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Writing Complicity: Race, Liberalism, and Post-War American Literature

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Introduction: Writing Complicity

In or around spring 1967, according to Mary McCarthy, the ethics of American writing changed. She was writing from Hanoi, where she had been sent by the *New York Times Review of Books* to report on the Vietnam War, and she was undergoing what she called an "identity crisis." During the course of her assignment, she had become uncomfortable with "an unspoken feeling of conflict with the North Vietnamese value system, a conflict that grew more and more obscure as I sought to bring it to the light."[1] In her final report, despite these admitted difficulties, she attempted to specify the source of her discomfort. She now saw that her writerly ideals had been radically undermined. She had arrived on her tour with "the confidence of the American who knows himself to be fair-minded, able to see both sides, disinterested, objective, etc."[2] These qualities, though long calcified, remained discoverable in the self. They were the "fossil remains of the old America."[3] Henry James's characters saw themselves in this way and so McCarthy had seen herself. During her time in North Vietnam, however, she had come to realize that her valorization of disinterestedness was itself ideological. The myth upon which it had been built, of an America without colonial interests, was untenable. She wrote: "my detachment and novelistic powers of observation were not only inappropriate but also a sort of alibi. The plea of being elsewhere, at my blameless typewriter, while the crime was committed would not stand up any more for an American writer."[4]

It was an extraordinary *volte-face* for McCarthy, whose resolute anti-Communism and insistence on fastidious disinterestedness had been consistent since she disavowed Trotskyism in the early 1940s and emerged as a new voice among the New York Intellectuals. Her rise as part of that group had been remarkable, and the commercial success of her 1963 novel *The Group* had brought her wider attention. Now her various securities, privileges, and cultural capital as a well-known writer "weighed as heavy as my suitcases, as

my unenvied freedom."[5] McCarthy's claims for an abrupt shift in the ethics of American writing raises some difficult questions. If her tour of North Vietnam was the occasion for what she called her "awful self-recognition," then at what point had the plea of being elsewhere stopped functioning as a legitimate alibi for liberal writers confronted with violence and injustice?[6] When did those ideals of disinterestedness and scrupulous observation she associates with the history of the Republic calcify into dead monuments? Her horror, we must suspect, is bound up with her growing sense that Vietnam marks not so much the establishment of a new set of protocols for establishing guilt and responsibility among writers as it does the recognition that the old protocols had been in ruin for some time. From this perspective, McCarthy's concerns are not only with her present self and the ethics of her assignment. They also address the now-visible enterprise of post-World War Two American writing itself, for which she, as was now painfully apparent, was a key representative. McCarthy was 57 years old, the author of five novels, a best-selling memoir, and a considerable portfolio of acclaimed essays and reviews.

The most surprising aspect of McCarthy's confession, given her reputation for incisive and coolly objective prose, is its ponderousness. In the course of these pages, she lapses—consciously or not—into her own equivalent of a late-Jamesian mode. "It came down to this," she offers, as her prose begins to meander:

> If I was an unsuspicious source, worthy of belief, so far as a wide American public was concerned, this meant I was a suspicious character to all who mistrusted that public's standards and morality—including myself. On the other hand, the command (if that is not too strong a word) of an audience was my value to the North Vietnamese, and if I vacated that little seat of judgment I had pre-empted years ago and resigned the duties, perhaps inflated by my vanity, that went with it, then I might as well have stayed at home.

> Everybody knows that you cannot serve God and Mammon, but few can refrain from trying; they count on being the exception, especially if, as in my case, they do not set out to serve Mammon but allow Him, as they think, to serve *them*, since that seems to be His whim.[7]

McCarthy's prose registers the difficulty she had foreseen when warning us of "a conflict that grew more and more obscure as I sought to bring it to the light."[8] Replete with qualifications and parentheses, her style here heaps clause upon clause as it attempts to explain the moral complexities of her situation. Subject and object positions become reversible in the course of a sentence. The more she strives to cut through the dilemma for clarity, the more words she needs.

It remains unclear what the "crime" is for which McCarthy now understands her alibi to be inadequate. She is conscious, it seems, of this ambiguity, since she concludes her report by returning to it with the ominous warning that "surrender is a confession of failure. Yet we will be lucky, though we do not see it, if failure, finally, is the only crime we are made to confess to."[9] Is she referring to the indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets in Vietnam? The pursuit of a war in East Asia? Or, in a broader sense, the project of US imperialism itself? These registers of scale, geographic and temporal, are difficult to parse, as is the precise nature of McCarthy's involvement as a writer. Clearly, she cannot be understood as directly or solely culpable for these actions (in fact, she had been a voluble and early critic of intervention in Vietnam). Perhaps it is easier to interpret this passage as McCarthy's admission of guilt for *inaction* rather than action. The following year, her close friend Hannah Arendt was to argue in that "there is no such thing as being or feeling guilty for things that happened without oneself actively participating in them," but the language of the Vietnam report seems to contradict the categorical definitiveness supplied by Arendt's declaration.[10] This language, by contrast, places McCarthy in a position she calls *complicity*.

"The illusion of being effective," she writes, "the sole justification of my presence there, began to waver in North Vietnam the more I called upon it to defend me against the charge of complicity with American ruling circles—a complicity attested by the mirror."[11] Complicity with ruling circles, then, is the closest we get to a satisfactory answer to our questions, a conceptual limit for McCarthy's usually pointed powers of analysis, beyond which she is unable to go. The term *complicity* derives from the Latin *complicāre*, which means to fold, and which also gives us the word modern word *complicate*.[12] To be complicit is to be folded into a structure of harm over which one has little or no direct control.

In this study I take complicity to name a structure of feeling dominant among American intellectuals and writers in the period running from 1945 to around 1970, one corresponding to the establishment and then fracture of post-war liberal consensus. McCarthy's anguished realization of complicity with harms perpetrated by the state, which gathers a nebulous feeling of guilt for actions not taken with an indirect responsibility for crimes committed by others, offers us an instructive example of a pattern discernible throughout the period. It can be seen in a number of genres and modes of writing, from political and philosophical essays to journalism and reportage, from short stories and crime fiction to the novels of postmodernist metafiction. The aim of *Writing Complicity* is to *historicize* complicity in a way that will show why it became a dominant concern in American literature, and how various writers and thinkers dealt with it both formally and thematically. In this period, figures such as McCarthy started to become conscious of complicity as a special kind of problem for writing, which issued new demands on their creative powers. As a result, they returned to established genres and found fresh ways to exploit their conventions; they experimented with narrative structures and expressions of self-consciousness; they established distinctive tones, voices, and patterns of imagery. What we find in McCarthy's moment of "awful self-recognition" in the mirror, then, is not only the

realization of a historically specific structure of feeling, but also an example of a process replicated many times over during the post-war period, of a writer feeling their way towards a new means of expression capable of representing it.

The Trouble with Complicity

In building a literary-historical account of complicity in post-1945 America I will be drawing on a rich tradition of scholarship. A cluster of midcentury thinkers, including Arendt, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Theodor W. Adorno, have left us with an archive for the understanding of complicity as a social and philosophical problem. Their role in *Writing Complicity* is doubled insofar as they also belong to the period under scrutiny and are implicated in the historical narrative I am constructing. All of them, in their different ways, explored how their work related to specific American contexts, from the US culture industry to its literary traditions, and from the Vietnam War to the civil rights movement. Often, those theorizing what we now recognize as complicity were also those wrestling with it as lived experience in the present. Among these mid-twentieth-century intellectuals, there was no outside position from which to write objectively about complicity. Adorno exemplified this problem most explicitly. In the introduction to *Minima Moralia*, the collection of aphorisms he wrote in wartime Los Angeles, he reflected on his exile: “I did not yet admit to myself the complicity that enfolds all those who, in the face of unspeakable collective events, dare to speak of the individual at all.”[13] In the process of writing, he had learned that the intimate personal form he had chosen in the world-historical circumstances of the war made complicity an unavoidable situation. The question was how to incorporate that realization into the work itself. Adorno’s understanding of complicity as a self-reflexive problem, which enveloped the intellectual’s own writing and ramified in the process of expression, prompts a foundational observation:

those who did most to establish a conceptual framework for grasping complicity did so by building from the inside out, grappling with it at close quarters before gaining the necessary distance to see it clearly. The strenuous intellectual efforts entailed in this operation, and the contradictions it generated, are necessarily part of this book's story.

Closer to our own historical moment, the twenty-first century has seen a concerted focus on complicity by scholars working in a number of disciplines. In law, scholarship on complicity has tended to focus on questions of blame and culpability, and on determining precisely what can be legitimately identified as complicity (as distinct, for example, from its near term *collaboration*).[14] In parallel, the avoidance of complicity has become a major concern for contemporary business ethics, especially since the 2010 UN global compact identified the avoidance of corporate complicity as one of its ten key principles.[15] In philosophical and literary studies, meanwhile, a number of scholars have returned to the work of Adorno, Arendt, and Sartre in order to excavate their theories of complicity and use them to develop new approaches.[16] These approaches have been applied in a variety of contexts diverse in their historical and geographical reach, from the literature of the Holocaust to the end of apartheid in South Africa, from the murder of Trayvon Martin to neoliberal governmentality. In doing so, they have demonstrated the relevance of complicity for discussing contemporary concerns about collective responsibility for large-scale systems of social harm. Despite their diversity, what unites the majority of these twenty-first-century studies is their acknowledgement of the analytical, categorical, and terminological problems raised by the discourse of complicity.

Although complicity appears as a necessary concept for thinking about how individual subjects in modernity relate to depersonalized systems of harm and injustice, it also suffers from a certain conceptual imprecision. We saw something of this difficulty in McCarthy's use of the term in her Vietnam report, which leaves her readers uncertain about

where she stands in relation to the crimes she refers to, or even what those crimes are. Complicity is constitutively nebulous because it encompasses and confounds various oppositions upon which writers often depend in order to structure sense-making in their texts: subject and object, agent and instrument, innocence and guilt, collective and individual.[17] The problem has persisted up into the twenty-first century. In the UN-commissioned report that led to complicity being included in the global compact, its author admitted simply that "given the substantial variations in definitions of complicity within and between the legal and non-legal spheres, it is not possible to specify definitive tests for what constitutes complicity in any given context."[18]

More recently, Michael Rothberg begins his 2019 study *The Implicated Subject* with his dissatisfaction with the "underdeveloped vocabulary" we use to discuss power, privilege, violence and injustice, and the "lack [of] adequate concepts" for describing our responsibility for things we have not done.[19] He suggests we use *implication* instead, in an attempt to resolve some of these difficulties. Nevertheless, it must be said that the "implicated subject" he recommends as a new term for critical theory may suffer from many of the same shortcomings as complicity does, gathering together a great number of different types of relationship and subject positions under its umbrella, from victim and perpetrator to bystander and beyond. A similar difficulty is evident in Timothy Bewes' literary-theoretical *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (2011), which takes shame, via Gilles Deleuze, to be a ubiquitous event entailed in the very act of writing itself, "an experience of the subject's dissolution, of the fundamental complicity that, in the modern world, constitutes living."[20] In his account, shame becomes so generalized that its critical value is compromised, especially with regard to its literary-historical particularity, which is subsumed under "the modern."

I propose that we take the conceptual and categorical insufficiencies associated with complicity not as a practical problem to be remedied, but as a historical fact in its own right.

What if we decided that the imprecision of complicity was not an obstruction to analysis but rather its starting point? In order to pursue this line of thought, we need to consider the term itself as an example of what Marx in *The German Ideology* called "practical consciousness," a living material language which develops as a constitutive part of human social activity, "from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men."[21] Some historical considerations are in order, then, that might return the term to its socio-historical contexts. The Anglophone term "complicity" was used infrequently by writers in the 1940s and 50s. McCarthy and Arendt were among those who did deploy it, though they did so in unsystematic ways as part of a wider discourse of guilt and responsibility, and not to describe their own situations. Sartre used the French term *complicité* in *Being and Nothingness*, written during the early 1940s, but insisted that its meaning should be understood in a strictly juridical sense, and when the New York Intellectual Leslie Fiedler accused liberals of complicity in Stalinism in the early 1950s, it provoked controversy and indignation among his circle.[22] As we will see, however, in the years that followed, the use, meanings, and contexts for the term complicity began to settle. Sartre discussed complicity explicitly and systematically in his 1957 essay "You Are Wonderful," about colonial violence in Algeria.[23] In the course of the 1960s, as digital corpus-analysis confirms, use of the word "complicity" in English underwent a marked increase, suggesting a more general need for the term as writers sought to name and describe the reconfigured relations between individual subjects and large-scale racial violence that had emerged over the preceding two decades.

There are other examples of existing terms being rediscovered in this period and given new purpose in order to make sense of dramatic historical change. As Ira Katznelson has shown, for example, liberal thinkers in the 1940s created a new terminology to name the catastrophic events of war, using words that had previously held obscure or very specialist meanings: "total war," "totalitarianism," and "Holocaust."[24] World War Two birthed one

usage closely related to complicity: "Quisling," referring to an individual who collaborates with an enemy occupying force.[25] The words "collaborate" and "collaborator", which previously carried more positive connotations of cooperative labor, took on after the war a darker shadow meaning. McCarthy's talk of complicity in 1967 is suggestive of the way in which a language, however unsatisfactory, began to crystallize retrospectively around an experience that had already been lived by American liberals for some time.

My framework for telling this literary-historical narrative builds on the work of Raymond Williams, and especially on his critical concept *structure of feeling*. Structure of feeling has been widely used and considered since its elaboration in the 1960s and 70s, as an enabling concept for literary and cultural historians and as a landmark in the history of Marxist theory in its own right. Defined in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) as "social experiences in solution," its flexibility and capaciousness has meant that it has sometimes been deployed in a relatively loose way as a convenient placeholder for intractable knots of cultural-historical vectors, especially ones containing questions of affect and emotion.[26] Williams' critical project, it seems to me, is best conceived as a negative one, an indefatigable war against reification in which he restores movement to the fixed, and recovers a fluidity and provisionality within historical formations that we have become accustomed to viewing as complete. He does this by mediating between determinate, readily graspable institutions of the social, and the more uneven qualities of what he called "the personal: this, here, now, active, alive, 'subjective.'"[27] It should already be evident how well-adapted such a frame is to approach complicity as I have been describing it, a concept that entails the folding of the individual subject into a system of social harm, bringing the fluid, partially-accessible undercurrents of personal psychology and guilty consciences into dialogue with concrete historical formations, practices of imperialism, and racial violence. The danger of a study of this kind is that one's analysis may begin to mimic its object by lapsing into the properties of

nebulousness and indeterminacy associated with complicity itself. By grasping complicity as a structure of feeling we mitigate this risk, because it allows us to be precise and specific about writing that is often anything but. Complicity may *appear* indeterminate to those experiencing and writing it, but the critical task is to narrate that problem of indeterminacy as a phenomenon with its own identifiable, concrete history.

Williams was clear that the concept of structure of feeling was necessitated by his desire to account for what he called "pre-emergence," that temporal interval in which new cultural formations are in evidence and yet still to be born.[28] Correspondingly, this study tracks that interval between the first signs of midcentury complicity as experienced in the wake of the discovery of the death camps, and its formalization in the discourse of the late 1960s, when the term itself began to be widely used. Structures of feeling are complexes of thought and emotion "at the very edge of semantic availability" that can be discerned only in provisional form before their reification as finished and reproducible cultural forms.[29] As such, they necessarily involve a tension between shifts in the qualities of lived experience on the one hand, and the available means of articulation on the other. "As the structure changes," Williams explained in *Preface to Film* (1954), "new means are perceived and realized, while old means come to appear empty and artificial."[30] In my analysis of complicity, then, I am interested in how various genres of writing registered complicity as an encounter with "the very edge of semantic availability," and therefore with the need to develop new means of expression.

Once we reframe its refractory slipperiness as a literary-historical fact instead of an internal impediment to analytical clarity, then we can comprehend complicity as an experience for which adequate language and concepts were still in the process of development during the post-war period. From this perspective, we can reassess how a range of literary production gradually articulated and shaped that experience. To take some

examples from the chapters that follow: the formal innovations of postmodernist metafiction in the early Cold War can be reframed as an improvised attempt to account for new experiences of indirect implication with the vast histories of racial atrocity brought into focus by World War Two; the arrival of the "New Journalism" in the 1960s can be recognized as an effort to fold the narrator-observer into the historical processes being recorded; the conventions of hard-boiled crime fiction can be seized upon as providing a way to represent and think through complicity with racist state apparatuses such as the police. When we place such arguments alongside one another, we can see that a multiplicity of post-1945 literary practices developed in relation to a common need: to find a formal grammar commensurate to the experience of complicity with racial projects.[31]

Confronting Racial Complicity

This experience of complicity was registered by McCarthy's generation principally through its relation to three conflicts. Collectively, these provide the historical anchor for the story of complicity's literary and intellectual evolution. One was the Nazi attempt to exterminate Europe's Jews during World War Two, which afterwards prompted wholesale reconsiderations of the concepts of guilt and responsibility. Another was the ongoing process of third-world decolonization, of which the war in Vietnam was a materially and symbolically crucial part. The third was the anti-racist struggles taking place domestically in the United States, including the civil rights movement, the emergence of Black Power, and the urban uprisings of the Sixties.

For many, these conflicts overlapped in their basic features and even formed a continuum. For Frantz Fanon, Nazism was a "colonial system in the heart of Europe"; W. E. B. Du Bois saw the industrial murder of Jews in Poland as part of the same historical problem

as anti-Black racism in the United States and colonialism in Africa; the intellectuals of the Black Power movement frequently used analogies suggesting similarities between the Holocaust and the treatment of African-Americans in the United States; and Sartre saw French colonial practices in Algeria as continuous with Nazi practices in France ten years earlier.[32] The liberal mainstream of American literary and intellectual culture, however, was either reluctant to consider the continuity between these events, seeing them as politically and morally incommensurable, or else lacked the methods and concepts it needed. To a large degree, the problems of midcentury complicity that I focus on in this study emerged from the various ways in which individual figures mapped their own position in relation to these large-scale racial conflicts, and from their sense of the continuity or disjunction between them.

Racial complicity was by no means unique to the United States in the post-1945 era, but it took a distinctive form there. This was because, unlike the former Great Powers of Europe, the US liberal state and its institutions survived the war intact. The global reach of US economic, cultural, and military power was extended rather than diminished by the conflict. On the cultural front, such was the dominance of liberal thought that Lionel Trilling was able to claim in 1951, "in the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant, but even the sole intellectual tradition."[33] Meanwhile, the United States also retained a legal system of racial segregation in the South, and in the Northern cities a number of Black ghettos emerged with appalling living conditions. The so-called "Negro problem," as white commentators tended to call it, had not been solved. The contradictions generated by the co-existence of a hegemonic liberalism committed to individual liberties and rights, and a nation visibly scarred by the color line, gave to racial complicity in the United States its historical character.

In the US, the national reckoning with racial complicity was deferred until the liberal hegemony was challenged by the social movements of the 1960s, but comparable processes

had necessarily begun earlier and in different forms in other Western states. In Germany, as we will see in Part I, Chapter 3, it was initiated as the war concluded with the Allied program of denazifiction and the international war trials for Nazi leaders. In France, the summary execution of thousands of Nazi collaborators in a few months following liberation prevented the topic of complicity from becoming integrated into intellectual and public discourse until the events of Algerian War of Independence between 1954 and 1962 made it unavoidable.[34] This French context is particularly relevant to the American history of complicity, as we will see in discussing Black expatriate writers such as James Baldwin and Chester Himes. In this comparative context, it becomes significant that the key midcentury thinkers who did most to shape our contemporary understanding of complicity were born and intellectually formed outside the United States in Germany and France.

For Arendt and Sartre, analyses of collaboration and complicity were driven by urgently felt demands to make sense of their own historical experience of National Socialism in Western Europe during the 1930s and early 1940s. Their work, nevertheless, is powerfully resonant when read in conjunction with post-1945 American literary history. This is partly because of the way their own careers and contemporary concerns became so closely entwined with the United States in this period: Arendt became largely integrated into US intellectual life and wrote frequently on American current affairs; Sartrian existentialism was hugely influential in American literature and intellectual culture, even while his Marxism and later strident opposition to the Vietnam War made him unpopular with liberals. Arendt and Sartre are of special interest because they developed methods and frameworks to reflect philosophically on complicity in relation to totalitarianism and genocide in the European 1940s, which could then be brought to bear upon decolonization struggles in the 1950s and 60s. They highlight how the question of racial complicity in the United States was always a

transnational and comparative one, which mediated between domestic and international contexts.

McCarthy, it is salutary to consider, fantasized as late as 1967 that America was "a permanent outsider" with "no colonial interests" before her experiences in North Vietnam led to a recognition that her complicity stemmed precisely from her ideological position within the new *imperium*.[35] Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) had by this stage cut through such entanglements by refusing to grant moral complexity to the question of colonialism and foregrounding instead the materiality of repressive force. Fanon insisted that there were no legitimate positions of compromise, and permitted no shuttling between inside and outside, innocence and guilt when it came to decolonization. In the metropole, he suggested, it might be prudent for the governing elite to keep the exploited classes onside through the institutions of Church, education, and family. However, according to the Manichean logic of colonialism, the division in the colony between colonizer and colonized was to be maintained by repressive force and spatially policed zones that "follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity."[36] Sartre, at roughly the same juncture in the Algerian War, put it more straightforwardly: "For it is not true that there are some good *colons* and others who are wicked. There are *colons* and that is it."[37]

In the United States the analogous moment took place five to ten years later, when a wave of radical Black thinkers, many of them influenced directly by Fanon, systematically retheorized an older tenet of Black nationalism in the United States by insisting that the oppression of African Americans was a form of internal colonialism. Figures such as Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Amiri Baraka, James Boggs, and Harold Cruse frequently pointed to the ubiquity of liberal complicity and the guilty feelings that accompanied it. Like Fanon and Sartre in the previous decade, they dismissed such concerns as an epiphenomenon distracting from the revolutionary objectives of their movement. Their

work, as we will see in Part II, made very clear that complicity was not the preserve of whites. Indeed, many of their most forceful critiques were reserved for what Boggs called "safe Negroes," who could be trusted to cooperate with the occupation. "In Hitler-occupied Europe," he reminded his readers, "such safe members of the native population were called collaborators or Quislings."[38] As Carmichael and Hamilton were to propose in *Black Power*, "politics results from a conflict of interests, not consciences."[39] The materiality of colonized life, for decolonial thought, effectively demystified complicity and designated it as the ideological false consciousness of racial liberalism, albeit one with tremendous real-world effects.

The relationship between the development of complicity as a structure of feeling and the decolonial struggles taking place in Algeria, Vietnam, and the United States is best grasped in dialectical terms. As we saw in the case of McCarthy, the decolonization process precipitated moments of complicit self-recognition for liberal intellectuals. Yet the intellectual front of the decolonization struggles also generated revolutionary self-consciousness from its exposure of First World liberal complicity, distinguishing its own commitment and purpose from the prevarications and moralizing of liberals. This is as true of Fanon's critique of the liberal intellectuals of metropolitan France as it is of Carmichael's excoriation of the assimilationist Black middle class. The theoretical and philosophical work undertaken by such thinkers enabled a clear-eyed view on the ideological tangles in which liberals labored to orientate themselves. In this way, they created an opportunity for First World intellectuals to step outside the folds of liberal complicity, however briefly, and to see it from the outside. In the case of Sartre's dialogue with Fanon, this process brought an entirely new dimension to his thinking about complicity. For Arendt, the decolonization and the anti-racist struggles of the 1960s, even if they produced moments of intellectual doubt and dissonance, never brought about a sustained reconsideration of her position on

complicity. Adorno, who died at the end of that decade, seems to have been little effected. For contemporary scholars, this dialectic between liberal and anti-colonial thought on complicity is an indispensable resource for understanding our subject. We ignore it at the peril of either becoming lost in our own folds of complicity, fooled into believing the view from inside the liberal tradition is a comprehensive one, or else of dismissing complicity as liberal false-consciousness not worth our attention. If we take the latter position, large portions of the literary field of the post-war United States will remain occluded, as will a crucial facet of US political and social experience.

