, they evaluate him as an inadequate lawspeaker: “Bjorn Bollason could be said not to have learned the laws

especially well himself, since the telling of them had shrunk in his time from a three-day cycle to less than a one-day cycle” (562). Not-so-distant Things, readers and Greenlanders alike remember, lasted seven days (562). Even so, notwithstanding their assessments and remembrances of the official forum, the Greenlanders do not renew the Thing after it is toppled. This lack of legal reinstatement, they together attest, is largely because Bollason “had not sought to teach the body of the law to anyone,” except maybe to his son Sigurd, a victim of the battle (561).

Ironically, the aggressors in fact plan the murders of Bollason’s sons for the purpose of suppressing their compensatory acts of justice. By restraining any possible acts of redress, Jon Andres and his men likewise terminate the oral transmission of the laws through the generations. This chain of events exposes the impotence of a *laissez-faire* attitude toward the meting out of justice. Literally stifling the law so as to ensure their own safety from acts of retaliation, Jon Andres and his men kill off those that would be commonly considered as “strong enough” to “avenge the injuries done to them” (559). When Jon Andres and his allies kill off those who legally can retaliate, in other words, they eradicate legality. Justice thereby disappears along with the laws. And what comes to pass as a result of this elimination of evenhandedness and inherent accountability insinuates the truth of Ulfhild’s prognostication about the decline of the colony. Within a year of razing the court, the Greenlanders resign themselves to a non-legislated variety of reciprocity. The members of the colony halfheartedly appear to allow that, “Though no one knew all the laws, did not everyone know, in a general way, what was to be expected of one another?” (562).

Without a formal legal system, clashing can overtake conversing, unannounced

killings can supplant legal technique, and individual agenda can supersede social consensus. This state of affairs ironically reflects the approach that Jon Andres and his men utilize in order to overthrow the Thing. Because they judge a decision to be unjust, they present a case that questions the head of the legal system. When the less than solicitous court fails to consider the legitimacy of this case, the accusers summarily attack the lawspeaker, thus destroying the legal system. This act of retaliation creates nuances of irony and complexity of justice, especially when justice is understood to be nonpartisan or impartial. Yes, Jon Andres and his men question the legal process of the court. Yes, Jon Andres and his men eliminate what they determine to be an unjust court. And yes, they eliminate injustice in the name of justice. Nonetheless, they perform these maneuvers unjustly.

In the name of legality, they illegally overthrow Bollason's illegality. Jon Andres' revolutionary group strong-arms the law so that Bollason and his defenders no longer can. The attackers therefore replace a partiality with a competing partiality. Neither legislative body privileges the disinterestedness of the law. Neither assembly argues its case. Acting unjustly, each cluster of men dismisses dialogue and debate. Be that as it may, Jon Andres' injustice still highlights and puts an end to a perceived injustice. In Smiley's representation, unjust actions can redirect the unjust course of legality toward the rigorous demands of justice; unjust actions can play up the ongoing renegotiations that implementations of justice require. Irony, Smiley insinuates, becomes the preserve of justice. Since irony is one way of creating escape-hatches in the law, justice integrates incongruity in order to serve and protect. Without a system of law to correct, however, there can be no escape-hatch.

When there is no legality, there are no illegal acts. When vigilantism or revenge or chaos reigns, taking the law into one's own hands—a legal fallacy—cannot amend the official lack of rule. Legality and its concomitant orderliness, does not plainly spring from disorder. Though illegal acts can draw attention to the necessity of legality, these acts need to be evaluated—ranked, judged—from the standpoint of order. Legality entails sanctioned exchanges within a dynamic lawful-unlawful dialectic. The only way to right a lack of legality is to formulate a legal system. Naturally, the Greenlanders are not starting *ex nihilo*. From their position, legality need not be inaugurated or instituted from nothing; on the other hand, The Thing only needs to be restored, as they collectively concur. Yet after “some talk” the men of the colony decide against “reinstating” the Thing that was leveled a few years before: “but the Greenlanders would have to make up a whole new set of laws for a new lawspeaker to learn, and this seemed both an impossible task and an unnecessary one, since almost everyone agreed on what actions were the proper ones and what were the improper ones” (570). The Greenlanders oust legal process in favor of a reliance on propriety. Dismissing the virtues of debate, they therefore replace a fluid legal method with an intractable moralistic system.

Walzer makes the point that any goodness that masquerades as inevitability or propriety or something else that a cultural group putatively takes for granted is by definition contentious. He attests that “No account of the meaning of the social good, or of the boundaries of the sphere within which it legitimately operates, will be uncontroversial” (21). Social goods, in brief, are not social givens. Alternatively, they are arguable and changeable. This understanding, as it pertains to social justice, extends to the field of ethics. J. Hillis Miller remarks on the groundlessness that surrounds ethical

judgments: “An ethical judgment is always a baseless positing, always unjust and unjustified, therefore always liable to be displaced by another momentarily stronger or more persuasive but equally baseless positing of a different code of ethics” (55). The only stability for ethics, he insists, is the certainty of instability. Distinct from morality, which can be understood as a binary differentiation (good from bad, hero from villain, right from wrong) that never questions its foundation, ethics compels an ongoing reappraisal of its fundamental propositions. Like justice, ethics relies on openness, incertitude, and transformation. Never a *fait accompli*, without this sustained incorporation of point and counterpoint, ethics becomes moralistic.

Addressing democratic systems, which the Thing typifies on account of its prescribed agonistic or polemical structure, Chantal Mouffe underlines the conditional nature of ethical and political accord. According to Mouffe, “every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power” (92). Democracy, she insists, “always entails some form of exclusion” (92). Endorsing controversy, democracy recognizes and legitimates diversity by making “room for the expression of conflicted interests and values” (92). In this way, ethical principles define the democratic process. Developing change can be a corollary of dissent and discussion. The laws that govern the collective can evolve as individuals within the collective question and correct the limits of these laws. Under the rubric of democracy, order is pliable and temporary, not authoritarian and non-negotiable.

When the Greenlanders avoid the reestablishment of their formal legal system, they also fail to revive the regulated provisionality of social and legal consensus. This flaw results in a comprehensive feeling or form of exclusion in the colony. Given that

there is no Thing and “no one kn[ows] the laws,” there is no way for lawbreaking Greenlanders to be “punished or outlawed” (*The Greenlanders* 575). Without a milieu for collective discussion, compensatory killings go unannounced (575). Without a Thing, legislated concurrence, answerability, and argument are steadily expunged from the severity of daily life. In the absence of Thing law, folk begin to take the remonstrations of Larus, a onetime cowherd now directing the Church mainly because of his nonstop prophesying and steadfast pushiness, to heart. After an inauspicious seal hunt, wherein “Two boats were lost, and three men, and few seals were taken, and men fell to blaming each other” (575), Larus decrees that this bad turn is a “Corrective” intervention on the part of the “Righteous Lord” (575). Larus proclaims that without legality, the Lord calls the shots. Silenced, the Greenlanders simply listen while righteousness appears to replace political and ethical conditionality. Lacking the legal system that encourages exchange and change, the Greenlanders begin to look upon interpersonal relations with trepidation. Waxing nostalgic, the narrator somberly explains that “many folk in many districts were afraid, and no longer spoke to one another as Greenlanders once had, in open jest about many things” (575). The folk no longer “gather” as they once took great pleasure in doing; there is no more commemorative “talk, and jesting, and tale-telling” (158).

Story

Previously characterized by their dedication to conflict, which includes banter, the folk come to fear disagreement and altercation. Without the redress and protection of liability, the Greenlanders start circumventing forms of dispute, an avoidance that ironically becomes indispensable to individual survival once the new codes of their so-

called inevitable propriety prove impossible to interpret. Once legality no longer defends one from viable lawlessness, the narrator laments, it is clearly prudent to hide from this very lawlessness: "a man might do anything and be in the wrong. There was no way to tell. It was better to stay on the steading and mind the cows and be content with such days are left to one" (577). He means that justice requires communal consent. Sequestration on the steadings calls attention to the movement between farms and districts that the Thing formerly stipulated. Since Thing verdicts were influenced by the number of followers individual claimants rounded up, case presenters circulated from farm to farm (as Ulfhild the widow detected of Jon Andres) for the purpose of petitioning for support by offering food and bribes, sometimes in the form of livestock and sometimes in the form of pledged allegiance. Due to the prior predominance of Thing cases, friendships, like foodstuffs, were simultaneously practical and essential investments. Drawing attention to the dialogic nature of public deliberation, the private pledges of support that of necessity preceded Thing cases tended to be reciprocated. To offer support often entailed receiving support.

Just as Thing preparation engenders communal interaction, Thing attendance provokes general participation. This involvement extends beyond the legal benefits attending the public recital and reconsideration of the laws. The Thing itself has invaluable social implications. In the absence of the Thing, these communal payoffs are all the more perceptible. At the midway point of the saga, for example, certain folk recall the conviviality of their annual tribunal during a downswing in Thing attendance that clearly anticipates the fate that eventually befalls the Greenlanders: "now it seemed to some powerful men in the largest districts that certain benefits of the Thing assemblies

that had once gone unremarked upon, such as the opportunity to view prospective brides, or to trade goods, or to make plans for the seal hunts and the reindeer hunt, had come to be distinctly missed” (292). Through a variety of exchanges, the Thing props up the requisites of social capital in the remaining settlement of the colony. The Greenlanders can be seen to subsist because of what Putnam, clarifying this sociological conception of resource, describes as the efficiencies and conciliations of trust. Putnam makes it plain that “Honesty and trust lubricate the inevitable frictions of daily life” (135). Without the associate benefits of the Thing, essential hunts are diminished in the same way that necessary trades are underprivileged. The frictions or hardships of Greenlandic life therefore escalate in the absence of the legal system and the parallel social network that helps restore the balance of justice. Without the Thing, the odds of survival on the colony drop.

In the absence of laws, the folk can only live as outlaws. No longer a part of a colony, no longer mobile members of an interdependent group, the Greenlanders are bound by both place and quietus. As general outlawry replaces legality, death can follow from free movement. Gunnar’s account of outlaw justice sets forth the gravity of the Greenlanders’ final predicament. As he considers forming a Thing case against Ofeig Thorkelsson near the beginning of the third book of the saga, he makes the point that “If [Ofeig] is made an outlaw, then he must live as an outlaw, for if he comes into the districts of men, they may kill him with impunity” (400). Ofeig, readers learn, is the devil figure of the saga. As “The Devil,” which is the title of the second of three books in *The Greenlanders*, Ofeig symbolizes the ultimate fate of the Greenlanders. Remarking that “The Devil enters Greenland through the door of disorder” (115), critic Neil Nakadate

appears to pick up on this synecdoche. Disorder can here be understood as the lawlessness or devilishness that compels the Greenlanders to isolation on their farmsteads. This self-seclusion, however, only compounds devilry.

That the Greenlanders sentence themselves to a form of self-detention on their steadings is a cruel twist of fate. Many of these folk naturally presume that solitude itself is devilish. Given this preconceived understanding of aloneness on the part of her Nordic characters, Smiley may perhaps be manipulating one of Pascal's ideas of devilry, as appropriated by William Gaddis in his first novel *The Recognitions*. "All the malheurs in this world," Gaddis' narrator says, "come from a man's inability to sit alone in a small room" (477). *Malheur* furthermore comes from being forced to be alone or isolated. In Greenland, for example, the Devil seeks solitary figures: "it was said that devils sought out those who were alone and entered into them and possessed their souls" (*The Greenlanders* 185). This general belief brings to mind some of the psychological and sociological implications of enforced isolation. In "Control Units," an essay from *How to Be Alone*, Franzen critiques the empowerment politics behind the prison system and scrutinizes the disabling isolation inside the prison system. Embedded in the essay, Franzen's interview with political-prisoner Mutulu Shakur (a former Black Panther and the father of famed Tupac, the celebrated antiestablishment rapper and actor fatally shot in 1996 while in his mid-twenties) underscores the results of community disconnection. Shakur stresses that with penal isolation "The potential for mental damage is tremendous" (214). Whether in its most strict form (solitary confinement) or in its comparatively moderated form (general captivity), isolation can incapacitate mental faculties. Individual well-being, Shakur implies, depends upon social interaction. These

productive exchanges and struggles include, among other things, collective insights, chancy opinions, and corrected allegations.

For the Greenlanders, the fast-held doors of isolation illuminate the way for the Devil. Here, devilishness translates into the annulment of social interaction. This suspension certainly threatens the survival of individual Greenlanders and, by extension, the continued existence of their remaining settlement. Devilishness intimates the end of civilization and spells the replacement of order (legal justice) with disorder (outlaw justice). Isolation thus relocates “the waste districts, where the Devil holds sway” (489), to the residual farmsteads in the colony. Gunnar’s bear story articulates this conclusion by redefining the incursion of the wilderness into civilization as a form of self-consumption. In this parable, Kari, a Greenlander, captures a bear cub while hunting. He and his wife Hjordis then name him Bjorn and resolve to raise him alongside their true son, Ulf. A decade later Kari releases his bear “son” to the wild (498). Shortly thereafter, Ulf dies. Lonely, Kari beckons the now wild-eyed bear to return to his steading. Bjorn consents. Inevitably, he consumes Kari’s food and livestock. Finally, in order to sate Bjorn’s hunger, Kari offers the bear his own arm knowing that “the bear would never be satisfied with only one arm, but must, in the end, eat him up” (501). Wilderness literally swallows everything on the steading.

The bear story also reflects the devil Ofeig’s relations to wilderness and confinement. (Gunnar, in fact, relates the bear parable in the pages that fall in the mathematical middle of Ofeig’s outlawry sentence [433] and his confirmed death [564]). As the Greenlanders prepare for the Thing at which Ofeig receives a capital punishment conviction, Jon Andres and Kollgrim discuss “hunt[ing]” and “kill[ing]” this “devil

among [men]" in the same way that they would a "bear" (432). Jon Andres twice calls attention to Ofeig's resemblance to a bear when he and his men are summoned to the widow Ulfhild's sheep byre, where she has latched the door behind Ofeig, effectively locking the brigand inside with her livestock. At the byre, Jon Andres shouts, "Folk say that bears have returned to Greenland," before he threatens Ofeig's life: "Folk say that in former days, it took ten men to capture a bear, but only six to kill it, we have ten men here, and would hate to use only six of them, for all are ready to fight" (446). For all their might, however, the "bear" breaks down the barn door and flees (446). Bear-like, devil-inspired, Ofeig overpowers and outruns the many men who later sequester him in Undir Hofdi church as well (448-50).