Liberalism, Complicity and the Literary Imagination

The conjunction of Marxist and anti-colonial thought helps us to understand how complicity became a structure of feeling corresponding to liberalism between World War Two and 1970. Liberalism is a flexible and capacious term in its own right, particularly in the US context, where it has at different times indicated positions that are mutually exclusive or even in direct contradiction, giving American liberalism what Gary Gerstle called its "protean character."[40] We might observe, for example, how New Deal liberalism's endorsement of state activism, mutuality, and collectivity is in several senses at odds with the emphasis on pluralism, individual freedoms, and unsentimental hard-headedness evinced by Cold War liberals.[41] The transition from the former to the latter will be an important part of my narrative of post-war complicity.[42]

Cold War liberal thought in the US was characterized by its acknowledgement of what Arendt described, in *The Human Condition* (1958), as "the darkness of the human heart," which eschewed the positivism and meliorism of earlier twentieth-century liberalisms in order to grapple with the persistence of irrationalism, cruelty, and anxiety in the wake of

World War Two.[43] An influential articulation of this version of Cold War liberalism is that represented by Judith Shklar's typology of "the liberalism of fear," which she described emerging in response to state-actor atrocities.[44] For Shklar, cruelty rather than ignorance was the greatest evil faced by liberals. But for the liberalism of fear, the primary objective was not to eliminate cruelty and the suffering it produced, but to aim, more modestly, for "damage control."[45] For Jan-Werner Müller, the Cold War liberalism of figures such as Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper and Raymond Aron was distinguished more by sensibility and temperament than by ideas, and its readiness to focus on avoiding the worst rather than achieving the best.[46] In the United States, as Katznelson shows, key liberal thinkers from Arendt to Richard Hofstadter and C. Wright Mills engaged in a rear-guard effort to salvage the wreckage of enlightenment reason from the devastation wrought by total war and the Holocaust.[47] Amanda Anderson's term "bleak liberalism" goes some way towards drawing together these features of Cold War thought, which she sees exemplified in the "registers of crisis and repair" adopted by Trilling and Adorno, Arthur Schlesinger Jr and Reinhold Niebuhr.[48]

In the context of this body of scholarship, the aspect of Cold War liberalism that is most salient for our study of complicity is the way its practitioners so often privileged the private moral conscience as the arena in which large-scale social and political questions were to be considered and decided. This tendency can be understood as one aspect of the "value pluralism" associated with Isaiah Berlin among other liberal philosophers of the period, by which simultaneous adherence to several conflicting value systems on the part of individuals is inevitable.[49] To see how the challenges of value pluralism might play out in the situation of midcentury race relations in the United States, we can turn to Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944), one of the most influential documents for the framing of post-war discussions on race policy. Commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation of New York in 1938, Myrdal approached anti-Black racism in the

United States, as he made clear in his introduction, using an explicitly moral frame: "The American Negro problem is a problem in the heart of the American. It is there that the interracial tension has its focus. It is there that the decisive struggle goes on."[50]

For Myrdal, white Americans experienced racism as "something difficult to settle and equally difficult to leave alone. It is embarrassing. It makes for moral uneasiness."[51] The gap between the ideal of equality and the reality of racial injustice, he suggests, is one they can see but can't acknowledge:

> Most people, most of the time, suppress such threats to their moral integrity together with all of the confusion, the ambiguity, and inconsistency which lurks in the basement of man's soul. This, however, is rarely accomplished without mental strain. Out of the strain comes a sense of uneasiness and awkwardness which always seems attached to the Negro problem.[52]

The strangeness of Mydral's metaphor here—his evocation of white supremacy in the United States as a problem that lives in the basement of man's soul, rather than, say, in the Jim Crow laws on the statute books in the South, or in the *de facto* segregation of the Black ghettos—is remarkable. His delineation of a race problem that can neither be settled nor dismissed, that is enveloped by an atmosphere of embarrassment, and that is experienced by liberal Americans as moral dissonance, is an early and unusually clear articulation of the complicit structure of feeling that I will be tracing in my readings of literary texts from a variety of genres. The word *structure* is apposite, for what Myrdal describes in his introduction is a specific set of relationships that we will find reproduced in many literary contexts examined in the course of *Writing Complicity*: firstly, between individuals' experience of everyday life and an abstract sense of given social categories; and secondly between the resultant tension and a group of negative affects including anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, and shame. What Myrdal's

"American dilemma" shares with Berlin's notion of value pluralism is the way grasp social contradictions as problems framed by individual conscience. However, Myrdal's pseudo-Freudian posing of the American dilemma as a repressed problem lurking in the basement of the soul lacks Berlin's faith in the ability of individuals to find their way through their conflicts independently. Like McCarthy's realization of complicity, the American dilemma threatens to grow increasingly obscure the more one attempts to compel it into the light.

Myrdal's *American Dilemma* exemplifies the body of thought that Lani Guinier, Joseph Darda and others have called *racial liberalism*.[53] Racial liberalism refers to the approach to American racism proposed and adopted by the political and intellectual elite from the end of World War Two through to the early 1970s, and in some accounts all the way to the Obama presidency.[54] It emerged from the declining legitimacy of crude biological racism in the mid-twentieth-century and its replacement by what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call the "ethnicity paradigm," by which racial difference was understood using a cultural rather than a biological frame.[55] Rejecting any explicit notion of inherent inferiority, racial liberals preferred to think of racism as an irrational prejudice to be addressed at the level of individual psychology and morality rather than a systemic or structural problem. The objective of racial liberalism is the overcoming of prejudice through integration, achieved by social institution building and the establishment of legal equality. Guinier suggests how its key characteristics were "its pragmatic devotion to a single strategy [integration], its individualized and static view of American racism, and its top-down focus on social reform."[56] For Darda, racial liberalism was above all a way of narrativizing racism historically in the United States as a problem that was always on its way to incremental resolution in some distant future, even while the effects of that narrative were precisely to defer that resolution and contain those pushing to achieve it in the present. The hypothesis I propose in this study is that in the post-1945 era complicity operated for large parts of the

literary field as the affective correlative of racial liberalism, in which the contradictions contained by racial liberalism generated several of the formal and tonal features that we have learned to recognize as signs of the literary itself. Post-war US literature's investment in complexity, I argue, was in part generated by the problem of complicity. Our history of complicity, then, is also a history of literary complexity.

We can glimpse the contours of this logic by considering Myrdal's own forms of expression and range of reference, which indicate his engagement with the literary field and even his own literary style. A number of scholars have recently discussed how literary fiction in the early Cold War functioned as a legitimate form of political and philosophical intervention, or in Benjamin Mangrum's words "political philosophy expressed in narrative form."[57] Less is said about the opposite traffic, by which works of sociology, history, philosophy, and politics took on literary qualities. Take, for example, Myrdal's use of that metaphor by which the moral dissonance caused by racial complicity lurks in the basement of the soul. The Black man in the basement was a standard trope in literary writing about race in the midcentury United States, bringing together a range of psychoanalytical, existential, and Marxist registers connoting invisible labor, alienation, and the suppressed unconscious. The basement is where Bigger Thomas does much of his work as a house servant for the Daltons in Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), but it is also where he dismembers Mary Dalton's body before stuffing it into the furnace in an attempt to conceal his crime. Shortly after the publication of *An American Dilemma*, Ralph Ellison chose to reclaim the basement from Wright and to use it as a framing device for *Invisible Man* (1952), where it plays an ambiguous role. The basement provides his protagonist with a refuge from the conflicts raging in the streets above his head, but is also the symbol of his alienation. Both writers were making allusion to Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864), widely read at the time in Constance Garnett's English translation, thanks to Dostoevsky's rising

reputation among the highbrow elite.[58] Myrdal's choice of metaphor, then, brings his sociological study into dialogue with the literary field and orientates him by its coordinates.

To draw Myrdal away from the sociological context in which he is usually read and to place him within such a literary one is an unfamiliar, not to say defamiliarizing move. Yet it reveals how certain types of figurative language, and the constellations of cultural meanings and literary references that such uses entail, became resources for the articulation of complicity. For Myrdal to evoke "the confusion, the ambiguity, the inconsistency that lurks in the basement of man's soul" is to return racial complicity to the term's etymological roots in *complicare*, which also gives us our modern term *complexity*. The metaphor invokes a literary interplay of multiple registers without committing to any of them, suggesting how complicity is overdetermined and hidden from plain sight. This interplay acknowledges the inexhaustible complexities of human moral life, and calls for a language able to parse them.

This combination was a feature of the liberal imagination hailed by Lionel Trilling in 1950, with its focus on literature as "the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty."[59] There is something about the liberal treatment of complicity at midcentury, I argue, that found a paradoxically comfortable aesthetic home in the dominant literary culture of the time. Complicity's constitutive complexity and its ideological recalcitrance—its various folds, surfaces, and false bottoms—afforded it value in relation to a culture searching for a literature "that goes on existing beyond our powers of explanation."[60] The dark irrationality attributed to racial prejudice by liberals in the political sphere became for more literary-minded intellectuals like Trilling one of the sources of its perennial interest. To believe that the function of literature was to animate the emotional life of ideas was to be drawn to complicity as a structure of feeling with a privileged relationship to the literary.

It is clear enough that those midcentury thinkers who did most to shape our modern understanding of complicity, such as Arendt, Sartre, and Adorno, were heavily invested in the literary as a means necessary to grasp that structure of feeling. Rejecting the academic disciplinary specializations of their day, they chose to roam among and between sociology and history, philosophy and political science. Binding together all these commitments, however, was a recognition of the role literary imagination and literary language had to play in representing complex ethical and political experiences. While the literary interests of Adorno and Sartre are evident in the corpora of their work, the same is not so immediately apparent in the case of Arendt. However, in the course she taught at the University of Chicago, "Political Experience in the Twentieth Century," she set little reading from political science, asking her students instead to immerse themselves in literary testimonies, memoirs, and essays: poems by Berthold Brecht, fiction by William Faulkner, and Hanna Hafkesbrink's *Unknown Germany.*[61] She set them extracts from Marcel Proust's *A la recherche* in order to discover the specific forms of anti-Semitism in *fin-de-siècle* France, and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* for insights into the unstable relation between civilization and barbarism. "Imagination is the pre-requisite for understanding," she wrote in her teaching notes in 1955. "You," the students, "should imagine how the world looks from the different points of view where these people are located."[62]

Arendt's pedagogical investment in literary representation as a means to understand situated social experience flows from her engagement with Kant. In Kantian terms, a subject's recognition of her own complicity would necessitate the imaginative act of representing what is absent.[63] Understanding our own complicit relationships would require of us imaginative work capable of bridging the gap between the world of concrete personal experience and that which, whether because of distance or because of its abstract nature, remains unavailable to the senses. This is precisely the kind of work that Adolf Eichmann, in

Arendt's famous account *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, was incapable of. Eichmann had served as an *Obersturmbannführer* in the Nazi administration during the Holocaust, a senior role devoted to managing the logistics of transporting Jews across Europe to the camps. His unrepentant testimony in the trial he underwent in 1961 for the crimes he committed in this role, according to Arendt, was a symptom not of stupidity but rather of *thoughtlessness*, his inability to "think from the standpoint of somebody else," which stemmed from his "lack of imagination."[64] In connection, Arendt noted that he was fundamentally uninterested in literature, offering by way of anecdote his response to the novel his guard had offered him. This, ironically enough, was Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), one of the most self-conscious explorations of complicity in midcentury fiction, and a text that explicitly demands of its readers that they participate in the crimes described therein: "I want to ask my learned readers to participate in the scene I am about to replay."[65] Trilling, in a laudatory review of *Lolita*, had noted that "in the course of reading the novel we have come virtually to condone the violation it represents."[66] Arendt reports, however, that Eichmann judged it unreadable, an "unwholesome book."[67] It is an instructive negative example. Seen from Arendt's point of view, the literary offers both a rich archive of experience for the imagination to work upon and a means of modelling the kind of imaginative processes that might allow us to grasp and conceptualize states of complicity.

If Arendt wanted her students to use literature as a way of imaginatively occupying subject positions in different locations, then more recent work on complicity by the legal philosopher Christopher Kutz also stresses the importance of "the relationality and positionality of accountability."[68] Works of literature, he suggests, offer productive methods for mapping and articulating the irreducible particularity of these socially embedded relations. In his reading of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*, for instance, he explores how a single individual might respond to a harmful system in multiple and conflicting ways,

determined by their occupation of several social roles simultaneously. It is what Kutz calls the "refractory" nature of literature, its intractable commitment to social complexity and resistance to reductive interpretation, that makes the process of literary criticism, in his account, comparable to that of making ethical and legal judgments on tangled and thorny cases of accountability.[69]

This parallel between aesthetic judgments and moral ones has a long philosophical history, much of which refers back to Kant's *Critique of Judgement* and, as I show in Part I, Chapter 2, resurfaced in the thought of the New York Intellectuals after World War Two. According to Kant, it is above all the role and value of disinterestedness in the forming of judgments that links the two.[70] One of complicity's effects, however, is to call into question the possibility of disinterestedness in the forming of such judgments. In 1857, Charles Baudelaire articulated this knowledge when he had the seductive but dissolute voice of his poem "Au Lecteur" ("To the Reader") solicit the reader as "—Hypocrite lecteur, —mon semblable, — mon frère!" ("—Hypocrite reader, —fellowman, —my twin!"), crystallizing a tradition of writing that knowingly transformed the reader into an accomplice.[71] Baudelaire's inspiration for this literary strategy likely came from the doppelgänger tales of Edgar Allan Poe, whom he translated and praised on several occasions, and its influence can be felt pervasively across the literature of decadence in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The dominant feature of this strategy is a deployment of voice and style in which the reader is drawn and enfolded into ethically compromised situations through modes of confession, flirtation, eroticism, flattery, and appeals to shared taste. This tradition of tainted intimacy between reader and writer is one example among many of an aesthetic strategy developed in response to notions of complicity. It is especially useful to us, however, because it so explicitly models the ways complicity undermines the logic of Kantian aesthetics by removing disinterestedness from the range of available readerly dispositions. In the work of

post-1945 writers who draw on this tradition, such as Nabokov, John Hawkes and Kurt Vonnegut, states of complicity are not simply represented; they are also *enacted* in the process of being formed and dissolved through collaboration. As Humbert Humbert proclaims to the reader of *Lolita*, "Imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me."[72]

The Long View on Complicity

Although the principal historical focus for *Writing Complicity* lies between the end of World War Two and 1970, it would be misleading to suggest that complicity arrived as an intellectual or literary problem in American culture *ex nihilo* in the wake of the Holocaust. While there was a surge of interest in guilt and responsibility after the war that was remarkable in its scope and ambition, it is nevertheless helpful to comprehend this moment as a milestone in a longer history, at which older questions about complicity were rearticulated in new forms and contexts.

The wrestling of complicity to the surface of public attention from its usual location as an undercurrent running through the intellectual life of liberal democratic nations occurs periodically in post-enlightenment history. These historical moments prompt fundamental and wide-ranging re-evaluations of modes of being-together, and of thinking itself. The twenty-five years after World War Two was one such period in the United States, France and Germany. Yet, as Dwight Macdonald argued in his 1945 essay "The Responsibility of Peoples," the crisis of responsibility brought to light by Nazism demanded to be understood alongside earlier occasions of organized racial violence: the attempted genocide of aboriginal peoples in Australia, the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion in China, the British facilitation of mass famine in Bengal, and the Jim Crow laws of the United States.[73] The present consideration of complicity, his essay suggested, could not be disengaged from longer

histories of empire and racial domination. His argument resembles in this regard the longer and more celebrated account of the origins of totalitarianism in Great Power imperialism published by his friend Arendt in 1951.[74] Rather than focus complacently on German guilt, he suggested, the Allied nations should look to their own histories to find the roots of racial violence.

In the US context, the most significant precedent for post-1945 complicity is in the period leading up to the American Civil War. Then, too, a concern with individual responses to collective racial harms emerged in tandem with a crisis of liberalism.[75] Accelerating capitalist development in the industrializing north, the waging of an expansionist settler-colonial war against Mexico, and increasingly violent disputes over the future of slavery generated a wave of polemical essays, speeches, literary production, and activism all focused on radical non-complicity. Perhaps the most famous treatment in the fiction of this period is Melville's 1853 short story "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street," with its excoriating critique of its narrator's complacent and vacuous humanism.[76] Another is Henry David Thoreau's "Reform Essays," running from "Resistance to Civil Government" (1849) to his writing on John Brown. These responded to the threat of racial and colonial complicity issued by the Mexican War and the institution of slavery. Thoreau's radical abolitionism provided a usable past for the radicals of the twentieth century in thinking through complicity both in the United States and across the globe, and he influenced a range of figures from members of various armed resistance groups under Nazi occupation in World War Two to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Ghandi.[77] In contemplating ways to overcome intellectual complicity in the Vietnam War, McCarthy urged her readers to "study the example of the Abolitionists—the nearest thing to a resistance movement the Republic has had."[78] Many followed her advice. Thoreau's popular revival among the New Left, the Vietnam protest movement, and anti-racist activists of the late 1960s, meanwhile, led Arendt

to launch her own critical engagement with "Resistance to Civil Government," in which she repurposed her arguments about Holocaust complicity.[79]

Thoreau's declaration in "Resistance to Civil Government" that "I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as *my* government which is the *slave's* government also" suggests a literary politics of withdrawal and disaffiliation that, though it may have been attractive to radical activists in the 1960s, would have seemed hopelessly utopian to the majority of the liberal thinkers and writers I treat in *Writing Complicity*.[80] Thoreau saw such gestures as speech acts that repeatedly performed his ethical disseverance from the institution of slavery. These words, like those of most of the reform essays, were delivered first as speeches at the Concord Lycaeum and other venues around New England in the 1840s and 50s. For Thoreau, the judicious use of language—what Stanley Cavell described as his "commitment to total and transparent meaning"—still held out the promise of disentangling the subject from the folds of complicity.[81] For the post-World War Two period, by contrast, such optimism was in short supply.

The historical development that I describe in *Writing Complicity* is one in which writers grasped complicity in a self-reflexive manner, that is to say as a problem posing a challenge for writing itself, and which demands to be articulated using means of expression that were themselves already compromised. This argument is not to be confused with Adorno's much-discussed claim that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."[82] My concern is not to pass ethical judgment on writers or works of literature, still less on whole categories of literary expression. Neither do I claim that the Holocaust represents a point of absolute historical rupture for culture. Yet there is one aspect of Adorno's thought that requires further comment: his conviction that, in the post-1945 period, culture itself was emptied of its enlightenment promise, coming under suspicion of complicity with the kinds of

inhuman cruelty and violence that in its earlier guises—as Arnoldian sweetness and light, as Hegelian *Geist*—it had defined itself against.

The mode of literary criticism that followed the broad path opened by Adorno's line of thinking, by arguing that canonical works of literature are implicated in the systems of social harm and injustice their readers and writers are supposed by convention to abhor, was to become common in the academy. Reading for complicity is one of the critical activities that Rita Felski has grouped together as "the hermeneutics of suspicion," an approach which she claims has dominated literary criticism in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. "In some of the essays we read," she suggests, "suspicion slices into a text like a scalpel to expose its complicity with the logic of imperialism or heteronormativity."[83] Complicity, by this way of thinking, is the unspeakable bad conscience of the text; the hermeneutics of suspicion, according to Felski, assumes that meaning lies "encrypted in what the literary work cannot or will not say."[84]

One of the most influential examples of this mode of criticism is Edward Said's reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Said's elegant commentary, in which the novel's plot and structure are reinterpreted in the light of the ideological and material foundations provided by British slavery in the West Indies, finds that the novel tacitly endorses the values of colonial plantation management, remaining silent about the sources of the wealth that enable the freedoms enjoyed by its characters. Said encounters many of the same difficulties with finding a language for cultural guilt and implication that we have already discussed. "I am *not* saying," he reassures us, "that the major factor in early European culture is that it *caused* late-nineteenth-century imperialism."[85] Thomas Carlyle, he stresses, cannot be blamed for Cecil Rhodes, and "it would be silly to expect Austen to treat slavery with anything like the passion of an abolitionist or a newly liberated slave."[86] Rather, *culture itself* is to held responsible for the

things it failed to do. Said finds it "genuinely troubling to see how little Britain's great humanistic ideas, institutions, and monuments, which we still celebrate as having the power ahistorically to command our approval, how little they stand in the way of the accelerating imperial process."[87]

Said's formulation reflects tensions in his own diverse intellectual inheritance. In his own words, he learned from C. L. R. James and various metropolitan historians of culture and empire that "there could be no neutrality: one was either on the side of empire or one was against it."[88] Such a binary logic, as we have seen in the case of Fanon, tended to expose liberal complicity as false consciousness, *tout court*. However, this intellectual impulse was complicated by the Adornian influence on Said's thinking, by which, as Adorno memorably put it in *Minima Moralia*, one should not "throw the baby out with the bath water."[89] The rejection of culture as ideology, Adorno argued, was a mistake that would "extirpate, with the false, all that was true also."[90] Complicity, in other words, should not be understood as an excuse to remove critical attention from the text altogether. Rather, it demanded an even more strenuous dialectical reading. The problem Said stumbles over is that he is obliged to engage concepts of complicity that were not in existence at the time Austen was writing. Adorno's was an attempt to understand complicity from the inside, as a living contemporary concern of the post-war years, enveloping both text and critic. In Said's case, as for many literary scholars, the deployment of this frame for thinking about earlier periods of literature risked historical prolepsis. The complicity, in this sense, belongs not to Austen's novel but to him, a product of the intellectual milieu of the 1960s in which he was formed.

To be clear, then, I am not interested in making ethical judgments, as Said and Adorno do, about whether certain texts or cultures should be seen as complicit in racial projects. I will not be uncovering the repressed bad conscience of the text or decrypting its buried secrets for the simple reason that the literature I consider is already undertaking that

process for itself, representing its own becoming-self-conscious about complicity. *Writing Complicity* does aim, however, to show how readings like Said's were themselves made possible by the midcentury emergence of complicity as a major concern of and for literature.

Argument and Structure

This study is divided into two parts. In the first, the immediate historical focus is on the aftermath of World War Two and the Holocaust. The second shifts the center of attention to the 1960s and after, anchored by the Vietnam War as well as the Black freedom struggle and its legacy. In the movement from one to the other, and in the final chapter's extension into the twenty-first century, a narrative of complicity's literary and intellectual development since 1945 emerges.

The first chapter focuses on the way Arendt and Sartre engaged the concept of complicity from World War Two to the Sixties. I trace how their ideas on guilt and responsibility evolved in the transition of contexts from World War Two to decolonization and civil rights. The chapter excavates and examines some of the key claims and ideas that animate this study. These include Sartre's identification of "bad faith" as a way of conceptualizing how one can simultaneously recognize and deny one's responsibility for social harms, and Arendt's idea of "organized guilt," by which complicity is purposefully cultivated by totalitarian regimes. Yet I also suggest how we might consider the essays, philosophical works, and reportage of Sartre and Arendt as literary works in their own right, which register and recognize their authors' own implication in the historical problems they theorize.

The second chapter turns to Nabokov, McCarthy, and Saul Bellow, three prominent writers of the new highbrow cultural formation establishing its reputation in the years

immediately following World War Two. I collect a group of fiction published between 1945 and 1953, featuring a common scenario: the liberal intellectual coming to consciousness of their own entanglement with anti-Semitic prejudice. The chapter captures a particular moment in the history of post-war complicity, when writers first began to grapple with the vast implications of the Holocaust not only for world history but also for the experience of everyday life. A reading of these fictions sheds light on the way writers improvised aesthetic responses to the ethical and political challenges issued by genteel anti-Semitism at this time, when the conventional categories of liberal individualist ethics were beginning to be confounded. The writers associated with the New York Intellectuals and their sensibility saw complicity as a threat to the kinds of disinterested and finely discriminating judgments that they identified as their intellectual ethos. I show how Nabokov, Bellow and McCarthy developed a distinctive aesthetics of complicity based on the literary representation of atmospheres, in which guilt and responsibility are given nebulous form and dispersed across shared spaces without attribution.

Chapter three explores the interrelationship of liberal complicity and the emergence of experimental metafiction in the post-war era. While thinkers such as Arendt and Kutz have used realist modes of fiction in making arguments about complicity, the special contribution of self-conscious fiction to our understanding of complicity has been less clear. In this chapter, I examine some overlooked works in the early history of post-war metafiction—Nabokov's *Bend Sinister* (1947), John Hawkes' *The Cannibal* (1949), and Kurt Vonnegut's *Mother Night* (1961)—in order to show how their formal devices and techniques evolved as articulations of complicit subjectivity occasioned by totalitarian co-ordination and denazification. By examining them together, we stand to grasp the pre-history of what later became called postmodernist fiction, to see its roots in wartime crises of conscience, and to understand the particular relevance of self-reflexivity to the literary history of complicity.

In the first chapter of Part II, I read the emergence of the New Journalism in the 1960s as another genre of post-war American writing whose features were shaped in relation to the history of complicity. The reconception of the self-conscious narrator as a subject implicated in both the action and the ethics of the reported scene is a development held in common by metafiction and the New Journalism. While in Tom Wolfe's insider's account, this technique was employed simply as a way to attract and maintain the attention of bored readers, in practice it offered another component of the formal literary grammar being developed to express the uncomfortable positions of complicity precipitated by the New Left and Black radicalism.[91] My readings of the New Journalism identifies a series of contradictions at the heart of the genre, between involvement and detachment, self-exposure and self-effacement. After surveying work by Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag, Michael Herr, and John Hersey, I focus on Joan Didion's non-fiction, tracing its development from her breakthrough essays on the counterculture and student movements in the late 1960s through to her reflections on US imperialism in El Salvador in 1982.

My next chapter focuses on the work of a single writer, James Baldwin. More than any other figure in post-1945 US literary history, Baldwin took racial complicity as his great subject and grappled with the challenges it posed to literary form. His rich oeuvre of non-fiction offers us a narrative of the evolution of complicity as a structure of feeling, and a means of grasping complicity's relationship to liberalism. I read Baldwin as a liberal figure, engaged in an internal critique in the tradition of Trilling and the New York Intellectuals. Viewed in this way, Baldwin's careerlong project of finding adequate ways to express his own subject position in relation to racial domination in the United States is thrown into new relief. I explore the trajectory of his non-fiction from his early essays to *No Name in the Street* (1972) and show how he came to use the concept of survivor guilt, borrowed from post-Holocaust psychiatry, as a means to retrospectively structure his own experiences of

complicity during the racial struggles of the era, from Algerian decolonization to the civil rights movement.

In the final chapter, I take a longer view on the development of a genre, examining hardboiled crime fiction from its origins in the interwar period through to the Obama years. Hardboiled crime fiction has always been one of the clearest means of literary expression for complicit situations. In the work of Black crime writers, the resources of the genre were deployed in order to explore how Black Americans were to navigate the compromises and accommodations necessary to live in conditions mediated by structurally racist institutions such as the police. I trace the arrival and development of the Black detective in Chester Himes, Walter Mosley, and Attica Locke, showing how this figure embodied the tensions and contradictions of complicity with white power. I read these authors in the context of the urban uprisings of the mid-Sixties, the subsequent rise of a new Black middle class, and the impact of neoliberalism on race politics in the late-twentieth century. This approach enables a different, more materialist view on complicity from that exemplified by the writers discussed in the previous chapters, foregrounding the importance of class and capital, and pointing the way to more contemporary forms of complicity developing in the wake of the Sixties.

The decision to use genre as one of the main organizing principles for the study is deliberate, enabling me to tell a multi-faceted story of literary-formal evolution over time, in which different sets of devices and techniques were adapted in distinctive ways according to exigencies of the moment. It also allows me to show how the problem of complicity was addressed by a range of writers with their own idiosyncrasies, but at the same time pay attention to the underlying patterns and conventions lending them a collective coherence. Without this multiplicity, there is no structure of feeling which might gesture toward the social totality, as Williams intended. Yet the texts and authors have nevertheless been selected according to a rationale which allows certain threads to come into view across

chapters. The dilemmas of Holocaust complicity discussed by Arendt, for instance, recur and resonate across a number of different contexts, from writing on Vietnam and widely to Black radical discourse in the United States. Sartre's notion of "bad faith," introduced in the first chapter, provides a way of comprehending the relation between ethics, consciousness and literary form in texts from Nabokov's *Bend Sinister* to Baldwin's *No Name in the Street*. The deployment of atmospherics as a way of representing situations of complicity is likewise to be found operating across a large selection of the texts under review.

The desire to articulate complicity in language shaped the multiplicity of post-war US literature, but conversely literary writing was where the contradictions of complicity were most actively worked through. As a historical concept, complicity cannot be properly understood without consideration of the imaginative acts that its recognition entails, the feelings it generates, or the forms that are used to represent it. In the absence of such concerns, our scholarly grasp of complicity will remain abstract and impoverished, divorced from the realm of experience. This was a principle that midcentury intellectuals recognized, but which is in danger of being forgotten today. Macdonald worried in "The Responsibility of Peoples," written in the final stages of World War Two, that "it is a terrible fact, but it is a fact, that few people have the imagination or the moral sensitivity to get excited about events they don't participate in themselves."[92] The study of literature holds out the promise to recover precisely those relations between thought and feeling that bind together the structure we know as complicity. In the course of this book, we gain fuller view of something we have only ever glimpsed in fragments.

[1] Mary McCarthy, *Hanoi* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 128.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 129.

[5] Ibid., 131.

[6] Ibid., 134.

[7] Ibid., 129-30.

[8] Ibid., 128.

[9] Ibid., 138.

[10] Hannah Arendt, “Collective Responsibility,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2003), 147.

[11] McCarthy, *Hanoi*, 131.

[12] On complicity’s etymology, see Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 5.

[13] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 18.

[14] See for example Helmut Philipp Aust, *Complicity and the Law of State Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); John Cerone, “Re-Examining International Responsibility: ‘Complicity’ In The Context Of Human Rights Violations,” *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law* 14, no. 2 (2008): 525–34; Philippe Sands, “International Rule of Law: Extraordinary Rendition, Complicity and Its Consequences,” *European Human Rights Law Review* 4 (2006): 411–21.

[15] “The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact,” United Nations Global Compact, 2010, https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles. On corporate complicity, see Florian Wettstein, “The Duty to Protect: Corporate Complicity, Political Responsibility, and Human Rights Advocacy,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 96, no. 1 (2010): 33–47..

[16] Among literary and philosophical studies on complicity, I have learned in particular from Christopher Kutz, *Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collective Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006); Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Thomas Docherty, *Complicity: Criticism Between Collaboration and Commitment* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2016); Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019); Ivan Stacy, *The Complicit Text: Failures of Witnessing in Postwar Fiction* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2020). For a collection of contemporary critical perspectives on literature and complicity since 1945, see *Complicity in Post-1945 Literature: Theory, Aesthetics, Politics*, ed. Adam Kelly and Will Norman, special issue of *Comparative Literature Studies* 56, no. 4 (2019).

[17] This aspect of complicity is taken up in particular by scholars working in poststructuralist and deconstructive modes. See Sanders, *Complicities*; Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable.*

[18] John Ruggie, "Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the Issue of Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises" (Human Rights Council, April 7, 2008), http://www.reports-and-materials.org/Ruggie-report-7-Apr-2008.pdf.

[19] Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*, 1.

[20] Timothy Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), 28.

[21] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Part One*, ed. C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 51.

[22] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Routledge, 2003), 575. Leslie A. Fiedler, "Hiss, Chambers, and the Age of Innocence," in *An End to Innocence: Essays on Culture and Politics* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), 3–24.

[23] Jean-Paul Sartre, "You Are Wonderful," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London: Routledge, 2001), 54–61.

[24] Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge After Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 1–46.

[25] The term originates from the surname of the Norwegian war-time leader Vidkun Quisling, who headed a Nazi collaborationist regime during World War Two.

[26] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 133. On its key features and uses, see Sean Matthews, "Change and Theory in Raymond Williams's Structure of Feeling," *Pretexts: Literary and Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 179–94.

[27] Williams, *Marxism*, 128.

[28] Ibid., 126-7

[29] Ibid., 134.

[30] Raymond Williams and Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film* (London: Film Drama, 1954), 22.

[31] "A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular race lines." Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 1994), 56.

[32] Frantz Fanon, "Racism and Culture," in *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 33; Huey P. Newton, *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Writers and Readers, 1972); W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto," *Jewish Life* 6, no. 7 (1952): 14–15; Jean-Paul Sartre, "A Victory," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London: Routledge, 2001), 65–77.

[33] Lionel Trilling, "Preface," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2008), xv.

[34] On the post-war purges in France, see Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940–1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 577–80. On the post-war memory of French collaboration, see Philip Nord, *After the Deportation: Memory Battles in Postwar France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[35] McCarthy, *Hanoi*, 128.

[36] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 31–32.

[37] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Colonialism Is a System," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London: Routledge, 2001), 32.

[38] James Boggs, "The City Is the Black Man's Land," in *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker's Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 39.

[39] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), 75.

[40] Gary Gerstle, "The Protean Character of American Liberalism," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 4 (1994): 1043–73. On the varieties of liberalism, see Edmund Fawcett,

Liberalism: The Life of an Idea, revised edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[41] Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”: The Po* *Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). On the unsentimental, hard-headed realism of Cold War liberals Arendt and McCarthy, see Deborah Nelson, *Tough Enough: Arbus, Arendt, Didion, McCarthy, Sontag, Weil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 45–95.

[42] On the transition from New Deal liberalism to Cold War liberalism in American literature, see Benjamin Mangrum, *Land of Tomorrow: Postwar Fiction and the Crisis of American Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2000).

[43] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 244.

[44] Judith N. Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21–38.

[45] Ibid., 27.

[46] Jan-Werner Müller, “Fear and Freedom: On ‘Cold War Liberalism,’” *European Journal of Political Theory* 7, no. 1 (2008): 45–64.

[47] Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment*.

[48] Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016), 23.

[49] Müller identifies value pluralism as a key feature of Cold War liberalism in “Fear and Freedom.” Berlin discusses value pluralism in Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958).. See also George Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism* (London: Continuum, 2002).

[50] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), xlvii.

[51] Ibid., xlv.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Lani Guinier, "From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy: Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Divergence Dilemma," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (2004): 92–118. Joseph Darda, *The Strange Career of Racial Liberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022). While Guinier and Darda associate *racial liberalism* with a historical period in the United States, Mills uses it to refer to the racialization of liberal concepts of rights across periods. Charles W. Mills, "Racial Liberalism," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1380–97.

[54] On the fortunes of racial liberalism under the Obama administration and after, see Nils Gilman, "The Collapse of Racial Liberalism," *The American Interest* (blog), March 2, 2018, https://www.the-american-interest.com/2018/03/02/collapse-racial-liberalism/; Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, fifth edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), 203–37.

[55] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 14–23.

[56] Guinier, "From Racial Liberalism," 100.

[57] Mangrum, *Land of Tomorrow*, 4. On the confluence of fiction and philosophy in this period, see also Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933-1973* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); George Hutchinson, *Facing the Abyss: American Literature and Culture in the 1940s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 75–113.

[58] "Notes from Underground" was included in Garnett's translation of Dostoevsky's *White Nights and Other Stories* (New York: MacMillan, 1918). On the increased interest in Dostoevsky among US intellectuals in the mid-twentieth century, see Lionel Abel, "A Taste for Dostoevsky," *Commentary*, November 1984.

[59] Trilling, "Preface," xxi. On Trilling and midcentury "liberal aesthetics," see Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism*, 78–98.

[60] Lionel Trilling, "The Meaning of an Idea," in *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2008), 294.

[61] Wolfgang Heuer, "Verstehen als Sichtbarmachen von Erfahrungen: Die Brücke zwischen Denken und Urteilen," in *Dichterisch denken: Hannah Arendt und die Künste*, ed. Wolfgang Heuer and Irmela von der Lühe (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2007), 243–57. On the importance of literature for Arendt's thought, see Richard H. King, "Hannah Arendt and the Uses of Literature," *Raritan* 36, no. 4 (2017): 106–24..

[62] Hannah Arendt, "'Contemporary Issues,' Undergraduate Seminar, University of California," 1955, Subject File, 1949-1975; Courses, Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/mss1105600981/.

[63] "Imagination is the faculty for representing an object even without its presence in intuition." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. F. Max Müller (London: MacMillan, 1881), 449. For a comprehensive study of Kant's view on the imagination, see Samantha Matherne, *Seeing More: Kant's Theory of the I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024).

[64] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin, 2006), 49, 287.

[65] Vladimir Nabokov, "*Lolita*," in *Novels 1955-1962*, ed. Brian Boyd (New York: Library of America, 1996), 53.

[66] Lionel Trilling, "Review of 'Lolita' by Vladimir Nabokov," in *Vladimir Nabokov: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Norman Page (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 92.

[67] Arendt, *Eichmann*, 49.

[68] Kutz, *Complicity*, 255.

[69] Ibid., 13.

[70] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 98–99, 127–30.

[71] Charles Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

[72] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 121.

[73] Dwight Macdonald, "The Responsibility of Peoples," in *The Responsibility of Peoples and Other Essays in Political Criticism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1957), 16.

[74] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin, 2017).

[75] On the contradictions of US liberalism in this period, see Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2014).

[76] On complicity in "Bartleby," see Docherty, *Complicity*, 112–14.

[77] On Thoreau's reception history from the 1930s to the 1960s, see Gary Scharnhorst, *Henry David Thoreau: A Case Study in Canonization* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), 61-100.

[78] Mary McCarthy, *Vietnam* (London: Penguin, 1968), 118.

[79] Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 60–61.

[80] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, the Maine Woods, and Collected Essays and Poems* (New York: Library of America, 2007), 732.

[81] Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, an expanded edition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 31.

[82] Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 34.

[83] Rita Felski, "After Suspicion," *Profession*, 2009, 28.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 81. Said's emphasis.

[86] Ibid., 96.

[87] Ibid., 82.

[88] Ibid., 337.

[89] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 43.

[90] Ibid., 44.

[91] Tom Wolfe, "Tom Wolfe Gives an Eyewitness Report of the Birth of 'The New Journalism,'" *New York Magazine*, February 14, 1972, https://nymag.com/news/media/47353/.

[92] Macdonald, "The Responsibility of Peoples," 39.

Part I: Complicity After World War Two

Part I, Chapter 1

Unbearable Situations: Sartre and Arendt

Why choose to begin a book about complicity in American literary history with a discussion of two philosophers, one French and the other a German émigré to the United States? Firstly, Sartre and Arendt have left us with an extensive and influential set of conceptual resources for grasping complicity as a distinctive historical problem for liberals in the mid-twentieth century. Without Sartre's concept of bad faith, we cannot build a satisfactory account of the paradox of the post-war liberal conscience: that it simultaneously knows and doesn't know that it is answerable for distant harms. Arendt's theory of organized guilt and her skepticism about feeling and conscience in political thought are likewise crucial reference points for the assessment of complicity in midcentury American literature. Sartre and Arendt were widely read and discussed in the period.[1] In the Anglo- and Francospheres, Sartre was likely the most famous living philosopher from 1947 until at least 1963, when he declined a Nobel Prize for Literature. Arendt, too, commanded large readerships, both among highbrow intellectuals and, increasingly after *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and the controversies surrounding it, the US middle-class public. For both, it was their writing on guilt and responsibility that confirmed their reputations.

Secondly, Sartre and Arendt understood complicity to be a social and affective structure that risks encompassing the writing subject. As such, complicity was to be grasped, at least in part, *from within*. Consequently, they wrote about complicity as something they experienced as well as observed, a self-reflexive drama from which they could never fully extricate themselves. This self-consciousness about complicity and its articulation was particularly evident in Sartre's thought, with its consistent focus on the phenomena of consciousness. Arendt often resisted it, and its implications unsettled her on several

occasions, most notably in her 1959 essay on desegregation at Little Rock. In both cases, however, their self-implications converge on the terrain of what Arendt would describe as an "unbearable" situation, marked by shame and anguish.[2] Sartre and Arendt serve as important case-studies of writing complicity, as well as guides.

As with the other writers I address in this study, I am interested in how they responded to the challenges that complicity presented at the level of representation in language. Both wrote across a number of modes and genres, and fused disciplinary methods that, in the modern academy, are often kept distinct if not separate. They produced journalistic essays on politics and contemporary affairs as well as more formal philosophical texts and literary criticism. Sartre wrote widely-discussed plays and novels, and Arendt wrote poetry. I wish, however, to consider their literariness in a more expansive way that exceeds the genres of poetry, drama, and fiction to include the writing of philosophy, history, and the essay, together with a certain self-consciousness about the process of composition in language.[3] The texts I consider will include philosophical work as well as political essays, history, reportage, and literary criticism. These may not be genres conventionally considered as literary today, but they exemplify for us how writers were prompted to adopt differing formal responses corresponding to what Sartre called *situations*, the singular complexes of social and historical forces within which individuals are orientated at particular times and in particular places. They help us to defamiliarize complicity and see it as a literary-historical issue rooted in language and form, rather than an exclusively ethical and political one.

In the course of the chapter, I will chart how Sartre and Arendt developed their thinking and writing about complicity in dialogue with a set of historical co-ordinates that will orientate my study as a whole. For both, their thinking and writing about complicity were determined by their responses to Nazism, World War Two, and the Holocaust. These events precipitated a remarkably rich period of literary and intellectual creativity in the 1940s and

early 1950s, establishing the grounds upon which their subsequent work on the topic was founded. We will also see that their later writing about guilt and responsibility responded to the decolonization struggles of post-war years: the wars in Algeria and Vietnam in the case of Sartre, and the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in Arendt's. As they adapted their modes of thinking and writing to the exigencies exerted by such racialized violence as French torture in Algeria, the carpet bombing of Vietnam, and white backlash in the Deep South over desegregation, one question loomed consistently for them. To what extent were these events to be understood using the concepts and frameworks they created to negotiate the crises of Nazism and World War Two?

Sartre's War

In November 1944, Sartre published his essay "Paris under the Occupation," an attempt to convey the Parisian experience of the war for those who had not been there. It was a paradoxical aim, for Sartre insisted that this collective experience resisted communication in language. "There is an abyss between us," he wrote of the gap between Parisians and Londoners, "and words cannot bridge it."[4] For Sartre, London had lived through the war proudly, while Paris had done so in shame. Accordingly, "we shall have to learn to speak of ourselves without passion; you will have to learn to understand our voices and grasp what, beyond words, can only be hinted at, and all that a gesture or a silence may mean."[5] The essay was acutely self-conscious about the difficulty of communicating historical experience. Yet the experiences Sartre wanted to convey were not of the extreme type conventionally associated with the trauma of war and the representational difficulties that accompany it. After all, in the occupation of Paris there had been no military casualties and no bombing.

Rather, Sartre was interested in occupation as what he calls "a *daily* affair," one which constituted everyday life.[6]

Despite viewing the Germans as a dreaded enemy, Sartre found them disarmingly polite. He had seen them stroking the cheeks of French children. Parisians squeezed up against them in the Métro and bumped into them in the street. "A kind of shameful, indefinable solidarity had established itself between Parisians and these troopers who were, in the end, so similar to the French soldiers."[7] The violence of the occupation, meanwhile—the arrests, tortures, and disappearances—happened offstage and out of sight, the victims registered simply as absences. As the essay proceeds, it becomes clear that "Paris under the Occupation" is not so much about complicity itself as it is about the difficulty of writing about it. Accordingly, Sartre's account is not one of events so much as it is of emotions: "I want to try and show how Parisians *experienced* the occupation *emotionally*."[8] "The horror," he explains, "was so familiar that we took it sometimes for the natural tonality of our moods."[9]

As for the Gestapo, "even when we didn't name them, even when we were not thinking of them, their presence was among us."[10] He exhorts us to imagine the "perpetual coexistence of a phantom hatred and an over-familiar enemy whom one cannot quite come to hate."[11] This play of absence and presence, of hauntings and phantoms, will become familiar to us in the course of this study as we explore the aesthetic strategies used in post-war writing to articulate states of complicity. For the moment, however, we can observe that Sartre's evocation of moods, emotions, and spectrality is figured in "Paris Under the Occupation" as a necessary but insufficient strategy for communicating the subjective experience of an objective set of conditions that Parisians were forced to endure: "we could not take a step, eat, or even breathe without colluding with the occupier."[12] The logic of this bind lay in a brute material fact. The occupied French were obliged to either produce the means of their

own subsistence or perish, but "the slightest activity served the enemy, who had descended on us and stuck his leeches on our skin and lived in symbiosis with us. Not a drop of blood formed in our veins in which he did not share."[13] To reproduce life for the occupied was to reproduce life for the occupiers.

Sartre is clear that he is not talking about conventional collaboration here, which he sees as a normal social phenomenon in which specific individuals consciously decide to throw their lot in with the enemy. Rather, "what seemed abnormal to us was the situation of the country, which was wholly collaborationist."[14] This collective collaboration was determined by the fact of occupation in the context of France's food systems and basic infrastructure. It was the social experience of an ethical crisis created, as he puts it, "by force of circumstance."[15] The result, in this case, was psychologically painful:

> From one end of the war to the other, we did not *recognize* our acts; we were not able to claim their consequences as our own. Evil was everywhere; any choice was bad but we had to choose and we were responsible; every beat of our hearts drove us further into a horrifying state of guilt.[16]

Here is the classically existentialist predicament realized in the concrete experience of occupation. The individual is ineluctably free. The only limit on freedom is that one is not free *not* to choose. The horizons of choice, however, are drawn by circumstance in such a way as to create an agonizing guilt. To live in occupied France is necessarily to collude with the enemy. As Sartre himself noted, this experience of World War Two came to represent a kind of ground zero for the literary and philosophical concerns that preoccupied him for the rest of his career, focusing on the question of how individual experience related to collective responsibility, and of how to reconcile existentialist ethics with the challenge issued by materialist and determinist accounts of social change.[17]

Sartre's essay registers complicity as a historically specific experience for which there is not yet a stable language or mode of representation. This provisionality is a consistent focus in my approach to complicity as a structure of feeling in Raymond Williams' sense, one in which social experience has not yet hardened into fixed forms, and is legible instead on the terrain of "thought as felt, and feeling as thought."[18] The literary-historical narrative I set out in this book is one in which writers and intellectuals develop, during the course of the post-World War Two era, new ways to represent and describe this structure of feeling across a variety of genres. The difficulty we face in this particular case, however, is that the emotional description of structural collusion Sartre offers in "Paris under the Occupation" lies in tension with his philosophical treatment of responsibility in *Being and Nothingness*, published the previous year.

Being and Nothingness sets out in painstaking detail the ontology forming the foundations for post-war French existentialism. It offers a phenomenological account of consciousness that lays claim to the absolute and ineliminable freedom of the self. One of the most counterintuitive of Sartre's claims about this freedom is that it is in no way impaired by constraints on power. Even if an individual is in a situation of extreme oppression (one of his examples is chattel slavery, another is torture by the Gestapo), choice is never eliminated. One may always do either something or nothing. The consequence of the "freedom without limit" that Sartre posits in *Being and Nothingness* carries with it great significance for responsibility: "Man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world of his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being."[19]

Being and Nothingness contains one of the more extraordinary passages in Sartre's oeuvre, in which he unfolds the consequences of the radical freedom he has discovered, a vision in which "everything that happens to me is mine." It requires quoting at length, in order for the rhetorical audacity of Sartre's philosophical mode to be experienced:

> For lack of getting out of it, I have *chosen* it [the war] . . . . Therefore we must agree with the statement by J. Romains, "In war there are no innocent victims." If therefore I have preferred war to death or to dishonor, everything takes place as if I bore the entire responsibility for this war. Of course others have declared it, and one might be tempted perhaps to consider me as a simple accomplice. But this notion of complicity has only a juridical sense, and it does not hold here. For it depended on me that for me and by me this war should not exist, and I have decided that it does exist. There was no compulsion here, for the compulsion could have got no hold on a freedom. I did not have any excuse; for as we have said repeatedly in this book, the peculiar character of human-reality is that it is without excuse.[20]

One reason for the importance of this passage is that Sartre effectively eliminates two central categories from the discourse on guilt and responsibility in relation to collective violence. The first is the innocent victim who bears no responsibility for their fate. The other is that of the bystander—the "accomplice"—whose responsibility is arguable but limited and indeterminate.[21] Both categories, for Sartre, depend on a certain positionality for consciousness in relation to violence: violence appears to emerge as if from some outside, from an external force. This outside, however, is itself an illusion generated by the flight from freedom and its corresponding responsibility. For Sartre, *there is no outside*. We have already seen one example of a writer recognizing this position of externality as an illusion: McCarthy's Jamesian moral confusion in North Vietnam, when she realizes that her self-identification as an American intellectual does not place her beyond the world of imperialism. Yet whereas McCarthy in 1967 identifies her position as one of complicit entanglement, Sartre disallows the term, except in its strictly legal sense, as misleadingly passive. As he explains in the introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, "'To support passively' . . . is a conduct which I assume and which engages my liberty as much as to 'reject resolutely.'"[22]

For this reason, complicity is not permitted—at least in 1943—to enter his philosophical vocabulary.

What are we then to make of the account of absolute and inescapable responsibility in *Being and Nothingness* when we read it alongside Sartre's descriptions of the emotional experience of structural collusion in "Paris under the Occupation"? In philosophical terms, they are not contradictory. In the essay, Sartre does not deny his freedom under the objective conditions imposed by occupation. He even emphasizes that "we had to choose and we were responsible."[23] But he also foregrounds the felt dimensions of thought, taking what remains in *Being and Nothingness* (for all its rhetorical perversity) an abstract philosophical argument, and thickening it with the phenomena of experience. We are registering the differing affordances offered by two modes of writing. One is indebted to the academic tradition of European philosophy, while the other takes the form of reportage, a genre that facilitated the kind of literary self-consciousness Sartre's formal philosophy demanded. While *Being and Nothingness* mandated extreme courage in the struggle against oppression and allowed no excuses, "Paris under the Occupation" tells us that the felt experience of collusion was one of horrifying guilt.

The affordances of the reportage-style essay presented Sartre with the most appropriate form for articulating his intellectual commitments in the world. Its fidelity to the phenomena of personal historical experience meant that it could describe and test individual authenticity by measuring thoughts and feelings against intentions and actions in real situations. *Situations* was both a key concept for Sartre, and the name he gave to the ten volumes of essays he collected and published periodically throughout his career. A situation, for Sartre, is neither purely objective nor subjective. Rather, it is a "*relationship of being*" between "*the things themselves* and myself among things."[24] In "Paris under the Occupation," for example, it is between consciousness and the brute existence of the occupation. Sartre

reminds us that "it is impossible to consider a situation from the outside."[25] The situation thus brings complicity into view as that which encompasses both the writing subject and the objectively existing structures that create violence and harm. This is why, if we are to see the development of complicity in Sartre's work, we must read the essays carefully, paying as much attention to the personal as to the abstract philosophical discourses he employs. We know that Sartre declared there was no place for complicity in *Being and Nothingness*. We will see, however, that it emerged as increasingly important in his later writing about colonialism and decolonization.