Elucidating the association between confinement and the Devil, Ofeig routinely breaks into structures only to get locked inside them. With the exception of the events at Undir Hofdi church, these entrapments tend to occur on properties that are owned by women. Ofeig commits his first grave crimes, three assisted homicides, on the land of the widow Vigdis. The uncharitable Vigdis, who long dreads the loss of her vast food stores, dubs Ofeig and his collaborators as diabolical when they awaken her by breaking into both her storehouse and her steading. Seeing his arrival as the confirmation of her fears, she shouts, "Now I see that Satan and his minions have come upon me at last" (358). Without any second thoughts, Ofeig and his hungry minions promptly attack Vigdis using "joints of beef and reindeer meat" as weapons before they finally murder her and two of her "elderly servingmen" (358-9). Afterwards, the criminals fall into a "great eating frenzy" (359). In contradistinction to his minions, though, Ofeig neither gets sick from the feasting in the steading nor caught by the men who quickly gather outside the

steading. Peculiarly free of abdominal pain, with his “great mouth” Ofeig continues consuming food and mead even as his “hirdmen” suffer from the consequences of overeating after a prolonged dearth of food: cramps, vomiting, retching (360-1). In the end, the “staggering and shamefaced” accomplices topple outside the farmstead into the hands of the thirty or so men encircling the property (361). For his part, Ofeig, now solo, slips away from the policing band. When the monitors of the law enter the scene of the felonies in order to apprehend the at-large criminal, he is “nowhere to be found” (361).

The site of Ofeig’s last reported crime is particularly coded as female. Jon Andres, the owner of this property, is off soliciting support for his legal case against lawspeaker Bollason. Moreover, his two male servants are visiting a neighboring farmhouse for the night. Therefore, when Ofeig forcibly enters this steading—by crashing through the roof—he lands in a uniquely female space. Taking advantage of cunning and luck, these women, seven in number, including Jon Andres’ young girl Gunnhild and his baby girl Unn, ultimately outmaneuver Ofeig. Using food as their main weapon against the invader, they patiently feed him and feed him and feed him. Unsurprisingly, he eats and eats and eats. Perhaps evoking a connection between female *savoir-faire* and good luck, just after Unn, who is hidden in a “bedcloset,” randomly “whimpers,” the startled Ofeig abruptly writhes, doubles over, and falls to the ground (547-8). The interloper, of course, overeats. Yet it is the baby’s impromptu wail, an ostensibly unlucky exposure that turns out to be a fortunate intervention, which results in his indisposition. In sum, a haphazard cry combined with a calculated surfeit works to unsettle Ofeig’s inordinately strong stomach. Once the assailant collapses in pain, Jon Andres’ wife, her sister, and her servingmaids, one of whom is tellingly named Oddny,

proceed to hector him for his “gluttony” and other criminal acts as they beat him and beat him and beat him (548). Still, before they can lawfully kill the fugitive, he “scrabbles” to his feet and decamps into the empty “moonlight,” a barrenness that brings to mind what the Greenlanders see as the palpable association between aloneness and devilry (548).

Ofeig’s overindulgence and successive beating at the hands of a group of women, so Smiley suggests, prompts the death of the outlaw. Notwithstanding the fact that he disappears, as he has a tendency to do after he routinely absconds, there are neither any more reports of his general lawlessness nor any more accounts of his entrapments. Rather, the repeat offender is found dead, “from starvation” by “all appearances” (565), not long after being tricked and trounced by the women on Jon Andre’s farm. Since Ofeig overeats, it appears, he starves. Intriguingly, the narrator accentuates that Ofeig expires “some time” between the razing of the Thing and the decision not to reinstate this legal forum (565). The uncertain time of the delinquent’s death—“the devil had been dead for some time” (565)—speaks to the correspondingly unique moment in the history of Greenland. In disbanding the Thing, the Greenlanders sentence themselves to the indecisiveness of legal deregulation. Ofeig, the last legally condemned outlaw in the colony, dies in the transitional period between the practice of legal justice and the inveterate espousal of outlaw justice. It can therefore be said that at this unprecedented time the Devil no longer needs Ofeig for a vehicle. Shortly after the aggressor’s death, isolation lures the devilry that he personified into the distinct steadings of the Eastern settlement. The lawlessness that Ofeig represents speaks to the disorder that finally unsettles an enduring, if not a thriving, civilization.

Still, Ofeig’s story does not merely foreshadow the encroachment upon or the

swallowing of civilization by the disorder that his death in the wilderness suggests. In lieu of exclusively epitomizing self-consumption, and thereby heralding the decline of the colony, Ofeig's movements between the wasteland and the settlement likewise lay emphasis upon the peripheries of Greenland civilization. These borders, Ofeig's illicit incursions show, extend to the marginal characters of Greenlandic society. His violent crimes lead to encounters with both the privileged members (leading men) and the underprivileged members (everyone else) of the colony. Tellingly, his lasting confrontations are with the latter group of people. Whereas he swiftly penetrates bands or circles of watchful men, he spends considerable amounts of time within the female properties that he invades. It is no great surprise that Ofeig's burial is administered by a woman rather than by a customary male priest. Despite the fact that this elderly maidservant is crack-voiced, "incontinent," and "blind and bent," that is to say, she is the marginal figure *par excellence*, only she knows how to exorcize or "lay the evil spirit" (566). In death as in outlawry, Ofeig's story concentrates not on the powerful men of the colony, but in turn on the qualities or assets of the colony's fringe figures—women, servants, children. These peripheral characters are the central victims of his disreputable actions.

This progress from margin to middle recalls the plot in Smiley's lone city novel, *Duplicate Keys* (1984). In this reconfiguration of the detective genre, protagonist Alice Ellis laments that because of the double-murder of her two friends (the foster brothers Craig and Denny), she is unnervingly "thrust from the periphery" of her social circle into its center (*Duplicate Keys* 174). Describing this unanticipated relocation, a positioning that refocuses her *déménagement* from the Midwest to New York City, she remarks,

“everyone twirled and turned alarmingly toward her” (174). As the plot of the crime novel advances, her unwonted position grows more and more alarming: her phone rings endlessly; less than memorable acquaintances drop by her flat; unfamiliar people acquire copies of her apartment keys; she unwittingly solves the crime. What’s more, she is nearly murdered. Detective Honey’s cautionary words seem to summarize this sequence of incidents while it still progresses. Addressing Alice, he says, “Among other things, a violent crime is the beginning of a train of events, and a sign that whatever balance a given social network has achieved is strained. The crime is a change, and the change is always sudden and profound, affecting every member of the network in unforeseen ways and often violently” (221). Crime widens the parameters of storytelling and storymaking. The replication trope of the novel, specifically, the duplicate keys, the adopted brothers, the double-murder, and the nearly anagrammatic hero, plays up the dual roles of character. Alice Ellis is at once an outsider and an insider, a stranger and a friend, an intuitive detective and a possible victim. At one and the same time, she can be caught and she can catch.

In *The Greenlanders*, Ofeig’s relation to women and servants recasts the message or moral of Gunnar’s bear parable. The parable, as Gunnar relates it, concludes with the bear’s consumption of his foster father. The story, however, does not necessarily end where Gunnar stops relating it. Hjordis, the proxy mother of Bjorn the bear, is still present. In other words, she is not *de facto* consumed like everything else on the steading. Like the earlier Alice from *Duplicate Keys*, Hjordis too has a story that evidently promotes complexity. Conspicuously left untold, her story can develop beyond the limits of Gunnar’s narrative. As the chronicle of Ofeig elucidates, just as criminality involves

every member of the colony, every member of the colony can combat criminality.

Women, servants, and children, for instance, impel the death of Ofeig and lay his spirit to rest. Female characters can eliminate lawlessness. For this reason, they can make invaluable contributions to the colony. These figures can *up* the odds of survival in Greenland.

Though they may be evaluated as representationally marginal in Smiley's saga, women are not simply the "trinkets[s] ... lying in the grass" that most Greenlandic men make them out to be (*The Greenlanders* 493). Instead, they play indispensable roles in the colony. The magnitude of these roles becomes all the more apparent once the entire colony comes to embody the outlaw ethos. In a sense, the women of Greenland have always lived within and coped with parameters similar to those of outlawry. For one, they tend to be isolated upon certain steadings, as Ofeig's recidivist incursions exemplify. Women also tend to have little or no say in the exacting of justice, as Ulfhild the widow's confrontation with Jon Andres attests (540). Moreover, women likewise tend readily to accept the condition of what the girl Sigrid Bjornsdottir calls "incomprehension" (532). To rearticulate Sigrid's application of this term, the women of Greenland are accustomed to encountering unknowns. As an alternative to calling the shots, women thus learn to adapt to the consequences of these shots. Given this attuned form of negotiation, adjustment and reconciliation can make women more lenient when it comes to change on the colony.

This manifested openness may be why women in particular manifest the peculiarities of second sight, prognostication, and intuition in Greenland. Contrary to the men, who generally rely upon the order or rule of reason that they themselves determine,

the women do not constrain themselves to the ideal logic of these limits. In other words, the women do not dismiss the unexplainable by reducing it to the explainable or the monitory. Because the women do not delimit what they see, it might be said that they allow themselves to see. In allowing themselves to envision freely, conventional boundaries and expectations appear not to circumscribe what they in fact can see.

Birgitta Lavransdottir's first experience of second sight ends up being the most telling vision of the saga. Incorporating a scene that summons up the brief montage featuring a young woman with stumbling child in Ingmar Bergman's 1957 film *The Seventh Seal*, set in fourteenth century Sweden, in *The Greenlanders'* first book, optimistically titled "Riches," Birgitta, after having just moved to Gunnars Stead as a young bride, sees a woman in white "carr[ying] in her arms a child of about one winter's age, also clothed in white" (64). Entranced, the newlywed watches as the "woman lift[s] the child to her face and kisse[s] it, then set[s] it among the flowers on the grass" (64). Happily, the child "laugh[s] ... stand[s] up carefully and stagger[s] forward with its arms in the air" (64). Called by a servant, Birgitta looks away. When she returns her gaze, the remarkable tableau is blank: the woman and child are gone. Birgitta, "who was later well known for having second sight" (64), relates this episode to Sira Pall and Sira Jon. Without further ado, the two male priests judge that Birgitta has seen the Virgin and Child (65). For Sira Pall and Sira Jon, who are considered model interpreters, the story is already written. According to them, there is nothing either to apprehend or to foresee. Birgitta, like three women before her, so Sira Jon explains (65), witnesses the apparition of the ideal woman and her perfect son. The meanings of this vision, the ministers of God make plain, are self-evident. Dispensing with foresight and prescience, these two men

look to the past, not the future.

In the final book of *The Greenlanders*, called “Love,” Margret Asgeirsdottir beholds an apparition that matches Birgitta’s. Likewise on Gunnars Stead, the childhood dwelling to which she returns as an old woman, Margret sees a child in white “running and stumbling forward, its arms raised happily in the air” (527). Engaged in the scene before her, Margret watches as the “mother, also in white, sway[s] in attentive pursuit, now smiling, now laughing, at the child’s antics” (527). Swaying, the child then “stumble[s] into a circle of flowers and f[alls] down,” whereupon the “mother step[s] forward and sweep[s] it into her arms and cover[s] its neck with kisses, just below the ear, so that the child laugh[s] out in glee” (527). Margret sees a near replay of Birgitta’s first vision, a revelation Margret indubitably recollects, since she resided with Birgitta at the time of the sighting. In terms of the narrative, Margret is the first person Birgitta sees subsequent to her visualization of the so-called biblical pair (64). Margret’s first-hand experience of this remembered second-sight, however, is not a moment of virginal visioning. What Margret sees is not the Virgin and Son that Birgitta finally appraises as a “false . . . promise,” largely due to male intervention and correction (391). Demonstrating that the men misinterpreted Birgitta’s initial experience of second sight, the spectacle that Margret witnesses is not a vision at all, religious or otherwise. Alternatively, she observes Birgitta’s daughter Helga playing with her own daughter Unn. The “mother” whom Birgitta envisions turns out to be an actual woman of Greenland playing with her “child,” a child that is an actual Greenlandic daughter, rather than the holy Son.

In lieu of affirming classical religious and moral paradigms, Birgitta’s original vision anticipates a future event on the colony. As homage to the narrow hope for the

surviving generations of the Black Plague that Scandinavian director Bergman includes in *The Seventh Seal*, Birgitta's prognostication points to the individuals who can play an integral part in the preservation of Greenlandic civilization. Though it is naturally impossible to predict the instrumental and half-random way in which Helga and Unn, among others, prompt the death of Ofeig, the vision focuses on a woman and her child. Without speaking, these characters stand and step and stumble and stand again. The revelation consequently urges the men to pay attention to the peripheral figures within the colony. It likewise encourages the men to listen to these marginal characters in the same way that they can listen to Birgitta's descriptions of her envisioned characters. Just as women can *see* valuable things, they can *say* valuable things. Women, servants, and children do have voices, voices that ought to be taken into account by the men of Greenland.

Smiley in fact peoples her saga with resilient, autonomous women. These characters counterbalance or even override her focus on exacting, leading men. Born on the first page of *The Greenlanders*, Margret, who is Gunnar's older sister, is for all intents and purposes the heroine of the saga. Compellingly, her role in the work ironically plays up the consensus that women are "eternal strangers" on the colony (116). After being tricked into marrying Olaf, whom she later names Odd and likens to a repugnant polar bear when she fictionalizes her long-suppressed story (428-430), Margret falls in love with Skuli Gudmundsson, a Norwegian. In time, they "lay together as man and wife" (100). Lacking discretion, they are discovered. As a result, Gunnar and Olaf peremptorily kill Skuli for his part in the illicit liaison (125). The leading men of Greenland then banish Margret from her steading and district (126-7). Signaling the ever-

increasing difficulty of her long exile, her child dies at a young age. Margret goes on to spend the fifty winters between Birgitta's vision and its actualization away from her beloved home, first on an abandoned farm that she appropriates, then as a servant who insinuates her way onto various farms in the colony by means of contributing livestock and needlework.