Bad Faith

Before we examine Sartre's thinking on complicity after 1945, we need to consider his "signature concept," bad faith.[26] Bad faith is pervasive in Sartre's oeuvre, providing a keystone for several of his most complex philosophical arguments.[27] It is also his most important legacy for our understanding of how states of complicity are represented in post-World War Two American literature. The concept of bad faith helps us because it offers an explanatory model for the special kind of ambiguity that surrounds complicity, that is the way literary representations of complicity typically involve a hesitation or oscillation between accepting and denying responsibility for large-scale systems of racial domination, sometimes to the extent that both acceptance and disavowal seem to be happening simultaneously. Bad faith helps to explain why literary representations of complicity appear so vexed and contradictory, so *tangled*.

At the basic level, bad faith is the project of attempting to flee from the terrible but ineliminable freedom and responsibility that Sartre ascribes to all humans in *Being and Nothingness*. We have seen in the case of Sartre's structural collusion in the German

occupation that this freedom and responsibility can be experienced as anguish. The realization that one is free to choose, even in the most oppressive situations, is painful. Rather than face it, in bad faith we prefer to hide or deny it, and may instead view our actions as prescribed for us by some fixed component of our character, or by the immovable facticity of our situation, or by some combination of the two. In doing so, we try in vain to turn ourselves into objects: "we flee anguish by attempting to apprehend ourselves from without as an Other or as a *thing*."[28] Sartre's most well-known illustration of bad faith is his description of a waiter in *Being and Nothingness*, but it is more useful for us to think about the freighted historical situations he examines elsewhere in his essays. As he suggests in "What is a Collaborator?" (1945), the project of denial and concealment can lead to outright collaboration. The essay focuses on the psychology of collaborators, who "bow to the fait accompli, whatever it may be" in the name of realism and "ratify events simply because they have occurred."[29] This is a form of bad faith because the collaborators refuse to see themselves as capable of using their freedom to shape the future. Their superficial realism, Sartre writes, "conceals the fear of performing the customary work of the human being—that stubborn, narrow work that consists in saying 'yes' or 'no' in accordance with principles, in 'undertaking without hope and persevering without success.'"[30]

We can see, then, how bad faith might operate in the case of outright collaborators. We shall meet several more variations on this figure in the course of this study, individuals who consciously reflect on their choices to align with their oppressors and occupiers in following the bad faith logic of realism: Chester Himes's Black Harlem cops, for example, and Walter Mosley's detective, Easy Rawlins. Such characters have reflective knowledge of their accommodations with the dominant power, even if they are not always represented as being clear about their precise motivations. But what of those complicit figures who remain only dimly or intermittently aware of their responsibility for oppression? What of Krug, the

philosopher in Nabokov's *Bend Sinister*, who believes himself safe in his ivory tower from implication in Paduk's murderous regime? What of Joan Didion, whose self-identification as a coolly dispassionate observer is threatened but never fully dismantled by her witnessing a militia abducting a boy in *Salvador*?

Sartre's account of bad faith is particularly concerned with cynicism, asking whether one can properly deceive oneself in an act of bad faith, and thus be genuinely unaware of one's freedom and concomitant responsibility.[31] Sartre issues a paradox: on the one hand, bad faith is the project of denying or hiding one's own freedom; on the other, it is impossible to successfully lie to oneself, since consciousness is translucent. "In bad faith there is no cynical lie," he explains, "nor knowing preparation for deceitful concepts."[32] It is impossible to be duped by one's own ruses. Sartre poses a riddle: "the one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are the one and the same person, which means that I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived."[33] His answer posits a duality within consciousness, of reflective and pre-reflective. According to Thomas R. Flynn, this duality "enables us to understand (prereflectively) more than we know (reflectively)."[34] Prereflective consciousness is the locus of fundamental choice, one for which we are fully responsible but not available for self-conscious deliberation. It is the grounds for our deepest-rooted orientation in the world, and any revision of it entails what Sartre calls "conversion," a radical change in one's life-path.[35] In this sense, it comes close to some Marxist conceptions of ideology as "false consciousness," referring to those basic assumptions about one's relation to the world which appear so obvious as to be unworthy of interrogation. The duality of consciousness in Sartre's work resolves the contradiction of bad faith by explaining how one can be responsible for the things one isn't fully aware of, or, to put it another way, how one can be responsible for one's own innocence.

This duality allows us to make sense of some of the strange aphorisms regarding white liberal complicity with racism in the postwar US. James Baldwin's declaration in *The Fire Next Time* (1963) is the most striking. Responding to claims by white northern liberals that they are not responsible for racial domination in the nation, Baldwin remarks that "it is the innocence which constitutes the crime."[36] Approached without the idea of bad faith, such a pronouncement seems logically nonsensical, a provocative but empty rhetorical gesture. As we will see in Part II, however, through the lens of bad faith, Baldwin's aphorism takes on the character of an acute psychological, and indeed political, statement about racial liberalism in the 1960s, a critique of its fundamental project and (to draw on the Marxist parallel for a moment) ideological blind spot. What are the things, Baldwin is asking, that liberals will not *allow themselves* to see, and what kind of "conversion" would be necessary for them to start seeing them?

Sartre's idea of bad faith achieves its resolution only at the cost of introducing a considerable challenge to the act of literary representation. How does one articulate the relationship between reflective and prereflective knowing in a particular concrete situation, or limn the subtle attendant dramas of concealment and denial? Even as Sartre maintains that it is quite possible to live one's life entirely in bad faith and never to reflect on it, there may also be occasional flashes of self-consciousness, or what he calls "abrupt awakenings to cynicism," when we see bad faith for what it is.[37] These may be occasions for radical conversion of one's life course towards authenticity, or they may simply prompt an even deeper plunge back into the sleep of bad faith. For the writer, they might secure narrative traction on the slippery problems of complicity. McCarthy's moment of complicit self-recognition in North Vietnam yields one clear example, but we will see others, such as Didion's shame at watching a boy being abducted in from a shopping mall in *Salvador*, and Baldwin's anguished sexual encounter with the white mayor of a Southern town in *No Name*

in the Street. These are epiphanic moments in the narrative forms afforded by the reportage genre, when the prereflective cogito awakens and erupts into view, presenting the potential for conversion and therefore for dramas of conscience. In Part I chapter 3, we will also discuss the formal difficulty of treating parallel threads of reflective and prereflective consciousness running simultaneously through a fictional narrative, as in Nabokov's experimental novel about life under totalitarianism, *Bend Sinister*.

Sartre's Colonial Complicity

With this view of bad faith and its literary applications, we can now return Sartre to his own concrete historical situations and examine how, after rejecting complicity as a usable concept in *Being and Nothingness*, he later used it frequently in his essays. The accusation made by the Marxist intellectual Pierre Navile, in response to Sartre's famous lecture "L'Existentialisme est un humanisme" in October 1945, provides a starting point. For all its claims to contemporary political urgency and revolutionary trappings, wasn't existentialism, in the end, merely "a kind of resurrection of liberalism"?[38] Sartre's lecture had summarized and extended the arguments about responsibility in *Being and Nothingness*, but Navile, whose exchange with Sartre was preserved in the published text, was unpersuaded. Sartre's emphasis on individual psychology and sovereign personhood left the subject lost in an ahistorical world without causality: "Like many others you bring to the fore human dignity, the lofty dignity of the person, themes which, all things considered, aren't so far from the old liberal themes."[39] Sartrean existentialism was unequipped to face the new postwar crisis.

Two years later, as existentialism began to make waves among US intellectuals, Sartre received another attack from the Marxist Left. Herbert Marcuse, one of the German émigrés to arrive in the US in the late 1930s, also identified Sartre as a liberal. For Marcuse,

though Sartre's insistence on absolute personal responsibility was correct from a strictly ontological point of view, his perverse insistence that, for example, Jews were responsible for choosing their oppression by the Nazis, only went to show how irrelevant to human reality existentialism had become. Sartre's perverse insistence on free choice between death and enslavement destroyed freedom as it really existed in the world. The absolute autonomy Sartre granted to the sovereign individual meant that his philosophy was "the modern reformulation of the perennial ideology: the transcendent stabilization of freedom in the face of its actual enslavement."[40] Behind the language of existentialism, Marcuse detected, were the outlines of classical liberal values relating to commerce and property: "the ideology of free competition, free initiative, and equal opportunity."[41] In this way, "he presents the old ideology in the new cloak of radicalism and rebellion."[42]

Navile and Marcuse set out a critique of Sartrean existentialism that dogged him throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, and was repeated in different forms by a number of thinkers.[43] His placement of individual ethics and dilemmas of personal choice at the heart of his philosophical system undermined its power as a political philosophy of the Left, facilitating its assimilation into the very liberal ideologies it purported to oppose.[44] Yet these same qualities were simultaneously what made Sartrean philosophy so attractive to scholars and intellectuals on the anti-Communist Left in the US, where a number of thinkers discovering existentialism for the first time enthused about its power to chasten and rejuvenate a complacent liberalism.[45] As Stuart M. Brown Jr., a philosophy professor at Cornell, wrote in an early assessment in 1948, "in his emphasis upon individual freedom, together with individual responsibility, he preserved what he thinks possible out of the tradition of liberalism."[46] *Partisan Review*, whose milieu included Arendt, McCarthy, and a young Baldwin, took particular interest and published early translations of Sartre's essays as well as assessments of his work. These were by no means uncritical, but the arguments made

by its editor William Barrett, that Sartre's principal value was as a Left critique of Stalinism, betokened the general disposition of the New York intellectuals towards Sartre at this moment when, as McCarthy put it, "around *PR*, we were all taken, more or less, with the existentialists."[47]

Rather than rehearse the story of Sartre's US reception, I want to indicate the intellectual compatibility, not to say resemblance, between Sartrean existentialism and the new forms of liberalism that became so influential on post-war American literature and thought. This resemblance was founded on a common concern for the ways that the turbulent interior life of the subject mediated individuals' engagement with systems of domination and oppression. The received narrative of Sartre's career over the next fifteen years is that he made a series of attempts to prove Navile and Marcuse wrong about being a liberal by reconciling existentialism and Marxism.[48] These attempts culminated in the unfinished *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), where he set out a detailed (if tortuously written) account of social collectivities and political action, which understood freedom and responsibility to be unevenly distributed, and in certain situations severely circumscribed by domination and oppression. Views on how successfully the *Critique* managed this objective are mixed, to say the least. What concerns us here is the part that racism, colonialism, and anti-colonial struggles played in Sartre's increasingly materialist understanding of responsibility during the 1950s and 60s, when he moved away from the individualist ethical dilemmas posed by existentialism in order to consider complicity as a form of collective bad faith.

Sartre's opposition to colonialism predated World War Two, but the Algerian War of Independence issued a particular warrant for his intellectual energies. The essays on Algeria that he published in *Les Temps Moderne*, such as "Colonialism is a System" (1954) and "You Are Wonderful" (1957), are key stages in the evolution from the ontology of *Being and*

Nothingness to the Marxism of the *Critique*, moments when the unfolding of historical processes required him to develop a new language and a new set of concepts to address the politics of responsibility. Sartre's responses to decolonization in these essays followed the pattern observed by Flynn, in which his practical ascriptions outreached his existing theoretical base, therefore gesturing towards the need for new, more materialist methods.[49]

"Colonialism is a System" answers Marcuse's earlier criticisms, that existentialism was a cover for liberalism. It begins with an outright denunciation of what Sartre called "neocolonialist mystification," whereby material problems are deliberately misframed as ethical ones: "Neocolonialists think that there are some good colonists and some very wicked ones, and that it is the fault of the latter that the situation of the colonies has deteriorated."[50] In place of this mystification, he offers a materialist analysis of colonialism as a system operating on "internal necessity," arguing that even "the purest of intentions, if conceived within this infernal circle, is corrupted at once."[51] The racist prejudices endemic in colonial situations emerge here as a means to rationalize the exploitation of indigenous labor: "one of the functions of racism is to compensate the latent universalism of bourgeois liberalism: since all human beings have the same rights, the Algerian will be made a subhuman."[52] Sartre's understanding of racism as "produced objectively by the colonial system" was to find more detailed expression in the *Critique*, but the question it begged was who should bear responsibility for it, given Sartre's unexpectedly determinist account of its impersonal self-perpetuating logic.[53] "Colonialism is a System" was written during the period in which Sartre cooperated with the French Communist Party between 1952 and 1956, one he later described as being characterized by "amoral realism."[54] He was at pains to emphasize that the systemic nature of colonialism should not distract from the horror of its concrete impact on the world, but he insisted that "this reality is embedded in a million colonists, children and grandchildren of colonists, who have been shaped by colonialism and who think, speak and

act according to the very principles of the colonial system. For the colonist is fabricated like the native; he is made by his function and his interests."[55] Here we find ourselves at some distance from the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*. In contrast to the individual autonomy proclaimed there, we discover instead that colonists are made by their function and interests regardless of their intentions, determined by the ideologies and institutions they inherit. At first impression, there seems little room for individual responsibility in the existentialist sense: "For it is not true that there are some good *colons* and others who are wicked. There are *colons* and that is it."[56]

There is an intriguing footnote in "Colonialism is a System," however, which opens the door to two categories we saw closed off in the moral absolutism of *Being and Nothingness*: that of the victim and that of the bystander. In reference to his use of the term *colon*, Sartre notes "I do not consider as colonists [*colons*] either the minor public officials or the European workers who are at the same time innocent victims and beneficiaries of the system."[57] Sartre returned to these "innocent victims and beneficiaries" in "You Are Wonderful," published three years later in the midst of the Algerian War. It deals with the growing sense of complicity among ordinary citizens of the metropole as they realized the extent of the French practice of torture in Algeria. Here, Sartre redeployed the concept of bad faith from his earlier work in the service of explaining the apparent paradox of metropolitan France as a collective social entity—its "guilty innocence"—and he gives it a name: complicity.

In "You Are Wonderful," we encounter once again the kinds of representational difficulties we noted in Sartre's attempt to deal with collective collusion in "Paris under the Occupation," and for similar reasons. Like that earlier essay, it attempts to articulate what Sartre would call "*le vécu*"— the lived experience or total psychological life of a society—in bad faith.[58] Where previously Sartre gestured towards the presence of bad faith by evoking

"moods," "tones," and "phantoms," so here he again mobilizes a language of quasi-objective and nebulous atmospherics: "The fact is that we are ill, very ill; feverish and prostrate, obsessed by her old dreams of glory and by the sense of her shame, France is struggling in the midst of a vague nightmare which she can neither flee nor decipher."[59] In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre had metaphorized bad faith as a form of sleep, but here it turns into a nightmare that presents itself simultaneously as an objective world to be inhabited and an imaginative projection of consciousness. We also find oxymorons piled one on top of another. "It is still possible," he admonishes his readers, "to break the infernal circle of this irresponsible responsibility, of this guilty innocence and this ignorance which is knowledge."[60] These oxymorons are another strategy for expressing the central paradox of complicity as Sartre understands it: a form of bad faith in which a preflective cogito grasps what reflective consciousness does not see. In "You are Wonderful" this dualism takes the form of a foundational, preflective decision not to seek out evidence of torture, despite consciousness requiring it in order to believe the rumors: "we do not seek this evidence because, *in spite of ourselves, we know*."[61]

"You Are Wonderful" marks a development in Sartre's thinking because it names and identifies complicity as a collective social problem for a particular group, the French citizens of the metropole removed by geographical distance from colonial violence, among whom he counts himself. "We personally must be accomplices to the crimes that are committed in our name, since it is within our power to stop them."[62] It is notable, however, that he takes complicity not as an unmediated response on the part of consciousness to this violence, but rather as an orchestrated strategy on the part of the ruling class. In other words, Sartre begins to grasp complicity as a political issue at the moment he recognizes and finds a language for it:

> We are not naive, we are dirty. Our consciences have not been disturbed, and yet they are not clear. Our leaders know this full well; that is how they like us; what they want to achieve by their attentive care and well-publicized consideration is, under the pretence of a fake ignorance, our complicity.[63]

The French government had deliberately degraded the morality of the state. "As for the procedure," he tells us, "everyone knows it: by precipitating us into a despicable adventure, they have instilled in us, from without, a sense of social guilt."[64] This identification of complicity as a useful tool for maintaining ideological control is quite distinctive to Sartre, though we will see a version of it in Arendt's concept of "organized guilt" under Nazi rule in Germany. Why might a ruling class wish to install bad faith among its citizens? The experience of complicity has the effect of atomizing them, placing them into a relationship of what Sartre would later call "seriality" in the *Critique*, as separate and fungible units.[65] Suspicion presides over social relations, since nobody knows for sure what anyone else believes, knows, or is trying to forget. "Mistrust teaches us a new solitude: we are separated from our fellow citizens by the fear of having to despise or of being despised."[66] Seriality makes objects of its members, who, lost in their isolated guilt, are unable to conceive of a collective response.[67]

Finally, "You Are Wonderful" confirms the parallels that Sartre was increasingly making during the Algerian War, between the French atrocities and the Holocaust.[68] The myth of the "good German" will appear frequently in the course of this study, referring to the figure who manages to retain her moral integrity while living through National Socialism, walking a tightrope between supporting Nazism and denouncing it. It functions as a virtual ur-text for post-war representations of complicity in American literature, as we will see. Sartre draws an explicit parallel between the metropolitan French of 1957 and Germans under Nazism:

> False naiveté, flight, bad faith, solitude, silence, a complicity at once rejected and accepted, that is what we called, in 1945, collective responsibility. There was no way the German people, at the time, could feign ignorance of the camps. 'Come off it!' we said. 'They knew everything.' We were right, they did know everything, and it is only today that we can understand: because we too know everything.[69]

Beyond the identification of the good German as a historical reference point for post-war complicity, this passage offers us a further insight: complicity is only to be fully understood by other complicit subjects. It is only in 1957, when they themselves had sunk into complicity, that the French comprehended the sense in which the Germans had known everything. Bad faith of this type is thus socially paradoxical in the sense that it causes solitude and atomization—"*seriality*"—at the same time that it forges shameful, unspoken bonds of mutual identification. This paradox is the source of complicity's political usefulness for the ruling elites, in Sartre's account, and provides a complement to Arendt's concept of "organized guilt," which we will come to later in this chapter.

After "You are Wonderful," complicity played a significant role in Sartre's writings on colonialism and neocolonialism, both conceptual and rhetorically. Many of these were directed at the US. In his analysis of neocolonialism in Cuba before the 1959 revolution, for example, Sartre extended his arguments about the cultivation of complicity as a conscious strategy on the part of colonial power. He suggested that the US deliberately created a complicit class of Cuban landowners who would devote their land exclusively to sugar crops for sale to the United States, working against the collective interests of the island by preventing it from diversifying and modernizing its economy. The benefit of this arrangement, as opposed to annexing Cuba and bringing it under direct US control, was more ideological than financial: "This complicity is indispensable; it saved face; puritanism kept a pure conscience."[70] We will encounter another version of this neocolonial practice when we

turn to Joan Didion's reportage from El Salvador in Part II, in which responsibility for repression of the Salvadorean peasant movement is farmed out by the Reagan administration to right-wing militias rather than risking the domestic backlash that would accompany direct military intervention.

As the 1960s advanced and the Algerian War receded, Sartre associated the politics of colonial complicity more with the US than with France. He drew on the discourse of complicity in articulating his strident opposition to the Vietnam War, which he saw as both an extension of the US neocolonial trajectory and an attempt at genocide against the Vietnamese people comparable to historical genocides such as the Holocaust. In "On Genocide" (1968), he described the perpetration of bombings, massacres, and other atrocities in Vietnam as a strategy of "blackmail" against all the peoples of the world, deliberately being undertaken in plain sight in order to render "all who do not denounce it accomplices of those who commit it."[71] It was a similar argument to the one made in "You Are Wonderful." Complicity was more than an epiphenomenon of colonial practice; it was a key tactic on the part of neocolonial strategists searching for ways to distribute responsibility for colonial violence across compliant liberal societies in the developed world. In naming it, Sartre was attempting to disarm it of its power. What he had not anticipated, however, was the problem that the liberal discourse of the later 1960s in the US was about to exemplify: naming complicity and identifying oneself as complicit was not, in itself, a political act. It neither helped those suffering under conditions of racial domination, nor brought those responsible to justice. As we will see, Arendt was one of the first to see and respond to this problem.

"On Genocide" was the report that Sartre gave in late 1967 to the International War Crimes Tribunal set up by the British philosopher Bertrand Russell in response to US conduct in Vietnam.[72] Among those who accepted invitations to be involved were two other figures we will come back to: Baldwin and Stokely Carmichael, key thinkers on complicity in the US

context who articulated the relationships between US imperialism in foreign policy and anti-Black racism at home. The anti-war movement and the emergence of the New Left provided Sartre with an international audience among succeeding generations of intellectuals, and Vietnam itself became the occasion for a new self-consciousness in the US about complicity, as thinkers and writers responded to his writings on the topic.[73]

Sartre's increasingly systematic and frequent use of the concept of complicity was part of the larger story of his intellectual development in the post-World War Two era, from individualist ethics through to the materialist accounts of colonialism and the Marxism of the *Critique*. This trajectory suggests a dynamic within the intellectual history of complicity that we will see played out elsewhere, particularly in Baldwin. While the experience of complicity was (and remains) mediated by a concern with the moral life of individuals, the intellectual means to cut through the foggy atmospheres of liberal morality to see it, name it, and reconceive it in political terms was provided historically by the Marxist and materialist commitments of the decolonization struggles. Marxism, Sartre wrote in *The Search for a Method* (1960), was responsible for "liquidating the categories of our bourgeois thought."[74] He knew, because he had undergone that process of liquidation in his own thinking, abandoning abstract universalism for concrete analyses of colonial systems, class interests, and social dynamics. This process, together with the concept of bad faith, is what allowed him to sharpen and focus the concept of complicity in the two decades after World War Two.

Arendt and Historicizing Complicity

If Sartre unlocked a phenomenological account of complicity with his concept of bad faith, then Arendt offered a means to historicize it. For her, complicity was the product of a distinctively modern catastrophe—the arrival of totalitarianism in Germany and the Soviet

Union in the 1930s and 40s—which brought vast implications for ethics, politics and philosophy after World War Two. The initial germs of Arendt's thinking about complicity can be found in her 1944 assessment of Franz Kafka for *Partisan Review*, written in the same year as Sartre's "Paris under Occupation." These germs developed the following year in "The German Guilt," an evaluation of the denazification process being undertaken by the Allies. They emerged fully in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951. There, Arendt articulated a historical logic for the degradation of individual responsibility that had both prepared the ground for totalitarianism's arrival, and characterized its social effects once it was established. Like Sartre, whom she read intensively during the composition of *Origins*, she identified the flight from responsibility as a central fact of developed societies.[75] However, she understood the destruction of morality and judgment ensuing from totalitarian refusals of responsibility to represent an absolute historical watershed, which necessitated a wholesale renegotiation of the act of thinking in the postwar era. If, for Sartre, Marxism had "liquidated all our categories of bourgeois thought," then for Arendt totalitarianism had "exploded our categories of political thought and our standards for moral judgment."[76] Complicity, by the time she started using the term in *Origins*, betokened the cynical manipulation of the subject by totalitarian regimes, and their project of dismantling of moral standards. The way she conceptualized this problem has parallels with Sartre's ideas about complicity as a colonial strategy, but it eventually led her to very different conclusions when she later turned to more specifically American contexts.

The beginnings of Arendt's arguments about the functions of complicity arrived in the form of literary criticism. Kafka, she explained in her 1944 essay, offered in his storytelling art "a quality of modernity which appears nowhere else with the same intensity and unequivocalness."[77] This quality of modernity in novels like *The Trial* lay in their treatment of the psychology of guilt in relation to the governing machinery of the ruling power. *The*

Trial tells two stories in parallel. One is about the functioning of the bureaucracy in K.'s nightmare world as an arbitrary but supreme source for the operation of law. The other, more compelling, is the story of K.'s voluntary submission to this authority, "obtained not by force but simply through increase in the feeling of guilt of which the unbased accusation was the origin in the accused man."[78] Arendt's view of Kafka's modernity, then, is determined by the way he intuits a new historical condition: the voluntary submission of subjects to arbitrary power on the basis of guilt feelings. It is an effective tactic because such feelings are ubiquitous, and in K.'s case they lead him into "mistaking the organized and wicked evil of the world surrounding him for some necessary expression of that general guiltiness which is harmless and almost innocent."[79]

Kafka's special value, in Arendt's account, was that he grasped a truth about modernity at a moment in the early-twentieth century when it was not yet fully visible. His nightmare worlds were not prophecies but "a sober analysis of underlying structures which today have come into the open."[80] She was thinking of course about the atrocities of what she later called totalitarianism, and how, from the vantage point of 1944, it was possible to discover signs of the present in the past. This was an antecedent for the historical structure of vision she employed in *Origins*, with its attempts to trace those elements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that had prepared the ground for the calamitous present. In the shorter term, however, Arendt built on the insights of the Kafka essay the following year, when she wrote "The German Guilt" for *Jewish Frontier*. Here, too, she considered the subjective experience of guilt as a potentially corrosive phenomenon open to exploitation and abuse, not in fiction but in the death throes of the Nazi regime.

Arendt saw the principal dilemma facing the occupying Allied powers to be "how to bear the trial of confronting a people among whom the boundaries dividing criminals from normal persons, the guilty from the innocent, have been so completely effaced that nobody

will be able to tell in Germany whether in any case he is dealing with a secret hero or with a former mass murderer."[81] The Nazi regime, in her account, systematically destroyed the distinction between innocence and guilt in a deliberate attempt to universalize their crimes and claim the loyalty of the German people. The Nazis used terror and propaganda to make neutrality about the regime impossible, which in turn "achieved the result of making the existence of each individual in Germany depend either upon committing crimes or on complicity in crimes."[82] This is one of the first uses of the term *complicity* in Arendt's work, and it has a particular valence. As with the guilt feelings in the Kafka essay, it represents a means by which to draw individual subjects into compliance and submission. "The German Guilt" goes one step further, however, by thinking this problem in a collective register, as if Nazi Germany were made up of many K.s. Guilt is "organized" into complicity. Rather than thinking through the fate of the individual, as she does with Kafka, she concentrates on the corrosive effect that complicity exerts upon the very possibility of judgment and the search for justice: "where all are guilty, nobody in the last analysis can be judged."[83] It was a phrase she was to repeat with minor variations throughout the rest of her career.

"The German Guilt" introduced a pair of terms in Arendt's thought: guilt and responsibility. She reconfigured them to deal with the crisis of moral judgment created by National Socialism. Previously, the two, if not identical, had existed in symbiosis. The effect of Nazi Germany, however, was to divorce guilt and responsibility from one another. Among the responsible, she counted those in "high society" in Germany and across Europe who facilitated Hitler's rise to power.[84] These elites, however, did not "incur any guilt in a stricter sense."[85] This stricter sense of guilt applied to those participating directly in the "vast machine of administrative mass murder," though she emphasizes that people who refused to follow orders were themselves likely to become victims.[86] This particular problem makes Nazism a historical watershed, to which there is no political solution. The guilty could no

longer be subject to effective judgment, because their number was too great, and the choices facing them were so narrow as to be negligible. Systematic mass murder thus "strains not only the imagination of human beings, but also the framework and categories of our political thought and action."[87] The historical phenomenon of organized guilt had effectively revealed the philosophical concept of guilt to be broken. Responsibility, on the other hand, kept its currency as a way of judging those who had failed morally to take account of the consequences of their actions. The responsible were those who should have known better, but in the event did not; those with the capacity to make meaningful choices about the world they lived in, but who acted ultimately from self-interest and in flight from their responsibilities for others.

In *Origins*, Arendt developed her arguments about the historical novelty and moral corrosiveness of the complicity problem in more detail. "Complicity" as a term was not used in the Kafka essay, and only once in "The German Guilt," but she deployed it frequently and decisively in *Origins*, further establishing its close relationship to the idea of organized guilt. One passage in particular shows the evolution of her thinking. In the section on "The Totalitarian Movement," she explains the methods that the Nazi elites used to establish and maintained their power in the early stages of the regime. The murders committed by groups such as the SA (*Sturmabteilung*) and later the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) were "publicly paraded and officially admitted by the upper Nazi hierarchy, so that open complicity made it well-nigh impossible for members to quit the movement."[88] "By extending complicity," she added, the aim was to "make every party member aware that he has left for good the normal world which outlaws murder and that he will be held accountable for all crimes committed by the elite."[89] In the later period of consolidation, this form of "gangster complicity" was extended to society in general, "for totalitarianism uses its power precisely to spread this complicity through the whole population until it has organized the guilt of the whole people under its

domination."[90] Arendt was drawing on the insights of "The German Guilt" by positing complicity as a method that served the interests of Nazism by inducing loyalty through a sense of shared exceptionalism, and reducing the space for conscientious resistance by exploiting the shame associated with guilt feelings.

Arendt reached a comparable position on the political function of complicity to Sartre's in "You Are Wonderful." Sartre had claimed that the complicity of white French in the metropole was installed by the leaders of the Republic: "that is how they like us."[91] Arendt's account is also suggestive of the political uses of complicity, with the key difference that she saw it as a tactic specific to Nazism, while Sartre also saw it in post-war democracies like France and the US. This is a crucial distinction, insofar as Arendt's reluctance to develop the implications of her totalitarian analyses for her adopted homeland, and her related refusal to think of US race politics in the same frame as European imperialist racism, became a major impediment to the development of her thinking on guilt and responsibility in the later 1950s and 1960s, when she turned her attention to desegregation and the Black struggle. Where Sartre made frequent and wide-ranging comparisons between Nazi Germany, imperial France and neocolonial America in terms of complicity, Arendt kept them strictly separate, following a staunchly exceptionalist line on the US with consequences we will discuss presently.

The most striking way that *Origins* develops the account of complicity given in "The German Guilt" is by arguing that totalitarian regimes not only systematically organized the guilt of ordinary people for mass murder, but also made the victims complicit in their own extinction. This was to become one of Arendt's most notorious and controversial claims, but it only drew wide attention much later when it was rearticulated in a diluted form in her reports in the Eichmann trial for the *New Yorker* in the early 1960s.[92] In the section of *Origins* dealing with Nazi death camps, she makes clear that this phenomenon was an

extension of organized guilt's logic, by which it became impossible to make effective decisions of conscience.[93] She is thinking here of the *capos* or *sonderkommandos* who were forced to participate in the running of the camps under threat of execution, and of the agonizing choices that victims were forced to make in giving up members of their families and communities to almost certain death. These are the kind of extreme choices that Sartre focused on in *Being and Nothingness*, using them as case studies for the painful but illimitable nature of existential freedom. For Arendt, they are evidence for the total breakdown of the categorical distinctions necessary to structure moral thought.

> Through the creation of conditions under which conscience ceases to be adequate and to do good becomes utterly impossible, the consciously organized complicity of all men in the crimes of totalitarian regimes is extended to the victims and thus made really total . . . The point is not only that hatred is diverted from those who are guilty (the *capos* were more hated than the SS), but that the distinguishing line between persecutor and persecuted, between the murderer and his victim, is constantly blurred.[94]

Here we discover a feature found in several accounts of complicity after World War Two: the unsettling of the basic distinction between victim and perpetrator under modern systems of domination. Accounts of victim/perpetrator collusion and identification were available from early testimonies provided by Holocaust survivor Bruno Bettelheim, whom Arendt acknowledges in her notes to this passage in *Origins*.[95] Its most well-known elaboration is in Primo Levi's later discussion of the "Gray Zone" in *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986).[96] The significance of this model extended beyond the context of the Nazi death camps, however, to include a wide range of colonial situations. Sometimes it took a more generalized form in thinking about nations. In his 1958 *Situations* essay "A Victory," for example, Sartre described colonialist France after 1944 as both "the wound and the knife," configuring victim

and perpetrator as lovers, an "entwined couple . . . engulfed in the night of debasement."[97] Still another powerful articulation can be found in the work of Black American writers such as Himes, Baldwin, and Mosley where, as we will see in Part II of this book, explicit parallels are drawn between the death camps and the conditions of the inner city ghettos and occupied colonial zones.

In the seven years from 1944 to 1951, Arendt developed a historical account of complicity as organized guilt, which articulated several of the key landmarks for writing on the topic in the years to come. The foundations for this "escape into irresponsibility," as Arendt set out in *Origins*, were laid in the late-nineteenth century by the development of a colonial bureaucracy in countries such as Egypt, Algeria, and India, as well as by the racist genocidal thinking practiced during the "Scramble for Africa" phase of imperialism.[98] But Arendt was clear that totalitarianism created an unprecedented set of historical conditions requiring a wholesale renegotiation of conventional categories of thought. Her account paralleled that of Sartre in his *Situations* essays from the mid-1950s, where he too sketched out the political uses of complicity, albeit using a much wider frame that included colonialism and neocolonialism. Taken together, their arguments present a formidable challenge to liberal conceptions about guilt and responsibility for racial domination. Indeed, they effectively decenter the dilemmas of individual conscience from their explanations of complicity as a collective social and historical event. Under colonialism for Sartre, and totalitarianism for Arendt, *it is the system that socially produces the experience of complicity for the atomized subject*. Moreover, the system does so by design, as a deliberate tactic for confounding the concepts of guilt and responsibility in the interests of reproducing relations of domination.

Arendt Between the Devil and the Deep Sea

Where do the theories of Sartre and Arendt on organized complicity leave the liberal subject, impotent and consumed by self-recrimination? The Sartre of the 1950s and 60s is more optimistic about this question than Arendt. His polemical writings name complicity in order to overcome it. Sartre does this by activating his readers' sense of shame, asking them to join his own experience of it, aiming to provoke them into throwing off the torpor of complicity by launching an active rejection of the colonial project. The most explicit articulation of this impulse came in his influential 1961 preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he asks the potential reader—"so liberal, so humane"— to "have the courage to read it, because it will make you ashamed, and shame, as Marx said, is a revolutionary sentiment."[99] Sartre alludes to Marx's 1843 letter to Arnold Ruge, in which he claims that the feeling of shame, if socialized across a whole nation "is a revolution in itself," creating a potential force like "a lion recoiling in order to spring."[100] This is the antidote to the effects of complicity described in "You Are Wonderful," which produce solitude and mistrust among the metropolitan French. Shame in this account is polyvalent and can be deployed for liberatory goals as well to disincentivize resistance.

Arendt was far less comfortable with self-implication. Her received image in both popular and scholarly discourse has been that of the aloof mandarin, speaking in the voice of what Ralph Ellison called her "Olympian authority."[101] Arendt cultivated this image, especially in the way she privileged Kantian disinterested judgment as an intellectual ideal throughout her career. Not for her the Sartrean *situation*. In general, she preferred rather to exclude herself from her own writing, evaluating historical, political, and philosophical problems from a distance. This tendency makes revealing case studies of those exceptions when she did acknowledge—however reluctantly—her personal orientation in relation to the problems she approached. On such occasions as the preface to her infamous 1959 article on

desegregation at Little Rock, and in her 1964 essay on "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," Arendt reflected on being a German-Jewish émigré intellectual in the US, and asked how that might have affected her judgment. In this light, she reconsidered and revised some (though by no means all) of the earlier positions she had taken on guilt and responsibility, demonstrating that she could not entirely evade being implicated in the issues she analyzed. Arendt described these occasions as either actually or potentially painful, demanding that she occupy a "situation I personally would find unbearable."[102]

What do Arendt's unbearable positions tell us about her own ways of articulating complicity as a structure of feeling, and what limitations do they reveal in her work? The place to begin is the conclusion to "The German Guilt." Here, Arendt endorses a claim to universal responsibility comparable to Sartre's in *Being and Nothingness*, that there exists no human position removed from responsibility for the Nazi horrors. Like Sartre in the Fanon preface, her route into this claim is through her own experience of shame. She writes:

> For many years now we have met Germans who declare that they are ashamed of being Germans. I have often felt tempted to answer that I am ashamed of being human. This elemental shame, which many people of the most various nationalities share with one another today, is what finally is left of our sense of international solidarity.[103]

Arendt worries that the humanism underpinning this shame at the evil deeds of other people has been undermined by the "doctrine of race, which denies the very possibility of a common humanity."[104] This concern follows from Arendt's view that racism is essentially the imperialist refusal to admit the humanity of colonial subjects, and thus to accept an obligation of responsibility for them:

> For the idea of humanity, when purged of all sentimentality, has the very serious consequence that in one form or another men must assume responsibility for all crimes committed by men and that all nations share the onus of evil committed by all others. Shame at being a human being is the purely individual and still non-political expression of this insight.[105]

We can immediately measure the distance between Arendt's conception of shame and Sartre's, since she doubts that it can legitimately be understood as political in the way that he and Marx do.

Yet the experience of shame stands as an "expression of [an] insight," one that might provide the foundations for action aimed at changing the world. This is a very different experience to that of organized guilt, which is orchestrated cynically from above to induce compliance. Rather, it is one that the writer herself shares with her readers, and which becomes a necessary condition for the fight against fascism. She finishes, "upon them and only upon them, who are filled with a genuine fear of the inescapable guilt of the human race, can there be any reliance when it comes to fighting fearlessly, uncompromisingly, everywhere against the incalculable evil that men are capable of bringing about."[106] It is an overcomplicated and syntactically awkward sentence of the type that was often produced by American writers in the postwar period when grappling with the intricacies of complicit situations. Given its structure, and its concern with evil, we might imagine it coming from one of Baldwin's jeremiads of the 1960s.

At this stage, Arendt was still developing her confidence with written English (Alfred Kazin and Rose Feitelson were to help her to "English" the manuscript for *Origins* a few years later).[107] Nevertheless, the phrase "inescapable guilt of the human race" is significant in the context of her earlier warnings that "when all are guilty, nobody, in the last analysis can

be judged," and, in her Kafka essay, that guilt feelings can be exploited by systems of domination.[108] Arendt seems to be reaching for a redemptive, even metaphysical meaning for the term *guilt* here, which she mobilizes as a necessary response to the atrocities and crimes committed by the Nazis, but cannot specify. As an attempt to limn the experience of complicity in language, it remains half-formed. This passage reappeared in a slightly different context in *Origins* a few years later, but there, too, the line of thinking it initiates is not completed. One of the reasons, we might speculate, that it has gone largely unremarked in the scholarship on Arendt is that it articulated a view on her own racial complicity that she went on to abandon.

In the course of the 1960s, in response partly to the furor over *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and partly to what she saw as the delusions of Great Society liberalism, Arendt's position on guilt and responsibility hardened into an emphasis on personal accountability, while her openness to self-implication diminished.[109] In *Eichmann* she had discussed the failure of the trial to deal with the "highly explosive matter" of "the almost ubiquitous complicity, which had stretched far beyond the ranks of Party membership," but afterwards she used the term less frequently in favor of narrower ones such as *co-responsibility*, *collaboration*, or, simply, *guilt.*[110] It was precisely the ubiquity of complicity that made it for Arendt such a tricky concept. In "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" (1964), she worried that her earlier responses to the Holocaust had been insufficiently rigorous, and regretted the way she had understood totalitarianism "to transcend all moral categories and to explode all standards of moral jurisdiction."[111] This was a revisionary moment that effectively withdrew her most consistently-made claims about the way Nazism had rendered a whole system of moral thinking redundant. Arendt explained that, in those years immediately after the war, she had been overwhelmed by the scale of evil and suffering. "And in this speechless horror, I fear, we all tended to forget the strictly moral and manageable lessons we had been taught before,

and would be taught again, in innumerable discussions, both inside and outside of courtrooms."[112] *Contra* the conclusion to "The German Guilt," "there is no such thing as collective guilt or collective innocence; guilt and innocence make sense only if applied to individuals."[113] This moment is instructive for us because it helps us to understand Arendt's shame in 1945 and her sharing of the "inescapable guilt of the human race" as the *un*manageable and intractable lesson of complicity, which cannot be assimilated or digested on the level of experience but which nevertheless expresses itself through the silence and discomfort of "speechless horror."

"Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" exemplifies a pervasive binary in Arendt's work between *feeling* guilty and *being* guilty.[114] In "Personal Responsibility," she describes as "the quintessence of moral confusion" the way Germans after 1945 "who personally were completely innocent assured each other and the world at large how guilty they felt, while very few of the criminals were prepared to admit even the slightest remorse."[115] The only satisfactory response to this confusion was the proper exercise of reason in the act of moral judgment. "For only if we assume there exists a human faculty which enables us to judge rationally without being carried away by either emotion or self-interest . . . can we risk ourselves on this very slippery moral ground with some hope of finding a firm footing."[116] What makes the essay important for our purposes is the unusual way Arendt discusses what she calls "personal matters," her own biography in relation to the Nazi regime in the 1930s. For here Arendt corrects her own past failures of judgment, which were characteristic of her own class of intellectuals in interwar Germany. This recognition is described in a language that she rarely used in her published writing, of personal discomfort and pain. Arendt remarks "how uncomfortable most of us are when confronted with moral issues," before going on to write "I better admit that not the least uncomfortable one is myself."[117] There follows an admission that, during her intellectual formation, questions of

moral judgment were not deemed a necessary or worthy object of attention. The result was that she and her peers were left wholly unprepared for the moral problems raised by Co-ordination (*Gleichaltung*), the policy by which the party demanded complete alignment from the institutions of not only political but also economic, cultural, and social life. She is chary about the specifics of her own biographical role, switching her pronouns between "we" and "they" in a way that makes it difficult to locate her in the situation. In this way, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" registers the unmanageability of complicity for Arendt when she approaches it as structure of feeling to be inhabited. Her language turns to spatial metaphors invoking impasse and confinement: "the more these things are discussed, the clearer it becomes, I think, that we actually find ourselves here in a position between the devil and the deep sea."[118]

Three years later, Arendt made clear that, even if her skepticism of guilt feelings over several decades had been prompted largely by reflections on the Holocaust, its contemporary relevance was most evident in relation to the Black freedom struggles in the US. She began her conference talk on "Collective Responsibility" by claiming that,

> There is no such thing as being or feeling guilty for things that happened without oneself actively participating in them. This is an important point, worth making loudly and clearly at a moment when so many good white liberals confess to guilt feelings with respect to the Negro question.[119]

Arendt suggests here that the response of ordinary Germans to the Nazi atrocities provided a precedent from which to learn in the context of contemporary US race politics: in Germany the temptation to indulge in guilt feelings among the general populace had only served to exculpate the real guilty parties and to produce "a phony sentimentality in which all real issues are obscured."[120] Accordingly, the "good white liberals" of 1967 needed to pay heed.

Arendt was responding to the rise of a discourse of liberal complicity in the US during the 1960s, which it is one of the tasks of this book to trace. The implications of her historical analogy are astonishing: she is not comparing, as Black radicals in the period often did, the oppression of Black Americans with that of the Jews under the Nazis; rather, her fear is that Black Americans might cynically exploit notions of liberal complicity in the same way that the Nazis organized guilt. In both cases, the notion of collective guilt is explicitly racialized as a naïve white delusion, but the political valence is reversed in the case of Black America, where the oppressed group emerges as cynical and opportunist. (A comparable characterization of Black radicals as cynical opportunists taking advantage of naïve white liberals' guilt feelings is to be found in Joan Didion's "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," published the same year. The essay is discussed in detail in Part II). Arendt was opposed to the Black Power movement in the later 1960s, which she saw as illegitimately violent and a threat to established social, cultural, and intellectual standards.[121] Her insistence that white liberals should feel neither guilt nor responsibility for racial domination in the United States was then part of a larger pattern of criticism of Black radicalism, skepticism about the value of integration, and rejection of conscience as a threat to dispassionate judgment.

Much has been written about Arendt's treatment of anti-Black racism in her work, particularly concerning her failure to consider anti-Black racism in the US using the same tools she developed for thinking about imperialism and Nazism in Europe.[122] At the root of this problem lay her steadfast refusal to consider the US as an imperialist power of the type she had analyzed in *Origins*. There, she had shown how the imperialism of late-nineteenth-century European powers had prepared the ground for Nazism in its cultivation of racist ideologies. The institution of chattel slavery in the US, however, and the history of racial domination that followed it, were to be grasped as autonomous developments specific to the US.

The most egregious example of this tendency is in "Reflections on Little Rock" (1959), where Arendt dismisses as "sheer coincidence" any structural resemblance between the dynamics of colonial racism described by anti-colonial movements around the world, and the US's own racial conflicts:

> [T]he country's attitude to its Negro population is rooted in American tradition and nothing else. The color question was created by the one great crime in America's history and is soluble only within the political and historical framework of the Republic. The fact that this question has also become a major issue in world affairs is sheer coincidence as far as American history and politics are concerned; for the color problem in world politics grew out of the colonialism and imperialism of European nations-—that is, the one great crime in which America was never involved.[123]

Arendt's determination to preserve American innocence with regard to colonialism and Nazism flew in the face of Black American intellectuals from Richard Wright and Langston Hughes to Chester Himes and W. E. B. Du Bois. During and after World War Two, these figures developed conceptual and historical frameworks for understanding imperialism, fascism and domestic racism as facets of a wider white-supremacist project, what Hughes called "Jim Crow for the world."[124] As Du Bois wrote in 1952, his experiences of visiting the Warsaw ghetto had led him to "a real and more complete understanding of the Negro problem," in which "the problem of slavery, emancipation, and caste in the United States was no longer in my mind a separate and unique thing."[125] Du Bois had used his visit to the locations of Jewish Eastern Europe to enlarge his sense of racial projects as transcultural overlapping phenomena, thus allowing him to emerge out of "social provincialism" into a new realization of race's imbrication with "oppression by wealth."[126]

The insistence on US exceptionalism with regard to race was far from unusual during the height of the Cold War, when many intellectuals and policy makers worried about the propaganda uses the Soviet Union could make of Jim Crow.[127] We will meet another example of this rhetoric when we examine Baldwin's 1955 report for *Encounter* magazine on the First International Conference for Black Writers and Artists in Paris. My purpose in invoking Du Bois is more to indicate the wide historical availability of alternative approaches to the interdependence of US racial projects with fascism and European imperialism. In the Francophone sphere, comparable frameworks were being constructed by thinkers in the Third World revolutionary tradition that we know Arendt had read, such as Fanon and Sartre.[128] Moreover, Arendt had almost certainly read "The Responsibility of Peoples" by her friend Dwight Macdonald, who had made some of those connections in 1945, asking those appalled by the atrocities of Nazism to consider their co-responsibility for crimes such as the genocidal slaughter of indigenous people in the US and Australia, and the devastating planned famines which the British had allowed to take place in Bengal, India.[129]

"Reflections on Little Rock" demonstrated the intellectual costs of Arendt's habits as a "splitter" rather than a "lumper," inclined to make ever finer distinctions between objects of thought and constitutionally adverse to synthesis.[130] She argued against federally-enforced schools desegregation, on the basis that it infringed upon the autonomy of states' rights fundamental to the Republic. She claimed that education belonged properly to the social realm of free association, as opposed to the private or political ones, so discrimination there was both normal and legitimate. David Spitz rejoined, in one of the most penetrating contemporaneous responses, that "society is the web of all human relationships; the political and the private are at most distinguishable but not separable strands within the greater fabric."[131] Arendt had separated social phenomena that were in practice mutually interwoven, and in attempting to abstract them had, in fact, done violence to the social fabric. Just as Jim

Crow racism for Du Bois could not be abstracted from anti-Semitism in Europe, so here schools' segregation could not be effectively disentangled from anti-miscegenation laws or equality of access to the vote, in the way Arendt proposed. Splitting emerges here as the key to what Anne Norton astutely identified in 1995 as the "uneasy fit between [Arendt's] writings on race and her disavowal of complicity in an unjust racial order."[132]

"Reflections on Little Rock" was published in *Dissent* with a preface omitted from its subsequently collected form in Jerome Kohn's edition of *Responsibility and Judgment*. In the preface, Arendt pre-emptively addressed some of the objections that she knew were coming. She admitted, "I have never lived in the South, and have even avoided trips to Southern states because they would have brought me into a situation that I personally would find unbearable."[133] Precisely what Arendt would find unbearable we do not discover, but this is a moment that demands to be read alongside the discomfort that accompanied her self-examination in "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," as well as the deep shame at recognizing her part in a collective humanity in "The German Guilt." These are all moments of unfinished self-reflection, when the process of thinking through her own position in relation to large-scale racial harms is broken off as dangerously unmanageable, as though contaminated with feelings that could not be borne. They are the affective counterparts to Arendt's dispassionate judgments on responsibility, authorizing those judgments while simultaneously effacing themselves as personal and therefore secondary.

Arendt's search for ever-finer distinctions within conventional thought-objects usually served to valorize distance and abstraction. Complicity, on the other hand, by her own account, is a problem precisely because it *confounds* those categories which must remain distinct for judgment to be effective: between victim and perpetrator, between thought and feeling, and between innocence and guilt. Complicity is a threat to judgment that Arendt cannot finally exorcise from her own intellectual projects, and the drama of her oeuvre—its

biographical and intellectual shape—is that the flight into disinterestedness is necessarily only ever an incomplete performance. In this, she stands in direct contrast with Sartre, whose tendency towards self-implication and passionate polemic during the same period also alienated many, but for opposite reasons.

While Arendt's 1960s thought has often been considered essential to a contemporary understanding of complicity, Sartre's importance is less frequently acknowledged, and often ignored.[134] This situation follows the pattern set by the backlash against Sartre's Marxism during the middle phase of the Cold War, when his materialist turn and criticism of US neocolonialism led to his effective blacklisting by liberal academia in the US and Europe. Yet an attention to Sartre's career helps us to see what is shut out in Arendt's: the possibility that racial domination in and by the United States formed part of a broader global history of empire, and that the questions of guilt and responsibility she developed in response to the Holocaust might equally well be asked of anti-Black racial projects in the United States, and of US neocolonialism. This is an avenue I will pursue in the second part of this study, when we turn to Black writing and the contexts of the Sixties. In the next two chapters, however, we will stay with the questions raised by Arendt about the crisis of judgment brought about by totalitarianism and by Sartre about the nature of bad faith in situations of complicity.