Among other things, Margret's movements all through the settlement accentuate the enigmatic qualities and distinctive features of the young women in Greenland. While she occupies her own property, called Steinstraumstead, Margret lives alongside Asta Thorbergdottir, "a girl so strong that she liked to compete with boys and men in swimming contests" (132). Also vying with the men, Asta has a relationship with, and a son by, "a skraeling boy" (225). Accordingly, she is the first and only woman in the colony to consent to a relationship with a male Inuit, unlike the Greenlandic men who regularly pair with Inuit women. Furthermore, as a servant at Solar Fell, the home of Bollason, Margret passes much of her time with the lawspeaker's daughter Sigrid, a notorious figure on account of her frequent "sham[ing] [of the boys] with the quickness of her wit and the breadth of her knowledge" (396). Despite her sagacity, Sigrid "h[olds] tightly to her incomprehension" when she and Kollgrim, the only boy she cannot embarrass, wordlessly sunder their marriage engagement (532).

Kollgrim's concubine Elisabet Thorolfsdottir, the maidservant who leaves Gunnars Stead not long before Margret returns, embodies the same complexity and resolve as the other girls. Before Kollgrim's incineration, Elisabet stays on the farmstead irrespective of his insistence that she depart. Her reasons for staying on this property against his wishes remain unclear. Though the men assert that Elisabet lingers on the

steading so as to sever Kollgrim's engagement with Sigrid (502), Sigrid herself disputes this claim (532). Perhaps Elisabet resists departure for the purpose of upbraiding Kollgrim for his subsequent affair with Steinunn Hrafnisdottir, a married Icelander (496). Moving from reprimand to retribution, maybe she stays by his side in order to avenge Kollgrim for the dalliance he starts with her and brusquely terminates (418). In yet another interpretation of Elisabet's determination, she may remain within his reach because she loves him, as the title of *The Greenlanders'* last book suggests. One of the themes of "Love," evidently, is that Elisabet positions herself according to her own private motivations. Like many women in the Scandinavian colony, the self-driven and steadfast Elisabet manages to abide "through everything," notwithstanding the oppositional firmness of a leading man (526). In Greenland, women can and do make meaningful personal choices, multifaceted choices that the men can learn from, indecipherable choices that can have a considerable impact upon the entire colony.

The men of Greenland should not only take note of the stories of Greenlandic women, but also ask for these stories. The opinions, insights, and attributes of these characters—servants or proprietors, young or old—are of particular consequence once the survival of the colony is threatened by lawlessness. Women are accustomed to the outlaw environment that comes to reconfigure existence in the colony. Outside of their steadings, the men typically silence the women. Because of this, the women have a lesser degree of legal input and right than the men. Given this diminished form of lawful involvement, women are demonstrably liable to the praxes and changes of a legal structure that they themselves have little opportunity of swaying. Although the law influences them, they cannot influence the law. Since they are disallowed a symbiotic or

democratic affiliation with the processes of legality, women can be seen as eternal strangers in Greenland, eternal strangers who are forever compelled to anticipate, encounter, and adapt to versions of lawlessness and isolation. Distinct and tenacious, the women are therefore the experts of *if*. Only by efficiently maneuvering through a life by and large determined by provisos, can a woman manage to survive the harsh realities of Greenland. So to listen to a woman's story can be an exercise in the discovery of how unique individuals can wrestle against long odds and outlast continuing—or emergent—uncertainty and unfamiliarity.

The pirates from Bristol, England, who attack the colony approximately a decade after the Thing is dismantled, epitomize the state of outlawry that finally besieges the Greenland settlement. Pirates, of course, are prototypical medieval outlaws. The first person these invaders dispatch is a steward by the name of Odd (578). Appropriately, after Odd's murder (and the several criminal acts that follow hard upon this representatively unlawful death) the odds of survival for the colony itself drop. When the freebooters restock their ship with what is left of the Greenlanders' limited goods, they expose the eroded social network of these Scandinavian people. As the opening paragraph of the saga's two-page "Epilogue" illustrates, general outlawry lies in the pirate's wake. The narrator opens his epilogue not only by expressing unprecedented dejection, but also by suggesting forthcoming devastation. Moving through the concentric circles that demarcate Greenlandic civilization, he mourns the fact that the "news between the districts was slow," grieves that "every district turned in upon itself," and finally bewails that "all the families were in a turmoil of accusations and retaliations" (583). Without the legal system and its concomitant social web, the survival of the

settlement becomes progressively more improbable. As the gaps between disparate families grow greater, as communication flags, districts segregate, and families fight, internecine conflict and indispensable isolation begin to typify daily life in Greenland. Once communal interaction dissolves, outlawry and lucklessness multiply and preponderate.

Perhaps this is why Gunnar, famous for his bad luck, as the reiterations of his unluckiness attest (55, 224, 329, 413, 417, 436, 509, 577), turns out to be the narrator of the saga. Regardless of his characteristic misfortune, the last line of the epilogue makes plain that *The Greenlanders* is “his tale” (584). Even though up to this point in the narrative he kills “eight men,” a tabulation that induces him “to weep and weep and weep” (581-2), Smiley, who revels in sacrificing her Nordic characters to principle, never forfeits Gunnar’s life in favor of a prearranged code or law. Albeit forever ill-fated, Gunnar himself suggests that his survival is a consequence of his recognition of the traits and stories of the women, children, and servants in the colony. From the earliest stages of his life, these members of the Eastern settlement make lasting impressions upon Gunnar. Like no one else in the narrative, he listens to the women and learns from them. Accordingly, Gunnar manifests a number of female attributes. As a boy, he tells tales with the servingwomen (19). While growing up, he has “little bent for hunting” (34). As a young man, “he resorted to spinning wool, like a woman, in order to earn his place at the table” (44). Still young, he second-guesses Sira Pall by admiring what he himself sees as the “bold resolve” of the woman whom the priest chides in his lesson (72). Indeed, Gunnar initially takes up scribbling on parchments in order to correct what he sees as Einar Bjornsson’s incomplete or unjust rendition of the Greenlanders’ story (236-7).

Women play pivotal parts within the only recognized European civilization to disappear. In Gunnar's view, the neglected importance of their roles becomes all the more apparent when the colony is beset by outlawry. Finally confined to and isolated on their farmsteads, the Greenlanders are deprived of what Asgeir Gunnarson, father of Margret and Gunnar, a half-century before christened as "real wealth," namely, "news of other places" (8). Whether it be tidings from distant Rome or Germany, accounts from the nearer North Atlantic, or reports from a neighboring district, the Greenlanders "get the greatest pleasure out of a curious event" (281). Gunnar dilates upon the advantages of curiosity and novelty when, on the final page of the saga, he includes a paean to play. Consolidating that consciousness, existence, and play are indissociable for children, an observation that Joyce Carol Oates similarly makes in her essay "Transformations of Play" (254), after Gunnar deliberately looks over the chessboard, he soberly says, "folk may not contemplate their fates all the time, and must play as well as work" (584). Gunnar is neither merely recalling the feasts and songs of Kollbein Sigurdsson's swimming contest (144-9), nor simply recollecting the sliding and skating of Jon Andres' Yule feast (404-411). Surrounded by children, and in "the shadow" of "the great loom" that his sister, mother, and "many generations of wives before them" spun upon (584), Gunnar recalls his introduction to play in the form of storytelling. Spinning his story belatedly, which positions narrative as antithetical to misconstrued legality, he concludes by fashioning a correlation between storytelling and justice by making *The Greenlanders* Margret's epitaph. As a testament to his sister, who fell victim to the pirates (582), he shows that justice, in order to be transformative and thereby just, must celebrate and circulate every story—especially the curious and rich stories of eternal strangers.

Chapter Six

Big Stakes in *Horse Heaven*

Chance

In scope, style, setting, and subject, *Horse Heaven* is about starts of one kind or another. Whereas *The Greenlanders* focuses on decline and concludes by insinuating what Jane Smiley sums up as “the end of the Norse colony in Greenland” (“It Ain’t the Eiffel Tower” 336), Smiley turns to beginnings in her horseracing novel. In the keynote address she delivered at the “5 Voices, One Place” conference held in April of 2001 at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Smiley pointed out that her racetrack novel was inspired by the mass of stories that surrounds the track: “*Horse Heaven* came from just a desire to investigate the language and stories of the racetrack, which abound, as many of you know” (338). Her attraction to a multitude and movement, as her recourse to the word “abound” suggests, stands in direct contrast to the motivating factor behind her saga: the singularity of the Greenlanders’ ruin. Compelled by extremes of number, Smiley emphasizes the limitations of narrative in her two longest works. In *The Greenlanders*, she shuts down narrative by restricting the sources for story so that her Nordic characters, now actively roaming and sharing, now passively sequestered and isolated, are left only to recollect. Countering the impression of constriction that ends *The Greenlanders*, she features an atmosphere of expansion throughout *Horse Heaven*. With her encyclopedic horseracing novel, Smiley perpetually amplifies the sources for narrative.

In her Nordic saga, Smiley closes doors as she moves closer and closer to the situation of solitude and stillness—and implied death—of narrator Gunnar and the civilization that his sister Margret emblemized. The condition that eventually governs the Greenlanders is therefore one of reevaluation. Like the remaining anonymous characters confined to their properties, and the readers constrained to following the demise of the Greenlanders, Gunnar is left looking and moving inward and backward. As the last living Greenlander who knows everybody, as the last rich voice, he reviews and retells the past. In the end, the destiny of the Greenlanders can be interpreted as autotelic. Once their legal and social networks dissolve, there is no more wealth, no more external, novel information. Restricted to their farmsteads, they finish in self-containment. In *Horse Heaven*, on the other hand, Smiley opens doors. This big novel subsumes a series of openings in order to show that the track is a useful (and maybe even an ideal) model of the global world. Among other attributes, the world of the track incorporates a dynamic investment landscape, a plural social network, and a developing rule book or legal system. These interrelated aspects naturally hinge on economic venture or gambling. In most cases, the racetrack is synonymous with the pari-mutuel—the booth where horse bets are posted and the winners divvy up the losers' stakes. Notwithstanding this classic understanding of the racecourse, an evaluation that she logically integrates into *Horse Heaven*, Smiley likewise illustrates that wagering can translate into socially responsive actions. As put forth in her encyclopedic novel, the stakes of horse speculation transcend the turns and limits of the racetrack.

Horse Heaven is in many ways unprecedented in contemporary female American writing, not to mention American women's writing in general. Though Smiley is

markedly more charitable to her readers than William Gaddis and Thomas Pynchon, and also more accessible than David Foster Wallace and Don DeLillo, *Horse Heaven* sits well in the company of post-WWII encyclopedic works like *The Recognitions* (1955), *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), *Infinite Jest* (1996), and *Underworld* (1997)—a market so far cornered by male authors. As the “Cast of Characters” that sets the stage of *Horse Heaven* implies, Smiley peoples her longest work, a work her liability disclaimer describes as a “comic epic poem in prose” (x), with a Dickensian range of figures, including six principle horses and a dog (xv-xvi). She manipulates the fifty characters of her novel within a wide sweep of often-intersecting and always-incomplete episodes. Just as the “Prologue” to *Horse Heaven*, subtitled “Who They Are,” ends by highlighting the “speculat[ion], myster[y], [and] potential” of Thoroughbred horses (7), the novel’s “Epilogue” focuses on probability and conjecture as well. She features several short endings for *Horse Heaven*, all of which operate as possible starting points for narrative.

Perhaps this is why Smiley’s epilogue is the only section or chapter (of seventy-four) in her end-of-the-millennium narrative without a title. Since her conclusion is really an assortment of openings set to unfold, she does not know what to call it. Reminiscent of her Nordic saga, *Horse Heaven* is comprised of three books. The first book is titled “1997”; the second “1998”; the third “1999.” She breaks up these respective books into months. Even so, this chronological construction does not depict three complete, ordered years. Alternatively, her layout concentrates on the timing of the Breeders’ Cup Classic, a mecca of American horseracing. Textually, *Horse Heaven* starts just after the Breeders’ of ’97 and ends an unclear number of weeks after the Breeders’ of ’99. On account of the fact that this superlative racing event takes place in mid-autumn, each of the three books

in *Horse Heaven* spans a different length of time. “1998” is the only twelve-month section in the novel. Complicating matters, however, none of her characters attends, and few even attend to, the Breeders’ Cup of that “November” (353). 1998 is an incomplete year too.

Following the cast of characters, the year marker, and the prologue, *Horse Heaven* opens on a distinct day: “On the second Sunday morning in November, the day after the Breeders’ Cup . . .” (9). The beginning of the epilogue recalls the November morning of some two years earlier: “The morning after the Breeders’ Cup . . .” (616). (There is, by comparison, no “morning after” in November ’98). The decisive discrepancy here, however, is one of sequence and specificity. The date of the Sunday morning—the Breeders’ is always held on a Saturday—that starts the final section of the fiction is indeterminate. In fact, her final month designation, unlike any of the twenty-three before it, combines two months and seasons: “September-October” (569). In spite of the fact that the three chapters and the epilogue enclosed under this two-month heading contain several date references, it proves impossible to add up the exact date or even month in which the last fragmented stories of the novel occur. Smiley leaves her readers with six vignettes, all of which take place in the morning, as she demonstrates either by time or by mood references. These “mornings” or commencements feature an undated selection from *The Thoroughbred Times*. As such, this selection calls to mind the numerous personal letters and journalistic pieces amalgamated in *Horse Heaven*. Contradicting narrative convention, none of these is dated. The epistles and news items encapsulate the openended close of the novel.