[1] On Sartre's US reception, see George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Ann Fulton, *Apostles of Sartre: Existentialism in America, 1945-1963* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999). On Hannah Arendt's reception and reputation in the United States, see Richard H. King, *Arendt and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[2] Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” *Dissent* 6, no. 2 (1959): 46.

[3] On the changing meanings of the term literature throughout history, see John Guillory, *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2022), 199–223.

[4] Jean-Paul Sartre, “Paris under the Occupation,” in *The Aftermath of War (Situations III)*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Seagull, 2008), 10.

[5] Ibid., 10.

[6] Ibid., 12. Sartre’s emphasis.

[7] Ibid., 13.

[8] Ibid., 11.

[9] Ibid., 18.

[10] Ibid., 17.

[11] Ibid., 17-18.

[12] Ibid., 32.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 33

[15] Ibid., 34.

[16] Sartre, “Paris,” 34. Sartre’s emphasis.

[17] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Life/Situations: Essays Written and Spoken* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 45. On the treatment of individual and collective forms of responsibility I have learned in particular from Thomas R. Flynn’s two books on Sartre. Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: The Test Case of Collective Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre: A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[18] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

[19] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), 574.

[20] Ibid., 574-5. Sartre's emphasis.

[21] On the bystander, see Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992).

[22] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 14.

[23] Sartre, "Paris," 34.

[24] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 569.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Flynn, *Sartre*, 184.

[27] On Sartrean bad faith, see Ronald E. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995); Joseph S. Catalano, *Good Faith and Other Essays: Perspectives on a Sartrean Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995). Matthew C. Eshleman, "Bad Faith Is Necessarily Social," *Sartre Studies International* 14, no. 2 (2008): 40–47; Jonathan Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (London: Routledge, 2008), 88–103.

[28] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 67.

[29] Jean-Paul Sartre, "What Is a Collaborator?," in *The Aftermath of War*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Seagull, 2008), 52–53.

[30] Ibid., 54.

[31] On cynicism in bad faith, see Ronald E. Santoni, "Bad Faith and Character in Jonathan Webber's Sartre: An Appreciation and Critique," *Sartre Studies International* 26, no. 1

(2020): 38–60; Jonathan Webber, "Sociality, Seriousness and Cynicism: A Response to Ronald Santoni on Bad Faith," *Sartre Studies International* 26, no. 1 (2020): 61–76.

[32] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 93.

[33] Ibid., 72.

[34] Flynn, *Sartre*, 184.

[35] On bad faith and conversion, see Webber, "Sociality, Seriousness and Cynicism," 66–68.

[36] James Baldwin, "The Fire Next Time," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 292.

[37] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 73.

[38] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 70.

[39] Ibid., 71.

[40] Herbert Marcuse, "Existentialism: Remarks on Jean-Paul Sartre's L'Etre et Le Néant," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 8, no. 3 (1948): 312.

[41] Ibid., 323.

[42] Ibid., 335.

[43] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Sartre and Ultra-Bolshevism," in *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 95–201; Georg Lukacs, "Existentialism," in *Marxism and Human Liberation; Essays on History, Culture and Revolution*, ed. E. San Juan, Jr. (New York: Dell, 1973), 243–66.

[44] On Sartre as a liberal thinker, see Michael Walzer, "Preface," in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, by Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken, 1995), xix; Fawcett, *Liberalism*, 328–35.

[45] Fulton, *Apostles of Sartre*, 48–82.

[46] Stuart M. Brown, Jr., "The Aetheistic Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre," *The Philosophical Review* 57, no. 2 (1948): 166.

[47] Carol Brightman, *Writing Dangerously: Mary McCarthy and Her World* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1992), 329. On Sartre's reception at *Partisan Review*, see also Cotkin, *Existential America*, 105–36.

[48] Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*; Flynn, *Sartre*, 314–54; Paige Arthur, *Unfinished Projects: Decolonization and the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (London: Verso, 2010), x–xiv.

[49] Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*, 51.

[50] Sartre, "Colonialism Is a System," 30.

[51] Ibid., 31.

[52] Ibid., 45.

[53] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 1: Theory of Practical Ensembles*, ed. Jonathan Ree, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso, 2004), 714.

[54] Jean-Paul Sartre, Philippe Gavi, and Pierre Victor, *It Is Right to Rebel*, trans. Adrian van den Hoven and Basil Kingstone (London: Routledge, 2017), 77.

[55] Sartre, "Colonialism Is a System," 44.

[56] Ibid., 32.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Sartre defines *le vécu* in more detail in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism: Essays and Interviews, 1959-70*, trans. John Mathews (London: New Left Books, 1974), 42.

[59] Jean-Paul Sartre, "You Are Wonderful," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London: Routledge, 2001), 55.

[60] Ibid., 61.

[61] Ibid., 58. Sartre's emphasis.

[62] Ibid., 55.

[63] Ibid., 57.

[64] Ibid., 55.

[65] On seriality, see Sartre, *Critique*, 256–342.

[66] Sartre, "You Are Wonderful," 59.

[67] The "fused group" is discussed in Sartre, *Critique*, 345–404.

[68] Sartre further developed his representation of this relationship in his 1959 play *Les séquestrés d'Altona*. See Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 149-81.

[69] Sartre, "You Are Wonderful," 60–61.

[70] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sartre on Cuba* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1961), 36. For more on Sartre and Cuba, see William Rowlandson, *Sartre in Cuba -- Cuba in Sartre* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

[71] Jean-Paul Sartre, *On Genocide*, trans. Arlette Elkaim-Sartre (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1968), 84–85.

[72] See John Duffett, ed., *Against the Crime of Silence: Proceedings of the Russell International War Crimes Tribunal Stockholm-Copenhagen* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970).

[73] Ronald Aronson, "Sartre and the American New Left," in *Sartre and the International Impact of Existentialism*, ed. Alfred Betschart and Juliane Werner (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 45–59.

[74] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Knopf, 1963), 21.

[75] Arendt wrote several essays on existentialism in 1946. On Arendt's engagement with existentialism, see King, *Arendt and America*, 39-40, 64-5.

[76] Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, trans. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 1994), 310.

[77] Hannah Arendt, "Franz Kafka: A Revaluation," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 1994), 69.

[78] Ibid., 70

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid., 74.

[81] This essay was given a different title when later collected. Hannah Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility," in *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 125.

[82] Ibid., 124.

[83] Ibid., 126.

[84] Ibid., 125.

[85] Ibid., 126.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Arendt, *Origins*, 487.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid., 533.

[91] Sartre, "You Are Wonderful," 57.

[92] In *Eichmann*, Arendt argues that the leadership of Jewish Councils were overcompliant with Nazi directives during the Holocaust, compared them to Quislings, and suggested that their cooperation cost Jewish lives. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin, 2006), 112-134.

[93] Arendt, *Origins*, 593.

[94] Ibid.

[95] On early discussions of victim-perpetator identification after the Holocaust, see Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 19–24.

[96] See Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 24–55.

[97] Jean-Paul Sartre, "A Victory," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London: Routledge, 2001), 76-77.

[98] Arendt, *Origins*, 271.

[99] Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Wretched of the Earth," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London: Routledge, 2001), 141, 142.

[100] Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Gregor Benton and Rodney Livingstone (London: Penguin, 1992), 199–200.

[101] Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 108.

[102] Arendt, "Reflections," 46.

[103] Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility," 131.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid., 132.

[107] King, *Arendt and America*, 44.

[108] Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility," 126.

[109] On the shifts in Arendt's thought during this period, see King, *Arendt and America*, 189–244; Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 328–437.

[110] Arendt, *Eichmann*, 18.

[111] Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2003), 23.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid., 29.

[114] On sentiment as a threat to thinking in Arendt, see Deborah Nelson, *Tough Enough: Arbus, Arendt, Didion, McCarthy, Sontag, Weil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 45-71; Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 155–200.

[115] Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2003), 28.

[116] Ibid., 27.

[117] Ibid. 22.

[118] Ibid., 25.

[119] Hannah Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2003), 147.

[120] Ibid., 148.

[121] Kathryn T. Gines, *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 112–23.

[122] Gines, *Hannah Arendt*; King, *Arendt and America*. See also Robert Bernasconi, "The Double Face of the Political and the Social: Hannah Arendt and America's Racial Divisions," *Research in Phenomenology* 26, no. 1 (1996): 3–24; Chad Kautzer, "Political Violence and Race: A Critique of Hannah Arendt," *Comparative Literature and Culture* 21, no. 3 (2019); Anne Norton, "Africa and African-Americans in the Work of Hannah Arendt," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 247–61.

[123] Arendt, "Reflections," 46.

[124] Langston Hughes, "From Here to Yonder," *Chicago Defender*, May 12, 1945, 12. Sarah C. Dunstan, *Race, Rights and Reform: Black Activism in the French Empire and the United States from World War I to the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 148–236.

[125] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto," *Jewish Life* 6, no. 7 (1952), 15.

[126] Ibid. On Du Bois's essay, see Michael Rothberg, "W.E.B. Du Bois in Warsaw: Holocaust Memory and the Color Line, 1949-1952," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (2001): 169–89.

[127] James Zeigler, *Red Scare Racism and Cold War Black Radicalism* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015).

[128] Arendt's critique of Fanon and Sartre can be found in *On Violence* (1970).

[129] Macdonald, "The Responsibility of Peoples," 16.

[130] King, *Arendt and America*, 17.

[131] David Spitz, "Politics and the Realms of Being," *Dissent* 6, no. 1 (1959): 58.

[132] Norton, "Africa and African Americans," 248.

[133] Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," 52.

[134] See Naomi Mandel, "Toward a New Complicity for New Media," *Comparative Literature Studies* 56, no. 4 (2019): 693–710. Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019); Thomas Docherty, *Complicity: Criticism between Collaboration and Commitment* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2016).

Part I, Chapter 2

Complicit Atmospheres: Anti-Semitism and Midcentury Fiction

A small constellation of literary texts was published in the decade after World War Two with a common theme: the nightmare of the liberal intellectual finding themselves to be complicit with anti-Semitism in a confined space, and being unable to escape. In Vladimir Nabokov's short story "Double Talk" (1945), the narrator, an émigré writer, attends a drinks party in a Boston apartment only to discover that the guests are fascist sympathizers, and that he has been invited mistakenly in the place of his malevolent anti-Semitic double. In Saul Bellow's second novel *The Victim* (1947), a Jewish newspaper worker in New York allows a jobless ex-colleague to share his home, despite the knowledge that he is plainly anti-Semitic. Mary McCarthy's autobiographical tale "Artists in Uniform" (1953) describes the narrator's encounter with an anti-Semitic colonel in the club car of a train, and her subsequent failure to disentangle herself from his prejudicial views as they lunch together in a cocktail lounge.

Read comparatively, these three texts offer us a route into understanding more about the aesthetics of complicity as they became established as a significant concern in the highbrow cultural field of the post-war years. Although each had a long and varied writing career stretching well into the latter part of the century, Nabokov, Bellow and McCarthy were, from World War Two through to the early 1950s, all members of an East-Coast intelligentsia characterized by its rejection of Stalinism, adherence to classically liberal political values and commitment to the aesthetic values of European modernism. McCarthy knew both Nabokov and Bellow, and all three published work in *Partisan Review*, the house journal for the loose cultural formation known as the New York Intellectuals.[1] Although Nabokov remained an anomaly in this set, never having counted himself a Trotskyist in the 1930s as most other New York Intellectuals had, Bellow was at the time of *The Victim*'s

publication understood by them to be the United States' most promising young novelist, while McCarthy stood at the very center of the group both socially and intellectually.[2] In reading them for their points of contact and shared concerns, we are able to build an account of how this liberal intelligentsia articulated complicity as an emergent structure of feeling, and more specifically of why anti-Semitic complicity was such an important concern for them.

The qualities of discriminating judgment, dispassionate scrutiny, and fastidious self-interrogation that provided the New York intellectuals with their sense of identity and purpose were precisely those threatened and thereby mobilized by the specter of complicity. This new formation of liberals aimed above all to maintain the disciplined exercise of reasoned judgment in a world in which such critical activity was becoming increasingly difficult to practice, due to the collapse after World War Two of categorical distinctions once held to be definitive. This crisis of confidence in axiomatic liberal principles followed in the wake of World War Two, along with the discovery of the death camps and a growing understanding of the human costs of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. In chapter one, we saw how it can be traced in the work of Hannah Arendt, another key member of the formation (and a close friend of McCarthy). Arendt understood totalitarianism to have been a watershed moment in the history of thought because of the way it confounded notions of guilt and responsibility, victim and perpetrator upon which ethical judgment often depends. As she wrote in 1954, "for those engaged in the quest for meaning and understanding, what is frightening in the rise of totalitarianism is not that it is something new, but that it has brought to light the ruin of our categories of thought and standards of judgment."[3] In what follows, we will examine how anti-Semitic complicity was perceived and represented by post-war liberals in relation to the acts of discrimination and judgment that it both demanded and frustrated.

The writers I discuss here improvised with literary form in the 1940s and early 1950s, searching for ways to respond to the crisis of judgment described by Arendt. We witness them experimenting with different means of expressing complicity as something that has not completely come into view as a finished or complete historical entity. This is complicity as what I have been calling, after Raymond Williams, a “structure of feeling” in the process of formation. In the aesthetic pattern that emerges, there are two distinct strands. One is concerned with language itself, and anxieties over its ambiguities. Speech is in danger of lapsing into careless imprecision, and its inherent ambiguities risk being exploited. The title of Nabokov’ “Double Talk,” already directs us towards this fear, but in the fictions by Bellow and McCarthy too, we discover how complicit situations are accompanied by linguistic betrayal, a failure to speak well to others, in one’s own words and in good faith. The other strand explores how complicity is rendered in midcentury highbrow fiction as a particular kind of space: pressurized, claustrophobic, and oppressive. Accordingly, we will need to pay close attention to the way space is evoked and delimited in these texts, from the stultifying interior of a train’s club car to a Lower East Side apartment in the height of summer.

In order to hold these two strands together I will be using the concept of *atmosphere*. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt described “the haunting specter of universal cooperation, the stifling, poisoned atmosphere which had surrounded the Final Solution,” using the term to express a certain ambiguity about agency and participation that we will see is characteristic of many literary representations of complicity.[4] In reading work by Nabokov, Bellow, and McCarthy, the concept of atmosphere helps us more specifically to grasp how doubts about referential adequacy of spoken language relate to the work of scene-setting and establishing place. The dialectic of dialogue and description that animates the mode of fiction takes on an augmented and oppressive charge when, in complicit moments, they begin to work in disharmony. Atmosphere is that which holds speech and space in tension and creates the

economy between them. Failures to communicate in the texts discussed here are accompanied by a recognition of complicity as atmosphere, one which fills up whatever spatial formation it occupies, and engulfs the embodied subjects we find there.

I draw here on Gernot Böhme's work on the aesthetics of atmospheres, and his understanding of atmosphere as "tuned space," saturated with a certain mood.[5] For Böhme, atmospheres are always both spatial and emotional, creating a challenge to the tradition of Kantian aesthetics with its emphasis on the dispassionate and disembodied judgment of the artwork. As he argues, atmospheres return aesthetics to the realm of sense perception and feeling, challenging the dominance of reason and language, as well as the structure of subject / object relations, focusing rather on spatiality and physical presence. Böhme's work does not address questions of complicity, but it nevertheless provides a suggestive theoretical frame for understanding how these writers transform an ethical and political problem into an aesthetic one. In their work, complicit atmospheres threaten to overcome the faculties of judgment and discrimination, compelling subjects into recognition of their social positionality as embodied, compromised and entangled selves.

Nabokov's Double Talk

"Double Talk" was published in the *New Yorker* in June 1945, in the last days of the war. Public realization of the extent of Nazi atrocities in Europe was beginning to increase. In the last two weeks of April, the Allied liberation of death camps at Belsen and Buchenwald had produced a series of articles in the US press that began to detail the discoveries, including photographs of piles of dead bodies. "Double Talk" was composed in late March and early April, before news of the camps became well-known, but Nabokov and his Jewish wife Véra had lived together in Berlin until summer 1937, witnessing the tightening grip of National

Socialism first-hand, and the accompanying spread of its race laws.[6] They had escaped Nazi-occupied France for the United States in May 1940. In 1945, Nabokov was living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and working as a Lepidopterist at Harvard University while he tried to resurrect his literary career in a new country. News of the comparable discoveries the Soviet Red Army had made as they reached camps East of Berlin earlier in the spring had likely reached him through his contacts in the Russian émigré community. He had yet to learn, however, that his brother Sergei had been one of those to perish in the concentration camps, having been arrested as a homosexual.[7]

"Double Talk" is one of the earliest examples of American fiction to treat the Holocaust substantively, though it is rarely acknowledged as such. The story received little attention at the time of its publication or subsequently, and on the rare occasion it is read by Nabokov scholars, it is dismissed as a minor work in a minor genre.[8] It comes as something as embarrassment to some that Nabokov, far from being the aloof aesthete he always presented himself as, responded actively and thoughtfully to contemporary events in his fiction.[9] "Double Talk" realizes the fear, explicitly raised in the highbrow press in 1945 by figures such as Arendt and Dwight Macdonald, that there is no position outside Holocaust responsibility.[10] It suggests that even the most cultured liberal intellectuals carry with them anti-Semitic doubles, and that strenuous efforts to disengage from anti-Semitism only result in deeper moral entanglement. Like a fish in a net, the greater one struggles to escape, the more entwined one becomes in the threads.

The narrator of the story has what he calls "a disreputable namesake, complete from nickname to surname, a man whom I have never seen in the flesh but whose vulgar personality I have been able to deduce from his chance intrusions into the castle of my life."[11] This double is a clear-cut anti-Semite, whose library fines for a copy of *The Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion* end up being sent to the narrator.[12] The only other things the narrator has

deduced about this double are that he is a drunkard and a fellow Russian refugee. The body of the story concerns a social gathering in Boston during the spring of 1945 organized by a Mrs. Hall. The narrator attends, having been invited on recommendation by a mutual friend. At the gathering he discovers a dozen middle-class people in a bourgeois salon calmly despairing the fate of Nazi Germany. The guest of honor is a man the narrator calls Dr. Shoe, another Russian émigré, who had been resident in Germany since the Russian Civil War. Dr. Shoe is a genteel Holocaust denier, who presents Germany as a high-minded but misled nation, unjustly criticized and victimized in defeat. As Dr. Shoe sits down to play "The Star-Spangled Banner" on the piano with the words "God Bless America," the narrator, overcome with nausea, storms out of the salon, expressing his disgust to Mrs. Hall on the way out. He takes the wrong hat, however, and the next morning Dr. Shoe materializes at his door to return the narrator's and to retrieve his own. The story concludes with the narrator receiving a letter from his double, accusing him of impersonating him and drunkenly insulting Mrs. Hall. The double suggests the narrator pays him a sum of money "by way of indemnity," or in other words as blackmail. In the final line, the narrator admits, "the sum he demanded was really a most modest one."[13]

The story takes its doubling theme from Fyodor Dostoevsky and Edgar Allan Poe, two writers that Nabokov dialogued with consistently throughout his career. Like them, he presents his narrative as an irrational nightmare in which events unfold beyond the control of the perceiver. The substance of this nightmare is one of anti-Semitic complicity, and its special power emerges only at the moment when the subject leaves the space of complicity—in this case the bourgeois salon—only to discover that its trace is ineradicable. In this sense, complicity is recognized, not at the moment one accepts an invitation to hospitality, but when one fails to leave the party convincingly. On an allegorical level, this persistence of the complicit trace is presented in the form of the anti-Semite's hat, mistakenly picked up by the

narrator as he leaves. In a nice detail, we read that the narrator is disgusted by the object, smelling of another's hair lotion, but wears it nevertheless because, as he tells us, "the night was rainy and cold."[14] This is an important detail because it condenses the conceptual stakes of the story's wider engagement with anti-Semitism and doubling. The malodorous body and its perfumes have long been a trope in anti-Semitic discourse, as with other forms of racism. In an ironic turn, then, the narrator's disgust at the smell of the hat likely imitates the mode of prejudice assumed by its owner, as well as bringing them into a shared identification through the physical wearing of the scented hat itself. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno claimed in the "Elements of Anti-Semitism" chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), "when we see we remain who we are, when we smell we are absorbed entirely," in a moment of bodily identification with the Other.[15] Taking the irony of the misplaced hat as an interpretive starting point, we can detect other pieces of evidence to suggest that the narrator is not as righteous as he suggests.[16] As in classic doubling tales such as Poe's "William Wilson," we are left unable to ascertain exactly what *does* distinguish the narrator from his double, and with the demand that the motif of doubling should be understood as an external projection of internal psychological state.

Before addressing complicity's spatial representation as atmosphere in this story, it is worth considering the problem of bad faith speech. The principal meaning of the phrase "double-talk" is speech that appears to be made in earnest, but on inspection is revealed to be empty or facetious. Its other meaning, related but distinct, is that of deliberately and deceptively ambiguous speech. The story's renders Dr. Shoe's own double-talk in the first sense, as he uses the platitudes and clichés of genteel middle-class culture to express Nazi apologism and Holocaust denial. He is asked why the Germans failed to resist Hitler.

> 'The answer is a terrible one,' he said with an effort. . . . 'As you know, I am German myself, of pure Bavarian stock, though a loyal citizen of this country. And never-

theless, I am going to say something very terrible about my former countrymen.

Germans'—the soft-lashed eyes were half-closed again—'Germans are dreamers.'[17]

Such double-talk is clear enough, but there remains the possibility that Nabokov intends his narrator's tale itself as double-talk in the second sense. According to this reading, the narrator's use of language creates convenient ambiguities about his own identity, making it unclear precisely how he is related to his double. This second sense of double talk takes us directly into the territory of Sartrean bad faith, which names situations in which the self takes a course of action, such as using language ambiguously, that allows it to conceal or deny its freedom and responsibility. In this case, much depends on the narrator's own failure to challenge Dr. Shoe. "Timidity, and perhaps morbid curiosity," he explains, "kept me from leaving the room," but he claims to have remained silent because he stammers whenever he becomes excited.[18] If we believe him to be capable of double talk, then the interpretive route remains open that the narrator lost control that night because of inebriation, like his drunkard namesake, and thus lacked the mental resources necessary to marshal his speech into an coherent challenge to Dr. Shoe. Alcoholism, of course, is an excellent cover for bad faith because of the way it diminishes liability for one's actions, disabling as it does one's ability to make good judgments.

This troubling of judgment is extended in the story by its evocation of coziness. The narrator imagines his double being present at the gathering, as he believes was intended: "the nightmare into which I had been propelled would probably have struck him as a cozy evening with kindred souls."[19] This coziness is closely related to the concept of atmosphere. Böhme describes atmospheres as quasi-objective in the sense that "we are not sure whether we should attribute them to the objects or environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them."[20] In the absence of directly anti-Semitic comments and therefore of culpable evidence, it is the nebulous, faux-genteel atmosphere of complicity in

the Boston apartment that the narrator finds so poisonous. The power of the story, however, rests in the way he is unable to exorcise the possibility that the atmosphere is in some sense attributable to him. He inhabits it, allows it to surround him, and most pertinently, despite its negative effect on him, is unable to alter its dominant social feeling as cozy.

The interior design of the apartment where this atmosphere circulates, and the way its mood is orchestrated, makes it seem like a stage set.[21] The narrator tells us how he is greeted by an "ancient elevator attendant, oddly resembling Richard Wagner," who "gloomily took me up." In the hallway, he notes "the chief decorative note was a certain type of ornamental vase manufactured in China, and possibly of great antiquity—in this case a tall, sickly-colored brute of a thing—which always made me abominably unhappy." He then crosses "a self-conscious, small room that fairly brimmed with what advertisement writers call 'gracious living'" before entering the salon.[22] The detail of Wagner's double conjures the specter of complicity with anti-Semitism.[23] Wagner was one of those anti-Semites to regularly deploy the trope of the malodorous Jew, but the Wagner allusion also suggests the way complicity can be perceived through the frame of aesthetic taste, and more specifically, through the aesthetics of atmospheres.[24] If Wagner was mass culture for middle-class Nazis, then gracious interiors and antique Chinese vases were mass culture for bourgeois American anti-Semites. The two arts of the composer and the interior designer have in common the way they are perceived by the subject as creating aesthetic experiences that fill up space with certain moods and emotions.