As in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, time is finally incalculable in *Horse Heaven*. Smiley leaves

her characters in a gap somewhere between the end of October 1999 and the millennial turn in the same way in which the Irish Bloomsday book leaves Leopold and Molly somewhere between the first hours of 17 June 1904 and the sunrise of this new day. This intentional ambiguity or vagueness exemplifies Smiley's interest in what one of her characters, referring to the track, expresses as "all these twists and turns in the plotline" (*Horse Heaven* 529). The author's equivocal denouement speaks volumes about the track. In lieu of tying up her multiple stories with the devices of fiction, she preserves the actual abundance of disconnected stories that first compels her to write about horseracing. This proliferation reveals the broad-spectrum strategy of encyclopedic representation: there is always a surplus of gaps, loopholes, conundrums, and episodes to account for and to narrativize. For this reason, no study or subject or field or department or even encyclopedia is comprehensive. According to Smiley, to talk about the track is to accumulate, catalogue, and speculate upon expanding information. In different ways, the track devotees within *Horse Heaven* participate in an enterprising process that likewise takes advantage of a desire to regulate or fulfill fate at individual levels. Because these gamblers play the odds of the track, they also take active stakes in the making of their own improbable stories.

Leo Harris, whom Smiley facetiously styles as a "racetrack aficionado [and] theorist of racetrack life" in her roster of players (xvi), revels in the proliferation and enigma of racetrack stories. Winding down yet another lecture on the lessons of the track to his son Jesse, who is nine years old, Leo outlines the multiple considerations that can be seen to mark out horse-playing from other forms of gambling and sports spectatorship: "Which horse has a hairline fracture, which horse sees something funny, which horse is

feeling especially good, which jock pushes which other jock. It's a mystery that can't be plumbed by the form, by the theories, by any known science, and it happens every day, for me to look at. And, then, it's another story too. Every horse, every jock, every owner, every trainer, every bettor, every race. A football game is one story, one day a week. That's boring. A day at the races is a thousand stories" (165). As he commemorates horseracing for its wealth of narratives, he also draws attention to his own personal involvement in these ongoing, changing storylines. The track, Leo implies, is an invitation to engage in an active process that takes into account both the analysis of the known (the race form, the past, odds) and the estimation of the unknown (the racehorses, the future, impulses).

Leo's long list accentuates that odds can be based in knowledge. His judgment of track ins-and-outs recalls a comparable inventory in DeLillo's *Great Jones Street* (1973). In this novel about a rock star who ironically increases his fame by way of self-exile, DeLillo stresses the dedication that racetrack wagering demands when his hero's downstairs neighbor deplores her husband's former ignorance and indolence. Playing up the incalculable consequences of the indefinite or the unexplained, the widow Micklewhite censures her dead namesake for his amateurish approach to the racetrack: "He was a horse pervert. He went to the track rain or shine. Him and the chink from the Bronx, they went to the track in blizzards with their hats down over their ears. He lost thirty, forty simoleans on the average every time they went. The chink had winners left and right. The chink knew the scratch sheet, he knew the smart money, he knew the track, he knew the weather, he knew the animals. My husband, he didn't know shit from Shinola" (135). Her unremitting yet instructive complaint registers some of the variables

(or stories) that astute gamblers and horse-handicappers (or odds-makers) diligently interpret in order to increase their chances of success at the races. These considerations include, odds, rail placement, the racing form, and the track surface, not to mention the horses themselves. Horses are far from surefire vehicles to victory. Predictable only in terms of their unpredictability, horses can tire, slip, strain, scare, and sicken. They can also come to life and triumph.

There is no single way for a bettor to compute this evolving myriad of information. As a result, to visit the track and its pari-mutuel windows is always, in a sense, to begin anew. Every day, each race calls on a reassessment of old variables and a negotiation of new ones. Once-fast horses weaken, just as slower ones improve. Celebrated jockeys fumble, just as unproved ones thrive. Soggy turf dries, just as sandy bases harden—maybe. A horseplayer must always be prepared to refashion her understandings of and projections for this irregular process. To revise or not to revise is not the governing ethic of track culture. Instead, informed pari-mutuel wagering entails a coupling of “When to revise?” and “How to revise?” As an embodiment of this racetrack feature, “maybe” is the most repeated term or condition in *Horse Heaven*. Any random reading of *Horse Heaven* yields the adverb maybe, and perhaps two or more maybes, before very many, if any, pages are turned.

These maybes underline the probability and prospect that typify life at the track. Smiley reemphasizes this focus on contingency and chance in her nonfiction *A Year at the Races*. Presenting a series of maybes on the penultimate page of this book, she conjectures on her racehorse, her horse-trainer, herself, and other racing particulars:

Pedigree-wise, Corey would be bucking the odds. But her individual

personality—dominant, self-confident, energetic, friendly—says maybe. Her physique—long legs, long stride, strong, sound—adds to the maybe. Her temperament—relaxation that revs into aggression rather than fear—adds again to the maybe. Into the mix we add luck, training technique, care, attention, timing, money, the world political situation, the state of horse racing in California, Alexis's health and luck, my health, luck and impulsiveness, the march of time and fate. Maybe. (282)

Maybes, so Smiley half-jokily claims, evoke the multiple internal and external influences that can alter the odds of track success. By extension, she points out that no approach to betting is foolproof. Notwithstanding the fact that Smiley seems to fashion an arithmetic out of maybes, she “adds to the maybe,” playing the odds involves the impracticable addition of volatile factors. This is not to allege, however, that odds cannot be calculated to advantage.

Though odds can be influenced by haphazard circumstances, like injuries, bad starts, and other intangibles, unlucky and not, horse-handicappers tend to be accurate. In *A Year at the Races*, Smiley indicates that, “as with the stock market, handicappers are often right—the favorite wins about 30 percent of the time” (119). Comparing racetrack and stock market wagering, Smiley implies that both activities incorporate serious versions of play. In *Horse Heaven*, “futurolgist” Plato Theodorakis draws attention to a similar point (xvi). After the characteristically pompous Plato volunteers that he “went to the race meets every weekend” while studying at Cambridge, he baptizes gambling in Britain as an unadulterated version of the marketplace economy. “Betting in England,” Plato contends, “is the purest form of market speculation there is” (254). These

investment activities, he stresses, consolidate the assets of attentive or learned speculators. Such is the case with Plato's girlfriend, the "animal communicator" Elizabeth Zada (xvi). According to Elizabeth, who somehow channels the consciousnesses of horses in order to place well-informed bets, her stakes earnings are "in the black for the year . . . Way in the black" (348). By contrast, purported track theorist Leo arbitrates his bets on the basis of superstitions rather than in relation to the changing information—the many stories—that Plato and Elizabeth access in different ways. In spite of the lessons he orates to his son Jesse, when he heads to the track, Leo routinely wears "lucky socks" (152; 329), believes "preferred parking" to be lucky (153), deems pooling his money with Jesse's propitious (153), and considers that "looking at a nun was the worst thing you could do" (153). Mapping out luckiness as best he can, Leo esteems the habits and rituals that he himself consistently performs.

Prefigured patterns furthermore determine how Leo actually sees individual races. For instance, while he and Jesse wait on the official result of a "Photo-Finish," Leo assures his son that their two picks, one and six, have placed first and second, respectively, on account of the numbers they brandish: "They did it! I knew it! Perfect pick! One and six. That's always been a great pick for me, because I dated this girl when I was sixteen, her name was Peggy Sue! It really was, and that song was such a great hit that my statistical average with one and six over the years has been way out of the normal range" (155). Unfortunately for Leo, the so-called time-honored poignancy of Peggy Sue's timing merits doubt. Since the number seven horse wins "by a head," Leo's numerical average with his memorable integers drops closer to normal (156). Overall, Leo can be said to approach betting dogmatically rather than dynamically. Relying on

superstition, which is a secular form of piety, cryptic configurations and a reliance on narrated coincidences delimit his stake making. Given this approach to wagering, Leo supplants the circumspection and study of racetrack speculation with a form of less than foolproof ceremony.

Jesse, on the other hand, takes a more active approach to what he conceives as “good investing” at the track (161). Against the advice and example of Leo, who “always stay[s] inside the track” in order to avoid “betting hunches” (156), Jesse adds the physical evaluation of horses and their jockeys to his consideration of the odds. After paying attention to the horses in the saddling enclosure and during their preliminaries, Jesse makes several bets, one of which, again counter to his father’s counsel, ventures on a maiden two-year-old filly named Residual to place in the top three (158). For his part, Leo never wagers on maiden two-year-old fillies. He plainly dismisses laying down anything on these rookie female horses that have yet to win a race. “That’s like playing the lottery,” he cautions (157). All the same, Leo, who traffics in luck, overlooks the study of horses. Playing the same numbers, and reading what he calls “signs” (328; 330), he bases his bets on perceived design. Repetition, rather than revision, defines his betting style.

After the maiden filly, against the odds, places a neck-and-neck, photoflash second (160), Jesse discerns what his father fails to recognize about the dynamics of the track. Thinking to himself, Jesse realizes that “What the track taught you was very detailed and there was a lot to remember, and his dad knew all about it. But his dad hadn’t seen how the filly floated” (161). Win or not, place or not, Jesse appreciates both the set-up to the race and the action of the race. With this emphasis on engagement and

action, Smiley illustrates that the payoffs of serious play, or what Jesse calls good investing, are not merely pecuniary. As Residual's name suggests, the benefits of stake-making stretch beyond the acquisition of money.

Not just about stakes, starts, and purses, horse racing concerns the physics of movement. Pari-mutuel wagering, which naturally includes an appraisal of how horses actually perform at the track, is a fluid process in itself. Horses therefore literally and figuratively represent the flowing processes—the changing odds and chancy turns—of the racetrack. Calling on enterprise and initiative, horseplayers take active stakes in the outcome of uncertain future events. Juggling known probabilities, they invest in the not-yet-known. Consequently, their form of serious play necessarily involves the acceptance of discomfiting results. Given that the accuracy rate of expert horse handicappers tends not to exceed thirty-percent, track speculators recurrently lose—and make appropriate adjustments to endure these hardships. Smiley speaks to the adaptability of bettors when she justifies the safe milieu of the racetrack in *A Year at the Races*. “Racing fans are exceptionally nonviolent,” she remarks, “because they have to keep reading the *Racing Form* and getting their bets together for the next race, and also because they are inured to disappointment” (166). Racetrack wagering, in other words, can accustom its devotees to the vicissitudes of loss. After losing, gamblers typically return to their study and their stake making. Starting over, players resume their interpretive practices.

The habituation to difficulty and scrupulous deliberation that Smiley delineates may indeed be the key merits of gambling in its serious form. Since astute gamblers manifest the convictions to take chances, they possess the abilities to overcome mischance. Present-day gambling, however, as some scholars mourn, suffers from a lack

of studious conviction and risk-taking. This state of gambling-world affairs is as recent as the field of gambling studies itself. In many ways inaugurating and legitimating gambling as a *bona fide* field of interdisciplinary study, William R. Eadington solicited academics and researchers to the First Annual Conference on Gambling, held in Las Vegas, Nevada, in the summer of 1974. In *Gambling and Society*, the book comprised of articles originally presented at this conference, Eadington's preface immediately speculates on the longstanding prevalence of betting: "The oldest profession known to civilized society may very well be prostitution, but probably just as old as a leisure activity or as a more serious endeavor is the phenomenon of gambling" (xi). Gamblers, he conjectures, have wagered stakes for as long as prostitutes have turned tricks. Each primal, risky activity appears to be a cultural given.

Nevertheless, the illicit twain seems to have parted ways. Still replete with risk, unlawful and forever serious, the prostitution trade, I think I can safely wager, continues quite like always. Yet the phenomenon of gambling, at least as a serious venture, suffers from a marked decline in participation over the last three or four decades. According to a number of scholars in the field of gambling studies, fewer and fewer contemporary gamblers seriously gamble. When it comes to gambling, these theorists appear to posit a symmetrical relation between play and initiation. Often backing their conclusions with statistical analyses, they by-and-large determine that how we bet mirrors how we approach betting. As a result of the fact that betting is now largely lawful, and for that reason less markedly suspicious, gambling lacks its original craftiness, ingenuity, and stealth.

Emphasizing gambling within the context of American state lotteries, first

ushered into the US in New Hampshire in the 1960s, James F. Smith remarks on the relatively recent acceptance and even celebration of gambling. Playing the diplomat, Smith criticizes the ideology that legalized gambling apparently bolsters: “gambling today can be seen as harmless, recreational, charitable and even patriotic” (102).

Eadington, who is Australian, widens Smith’s allegations to the international stage, or at least the Western one. Marking the progressively more politicized subtext of gambling since the 1990s in North America, Europe, and Australasia, he maintains that “gambling ha[s] transformed itself over the previous thirty years from an inappropriate, ‘sinful’ endeavour to a mainstream participatory activity” (“Ethical and Policy Considerations” 243). Smith, for his part, targets the pluses of traditional, “inappropriate” gambling. He indicates that when gambling was considered “a sin, a vice, a crime, and an unproductive waste of time,” successful gamblers, whether card sharps, pool sharks, or horseplayers, were interpreted as antiheroes (“When it’s Bad it’s Better” 102). These individual bettors, legendary and real, courted risk. In wagering stakes, they worked against and defied a variety of odds.

Though dealing beyond the boundaries of the law, these luminary figures, as Smith elucidates, “mirrored the risk-taking characteristic[s] of an evolving nation, culture, and economy” (102). This assertion recalls drama and cultural theorist Erving Goffman’s positive take on gambling, as clarified by Jan McMillen. Goffman’s analysis of gambling, McMillen argues, “contains an implicit recognition that gambling contributes to the moral and political regulation of society by reaffirming conventional values” (“Understanding Gambling” 16). Serious gamblers play up the merits of poise and counterpoise, of direction and redirection, of change and interchange. Since play in

the form of assiduous risk-taking at once underscores personal and collective advancement, Smith makes a case for the value of conventional, outlawed gambling. “In many ways,” he contends, “gambling was ‘better’ when it was seen as ‘bad’” (102).