The importance of interior design is developed in the passage where the narrator, himself a writer, imaginatively enters the minds of Dr. Shoe's listeners, in a self-conscious performance of free indirect discourse. The woman sitting next to him,

> [. . .] was, in all probability, worrying about a bit of decoration having to do with some social event or wartime entertainment the exact nature of which I could not determine. But I did know how badly she wanted that additional touch. Something in the middle of the table, she was thinking. I need something that would make people gasp—perhaps a great big huge bowl of artificial fruit. Not the wax kind, of course. Something nicely marbleized.[25]

The challenge we are left with is to make sense of the connection between Holocaust complicity and artificial fruit in Nabokov's mind. We might hypothesize that it relates to a characteristically midcentury concern with the debased taste of mass culture. Six years earlier, Clement Greenberg had written on the confusion between authentic art and "kitsch" in an influential *Partisan Review* essay. Greenberg understood totalitarian regimes to be particularly fertile ground for kitsch because of its pliability for the purposes of propaganda, arguing that "Kitsch keeps a dictator in closer contact with the 'soul' of the people."[26] The term that Nabokov used to describe aesthetic objects that aspire to high feeling and legitimacy but fall instead into cliché and inauthenticity was "poshlust," which he had adapted from the Russian word *Poshlost'*. His fullest account of poshlust was given in *Nikolai Gogol*, published a year earlier in 1944, where he offers detailed examples of poshlust in American advertising and Soviet state-sanctioned culture.[27] Later in his life, however, Nabokov made clear that the domain of poshlust extended beyond conventionally understood aesthetic objects. In 1966 he chose the phrase "we all share in Germany's guilt" as a prime example of poshlust.[28] The discourse of complicity itself, in this case, is subject to negative aesthetic judgment as cliché.

We can approach the problem of the marbleized fruit in more specific terms, however, by considering interior design as the intentional production of atmospheres—in this case one of coziness, generating a comfortable mood of lassitude.[29] The production of coziness in

"Double Talk" facilitates a kind of staged enchantment in which the exercise of discriminating judgment and vigilance are discouraged. The party's stage-managed atmosphere softens what might otherwise be understood as an uncomfortable encounter between bourgeois leisure and the catastrophe of the Nazi death camps, and creates instead a space in which complicity flourishes. The woman's imagined habit of piling redundant adjectives upon one another—"great big huge"—exemplifies a failure of aesthetic judgment, but the story's suggestion is that it betokens other and greater failures of ethical judgment too.

On this reading, the story suggests that if cozy complicity is the problem, the solution is the practice of vigilant speech and judgment capable of cutting though its hazy atmospheres. If people only exercised the same disinterested, discriminating judgment in social encounters that they did in evaluating aesthetic objects, then complicity might be avoided.[30] Considered alongside its critique of the narrator's bad faith, the story invites us to consider that the class of white liberal intellectuals itself might be complicit with racial prejudice. In pursuing this possibility, it is illuminating to pay attention to the dual meaning of the word "white" in Nabokov's story, its double talk, so to speak. The doppelgänger is imagined by the narrator as being "a young, very White émigré of the automatically reactionary type."[31] The capitalization of "White" points to a particular ideological and class identity among Russian emigres aligned with the departed monarchy and anti-Communism. Yet the word and its odd phrasing, together with the context of the setting in the United States also permits us to consider the function of racial whiteness, compatible with but distinct from the politics of the Russian emigration. The narrator is extremely perceptive about whiteness and the way the term mediates between the purely ocular and the construction of racial identities. He observes that Dr. Shoe is lit by a lamp at his shoulder so that "one could admire the whiteness of his clasped hands," and then admits that, "for some odd reason, I recalled a swarthy Russian girl in New York who was so troubled by the possibility of being mistaken

for her notion of a Jewess that she used to wear a cross upon her throat, although she had as little religion as brains."[32] It is clear, then, that in the double talk of the story, whiteness in both the Russian political and racial sense is in play, as is the shame of racial recognition and misrecognition. The most provocative ambiguity created and left unresolved is not whether the narrator paid off his double, but whether he is himself Jewish. In that case, the "indemnity" offered in return for cash at the story's conclusion may be one against the public revelation of his racial identity, and the story begins to take on a generic resemblance to the classic passing narrative. Whether or not we wish to follow this line of interpretation, the manner in which questions of race and color are brought to the surface of the story, but never fully exposed or resolved, exposes a tension in Nabokov's liberal aesthetics.[33] After all, in that 1966 interview, Nabokov designated "overconcern with class or race" as one of the contemporary signs of poshlust.[34] Race was a taboo topic if dealt with explicitly, but legitimate if only one used the strategies of literary double talk and the evocation of complicit atmospheres.

Bellow's Victims

A striking feature of the critical reception to Bellow's second novel, *The Victim*, is that there is little consensus over even the most basic questions about the work. In one of its first reviews, Alan S. Downer wrote that "it is never clear what *The Victim* is about," and the confusion has persisted.[35] Critics now tend to read it in the context of the Holocaust and survivor guilt, though these themes were by no means evident to its early reviewers, many of whom passed entirely over the theme of anti-Semitism. One question has vexed readers from the beginning: as Diana Trilling wrote in the *Nation*, "the exciting problem of Mr. Bellow's novel is to figure out who in this complex of circumstances is the 'victim' of the book's

title."[36] An examination of the novel's plot, loosely adapted from Dostoevsky's novella *The Eternal Husband* (1870), would suggest that the victim referred to by the title is not its Jewish protagonist, Asa Leventhal, but rather his anti-Semitic double, Kirby Allbee. It is Allbee who approaches Leventhal in a park at night near his New York apartment to claim that the latter willfully and vengefully conspired to have him fired from his job, leaving him homeless and broke. It is Allbee who demands restitution from his aggressor on the basis of this malicious deed, and who repeatedly proclaims his suffering. It is also the unemployed, alcoholic Allbee whom Leventhal assaults and ultimately ejects from his home. And yet, for readers such as Victoria Aarons, Leventhal is the victim in this tale, "caught in the grip of something he cannot fathom . . . victimized both by his own phobic dread of being 'found out' and hunted down and by Allbee, who makes of him *the victim*, the one for whom no escape is possible."[37] Neither are Allbee and Leventhal the only candidates for the novel's chosen victim. Bellow also follows Dostoevsky in making the death of a child a component of the plot and the novel's moral economy. In Bellow's novel, victimhood threatens to become ubiquitous.

In placing the novel in the context of our discussion of the complicit atmospheres, it should be clear enough that the confusion over the novel's treatment of anti-Semitism and the identity of its victim is itself an effect of what Philip Roth called *The Victim*'s "mood of baffled claustrophobic struggle," in which distinctions between perpetrator and victim, active and passive, subject and object, are put in question.[38] To answer Downer's review in his own terms, the novel is "about" the state of victimhood, and the seductiveness of its claims. In Nabokov's "Double Talk," Dr. Shoe's poshlust hinged on his ability to portray the German people as the victims of aggressive Jews and vindictive Allied powers, despite living in exile in the United States himself. Allbee inhabits his victimhood with comparably paradoxical comfort, as he becomes literally at home in sharing another man's house, wearing another's robe and even having sex in his bed. His intimacy with his supposed oppressor exists in a

space of complicity where social roles are reversible and social facts impotent, leading to a crisis over the very status of the real. Allbee assures Leventhal in one of their most abrasive encounters that "evil is as real as sunshine," but Leventhal's retort, "Millions of us have been killed. What about that?" receives no response.[39] That strange evocation of sunshine as emblem of the real, as well as its counterintuitive association with evil, is telling insofar as it directs us again to the concept of atmosphere as at once objective, bringing about material effects upon those who live in it, and yet also difficult to attribute to human agency. The effect of Allbee's claim about evil and sunshine is to reverse Arendt's pronouncement—"where all are guilty, nobody is"—but without changing the force of its meaning.[40] Everyone is a victim of evil, just as everyone feels the power of the sun, and thus all are equally fallen.

The Victim features several meteorological metaphors for evil, which suggest that it is diffused across society without agency or responsibility. In another, individuals are enveloped in saturated air on the point of precipitation:

> He really did not know what went on about him, what strange things, savage things. They hung near him all the time in trembling drops, invisible, usually, or seen from a distance. But that did not mean that there was always to be a distance, or that sooner or later one or two of the drops might not fall on him.[41]

The status of victimhood, thus conceived by Bellow as the inhabitation of a climate rather than as the object of another's actions, poses direct challenges to the exercise of moral judgment demanded by its historical context. It was always Bellow's intention to explore the threat to moral judgment issued by World War Two. In a review of Arthur Koestler's *Arrival and Departure* in 1943, he wrote that "the character of modern judgments may have been changed by modern psychology, but moral judgments themselves have not been abolished nor the need for them disclaimed." The "problems of ethical belief," he claimed, had been neglected since the Renaissance. In the age to follow the war, however, "all mankind may join in answering the questions of moral choice which individual men today attack with inadequate means and at the risk of their lives."[42] *The Victim* responds self-consciously to this

call, but it does so in contexts that changed as the war concluded and knowledge of the extent of the Holocaust increased.

Bellow likely began composing a first draft during the war, around the same time the Koestler review was written, but its final version was composed after the summer of 1945.[43] Accordingly, in *The Victim* moral judgments may still be required—perhaps more than ever—but the ability to make them has somehow been lost. As with Arendt's evaluation of the moral landscape after World War Two, Bellow depicts his characters unmoored and adrift among the ruins of their previous ethical standards. The novel suggests that his anticipation of a new age in which all mankind attack questions of moral choice, was premature. For Allbee, rather, the task is simply to make satisfactory accommodations with the current regime, however questionable, just as many Germans had under Nazism. In his final confession, he admits sheepishly "I'm the type that comes to terms with whoever runs things."[44]

Read in this way, *The Victim* appears as a "novel of ideas" akin to those of Sartre in the same period, and that was the frame used by several of its contemporaneous reviews.[45] Yet its claims on the reader are made primarily in its bravura exhibition of style. Bellow articulates the intellectual impasse created by the postwar crisis of moral judgment through the painstaking and relentless creation of claustrophobic atmospheric texture. The air in *The Victim* is always felt: on the surface of the skin, which it leaves drenched in sweat; in the eyes, which either smart with the brightness of the light or strain through the dark; and in the lungs, choked with fumes. Memorably, the novel begins with an orientalist vision of New York, "as hot as Bangkok":

> The whole continent seems to have moved from its place and slid nearer the equator, the bitter grey Atlantic to have become green and tropical, and the people, thronging the streets, barbaric fellahin among the stupendous monuments of their mystery, the lights of which, a dazing profusion, climb upward endlessly into the heat of the sky.[46]

As an opening move, this long, winding sentence does more than mere scene-setting, but rather initiates a process by which the concerns of plot and character are dominated by atmosphere and undergo continual combustion, given up into the air as oppressive light, heat and smoke. The process gathers momentum throughout the novel. At the opening of chapter four, Leventhal crouches naked at his window and observes the street outside, "deadened with heat and light. The clouds were heavily suspended and slow. To the south and east, the air was brassy, the factories were beginning to smolder and faced massively, India red, brown, into the sun and across the hot green netting of the bridges."[47] By the midpoint of the *Victim*, the combustion process is shown in a brief description of Leventhal's sunlit front room: "The heavy folds of the curtain, the brown door, the fine red flowers in the carpet slowly consumed into a light smoke of dust, gave him a feeling of suspension and quietness."[48] If any readers harbor doubts by this point that Bellow's imagery rehearses industrial processing of Jewish corpses in the death camps, these are dispelled by the narrative climax of Leventhal's relationship with Allbee, where atmosphere finally enters plot in the most transparent way. In an apparent attempt to kill himself and his host together, Allbee fills Leventhal's apartment with cooking gas from the oven in his kitchen. It is a remarkable reconfiguration of the parallel episode in Dostoevsky's *The Eternal Husband*, where Velchaninov wakes to find Trusotsky above him holding a razor blade, whether to kill himself or Velchaninov we never discover. Allbee's action, by contrast, positions *both* individuals in the doubling pair as victims, conjoined and enveloped by the same poisonous atmosphere.

My intention is to challenge a reading of the novel that would understand its strategy of treating the Holocaust though atmospheric imagery as an assumed ethical position in relation to the event's unspeakability, as a response to Bellow's unprocessed survivor guilt, or even as pathetic fallacy.[49] It would be a mistake, in other words, to neglect the aesthetic dimension of the task Bellow set himself. As he recalled later,

> I labored with the second [book] and tried to make it letter-perfect. In writing *The Victim* I accepted a Flaubertian standard. Not a bad standard, to be sure, but one

> which, in the end, I found repressive . . . Those books, though useful, did not give me a form in which I felt comfortable. A writer should be able to express himself easily, naturally, copiously in a form which frees his mind, his energies.[50]

The Victim, then, was an attempt to write a Flaubertian novel dealing with the moral landscape of the mid-1940s, coolly disinterested and exactingly stylish but nevertheless engaging the contemporary world with high moral seriousness. He resolved this apparent paradox by devising an aesthetics of complicity, in which the evocation of oppressive atmospheres did the work of representing the intellectual impasse articulated in the highbrow press by Arendt, Macdonald, Sartre, and others. The exercise of moral judgment that Bellow demanded in 1944 is made unachievable in the smoky complicity of the novel. Instead, it is displaced onto aesthetic discrimination; the arduous and scrupulous search for the Flaubertian *mot juste*. *Displaced* is Bellow's own term from an unpublished lecture dating from 1951, where he described how Flaubert "displaced his enormous energy from subject matter to style . . . the creation of beauty as a reply to the punishment and pain of human existence . . . mastery over language comes to represent mastery over human difficulties."[51]

Once we take Bellow's struggle with the demands of a repressive Flaubertian standard into account, it becomes possible to understand *The Victim* as a novel enacting its own suffocation in the complicit atmosphere it generates. We can begin to make sense of odd details in the prose, such as the moment during Allbee's attempt to turn Leventhal's apartment into a gas chamber, when the sound of the gas is described in the language of poetics: "the sibilance of the pouring gas was almost deafening."[52] In this way, the success of the novel might be judged on its ability to belie the comfort with which Allbee inhabits the spaces of complicity, and to communicate instead the discomfort experienced by Leventhal and the writer himself in the world thus created, their desire to fling open the windows. Of course, the next phase of Bellow's artistic development, the rejection of *The Victim*'s claustrophobia for the wide-open spaces and exuberant picaresque of *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), is well-known, even if Leventhal himself seems doomed never to

escape the "old tone of complicity" with which Allbee addresses him in the novel's final pages.[53]

"I was too busy becoming a novelist to take note of what was happening in the Forties," Bellow wrote to Cynthia Ozick in 1987, discussing what he called "the destruction of the European Jewry":

> I was involved with 'literature' and given over to preoccupations with art, with language, with my struggle on the American scene, with claims for recognition of my talent . . . with anything except the terrible events in Poland. . . . I can't even begin to say what responsibility any of us may bear in such a matter, in a crime so vast that it brings all Being into Judgment.[54]

My tracing of the aesthetics of complicity in *The Victim* suggests that, whatever the notes of recrimination and guilt sounded here, the distinction Bellow introduces between reckoning with the Holocaust in Europe on one hand, and his writerly preoccupations with art and language in America on the other is a false one. Certainly, as several scholars have noted, it was only in *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) that Bellow directly addressed the Holocaust in the narrative content of a novel.[55] However, *The Victim*'s carefully structured and orchestrated atmospheres constitute a response to precisely the question of judgment raised in this letter. In his 1976 Nobel lecture, Bellow claimed that despite the "violent uproar" of his age, in the realm of the arts and literature "we are able to think, discriminate and feel." *The Victim* both demands and frustrates the exercise of discrimination, taking a position characteristic of the intellectuals of the period in which judgment—the ability both to judge and to be judged oneself—can no longer be taken for granted but must conversely be understood as a necessary privilege under threat of erasure.[56]

McCarthy and Tuned Space

In 1947, while *The Victim* was garnering laudatory reviews in the highbrow press, in commercial terms it was being overshadowed by a different novel about Jewishness in New

York. Laura Z. Hobson's *Gentleman's Agreement* sold an astonishing 1,600,000 copies and topped the *New York Times* bestseller list.[57] The novel is a Jewish passing narrative, telling the story of a gentile journalist who goes undercover as Jewish in order to experience anti-Semitism firsthand. *Gentleman's Agreement* marks a historical moment for our narrative of complicity and racial liberalism because it popularized the concept of anti-Semitic complicity in the United States as a problem resulting from silence and inaction. In doing so, it expressed a key tent of racial liberalism, which issued a moral obligation to speak out against racial prejudice wherever it was encountered. To so otherwise—to remain silent—was tantamount to prejudice itself. The novel's hero, Philip Green, identifies anti-Semitism as a form of prejudice belonging to the respectable middle-classes who think of themselves as tolerant liberals. His friend Jane, he suggests, "is not consciously anti-Semitic," and neither are "the pleasant, intelligent people at the party or the inns and clubs.":

> They despise it; it's an 'awful thing.' But all of them . . . who also deplore it and protest their innocence—they help it along and then wonder why it grows. Millions like them back up the lunatic vanguard in its war for this country—forming the rear echelons, the home front in the factories, manufacturing the silence and acquiescence.[58]

In this way, *Gentleman's Agreement* offers a mass-cultural correlative to the chief anxiety of "Double Talk" and *The Victim*, that anti-Semitic complicity is underpinned by unintentional failures of speech in middle-class social settings such as parties, inns, and clubs. On this assumption, the real violence of anti-Semitism is founded on a *discursive* failure. This failure was to be given particular focus in McCarthy's "Artists in Uniform" in 1954.

McCarthy is a significant figure for an account of complicity in midcentury US literature by virtue of her relentless and aggressive interrogation of the moral life of liberal

intellectuals, one which began and ended with scrupulously objective self-criticism.[59] The origins of this tendency to self-interrogation might be traced through her long engagement with the Catholic tradition of confession in which she was brought up and educated (described in *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*, 1957), or through the classic liberal tradition of self-scrutiny and moral conscience exemplified in John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* (1873). Complicity was her great subject, reaching its apotheosis in the non-fiction account of her visit to Vietnam to report on the war in 1967, discussed in the introduction to this study. At the close of her report, McCarthy admitted her inability to assume the objectivity she aspired to, and began to doubt her own mission of providing the necessary clarity of vision to disabuse supporters of the war in the United States of their naivety: "the illusion of being effective, the sole justification for my presence there, began to waver in North Vietnam, the more I called upon it to defend me against the charge of complicity with American ruling circles—a complicity attested by the mirror."[60] This anxiety over the state of her conscience and the maintenance of unsentimental critical objectivity ran throughout her career from her breakthrough novel *The Company She Keeps* (1944) across all the genres in which she worked: fiction, memoir, criticism and reportage. The particular failure of which McCarthy finds herself guilty in "Artists in Uniform" is, as we shall see, her inability to transcend her own ashamed recognition of herself as both a Jew and liberal intellectual.

The story presents one of those moments in McCarthy's oeuvre when her satirical impulse turned away from the foibles of her New York intellectual circle and was directed mercilessly at herself. Although *Harper's* subtitle described the text as a story, McCarthy published a subsequent rejoinder, clarifying that it was "a piece of reporting or a fragment of autobiography," intended, as she put it, "embarrass myself and, if possible, the reader too."[61] The text begins with its narrator trapped in the club car of a train between New York and St Lewis with a casually anti-Semitic colonel. She challenges him on his views as they leave the

train, managing what Nabokov's narrator in "Double Talk" is conspicuously unable to, but she finds herself nevertheless lunching with him at the station restaurant, unable to convince him of his errors. Meanwhile, she begins to wonder if she might not harbor her own more subtle forms of anti-Semitism, despite her own self-image as an unprejudiced and enlightened intellectual. The colonel views her and her protests suspiciously, as typical of left-wing Bohemia, but cannot understand why she would "be for them" when she was apparently Irish herself. The story ends with the colonel understanding his logic to be validated when he mishears her husband's name as the apparently Jewish-sounding "Brodhead" instead of the "Broadhead" it really is. "The victory was his. 'One of the chosen, eh?' his brief grimace seemed to commiserate."[62]

The story is organized around two distinctive quasi-public spaces, the club car of the train and the cocktail lounge, which are differentiated atmospherically by light and temperature. Like *The Victim*, it takes place during a summer heat-wave, and "the air-conditioning had not met the test."[63] She becomes self-conscious about her green silk shirt, which she worries will seem a sort of Bohemian dress—the artist's uniform of the title—signaling her affiliations and social position. "As the conversation grew tenser, and I endeavored to keep cool," she writes, "I began to writhe within myself, and every time I looked down, my contrasting greens seemed to be growing more and more lurid and taking on an almost menacing light, like leaves just before a storm that lift their bright undersides as the air becomes darker."[64] This emphasis on light and temperature returns us to the distinctive attributes of atmospheres, with their ambiguous relationship to agency and feeling. Is it the light that draws attention to the green blouse or the narrator's choice of clothing? Does the threat of the storm emerge subjectively from within the narrator or is it a function of some external tension, one which exists independently of her, "out there" in the club car? The

interest here is in the way the narrator finds herself inhabiting a certain atmosphere, but is unable to determine conclusively who is responsible for it or from where it comes.

The other space is an air-conditioned cocktail lounge, in which, since she is hot and hungry, the narrator reluctantly lunches with the colonel. "The room", she tells us, "was dark as a cave and produced, in the midst of the hot midday, a hallucinated feeling, as though time had ceased, with the weather, and we were in eternity together."[65] Here, the atmosphere of complicity is given full and explicit treatment, as the narrator rehearses the history of the Nazi death camps with the colonel, through a series of misunderstandings and failed clarifications. When the colonel asks, "why should you be for them?" she protests "I'm not 'for' them . . . You don't understand. I'm not for *any* race or nation. I'm against those who are against them."[66] Following this awkward syntax comes what is for our purposes the most important passage in the story:

> This word, *them*, with a sort of slurring circle drawn round it, was beginning to sound ugly to me. Automatically, in arguing with him, I seemed to have slipped into the colonel's style of thought. It occurred to me that defense of the Jews could be a subtle and safe form of anti-Semitism, an exercise of patronage: as a rational Gentile, one could feel superior both to the Jews and the anti-Semites. There could be no doubt that the Jewish question evoked a curious stealthy lust or concupiscence. I could feel it now vibrating between us over the dark table. If I had been a good person, I should unquestionably have got up and left.[67]

This passage serves as an unusually concentrated demonstration of the structure of complicit atmospheres in midcentury US writing, exemplifying again the significance of speech as a locus for crises of moral conscience, the introduction of aesthetic criteria into the recognition of complicity, and the location of complicit atmospheres in the spaces between embodied

subjects. As in the work of Nabokov and Bellow, this atmosphere is underpinned by an uncomfortable Dostoevskian doubling effect, in which every liberal subject carries with them a despicable anti-Semite: McCarthy, in claiming the story as autobiography, described its narrator and the Colonel as "mutually repellent twins."[68]

The particular complexity of the problem in this story comes from the fluid and concealable status of Jewishness in relation to whiteness in the United States. One twist in the tale for "Artists in Uniform" is that the narrator of this story is herself Jewish, insofar as she has, as McCarthy herself had, a Jewish grandmother.[69] As she confides to us, "by Nazi criteria I was Jewish," but she ashamedly refuses to admit this to the colonel, writing that "though I did not 'hate' the idea of being taken for a Jew, I did not precisely like it."[70] In the way it represents a woman intentionally concealing her Jewishness as well as her status as an intellectual, the story engages the conventions of the passing narrative, in which identities are hidden in order to ease protagonists' movement through certain spaces and milieux. McCarthy's narrator enters a form of complicity comparable to that which entangles the narrator of Nabokov's "Double Talk": her encounter forces her to think in terms of "Nazi criteria" despite herself, leading her into the very racial discourse she is attempting to repudiate.

This problem of falling, for a lack of vigilance, into patterns of illiberal thought is crystalized in the use of the term *them*, "with a sort of slurring circle around it." In the light of the narrator's admission of her Jewish grandmother, we know that this circle contains an *I* in its *them*. Subject and object positions in this space are thus confounded, but the resultant confusion is presented to us by McCarthy as an aesthetic concern, being *ugly*. Its lazy imprecision belongs to the Colonel's impoverished "style of thought," into which McCarthy finds herself in danger of sliding. If Nabokov's narrator identified poshlust in the tastes of fascist sympathizers for marbleized fruit, then comparably McCarthy's sneers at the colonel's

incapacity for aesthetic discrimination. Her contemporary Elizabeth Hardwick rightly noted that "taste is . . . used as the surest indication of character" in McCarthy's fiction: seeing her volume of Dickens, the colonel enquires "*The Christmas Carol*?" as a means of opening the conversation, suggesting either that this is the only Dickens work he knows, or that it is his favorite.[71] McCarthy relies here on her readers' shared knowledge of *The Christmas Carol*'s status in Dickens' oeuvre, as a work exceptional in its appeal to the popular taste, intended by the author himself as a potboiler. Anti-Semitic prejudice then becomes associated with the literature of cliché, where language arrives second-hand, unthinkingly borrowed and carelessly deployed. In a correlative passage in McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe*, published the previous year, a character who has been duped into admitting responsibility for the actions of a malevolent colleague reflects on the occasion by saying "my words became disobedient, like the vocal cords of a person who habitually sings off key. I thought I heard the truth for an instant; somewhere I think I can still hear it, very faintly, but it eludes me, like perfect pitch"[72] Atmospheres, in Böhme's formulation, are "tuned spaces", but in cases of complicity they are tuned wrongly, leading those within to succumb to both aesthetic and moral failures, towards ugliness and discord.