Earmarking the main reason for his case against an increasingly state-sponsored gambling infrastructure, Smith points to the incongruous fact that gamblers today tend not to play: “The irony here is that there is little or no *real* play in the new world of gambling, while play (or action) is the *raison d’être* for traditional gambling” (110).

In his appraisal of legalized gambling, Smith charges that the scratch card, the state lotto, the slot machine, and the roulette-wheel alike disallow their disciples the true opportunity to engage in a process of play, intelligent or otherwise. In turn, these “new diversions,” so Smith brands them (112), call for a single, repetitive, mechanical act—if any act at all. As mere automatic amusements, these approaches to gambling take the action out of play and the skill out of staking. Appropriately, these games rely on luck exclusively. Instead of being the one erratic factor of a multitude of more-or-less calculable risks, luck seems to be the only factor in the patriotic cash nexuses of the lotto and the casino. In lieu of sitting on the sidelines and whimsically hindering or helping individual gamblers according to her customary leisure, Lady Luck now seems to govern popular forms of gambling. In other words, current submissions to chance override established convictions to take chances. Lamenting the effortless quick-fixes accommodated and created by “the new gambling culture,” Smith concludes that “the real value of gam[bling] is lost” (112). As gambling mislays its original outcomes, such as the validation of self-possession and pliancy, it likewise mislays its primary motivation, or what Freud, paraphrasing Dostoevsky, called “*le jeu pour le jeu*” (456).

Choices

As a big, social, encyclopedic text set over the last three years of the millennium, *Horse Heaven* ironically integrates the manifold public and private implications of playing for the sake of playing in a number of ways. In Smiley's seminal novel, Leo is the only compulsive gambler. Accordingly, his addiction reflects his style of "play." A representative member of the new gambling culture, he depends on weird rite and fickle luck as he stakes identical numbers or sequences of numbers. Without changing his tactic, he indulges in a perfunctory act. In so doing, he alters the end of gambling. Devoid of its active, changing, and fluid processes, gambling certainly is no longer an end in itself. Play, of course, cannot be its own reward once it becomes an habitual repetition. Winning is the sole reward.

Given the long odds against winning at the racecourse, Leo's enthusiasm predictably tends to transform into frustration between his arrival and his departure from the track. En route to the track with his dad, the precocious Jesse wonders why Leo fails "to remember that chances were he would be disappointed" by the end of their day at the races: "But how could he not know? Jesse was only eleven, and he knew. His mom never went to the track, and she knew. Jesse was used to thinking of his father as smart. No one talked like his father, no one impressed upon him all those differences in class and talent and pedigree the way his father did, and yet here was a simple thing, the simplest thing in the world, that his father didn't know" (330). In the same way that Leo overlooked how the maiden filly Residual moved around the track (161), he neglects to notice how he himself refuses to budge from his gambling routine, like dwelling on superstition and playing similar numerals. On the one hand, Leo stays the same while he relives

unchanging motions and emotions year after year. Jesse, on the other hand, changes as time passes. He insinuates this progression, a development that counters the inflexibility of his father's betting system, by pinpointing his own limited age. In downplaying the import of his own perceptions on account of his narrow life experience, his evolving opinions of his father furthermore intimate that Leo's visible obtuseness is a consequence of his static approach to gambling.

The young Jesse realizes that Leo's non-transformative betting style runs a parallel course to his overall lifestyle. Notwithstanding Leo's uninformed or amateur approach to stake making, he sees everything as betting. "It's all betting" is his mantra (328). Leo encourages his son to rehearse and live according to the same truism. Once again, however, Jesse goes on to observe something that his father fails fully to apprehend. With his characteristic penchant for the performative, only this time with a pistol for a prop, one night Leo prepares to leave the house for a dramatic run-in with his Korean bookie. Should Park Min Jong try to swindle him out of his fair take, Leo testifies before his cliffhanging departure, "there's going to be a payoff, let me tell you!" (431). Jesse, for his part, seems primed for this theatrically coded moment. Following his father's extravagant stage-exit, Jesse notes that Leo's been reminding him "over and over for years" that he "was a believer in justice rather than mercy" (433). Paired with his focus on reiteration, Jesse's unbothered demeanor after this climactic leave-taking suggests that he understands how justice rises above the repetition and staginess that typify Leo. Leo's macho act, Jesse's calmness appears to convey, will come to a conclusion once he faces the bookie. Whether enacted in front of a district attorney, a jury of one's peers, a television audience, or a so-called enemy, justice always makes

particular demands on accusers, defenders, and witnesses alike. These demands can work against ready scripts and preplanned actions.

Subsequent to his putative confrontation with the Korean bookie, Leo enters Jesse's bedroom quoting Thoreau and lecturing on what he professes is the message of Marxism. He makes clear that since his own father "let the bookies walk all over him," he "lived a life of quiet desperation" (435). In opposition to the father he "judges" as "wanting" (436), Leo sees himself as markedly successful. He credits his achievements to his modern-day Marxist principles. Predictably, he alleges that he gets what he wants because he knows that "power always comes from the barrel of a gun" (436). Then, presumably backing up his words with hard evidence, Leo draws a lump of money out of his pocket. The timing of his stylized, self-important gesture indubitably indicates that Leo stood up to the Korean, thus leaving him with little choice but to hand over Leo's accrued piece of the ante. Leo advocates this verdict with his final list in the novel: "the Koreans will respect you if you stand up to them. The Chinese won't, and you never want to stand up to a Russian, you know, just stay away from a Russian bookie, no matter what. The Jews are still the best, taken all in all, and I don't say that because we're Jewish, you know. It's just all lessons. Life is a set of lessons, and if you pay attention everyday, you'll learn them" (437).

Though Jesse pays careful attention to his father, or perhaps because he takes such close notice of his father, he remains less than impressed with the man's less than subtle theatrics. Conceivably identifying with the young version of his own father, he internally attributes the "biggish" size of Leo's roll to "the small bills" it likely contains (437). A little later, Jesse also imagines Jong's perspective of the would-be *mêlée*: "in the middle

of the night, it was as if he saw Leo through the bookie's eyes, small-time. All the talk. The whole system. The racetrack itself. Everything about it was very small-time. All the theory in the world, and even all the money in the world, couldn't change that" (437-8). The small-time, as Jesse discerns, pertains to Leo's seemingly persistent refusal to accept even a measure of change. Whether he wins big or wins nothing at all, as a man, a father, and a character, Leo never develops or grows. All too predictable, Leo is one-dimensional. In spite of the fact that he revels in the many stories of the track and fashions many theories about the track, he reduces the track to a set of inflexible patterns and mottoes. Leo plays up intricacy and intellectualism while he reduces these studied processes into some weird, personal paradigm. Supposing he thinks big and sees the big picture, he acts small. His actions in the everyday world reproduce his actions in the racetrack world. Moving within limited parameters, Leo cannot even do justice to himself, for justice, personal identity, social relation, and unpredictable circumstance are inextricably intertwined.

In contradistinction to Jesse, and most of the other characters in *Horse Heaven*, Leo only ever sees through his own eyes. The narrow lens of Leo's world picture, as Jesse finally understands it, ironically recalls Leo's first inventory in the novel. In the chapter titled "A Day at the Races," Leo accentuates the wide social layout of the track. Playing the cultural analyst in a move that recalls the social capital of the Greenlanders' Thing, he asserts, "There's no place like the racetrack, son. Everyone of every sort is there. No one is excluded at the racetrack. Blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Chinese. Koreans love the racetrack. Kids play there. People picnic there. Families break bread together there at the racetrack. Rich, poor, and everything in between. It doesn't matter what you

do in your life, son, the richest man you will ever see will be someone you saw at the track, holding his tickets just like you. And probably the poorest you ever see will be at the track, too" (164). For all his pontificating, however, Leo assumes no active role within this inclusive social dynamic. He takes no stake in these many stories. Whereas nearly all the characters in *Horse Heaven* interact at some juncture, or have remote connections to each other as bettors, owners, trainers, or jockeys, Leo has no engagement with any other track-world figures. In the same way that he dismisses hunches or intuitions from his playing of the odds, he seems to disallow coincidence and interaction from intervening into his own story. As a result of maintaining an imposed distance from the other characters in the novel, his story remains self-contained. His story never intersects with any of the other stories. Because he essentially eliminates the odds of any social interconnection, Leo thereby resists the numerous potentials for character. A variant to other featured stories in *Horse Heaven*, his personal narrative never moves forward.

Leo's demonstrably limited movement or range reflects upon some of Smiley's equally conspicuous personages in her 1995 novel *Moo*, which is a precursor to *Horse Heaven*. Like its sequel, *Moo* incorporates a considerable cast of characters (over thirty) and a substantial number of chapters (seventy). *Moo* is a social comedy about campus life in the 1989-1990 academic year at Moo University, the center of a small, unidentified town located somewhere in the Midwest. In the four-hundred-plus-page novel, Marly Hellmich is one of only a few characters not involved in intellectual pursuit, academic administration, or grant application. She works in Moo U's cafeteria. Perhaps anticipating Leo's initial list of track types in *Horse Heaven*, Marly's story begins with her mental

register of the half-freakish, half-inane patchwork of “types” that pass through her food line:

There were all physical types, from the blackest Africans to the palest northern Europeans . . . from the tallest—maybe seven feet—to the shortest, maybe three. They rolled through in wheelchairs, hobbled through on crutches, lifted their trays with hooks (farm accidents, most of those), carried white canes, followed guide dogs, watched her lips, wore hearing aids. They twitched and hunched and limped, or they seemed to dance. Breathtaking beauties of both sexes passed through the line. People who were quite the opposite of that did, too. There were girls who had shaved their heads and boys who had hair down to their waists, and vice versa. A few had tattoos on their faces, more had them on their arms. People in thousand-dollar suits stood next to people in torn sweats and T-shirts, but everyone had on shoes and shirts. That was a health rule and the only sort of uniformity. (*Moo* 26)

This long list underscores the physical properties of identity. Marly moves from the body types, through the props, to the trends that distinguish character. In her estimation, the only regularity in this lineup follows from the single banal rule everyone attends to in order to be served. Uniforms, in the deregulated combination of shoes and shirts, uphold a measure of homogeneity.

Marly’s remarks on the many external properties of character, some selected and some not, inevitably carry over into the internal qualities of character. As a person chooses her cane, clothes, or haircut, she fashions her identity. Yet these fabricated or

embellished physical traits do not always accurately reveal the multidimensional angles of identity. As expected, everyone has secrets and longings, and everyone suppresses these in one way or another. Smiley foregrounds this discrepancy between outwardness and inwardness or between projected identity and protected identity with the setting of her novel. Though *Moo* takes place in a college environment, the most compelling figures in the narrative are Marly, Loren Stroop, Earl Butz, and Joy Pfisterer, all of whom are non-academics. By the end of the novel, which, like a play, has five parts, each of these complex and misunderstood personalities literally opens a door to a new identity. Distinct from the later Leo, these apparently peripheral characters willfully vary their individual stories.

At the age of thirty-five, Marly lives with her father. She attends church twice a week. Her boyfriend, Travis, is a long-distance truck driver. When stationary, he stays with his wife and children in Pennsylvania. Notwithstanding her unhappiness, Marly keeps their affair a secret. Her lot in life changes, however, when Nils Harstad, Moo U's fifty-five year-old dean of extension who sees her as a virginal, late-twenty-something, plain, trusting, frugal woman (59-61), proposes marriage to her. No fool, Marly takes into account the lackluster job that she could quit and the sums of money that she could spend. She accepts his offer. Regrettably, before long she comes to find her *fiancé* insufferable. Moreover, her unanticipated engagement to a relatively wealthy administrator, what could be called her putative lucking out, quickly alienates her from her friends. "As Nils Harstad's wife-to-be," she finally admits, "she had long ago become a degree untrustworthy" (361). As a result of her revisiting melancholy, she decides to take an active stake in changing the parameters of her story. In the final scene that

includes Marly, she spontaneously climbs through the open door of Travis' tractor-trailer. Without warning, and without caring about her eventual destination, she leaves town, the first time that she has gone off on her own.

Loren Stroop's last action in the novel hinges on an open door as well. Despite his advanced age, the farmer and inventor spends the better part of his time rebuilding and refining a machine that will revolutionize American agriculture. Yet, ever suspicious of what he labels "the FBI, the CIA, and the big ag businesses" or "companies" (85, 85-6, 87, 165, 167, 289, 291, 358), he wears a bullet-proof vest, hides his blueprints, and tests his contraption only in the dark. He aims to donate his invention to Moo University. Before he gets the opportunity to exhibit his creation, he suffers a stroke. Months later, he returns home from unproductive rehabilitation half-paralyzed and unable to speak. He limps and shuffles. He coos and moos. Bored, and alone in the midst of a late-winter snowstorm that delays his caretaker, he decides to check up on the assailable invention stashed in his barn. Once he laboriously dresses himself, he manages to press his front door ajar just enough so that the "wind took it and slammed it against the house" (358). He laments his inability to close the wide-open door: "You didn't want to leave it like that, letting all the heat out, but he didn't have much choice" (358). Weak and weary, he soon slips in the snow. Unable to get up, he dies. As it turns out, Loren's invention does indeed mysteriously disappear from his property. His original drawings, nevertheless, are found. These designs, willed to the university, end up being Moo U's "*Deus ex Machina*," as Smiley's chapter heading makes clear (388). By patenting the machine, the university, which is undergoing severe cutbacks, "could earn millions" (389). Due to his death, which is timely insofar as it saves the university positions and programs that are

about to be curtailed, Loren is remembered not only as an eccentric, paranoid farmer, but also as an ingenious, charitable man. Though he has no choice but to leave his front door open, he makes the choice first to open it. With this deliberate, last act, he adds to his story by extending it into the future.

In acts four and five of *Moo*, Joy Pfisterer actively reorients the direction of her story, while Earl Butz, a hog, culminates his story. In fact, Earl's movements reveal that he has a personality and a stake in his own story, not to mention a story at all. In "It Ain't the Eiffel Tower," Smiley can be seen to reemphasize his story when she describes Earl as "the totally innocent porcine hero of [her] novel" (337). His story opens *Moo*. Earl, a Landrace boar, is unofficially penned in Old Meats, a rundown, unused building in the center of campus. As the object of hog expert Dr. Bo Jones' covert research, Earl's business is "eating, only eating, and forever eating" (*Moo* 4). Bo's simple project is to see how big a pig, when "allowed to eat at will for the natural course of his lifespan," can possibly grow (6). Even so, Bo disregards his line of investigation when, following the fall of European Communism, he plans and pursues a hog-hunting expedition in newly opened Central Asia. The hidden Landrace boar likewise loses interest in the fattening experiment. Once he somehow recollects the gambols in the green grass with his siblings that predate his near two-year confinement, Earl learns to prefer daydreaming and thinking over eating and eating (270). While his owner chases down hogs in their natural environment, Earl longs for his former freedom and movement. In early spring, he gets his chance to escape confinement. When a crane bites down on Old Meats, which was slated for demolition due to budget cuts, Earl rushes from his collapsing pen. "[A]s big as a Volkswagen Beetle but much faster," he rockets around the open, but "not empty,"

campus (371). Unaccustomed to exertion, in little time he slows, stops, and falls to his side on the white—not green—earth. Pains then shoot in his left foreleg, as his body trembles, and he dies of a heart attack. By way of his gutsy getaway, Earl himself proves the long-contradicted rumors about “the secret hog at the center of the university” (371). While he confirms his clandestine story, he validates his own memory of space and play.

Much like Marly, Joy redirects her personal story. Not a holder of an advanced degree, Joy works as Equine Manager at Moo U, runs a riding club, and lives with Dr. Dean Jellinek, from Animal Science. First “obsessed with cloning” (54), then obsessed with artificial lactation, Dean customarily secures funding for his projects, since he is a “great grant proposal writer” (55). Dean’s synthetic quests naturally depress Joy, who loves animals. She also comes to doubt his moral character. In response to her rising skepticism and clinical depression, a condition Dean effortlessly dismisses by saying that Joy is “in a bad mood all the time” (95), he, like the Earl of old, eats and eats and eats (218, 222-3, 297). Downcast on many levels, and no longer able to abide Dean’s nonstop discourse on hormone manipulation, a monologue that only his eating interrupts, Joy runs from the house one cold night without her coat. When she returns, Dean notices that “the front door [is] wide open” (300). Rebuking her, he begins holding forth on a major expenditure of the midwestern economy (“Heat is expensive!”) until he recognizes that she is suffering from hypothermia (300). Still, unlike the comparable fates of Loren and Earl, Joy survives the first winter of the new decade. When *Moo* ends, Dean and Joy are in therapy. He, understanding, now listens. She, conscientious, now stifles her sighs.

Nevertheless, Joy’s story does not conclude in suppression or self-restraint. As the only intertextual figure in Smiley’s fiction, seven years and three seasons after the cold

spring that concludes *Moo*, she returns as Joy Gorham, mare manager of Tompkins Ranch, California, in *Horse Heaven*. Despite her recurrent signs of depression, symptoms that her mother attributes to her “life choices,” Joy is “content” no longer to be “smiling and nodding” as her “old boyfriend Dean” frustratingly lectures “on and on about some 100-percent unnatural animal-breeding project” (*Horse Heaven* 26-7). Although less straightforward or immediate than the actions of Marly, Loren, and Earl, Joy chooses to modify her story as well. The self-directed maneuvering of these four characters, and Joy’s jockeying in particular, set up and lead into the exponential aspects of character and narrative that Smiley explores in *Horse Heaven*.

Stories

Smiley uses the racetrack to speculate on the unpredictable course, coincidences, and odds of stories working out. These multiple conjectures account for the episodic structure of *Horse Heaven*, as well as its encyclopedic storylines. Although she separates her many characters at the macro level by means of her prefatory playlist, many of her manifold stories overlap. Her players are not circumscribed by the initial settings that distinguish them. With a motif emblemized by Sir Michael Ordway, who is presented as a “horse agent [and] peer of the realm” under the heading “*Everywhere*” (xvi), most of the characters in *Horse Heaven* travel or relocate. Circulation governs the track and the unique fates of people and horses. As sure as horses run around a track, they similarly aspire to run around many tracks. Owners, trainers, assistant trainers, jockeys, exercise riders, grooms, and masseurs, among a host of less essential associates, follow the horses that they are affiliated with on these national, and sometimes transoceanic, racing tours.

The structure of Smiley's "Cast of Characters" insinuates the international scope of the racetrack. Moving from the local to the global, and the particular to the general, she commences with headings that feature American racetracks, cities, and states, as she progresses to the world-stage. Indicatively, her final four headings are "Texas," "France," "Everywhere," and "Horses" (xvi). The move that she orchestrates from "Everywhere" to "Horses" implies that horses are somehow more than everywhere, just as everywhere is more than France, and France is more than Texas. Horses, the author intimates, bring something more than globalism to the track. These equine characters in some way surpass the logic of conventional demarcation, spatial or otherwise. By extension, the human companions of these horses can also take advantage of this indeterminate transcendence: horse heaven.

Under "Horses," Smiley lists the names of six racehorses. Whereas she briefly describes her human characters by virtue of where they live and what they do, she portrays this final handful of fictional figures in terms of their body markings and their places of breeding. These highly abbreviated reports poetically downplay the lengthy list of forebears traditionally used to ascertain the value and estimate the potential of individual Thoroughbreds. Because purebreds are defined by their pedigree, as the first sentence of Smiley's prologue acknowledges, "All the Jockey Club knows about them is parentage, color, markings" (3). Documentation of horse lineage is comprehensive and exact.

In *A Year at the Races*, Smiley clarifies that the detailed record of these bloodlines goes back to the eighteenth century. Integrating a somewhat stealthy reference to human genealogy, she states, "Records have been kept about the racing and breeding

of Thoroughbred horses for almost three-hundred years, especially in England, where the *General Studbook* is not unlike *Burke's Peerage*. Every horse at every Thoroughbred track in the world is a statistical unit. His parentage for at least sixty-two generations (since the publication of the first volume of the *General Studbook* in 1791) is known. His performance in every race, and even in every training work, is recorded somewhere" (7). In keeping with racecourse standards, Smiley unsurprisingly incorporates a number of horse ancestries, fictional and non-fictional, into *Horse Heaven*. Every racehorse has her family tree. Every racehorse has predecessors looking down at her from horse heaven. In contrast to biblical and narrative conventions, Smiley's human characters do not come with these family lines in *Horse Heaven*. These characters are not encumbered or typed because of their names, as the Greenlanders often are by virtue of their patrilineal naming system. Human histories, titles, and names, unlike equine ones, do not automatically matter at the track and its pari-mutuel booths.

In his novel *Bob the Gambler*, Frederick Barthelme suggests that gambling, perhaps like nothing else, offers its individual practitioners the opportunity to play in what he would call the big time. Barthelme's protagonist, a blackjack devotee, tells his wife that "[gambling]'s the only thing we can play out of our league. Where it's like, real. The pro tour, whatever. Real as it gets" (150). When his wife doubtfully replies, "That's something we want?," he responds with an appeal to the justice of gambling: "Always. Everybody. Maybe the only thing we want" (150). Racetrack enthusiasts also participate in this "real" version of play—from the horse owners to the stable boys, the academics to the autodidacts, the octogenarians to the *ingénues*, the African-Americans to the Cantonese, and the wealthy to the poor. The plural nature of this cultural setting sanctions

a measure of equality that the everyday world cannot always furnish. At the racecourse, where everyone has the equal opportunity to play and influence her own odds of success, people and classes can always mix. Nepotism and name recognition have no impact on race results.

The track also offers a justness that professional sports cannot accommodate, whether the Pro Tour of golf, the World Series of baseball, or the World Cup of soccer. There are far fewer naturals in the gambling world. For human “stumblebums and stars” alike (Agee 333), victorious racetrack wagering ordinarily depends on something other than natural size, strength, reflex, or gift. The fact that cheating at the track is next to impossible for a bettor adds to this parity. A horse cannot be bribed like a boxer or a baseball team. Yet a horse can be doped. Corrupt owners, trainers, and jockeys can engage in this lawlessness to influence the outcome of races. While horses absorb the true costs of cheating, wins translate into fame and money for treacherous swindlers. The blood-doping and over-training of a horse in the service of winning can turn out to be fatal to a victimized racer.

A governing trope in *A Year at the Races* is the fragility of horses. As Smiley shows in this book, horses, which require tremendous investments of money, time, energy, and love, pass away from heart attacks (50), infections (67), lung aneurisms (77), racing accidents (84), and colic or intestinal twisting (261), among other natural frailties and unnatural events. One of the handful of “heavens” in *Horse Heaven* is the fact that none of her principal horses dies. Smiley does not sacrifice any of these characters to principle as she does the majority of her characters in *The Greenlanders*. Because of trainer Buddy Crawford’s practices, however, the filly Residual comes very close to

being killed at the races. Though Buddy recognizes that at the track “the only sure thing is that a sure thing is never a sure thing” (565), he attempts to replace manifest uncertainty with marked certainty. As an alternative to caring for and training Residual, Buddy drugs her and overworks her with the help of crooked equine-practitioner Curtis Doheny. Effectively limiting the distinctive and celebrated maybes of the racetrack, the notorious pair takes illegal risks in order to shorten the long odds against winning.

Buddy is the solitary dishonest trainer in *Horse Heaven*. He also happens to be the single religious character in the novel. At times, he applies a spurious, superstitious version of Christianity to himself. While in these fugues, he stops mistreating horses in an effort to increase his own odds of having a good life. For Buddy, horses are always a means to something else. Tellingly, Buddy is also the only character in the novel to spend time in “hell.” He uses this noun to describe the torment he undergoes once he gets to the Breeders’ Cup Classic, the American racing destination that eludes him for the duration of his thirty-year career. With a representationally ironic move, Buddy’s descent from horseracing heaven to personal “hell” occurs just as his filly Residual wins her race (614). When she crosses the finish line to capture the eminent Breeders’ Cup Distaff title, Buddy is “spin[ning],” “coughing,” and completely confused (613-4). “Looking right at it but not seeing it,” he fails to experience the filly’s highly improbable win (614). Given the pertinent timing of his unprecedented breakdown, his “terr[or]” matches Residual’s post-race fright (614). Once Buddy, “who didn’t even know that he had won!,” arrives in the winner’s circle with the help of his team, and he carefully observes Residual, he remarks to himself that “She was beyond exhausted, beyond afraid. She was done for” (614). For the first time, Buddy empathizes with a horse.

The condition that Buddy and Residual share in the penultimate chapter of the novel (the last episode before the multileveled epilogue) recalls a memorable statement made by Buddy near the beginning of *Horse Heaven*. Masking callousness as common sense, Buddy declares that horses are dispensable so long as they win before they expire: "If the fucking horse falls over two steps after the finish line, he's done his job that he was born into this world to do" (17). Both clearly fortunate, neither character dies after winning the race. As Smiley illustrates in the epilogue, Residual retires to a farm while Buddy returns to training (619-20). The implication, however, is that Buddy cannot retreat from horse training until he duplicates his outside chances of returning to the big time level. Although he makes it to the Breeders' and returns with his trainer's stake of Residual's prize, not to mention the cachet and soon-to-be increased remuneration befitting such a distinction, he never experiences what is most likely the culmination or defining moment of his vocation.

Smiley puts the experience of winning into words in *A Year at the Races*:

"Gamblers everywhere will always feel that Heaven reached down and touched them personally if they win" (245). It is not hard to imagine that Smiley is obliquely referencing the half pious, half pitiless Buddy. Despite the fact that he is not a horseplayer *per se*, he devotes a considerable amount of his time and energy to the track. In so doing, his diligent investment in horses, just or not, runs a parallel course to that of pari-mutuel gamblers. Because he refuses to play according to the rules of the racecourse, though, he fails to experience the real reward of gambling. Notwithstanding the fact that he finally wins the Breeders', that he finally beats the longest of all long odds, heaven still evades Buddy, on earth at least.

Residual narrowly endures the “raging case of pleuropneumonia” that Buddy’s training tactics instigate (614). Her survival therefore speaks to the manipulation of animal destinies featured throughout *Horse Heaven*. Though all of Smiley’s six principal horses escape death, each of these “characters” has a sporadic and unpredictable fate. Mr T., for instance, a twenty-year-old gelding that won over \$300,000 in stakes under the registered name Terza Rima, is found starving in the grassless fields of a small farm in Texas at the start of the novel. Due to the pleas in a letter from eleven year-old Audrey Schmidt who lives nearby (23-4), Mr. T is rescued from these inhumane circumstances. Not long after Mr. Tompkins’ secretary forwards Audrey’s typed letter to mare manager Joy Gorham, a truck carries Mr. T to the Tompkins Ranch in California, where he previously trained. Mr. T starts to mentor the young filly Froney’s Sis. Yet despite the fact that Froney’s Sis wins a stakes race, she does not have a runner’s natural desire or form. When the filly, no longer a maiden, retires from the racetrack, Joy moves Mr. T to another area of the same ranch, where he unpredictably reunites with his former trainer Farley Jones. Mr. T then guides or ponies for Farley’s colt Limitless. As a result, Mr. T occupies a position on the team that escorts Limitless to Longchamp, Paris, for “The Grand Prix de l’Arc de Triomphe” (572), the French equivalent to the Breeders’ Cup. Mr. T, who was bred in Germany and won stakes in France, as Audrey’s letter detailed (23-4), relishes his return to these heavenly, wet, green pastures. He communicates these feelings to Elizabeth the horse-whisperer, along with everyone else around him. Revitalized, he canters like a youthful colt (579). As he does so, he channels his desire to retire in France. Given his request, and the consideration of Limitless’ team, Mr. T does not return to the USA.

For his part, Limitless wins the race at Longchamp, a first for an American-bred horse. He does not race again however. Farley and his owners, Rosalind and Alexander P. Maybrick, decide to sell Limitless for seven million dollars to Matsuo Oku Stud, a stallion farm on a small island in Japan where, as legend has it, "horses live forever" (618). The spokesperson for this farm is a "Mr. Nakadate" (618), which is likely Smiley's nod to Neil Nakadate, her most enthusiastic critic. An adaptation of the retirements of Residual, Mr. T, and Limitless, Froney's Sis experiences a similar withdrawal from the racetrack. In the aftermath of her short-lived career, she finds herself at Ellen's hunter-jumper stable and riding school in Maryland. Since "racing did not suit her" (597), Kyle Tompkins agrees to give Froney's Sis to Audrey, who works part-time for Ellen. Now fourteen, Audrey renames Froney's Sis Chantilly (621). Suitably, this change of name reflects on another recent addition to Ellen's conspicuously unnamed stable.

Around three months earlier, Ellen receives a big black horse that has just been gelded. She does not know his name. In view of the fact that he always bucks and forever runs through her fields, she cannot read his identification tattoo. All she knows is that he was ruled off the racetrack for "savaging someone," and gelded because "he was still bananas" even without "the stress of racing" (518-9). He calms after a month, the usual testosterone tapering-off time. A natural jumper, he begins vaulting fences of his own volition. Because her new horse uses his instinct, Ellen names him Sudden Intuition, or, strangely, Toots (547). Later, while training him, she reiterates his odd double name: "Sudden Intuition, or Toots" (599). Confident in his newfound impulses, she never bothers to check his tattoo. She consequently never learns that his real name is Epic Steam, that he was "a three-million-dollar two-year-old" (143), and that he was convicted

of savagery for stomping an assistant starter in the gate (487-8). With his transition from the racecourse to Ellen's, his past does not matter. His innovative names call attention to the possibilities of identity. With the starting gate behind him, he moves and jumps forward. History, gates, and fences, all of which can be seen as constraints on his animal destiny, no longer demarcate his unique boundaries.

Playing up the migrations of all the feature horses in *Horse Heaven*, Sudden Intuition or Toots starts over on account of his own salient actions and movements. In like fashion to Ellen herself, whose family name is never revealed, the alternating destinations, attributes, and names of Smiley's horses address the open, evolving nature of human character. Names and titles neither delimit equine nor human identity. As illustrated in *Moo*, a single person can adopt multiple parts in a narrative. Reinforcing the correlation between *Moo* and *Horse Heaven*, Smiley peoples the margins of the sequel with a number of academics. Contributing to a sense of justice that consolidates expertise, luck, representation, and fate, these academics symbolically remain on the sidelines of the many narratives in *Horse Heaven*.

Initiating what comes to be a prolonged peripheral focus on the connections between scholarly conjecture and the lively social layout of the racetrack, horse-trainer Farley is likened to a "visiting physics professor" near the beginning of the novel (58). Later on, Smiley's free indirect narrator reminds readers that the likeable Farley resembles a "teacher or scientist" (468). Stressing what might be called the plurality and democracy of both scholastic and pari-mutuel approaches to revision and interpretation, Smiley integrates several other disparate references that associate versions of schoolwork to versions of track work. Louisa, who is the wife of horse-trainer Dick Winterson, for

example, “teaches vocal technique at a College in New York” (86). Characteristically lamenting what he dismisses as the unjust ratio of effort to reward at the track, at one point Buddy mentions his “Really fat” cousin who is a lazy “professor at a college or something” (130). In the same tangential vein, Ho Ho Ice Chill, a rap artist and racehorse owner, sleeps next to the doctoral dissertation of the woman he loves, a comparative literature professor at the college where he spent one year (145). Roberto Acevedo likewise postpones his formal education. He defers his secondary schooling to be a jockey while still undersized. He disappears from the novel after he rides Limitless to an unprecedented American win at the Arc and moves in with Mlle. Lalande-Ferrier, who “has a position at the Sorbonne” (594). Furthermore representing a relation between international travel, education, and horseracing, Plato, an assistant professor at Berkeley who studied in England, gives up his academic post in order to be Kyle Tompkins’ “house intellectual” in the “very new field” of “future management” (352). Throughout *Horse Heaven*, the majority of these characters emerge in secondary roles or as extras. Relegated for the most part to the background of intersecting plotlines, these figures have a tendency to be forgotten, faraway, or former academics.

As runaway students, former professors, or would-be instructors, these characters draw attention to what Smiley sees as another category of scholar. Unsurprisingly, given *Horse Heaven*’s sideline emphasis on academics, in *A Year at the Races* she compares the track world to the academic world. She alleges that “The available public information on all the horses running in any race gives the advantage to retention and interpretation of detail, and around every racetrack there are dedicated interpreters of detail who have devoted as much time and energy to contemplation of their subject as any professor at

any university in the country. And no doubt the two categories of scholars have been remunerated to the same degree” (245). Smiley herself seems to be a member of both of these groups: she professes and she gambles. Neither purely an academic scholar nor merely a racecourse scholar, her identity is indistinct, like the developing identities of her self-motivated characters. A dynamic personality, she goes on to say why she privileges racetrack wagering over other forms of legalized gambling. Lapsing into parataxis as she excitedly dilates upon horseplayers, she asserts that “It is always available to them to go out and watch the animals and their jockeys on the track eight or ten times a day, five or six days a week, all year round. It is always available to them to recognize that, in addition to money, there are horses; in addition to greed, there is beauty and talent and effort and joy and heartbreak” (245).

Smiley’s evident enthusiasm for the multiple facets of horseracing, an interest that in due course highlights emotional attachment over dedicated interpretation, appears to elucidate why Justa Bob is the most compelling equine character in her racetrack novel. His story is neither about money nor greed. Moreover, repetition and a series of “ands” typify the adapted *Wanderlust* form of his narrative. In distinction to the other horses in *Horse Heaven*, Justa Bob inevitably journeys all over the US because he is not a stakes horse. That is to say, he is not a big money, big race, big time horse. As a “claimer,” he belongs to a different class of racehorses. Smiley clarifies this racetrack “staple” in a footnote in the first chapter of *A Year At the Races*. “Claiming races,” she explicates, “are a staple of tracks all over the world. A horse in a claiming race (a ‘selling race’ in England) may be bought by any owner for a set price, in cash, which the claiming party deposits in the racing secretary’s office before the race. The price is set in the published

conditions of the race. As soon as the claimed horse goes into the starting gate, he belongs to the new owner no matter what happens in the race. Any winnings go to the previous owner” (19). Early in *Horse Heaven*, Roberto Acevedo translates the different types of racehorses into social classes after Justa Bob is claimed for the first time. Visibly saddened, Roberto notes that “Allowance races . . . were like the middle-class—a realm of hardworking stability that stakes horses rose out of on their way to wealth and greatness and claimers fell out of on their way to oblivion” (56). Standing in the winner’s circle, the jockey laments the red claim-tag on Justa Bob’s nose while trainer Farley puts the random fate of claimers into plain words: “You’ve got to run them in races they might win or you’ve got to retire them. But I hate to see [Justa Bob] go. He could end up anywhere. You know, horses start out in France and end up in North Dakota or Hong Kong” (56).

His movements mapping America as they catalogue various racetrack characters, Justa Bob travels between many owners in *Horse Heaven*. Since his races are always dramatic, he promptly develops loyal fan followings wherever he competes. On account of his status as a claimer, he likewise lives on luck, both good and bad. Following his last win with Farley, he runs for Buddy, who is also in southern California. After three more races with Roberto as his sole jock, Justa Bob then goes north to Golden Gate Fields, in San Francisco, where he runs a race with an unparalleled finale. He finishes first even as his jockey soars through the air after a competing horse lifts him off Justa Bob only seconds from the finish line. An inquiry follows as Justa Bob, unperturbed, dozes. Because the “book said one thing—that a horse must have a rider in order to win the race—but the heart said another,” the post-race inquiry seemingly lasts “forever” (168).

In the end, racetrack officials close their extended deliberation “by the book, placing the aggressor last and Justa Bob second to last” (168). Fred Linklater, Justa Bob’s newest trainer, sees this turn of events as “the best loss he had ever sustained” (168). The reward, for trainer, spectator, adjudicator, and horse alike is the race itself. Albeit, the implication is that just as Justa Bob can customarily change homes, legislators can modify or amend the laws and regulations that govern and define their game. In lieu of directly dismissing Justa Bob’s clearly proscribed finish, administrators reevaluate the justice of a particular track policy. By doing so, these judges affirm the dynamic nature of legal systems. If a particular case can be evaluated as falling beyond or between lawful precedents, legality must make adjustments or corrections. Typified by Justa Bob’s unpredictable migrations, justice must always be open to claims that extend, alter, or rectify its configuration and implementation. Also emblematic of Smiley’s encyclopedic project, the provinces of legality are never comprehensive: new instances, novel intersections, and unprecedented stories refine the structures of the law.

Subsequent to his short yet thrilling tenure under the tutelage of Fred Linklater, trainer Lin Jay “The Pisser” Hwang, who is also in San Francisco, appropriates Justa Bob. Unfortunately for the aging horse and his latest trainer, Justa Bob sustains a quarter-crack. The Round Pebble, a silent, eighty-year-old Cantonese woman who ordinarily does not like her son The Pisser’s claimers, assumes the responsibility of minding this unpredictable or “odds-defy[ing]” leg injury (217). Following his brief stint as The Round Pebble’s “Iron Plum,” which is what The Pisser’s mother christens the sociable Justa Bob (217), he works with two new trainers in Denver, Colorado, namely, the young Lily Dodd and the Icelander Hakon Borgulfsson, before he continues east to Chicago,

Illinois. After a long road trip, Justa Bob arrives at William Vance's small farm suffering from dehydration. As is common in such precarious cases, the distressed and weakened horse develops colic, a painful, life-threatening obstruction of the intestines. Unable to choose "death" for an animal, even an aging six-year-old claimer that he has hitherto neither raced nor trained (304), William pays "sixty-eight hundred dollars" for Justa Bob's emergency surgical procedure (389). After three and a half months of recuperation, Justa Bob returns to the track with William in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he startlingly wins and wins and wins—and always by the small margin of a "nostril" (389). Emphasizing these persistently narrow victories, the owner-trainer points out that "You can't run this horse if you got a weak heart. Or he'll kill you" (389). Though William makes over sixty thousand dollars from Justa Bob's inconceivable eight-consecutive wins, he "really likes" the fact that "Bettors around New Orleans love it. They love to bet on Justa Bob and they love to bet against him" (389). As "a sure thing who doesn't look like a sure thing" (389), the injury-prone claimer attains racetrack stardom because he relentlessly rallies to beat the odds against him. Illustrating that improbable stories can work out, Justa Bob is a model underdog.

After his eighth-consecutive win, his photo-finish nose is tagged once again. Still seemingly delimited by Midwest locales, Justa Bob arrives somewhere in Texas. His latest owner, the suspicious RT Favor, "née Robert Biddle" (491), soon leaves him underfed and ignored. Without warning, RT then disappears. As a result, the down-and-out Justa Bob does not race. Given the claim-horse's fall into "oblivion," a disappearance his former jockey Roberto disappointingly envisaged (56), William, who is back in Chicago, tries to track down the horse. Unable to get any news of Justa Bob, William

places ads in two racing magazines offering cash reward for “Justa Bob, by Bob’s Dusty, out of Justa Gal, by Rough Justice” (491). Giving up the search after six months, William endeavors to forget the memorable horse (550). Meanwhile, Angel Smith, a very slow, very old man, watches over RT’s two largely neglected horses. They in turn care for their substitute caretaker by “stamping” and “whinnying and whinnying” until his wife comes running after Angel collapses from a heart attack (590-1). No longer physically capable of tending his two rescuers, Angel sends RT’s abandoned horses to an auction with his friend Horacio Delagarza. In spite of his “Fifty-four starts, twenty wins, [and] seventeen seconds or thirds” comprising a “lifetime winnings of \$172,000,” the “slaughter guy” buys the skeletal yet composed Justa Bob, now known simply as Amigo, for thirty measly dollars (603).

In a remarkable twist of fate, Horacio saves the life of the amicable “Amigo.” Suddenly approaching the driver of the slaughterer’s “double-bottomed cattle-truck, now crammed with [disposable] horses,” Horacio negotiates the repurchase of the unusually familiar and self-possessed horse for less than two hundred dollars (604). Presumably aware that a cattle trailer “was just not his type of conveyance at all, at all,” once the driver opens the door of the overcrowded truck, Justa Bob straightforwardly saunters down the ramp and gives “Horacio justa bump in the chest” (604). Without any prompting or coaxing whatsoever, the presumably doomed horse understands that some sort of oversight requires correction. As a supplementary materialization of Justa Bob’s auspicious combination of fate, luck, and coincidence, all of which seem to be emanations of his distinctively impressionable character, shortly after salvaging Justa Bob, first-time horse-owner Horacio contacts William through the Jockey Club.

Incomparably thrilled, and with “plenty of feed,” William heads south for Texas in order to recover Justa Bob in the epilogue of *Horse Heaven* (617). Although just a claimer, Justa Bob manages to influence the irregular or coarse destiny that his lineage foretells. An out-of-the-ordinary emblem of the “Rough Justice” of horseracing, a caveat fundamental to the racetrack dictum “That’s Horses,” Justa Bob somehow manages to beat the long odds against his racetrack success, not to mention his actual survival. The adventures of this claim-horse suggest that, irrespective of social class, fate and justice can be regulated and fulfilled at individual levels. Even unjustly underprivileged characters can contribute to the restructuring of their ill-fated personal destinies.

In *Horse Heaven*, the statistical and genealogical units that typify Thoroughbred taxonomy do not determine Smiley’s horses. In opposition to the stable identities put forth in the *General Studbook*, the physical and psychological identities of her horses tend to modify as they change locations, owners, and names. Smiley’s horses are not merely variables and vessels. They work. They tire. They travel. They rest. As “individuals,” they independently transform as they distinctively mature. Like people, they can take active stakes in shaping the evolution of their own stories. In opposition to the collective narrative the Greenlanders advocate, an endorsement that dismisses the chronicles of many women in the colony, the ironic equine narratives of self-control in *Horse Heaven*, and Justa Bob’s in particular, call attention to the chances and accidents that human figures can consider so as to refashion the courses of their own stories. Perhaps taking a page from Aristotle, who conjectured that “coincidences are most striking when they have an air of design” (“Poetics” 55), Smiley’s encyclopedic novel assimilates a ruling strategy wherein the movements and preferences of racehorses play

up the coincidences that cross and connect the stories of different people. Unlike the cruel, quarrelsome Buddy and the crazy, melodramatic Leo, both of whom are governed and controlled by the betting model “you win some and you lose some,” attentive speculators can take advantage of any wager regardless of its upshot. As a reflection of this adaptability, these same conscientious gamblers can profit from haphazard encounters and improbable circumstances.

Because they are neither resigned to the concessions of Lady Luck, nor discouraged by the results of particular races, composed horseplayers can contribute to the construction of their own unpredictable yet intersecting storylines, at the track and beyond it. As evidenced by the professional work of the animal-communicator Elizabeth (who writes books about human relationships [554-5]), human characters can make significant decisions in spite of the fate that oversees their everyday lives. Smiley insinuates her preoccupation with the twists and turns that connect, disconnect, and reconnect the narratives of her individual characters by integrating the motif of inattentiveness into *Horse Heaven* (122, 172, 176, 247, 394). This trope barely extends past the halfway point of the novel. Not to listen, the author shows, is at once to interact and not to interact. It is to be present and absent at one and the same time. Tellingly, Smiley phases this pattern out of her most complex work as she incorporates more and more international destinations into the fabric of her text. Travel, especially in an international context, integrates novelty, strangeness, culture shock, and a greater sense of self-awareness, all of which encourage the individual agent to pay careful attention to the people that she encounters and the places that she visits. These global experiences translate into greater awareness—attention, integrity—on the home front.

Indicating an interconnection between movement, freedom, and justice, when people, especially married couples, physically separate, they begin to communicate in *Horse Heaven*. Such is the case with protagonist Rosalind Maybrick and her estranged husband Alexander P. Maybrick. A contemporary adaptation of Birgitta from *The Greenlanders*, Rozzy, who is also remarkably calm, has special “powers” (37). One of these unusual skills unwittingly enables her to make people cheerful. Exposing the link between her equanimity and the happiness that she instills in others, she identifies her inimitable quality of “self-possession” (31), before she fully comprehends how she involuntarily “cast[s] her spell[s]” (36). In correspondence to Justa Bob, who induces joy in fans and some of his owners, Rozzy illustrates her self-assurance by ensuring that “she never has to be in a rush” (31). While in the public eye, neither of these two leading characters ever exudes a sense of dishevelment or discomfort. Never rushing, Justa Bob just wins. Forever calm, Rozzy radiates poise. As an additional analogue between these protagonists, in the same way that Justa Bob saves his new custodian Angel from a heart attack, Rozzy comforts the stranger Farley after his undefined public collapse (274).

Given their discernibly attentive demeanors, and the lasting senses of fulfillment and achievement they not only evince but also evoke, each of these figures can be interpreted as a mapper of sorts. Inscribing his gripping story in the minds of local spectators and caretakers all through the US, and finally the Midwest, Justa Bob maps America. Recontextualizing Justa Bob’s orientations globally, Rozzy, who was born and schooled in Appleton, Wisconsin, “map[s] the world” (401). Her story starting where Justa Bob’s concludes (which is most likely in semiretirement as a mentor for William’s upcoming racehorses in Chicago and New Orleans), as a socialite, art connoisseur, horse

owner, and “prophetess” (180) ex-Midwesterner Rozzy travels to Singapore, Ireland, Istanbul, Nice, and Edinburgh, among many stateside locations (371; 390; 415; 502; 530). Compellingly, when she purchases art for her galleries, she immediately loses interest in the objects themselves. Thinking to herself, the cosmopolitan character reasons why: “What others thought was the product, beautiful rooms, was only the by-product. The product was the flow itself” (394). With this internal observation, which takes place on the same page whereupon Smiley discontinues her inattentiveness theme, Rozzy underscores the *leitmotif* of *Horse Heaven*. For her, as for Justa Bob, the “flow” or process matters more than the result, as when Justa Bob wins a race, then loses it because he has no rider. Because they privilege means over ends, Justa Bob and Rozzy do justice to themselves and to those around them. As judicious and attentive figures, figures Kant might read as mindful of the “categorical imperative” in all of its unconditional *a priori* practical principles (33-77), they pay attention to themselves and to others in equal measure. As Kant emphasizes, the “one end” of the categorical imperative (43), which “declares an action to be objectively necessary without reference to any purpose, *i.e.*, without any other end” (42), is indeed the “natural necessity” of “*happiness*” (43):

Elucidating that happiness, though a necessity, is not always a reality, Al, who is at odds with his wife Rozzy, likewise decides to travel widely. An entrepreneur, he manages industrial projects in Moscow, Lithuania, Japan, Rio de Janeiro, and Helsinki, among other destinations (366; 449; 530; 530; 569). Yet after being alienated from one another for more than a year (save for brief telephone calls beset by static), the couple reconciles at the Pré Catalan (a restaurant they visited on their honeymoon in Paris over a decade before) to celebrate the improbable win of their horse Limitless at the Arc de

Triomphe (588-9). By way of her long-shot success, *Limitless* reintroduces and rejoins the couple. This outwardly random turn of events recalls how Mr. T introduced and united horse-trainer Farley and mare-manager Joy. Neither knowing the other's name, they first fall in love from a distance at a race (232-3). Both single and secretly more-or-less obsessing over a solitary glimpse of an elusive stranger, they finally meet again—simultaneously thinking “lucky me” (307)—when Joy leads Mr. T to Farley's barn nearly three months later. In order for each of these impromptu rapports to rekindle, these individual characters needed an amalgamation of space, time, privacy, luck, and confidence so as to reestablish their senses of selfhood. Unique fulfillment insists on this vetted stake in the self, a risky pledge that permits the individual to begin to act justly—an endless beginning indicating that narratives are never just. Rather, stories are always capable of moving towards justice.

Conclusion

Risks and Starts

At once fashioned as prudent synopses and persuasive finales, closing arguments attempt to convince adjudicators of the justness of a particular story. Naturally, the legal processes that precede a counsel's final statement influence the formulation of this argument. No matter how diligently and with how much conviction an attorney designs and delivers her case, her last remarks, like the ones she makes during a trial, reveal the shared deliberations that jurisprudence demands—not just the narrative that she preplanned. A counsel's position evolves in conjunction with the interchanges that constitute juridical procedure. If a trial lawyer disregards the unpredictable developments that define the legal process, she does a disservice to her client and to jurisprudence. In the same way as fictional dispositions to justice incorporate narratological interventions, as well as analytic adjustments and textual corrections, the law must implicate itself in constant reconceptualization. As the vehicle for the allocation of the ideal of justice, judicial reflection must be as arguable as the conception of justice itself. Even on the home front, justice cannot be served in one way only.

As configured in the work of Jonathan Franzen, Don DeLillo, and Jane Smiley, local administrations of justice are informed through prolonged deliberations mediated through global experiences. In *The Corrections*, *Valparaiso*, and *Horse Heaven*, for example, principal characters travel to international spaces in order to escape the contrivances of American forms of legality. In leaving the USA, and in eventually fleeing

war-torn Lithuania, Chip Lambert of *The Corrections* identifies a connection between self-justification and self-correction. His revelatory auto-correction begins after he gets caught in a political *coup* and a life-threatening armed robbery in an outlaw zone. While in the empty, lawless space between two Baltic states, the unlikely hero of *The Corrections* realizes that no one has a monopoly on victimhood. As a victim, Chip recognizes that revenge cannot cancel out the injustices perpetrated upon him. Instead, he justifies his allegedly unjust actions by articulating the narratives of others. By traveling and by telling the stories of his family members, he legitimates the personal actions that the campus tribunal at D— College adjudicates as unjust. Justice, Chip shows, is not about one single event or narrative. Because they leave the continental US as well, Chip's cosmopolitan sister Denise and his suburban mother Enid likewise associate validation with the ability to appreciate the countless stories of the people around them. Justice inevitably concerns more than one person and therefore presumes the dimensions of narrative, if not novels. In distinguishing the countless stories around them, Enid and Denise recognize the participatory inevitability of justice. Justice obtains in social environments, where people have to tutor themselves in cooperation and getting along.

In *Valparaiso*, Michael Majeski ultimately avoids a similar notion of legal restraint by unexpectedly embarking upon an aircraft bound for the tip of the Americas. Without regular travel tickets or plans, he lands in Valparaiso, Chile, a continent away from his scheduled destination of Valparaiso, Indiana. Ironically turning around the submission to systems that ostensibly saves him from suicide in the turbulent air somewhere above South America, Michael reclaims his sense of individuality by acting out his death on a televised talk show. This public performance enables him to escape the

circumscription that the machinations of the media represent, as emblemized by his wife Livia's silent and endless pedaling on her stationary bike. In openly "dying," Michael regains his right to privacy. In sanctioning his official death, he reclaims the movement and isolation that individuals require, in Don DeLillo's estimation at least.

Like Chip, who performs a series of escapes to and from global spaces, Michael leaves the US because he finds himself alienated, then departs from the US where he finds himself victimized by the circumlocutions of the media. His sense of justice results not from an understanding of the stories of others *per se*, but from a newfound appreciation of his own, changeable story. He realizes that he can modify the limits of his narrative according to his will—a will that first requires an experience akin to the aloneness that Chip encounters on his solo, predawn walk to the Polish border. Chip and Michael both experience versions of the isolation that compromises justice. Though justice mediates interpersonal relations, it also works at the individual level. These scenarios suggest that justice can take in tiny or grand spaces, but the ultimate test of justice is about the disposition of the characters to assume a just attitude even while alone. Justice begins with an understanding of the self prior to one's entry into social systems.

In another adaptation of independence and justice as arbitrated through global experiences, private and public spaces, and responsive actions, Rosalind Maybrick of *Horse Heaven* runs from and returns to the US. As she travels, she integrates herself into the stories of strangers. She extends the margins of her own narrative at the same time. A wish granter, Rozzy's advantageous intuitions run counter to the laborious calculations that tend to determine legal apparatuses, as exemplified in the precincts of the pari-

mutuel and the racetrack. For Rozzy, as for her *Horse Heaven* co-hero, the popular claim-horse Justa Bob, success and survival are the consequences of unpredictable movements and intersections. In opposition to Leo the pitiable gambling fanatic, who is dissatisfied with his life because he fails to distinguish the differences between routine and instinct, not to mention between betting and living, Rozzy and Justa Bob exert free agency by insinuating themselves into random narratives. Like Diana in DeLillo's *The Engineer of Moonlight*, these two characters justify their dealings, and those of the people around them, by not only abiding but also welcoming the risky opportunities that force them to adapt to new environments. According to Smiley, justice is instituted through the commemoration of multiple stories. Every one of these stories, in turn, leads to another constellation of unprecedented and interminable narratives.

In depicting alternate emanations of spatial escape and personal adaptation, Smiley, DeLillo, and Franzen recall and invert the circumstances under which McTeague's narrative concludes. In the last lines of Frank Norris' naturalistic novel *McTeague*, the title character finally finds himself left for dead in an empty space handcuffed to the man whom he has just murdered. The rapid death of his ally-turned-adversary satirically augurs McTeague's own slow demise. McTeague is left in a theatrical space suddenly rendered untheatrical. His story ends along with the novel. Without an audience or an antagonist, he cannot persist. Like a Greenlander locked in his farmstead, McTeague expires when he can no longer share his story. Even the hero of the Inuit film *Atarnajuat*, who reclaims his sense of individuality by successfully fleeing his persecutors in the vast arctic, survives because others integrate him into their communal story. In contrast to McTeague, Atarnajuat shares his story after he locates his

personhood in isolation. He lives to share his story not because he escapes the would-be killers of a neighboring clan, but because strangers nurse his naked body—which is a text of battle-scars and frostbite lesions—back to health. Neither murder, nor escape, nor isolation guarantees survival. Rather, novelistic narratives do.

In contemporary American fiction, protagonists endure variable versions of victimhood because they widen the scope of their personal experiences. Not alone, silenced, or imprisoned within domestic spheres, lead characters in DeLillo, Smiley, and Franzen reconstitute the limits of their own lives by participating in impromptu international activities. As they illustrate the prevalence of justice within the everyday lives of Americans, all three authors elaborate on how global experiences inform local enactments of jurisprudence. Deliberated and delivered in campus tribunals, suburban homes, airplane cabins, television studios, theatres, casinos, and racecourses, spectacles of justice abound in contemporary American culture. Consequently, US citizens constantly participate in acts of justice. They do so as judges, plaintiffs, defendants, or witnesses. Spectacular or not, evolving implementations of legality occupy a vital place in the individual lives—or stories—of the mass collective.

In law and literature, the idea of “representation” is central. Chip, as narrator, bears witness to his own misguided behavior. Michael Majeski acknowledges a mishap and near suicide. Gunnar, the survivor in Smiley’s *The Greenlanders*, inscribes the story of a disappearing Nordic civilization into his writing and weaving as a representation of what has happened. The free indirect narrator of *Horse Heaven* openly concludes her representation of the racetrack with a focus on proliferating and uncontainable narratives. The reason that legality offers a crucial place in the lives of people is that it, too, implies

a convergence of representation with lived reality. Like representative fictional characters, people have ideas about what is just and they represent these ideas to themselves as truth. But the law will reprove and correct its subjects when those ideas diverge too far from the law. Fictional narratives articulate these same discrepancies and departures. In the courtroom, a lawyer represents one or sometimes one represents oneself. In the end, that representation may not be the truth either; it is just how individuals persevere in relation to reality. For this reason, justice requires multiple stories. Focused on parity, strengthened by conditionality, relying on refutation, juridical practice continues its onward march because it requires correction—or more stories—as well. Legality develops not because of precedents but because of transitions. Jurisprudence is only fair when it risks its claims to justness. Never conclusive, justice eulogizes the trajectories that contemporary American fiction makes a virtue of witnessing—and representing.

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