We are left finally with that transition from anti-Semitism to an atmospheric eroticism "vibrating" in the air between the narrator and the colonel, but belonging properly to neither. Its recognition by the narrator marks her relinquishment of the position of cool detachment she associates with the fantasy of the "rationale Gentile." Instead, she takes up the disposition of the stereotyped irrational Jew, aware of herself as sexually embodied, raced, and caught up in a tangle of mutually constitutive desire that compromises her ethical principles. "If I had been a good person," McCarthy's narrator tells us "I should unquestionably have got up and left." The implications of these doubts reach beyond the concern with venal sin associated with McCarthy's Catholicism, for the same statement could be made for Nabokov's narrator

in "Double Talk" and for Leventhal in *The Victim*. What is it that leads the authors of these fictions towards imaginative identification with anti-Semitic complicity and the failures of moral judgment that accompany it?

Midcentury Liberalism and the Categories of Thought

There is a sense of uncertainty and provisionality about the fictions we are discussing, which becomes more apparent when we consider their place in the oeuvres of their respective authors. These qualities may be explained partly by the relative status of the short story and the novel in the careers of Nabokov and McCarthy, which saw both writers later become famous for scandalous novels dealing with sexual license (*Lolita* in Nabokov's case, *The Group* in McCarthy's). Bellow's reputation also consolidated later, with a long, exuberant, bawdy novel, *The Adventures of Augie March*, which won him a National Book Award. In all three cases, the short, uncomfortable and claustrophobic fictions of complicity are considered to have been superseded by more expansive later works. This pattern of critical reception aligns with a broader decline in estimations of the short story in the United States after 1950, and it reflects a shift in literary tastes during the 1960s, towards sexual themes and playful irony.[73] The record of the authors' own relationship with their oeuvre also suggests doubts and dissatisfactions. Nabokov changed the title of his story sometime between 1947 and 1958 to "Conversation Piece, 1945," a decision that self-consciously trivializes the story while signaling its narrow historical relevance. We have seen how Bellow retrospectively framed his rejection of *The Victim*'s aesthetic as a realization that the Flaubertian formalism he had been pursuing was a restrictive dead end. McCarthy even felt the need to publish an article *about* "Artists in Uniform" in the same magazine a year later, wishing to clear up confusions about its meaning, which she thought had been misconstrued by over-zealous literature

students. There are aspects of these fictions that could not be allowed to stand, and which demanded either revision or forgetting in order for their authors to become who we now understand them to be.

In recovering them critically, we stand to learn something easily passed over in received accounts of American literary history, about a moment lasting from 1945 to around 1953 during which a corner of the literary field dominated by the liberal intelligentsia deliberately if tentatively experimented with ways of articulating anti-Semitic complicity after the Holocaust. It is the mid-1960s that are usually considered the moment at which debates about Holocaust responsibility took place, once the archive of atrocity had been more fully established in the public view.[74] This period was inaugurated by the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, the publication of Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1963, and the controversy that followed it for several years. McCarthy was prompted to write a defense of her friend in *Partisan Review*, while Bellow strongly objected to Arendt's suggestion that Jews were complicit in their own destruction (and lent his objections several years later to Artur Sammler in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*).[75] In 1966, Nabokov responded to these debates by describing the phrase "we all share in Germany's guilt" as fatuous *poshlust*.[76] Other prominent US writers, notably Arthur Miller in *After the Fall* (1964) and *The Incident at Vichy* (1964), took up Holocaust complicity as a major topic of concern in the mid-1960s.[77]

The purpose of identifying an aesthetics of atmospheric complicity in this earlier moment is less to offer a pre-history of the later one, but rather to capture a set of improvised responses to an authentic crisis in liberalism and literary expression brought about by World War Two and the discovery of the death camps. Unlike the 1960s debates, this constellation of texts was formed before the moral discourse surrounding the Holocaust had a chance to reify into anything like a set of positions. Rather, it registers the sheer inadequacy of existing concepts of individual responsibility and of the intellectual apparatus with which they could

be deployed. We return to Arendt's contention that totalitarianism had "brought to light the ruin of our categories of thought and standards of judgment."[78] The essay from which this quotation comes is "Understanding and Politics," published in *Partisan Review* in 1954. The generative paradox it begins with is that totalitarianism, the event that thinkers need to understand, has deprived them of the traditional tools for understanding it. By way of illustration, she points to the Nuremberg Trials, which vainly attempted to deploy ideas of criminal culpability when, as we saw in chapter one, she believed they had been made redundant by the course of National Socialism.

In the context of the predicament Arendt describes, in which writers and intellectuals attempt to reconcile themselves with a new historical situation but with the recognition that the existing concepts and means of expression for doing so are no longer adequate, imaginative literary production—and short fiction in particular—has a special role to play. The qualities associated with the minority status of short fiction, such as its affordance of hesitancy and ambiguity, its tolerance of risk and experiment —its *precarity*, in the words of one recent study—are precisely those which could not be allowed at Nuremberg.[79] In this light, they can be revalued as positive strengths. Short stories and novellas of the type we have been examining might in fact prove the ideal form with which to launch a provisional reorientation of the liberal subject within a radically changed moral landscape. Imaginative narrative writing provides opportunities for returning compromised abstract categories like victim and perpetrator to the messy terrain of lived social experiences, compounded by uncomfortably contradictory feelings and tested by extreme limit situations.

Scholarship over the last ten years has recognized how the qualities we have identified in our fictions here, which generate the need for clear judgment while at the same time frustrating them with hazy complicit atmospheres, were valorized in midcentury liberal thought. Amanda Anderson, for example, delineates a midcentury liberal aesthetic committed

to "values associated with complexity, difficulty, variousness, ambiguity, undecidability, hermeneutic open-endedness, and threshold experiences," standing at apparent odds with the values of transparency and proceduralism associated with political liberalism.[80] In Anderson's reading, this aesthetic stood for the necessary "other" of liberal reason, the limit to human progress and perfectibility that liberal thought posits as an enriching counterpoint to its political program. Certainly, the idea of anxious self-critique as constitutive in the liberal tradition is well-recognized. For Alan Ryan, "the way in which liberalism institutionalizes self-criticism is itself a guarantee of some progress, even if it is also a guarantee of permanent dissatisfaction."[81] In Daniel M. Stout's account, meanwhile, "the history of liberalism . . . is a history of anxieties about its own capacities," in which "many of its key features – freedom of contract, representative government, urban life, scientific empiricism – serve rather to point up the fragility and fictionality of the atomic units on which its image of itself relies."[82]

The fiction we have been examining is amenable to such models, if we begin to understand the exception to liberal political theory as the rule for liberal literary writing in the 1940s. The autonomous individual, satirized by Nabokov in "Double Talk" as one who fears "intrusions into the castle of my life," is discovered to be permeable, socially entangled with the very social harms they find most abhorrent, and responsible for inaction.[83] In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Nancy Armstrong has influentially argued, the novel functioned as a means to produce a new liberal subject.[84] In the argument I am following here, that subject is pushed to its constitutive limits. I want to emphasize, however, the sense in which midcentury American liberalism *required* this crisis of the subject assailed by anti-democratic prejudice in order to legitimize its political program under the aegis of anxiety and even panic. In 1949, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. set the affective tone of *The Vital Center* with the words "Western Man in the middle of the twentieth century is tense, uncertain, adrift." The admission in his preface is more easily forgotten: "The experience with

Communism has had one singularly healthy effect: it has made us reclaim democratic ideas which a decade ago we tended to regret and even abandon."[85] If we understand these two claims to operate in a dialectical unity we are some way towards grasping why McCarthy might wish to embarrass herself publicly as a latent anti-Semite, why Nabokov might write a story in which the émigré highbrow modernist is unmasked as an ineffectual drunk unable to shake off the taint of Nazism, and why Bellow's hero in the *Victim* is a Jew accused of confirming anti-Semitic stereotypes: "you're succumbing yourself to all the things that are said against us."[86] Such strategies can be readily grasped as practices of the kind of self-criticism that liberalism has always relied upon, and of its constitutive need for ideological conflict and crises of conscience upon which to whet the blade of discriminating judgment. As John Stuart Mill wrote in *On Liberty*, "both teachers and learners go to sleep at their post, as soon as there is no enemy in the field."[87]

The familiar binary of liberal and totalitarian, which appears to structure these tensions and animate the crisis of the autonomous individual, serves as something of a red herring, however, for the more fundamental target of these fictions of complicity is not directly the threat of Cold War cliché, posed by Communist or Nazi infiltration, but rather Cold War liberalism's near-enemy, the legacy of progressivism and the interwar Left. The perceived sentimentalism of that legacy, with its privileging of fellow-feeling and solidarity, had, in the view of several members of the New York Intellectuals, left them incapable of disinterested judgment, and therefore willing to accept collective responsibility for social harms in ways that imperiled their capacity for independent critical thinking.

This shift in the form and priorities of American liberalism is particularly apparent in McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe*. This 1952 novel tells the story of Henry Mulcahy, an academic at a liberal arts college, and his scheme to keep his job after he is threatened with dismissal for professional incompetence. The surface plot—the malevolent Mulcahy's

supposed Communist past, and its redemption in the context of progressive liberal higher education— transpires to have been fabricated by him in order to explain his dismissal. The narrative interest of the novel depends on the process by which he convinces his gullible progressive liberal colleagues to take responsibility for his shortcomings. In view of his dismissal, Mulcahy effectively persuades them, in a version of racial liberal principles repurposed for the context of McCarthyism, that inaction on their part is tantamount to condoning prejudice. They must speak up for him, or else risk participating in anti-Communist hysteria. Scheming Mulcahy ends up keeping his job, and his colleagues are humiliated, shown to have misrecognized phantom forms of affiliation and co-responsibility as the concrete foundations for commitment.

Mulcahy's exploitation of this perceived weakness in modern liberal thought is illustrated when, focalized through him, the novel describes the character of Domna Rejnev, who teaches Russian literature at the college:

> At bottom, he reminded himself, she was conventional, believing in a conventional moral order, and shocked by deviations from it into a sense of helpless guilt toward the deviator. In other words, she was a true liberal, as he had always suspected, who could not tolerate in her well-modulated heart that others should be wickeder than she, any more than she could bear that she should be richer, better born, better looking than some statistical median.[88]

Mulcahy's exploitation of Domna and her colleagues at the college hinges on her inability to accept a natural hierarchy in which judgments of individual value and merit are necessary. Her guilt is not *for* an action of her own, but rather describes her disposition *towards* other individuals. Mulcahy thus becomes a midcentury version of Dostoevsky's Stavrogin in *The Possessed*, playing naïve liberals against one another in order to destroy the institutions of

society. McCarthy's critique of "helpless guilt" resembles that of her friend Arendt, who, as we saw in the previous chapter, identified the state's manipulation of K's misplaced guilt feelings to be the outstanding feature of *The Trial* and later concluded that "there is no such thing as being or feeling guilty for things that happened without one participating in them directly."[89] Mulcahy anticipates another Dostoevskian figure in the 1950s canon, Humbert Humbert in Nabokov' *Lolita*, who also takes advantage of the naïve optimism of progressive parenting and education to indulge destructive impulses. We will later see the Dostoevskian satire of liberal guilt revived too by Joan Didion in her 1960s reportage on the New Left .

In literary criticism, a correlative for the fictions of complicity among the liberal thinkers of the New York Intellectuals at midcentury can be found in Lionel Trilling, whose notion of *moral realism*, expounded in his 1948 essay "Manners, Morals and the Novel," was mobilized to defend the social purpose of fiction, "to refine our motives and ask what might lie behind our good impulses."[90] Worrying that "at no other time have so many people committed themselves to moral righteousness," Trilling argued that fiction had the potential to encourage self-reflection in its readers, who might come to a new realization of how their internalized moral obligations to other individuals are meretricious, masking impulses to dominate and coerce.[91] In this view, the value of fiction "lay in its unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination, suggesting that reality is not as his conventional education has led him to see it."[92] Like Schlesinger in *The Vital Center*, Trilling claimed that Americans needed to be jolted from their moral complacency, and suggested that fiction's particular power derived from its ability to trouble the seemingly self-evident claims placed by society upon individuals. This is the logic behind McCarthy's doubts in "Artist's in Uniform" that "defense of the Jews could be a subtle and safe form of anti-Semitism, an exercise of

patronage."[93] As she put it in her explanatory essay on the story, "You delude yourself that you are spreading light, but you are really sinking into muck."[94]

When set alongside these currents in midcentury liberal thought in the United States, the complicit atmospheres of Nabokov, Bellow and McCarthy can be seen to fulfill a definite function. We can be precise about a set of aesthetic objects characterized by imprecision. Fictions of anti-Semitic complicity in the late 1940s and early 1950s conjured haziness and ambiguity in order to represent a new crisis in moral judgments about prejudice. This crisis left thinkers without the security of reliable categories of thought, undertaking self-examination and self-critique as values in themselves but unable to reach satisfactory conclusions. Yet the subjects constituted in and by these fictions, despite struggling to make successful moral judgments, are simultaneously preoccupied with another kind of judgment, an *aesthetic* one based on scrupulous attention to taste, style, and language. The fictions at one level tempt us to consider such aesthetic judgments as allegorizing or even modelling the kind of discriminating intellect required to transcend the post-war crisis, escape complicity, and establish a new set of moral categories. However, we have seen that, upon close inspection, the stories exhibit a much deeper sense of reflexive pessimism about the capacity of literary artefacts to master or escape the atmospheres they create and sustain. The question this begs, of whether the process of literary writing itself—the fact of representation— was to be grasped as in some sense complicitous, will be taken up in the next chapter.

[1] On the genesis, definitions, and critical history of the term New York Intellectuals, see Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 6-12.

[2] *The Victim* received laudatory notices in the highbrow press. Elizabeth Hardwick wrote, "it would be hard to think of any young writer who has a better chance than Bellow to become the redeeming novelist of his period." Elizabeth Hardwick, "Fiction Chronicle," *Partisan Review* 15, no. 1 (1948): 114.

[3] Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 1994), 318.

[4] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin, 2006), 123.

[5] Gernot Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, trans. Jean-Paul Thibault (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2, 32.

[6] Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 85.

[7] Boyd, *American Years*, 88.

[8] The chief exception here is Tim Conley, "History and Denial in Nabokov's 'Conversation Piece, 1945,'" *Journal of the Short Story in English*, no. 45 (2005): 113–21.

[9] On Nabokov's complex relationship to his historical contexts, see David M. Bethea and Siggy Frank, "Contextualizing Nabokov," in *Nabokov in Context*, ed. David M. Bethea and Siggy Frank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1–8.

[10] Hannah Arendt, "German Guilt," *Jewish Frontier* 12 (January 1945): 19-23. Repr. as "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-54*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 1994), 121-132. Dwight Macdonald, "The Responsibility of Peoples," *Politics* 2 (March 1945): 82-93. Repr. in *The Responsibility of Peoples and Other Essays in Political Criticism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1957), 9-45.

[11]Vladimir Nabokov, "Conversation Piece, 1945," in *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), 587. "Double Talk" was first published in the *The New Yorker*, June 23, 1945, 20-25. At some point between its inclusion in *Nine Stories* (1947) and *Nabokov's Dozen* (1958), Nabokov changed its title to "Conversation Piece, 1945."

[12] *The Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion* is a notorious, fabricated anti-Semitic text first published in Russia in 1903, purporting to describe a Jewish plan for global domination.

[13] Nabokov, "Conversation Piece," 597.

[14] Ibid., 595.

[15] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 151.

[16] For a detailed reading of such clues, see Conley, "History and Denial."

[17] Nabokov, "Conversation Piece," 590.

[18] Ibid., 590.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Gernot Böhme, "Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics," *Thesis 11* 36, no. 1 (1993): 114.

[21] See Siggy Frank, *Nabokov's Theatrical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[22] Nabokov, "Conversation Piece," 588.

[23] On Nabokov's engagement with Wagnerian anti-Semitism, see Leonid Livak, "Jewishness as Literary Device in Nabokov's Fiction," in *Nabokov in Context*, ed. David M. Bethea and Siggy Frank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 230–33..

[24] On Wagner's anti-Semitism and smell, see Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 195–260.

[25] Nabokov, "Conversation Piece," 590-1.

[26] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (1939): 47.

[27] Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 63–71.

[28]Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 101..

[29] On interior design as the intentional production of specific atmospheres, see Mona Sloane, "Tuning the Space: Investigating the Making of Atmospheres through Interior Design Practices," *Interiors* 5, no. 3 (November 1, 2014): 297–314.

[30] On disinterestedness in aesthetic and moral judgments in Nabokov's work, Dana Dragunoiu, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Poetics of Liberalism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 142–85.

[31] Nabokov, "Conversation Piece," 587.

[32] Ibid., 589.

[33] Dragunoiu, *Vladimir Nabokov.*

[34] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 101.

[35] Alan S. Downer, "Review of 'The Victim' by Saul Bellow," *New York Times*, November 20, 1947, 28.

[36] Diana Trilling, *Reviewing the Forties* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 228.

[37] Victoria Aarons, "Faces in a Sea of Suffering: The Human Predicament in Saul Bellow's *The Victim*," *Partial Answers* 14, no. 1 (2016): 81. Aarons' emphasis.

[38] Philip Roth, *Reading Myself and Others* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), 245.

[39] Saul Bellow, *The Victim* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 123.

[40] Hannah Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken), 147.

[41] Bellow, *The Victim*, 81-2.

[42] Saul Bellow, "A Revolutionist's Testament," *New York Times Book Review*, November 21, 1943, 1.

[43] Two drafts of *The Victim* had already been composed by 1945.Gloria L. Cronin and Ben Siegel, eds., *Conversations with Saul Bellow* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 15.

[44] Bellow, *The Victim*, 238.

[45] See, for instance, Trilling, *Reviewing the Forties*, 229. See also *Partial Answers* 14, no. 1 (2016), ed. Victoria Aarons and Gustavo Sánchez-Canales, on "Saul Bellow as a Novelist of Ideas."

[46] Bellow, *The Victim*, 9.

[47] Ibid., 35.

[48] Ibid, 115-16.

[49] On the Holocaust as unspeakable, see Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006. On *The Victim* and the Holocaust, see S. Lillian Kremer, *Witness Through the Imagination: Jewish American Holocaust Literature* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 36–45. See also Victoria Aarons, "Bellow and the Holocaust," in *The Cambridge Companion to Saul Bellow*, ed. Victoria Aarons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 55–67.

[50] *Conversations with Saul Bellow*, 63.

[51] Saul Bellow, *There Is Simply Too Much To Think About: Collected Nonfiction* (New York: Viking, 2015), 44.

[52] Bellow, *The Victim*, 229.

[53] Ibid., 235.

[54] Saul Bellow, *Letters*, ed. Benjamin Taylor (New York: Viking, 2010), 439.

[55] See for example Kremer, *Witness*, 36-45; Aarons, “Bellow and the Holocaust.”

[56] Bellow, *Too Much*, 295.

[57] “Assignment America,” *Time*, November 9, 1953, https://web.archive.org/web/20081222113701/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,819190,00.html. On *Gentleman’s Agreement* and anti-Semitism in the 1940s, see Gordon Hutner, *What America Read: Taste, Class, and the Novel, 1920-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 252–55.

[58] Laura Z. Hobson, *Gentleman’s Agreement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), 197.

[59] Deborah Nelson, *Tough Enough: Arbus, Arendt, Didion, McCarthy, Sontag, Weil* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017), 79.

[60] Mary McCarthy, *Hanoi* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 131.

[61]Mary McCarthy, “Settling the Colonel’s Hash,” in *On the Contrary* (London: Heinemann, 1962), 226, 227.. On embarrassment in McCarthy’s work, including analysis of “Artists in Uniform,” see Jaime Cleland, “Pink Pants and Pessaries: Mary McCarthy’s Aesthetics of Embarrassment,” *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 15, no. 1 (2004): 29–43.

[62] Mary McCarthy, “Artists in Uniform,” in *On the Contrary* (London: Heinemann, 1962), 65, 74.

[63] Ibid., 56.

[64] Ibid., 57.

[65] Ibid., 65.

[66] Ibid. McCarthy's emphasis.

[67] Ibid., 65-6. McCarthy's emphasis.

[68] McCarthy, *On the Contrary*, 239.

[69] McCarthy described her "curious attitude" to her Jewish family members as a child, "in which the crudest anti-Semitism . . . mingled with infatuation and with genuine tolerance and detachment." Mary McCarthy, *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (London: Penguin, 1963), 179.

[70] McCarthy, "Artists," 64, 61.

[71] Elizabeth Hardwick, "Mary McCarthy," in *A View of My Own: Essays in Literature and Society* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1962), 36. McCarthy, "Artists," 56.

[72] Mary McCarthy, *The Groves of Academe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1951), 253–54.

[73] Sam V. H. Reese, *The Short Story in Midcentury America: Countercultural Form in the Work of Bowles, McCarthy, Welty, and Williams* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017).

[74] Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 127–207.

[75] Mary McCarthy, "The Hue and Cry," *Partisan Review* 31, no. 1 (1964): 82–94. Bellow's objections are articulated in *Letters*, 391. See also Saul Bellow, *Mr. Sammler's Plan* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 18–19.

[76] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 101.

[77] Grant Gosizk, "The Banality of Addiction: Arthur Miller and Complicity," *Modern Drama* 61, no. 2 (2018): 171–91.

[78] Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," 318.

[79] Michael J. Collins and Gavin Jones, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to the American Short Story*, ed. Gavin Jones and Michael J. Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 6–7.

[80] Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 7.

[81] Alan Ryan, *The Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 42.

[82] Daniel M. Stout, *Corporate Romanticism: Liberalism, Justice, and the Novel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 8.

[83] Nabokov, "Conversation Piece, 1945," 587.

[84] Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[85] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr, *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2009), l, xii.

[86] Bellow, *The Victim*, 110.

[87] John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," in *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*, ed. Mark Philp and Frederick Rosen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 42.

[88] McCarthy, *Groves*, 52.

[89] Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," 147.

[90] Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2008), 220.

[91] Ibid., 219.

[92] Ibid., 222.

[93] McCarthy, "Artists," 66.

[94] McCarthy, "Settling the Colonel's Hash," 239.

Part I, Chapter 3

The Fact of Representation: Metafiction, Co-ordination, and Denazification

In the syllabus for her course on “Basic Moral Propositions,” taught at the University of Chicago in 1966, Hannah Arendt required her students to read several works of fiction in addition to Plato, Kant, and Nietzsche.[1] These were Herman Melville’s unfinished novella *Billy Budd* (1924) and Fyodor Dostoevsky’s two novels *The Idiot* (1869) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). This cluster of texts presents a pair of novelists from two empires of the nineteenth century, both taking innocence and violence as their great themes. We have an idea of how Arendt might have taught these works because she had discussed *Billy Budd* and a part of *Karamazov* in *On Revolution* in 1963. Melville and Dostoevsky were “great writers and thinkers,” whose texts demonstrated how “absolute goodness is hardly any less dangerous than absolute evil.”[2] Just as the Jacobins in the French Revolution had transformed pity and compassion for the wretched into a lust for violence, so the example of Billy Budd showed purity and innocence to engender murder. Arendt’s decision to include these authors in her teaching forms part of a larger pattern we have observed in her work, whereby literature provided valuable resources for thinking through political and philosophical problems. What strikes us as particular to this situation, though, is the rationale for Arendt’s selection in terms of mode and period, her preference for a nineteenth-century realism—albeit one modulated in distinctive ways by each author—over the modernist forms exemplified by the canonical writers of the early-twentieth century we know she admired, such as Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, and William Faulkner.

The preference for the nineteenth-century novel as a source for complex moral dilemmas upon which to deliberate, model judgment, and formulate ethical principles is one

Arendt shared with other, more recent, legal and philosophical thinkers. In his influential study of complicity, Christopher Kutz, for example, also reaches for *Billy Budd* and *The Brothers Karamazov* as part of his discussion of "the deep structure of individual accountability," in combination with Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). In Kutz's account,

> It is true that the attempt to draw argumentative support from literature comes up hard against the resistance of imaginative writing to the extraction of a single thesis or interpretation. But the very refractory nature of literature makes it well suited to ethical study. For the problem of extracting interpretation from literature is similar to the problem of assigning moral or legal responsibility in life. Both seek to reduce particularity to a procrustean set of categories of meaning and motive.[3]

The analogy Kutz draws between the interpretation of imaginative fiction and the assigning of moral or legal responsibility in life, fertile though it surely is, demands further consideration. To his credit, he does emphasize the stubborn complexity of both processes, but the element he leaves out in this passage is crucial, at least to literary scholars: the fact of *representation* in literary works, which generates distinctive problems of interpretation that cannot be resolved by legal or philosophical argument.

This much is evident in Kutz's discussion of *The Scarlet Letter*, a text that asks its readers to consider the materiality of language and its dual, indeterminate relation both to the social world and simultaneously to itself. The primary focus for these concerns is the symbol "A," stitched on Hester Prynne's breast, which Hawthorne presents in combination with various other appearances and interpretations of the same letter. These feature alongside other reflexive devices, such as the metafictional framing narrative used in the famous "Customs-House" chapter, where the author figure describes his discovery of the badge as a material object and ruminates on the nature of fiction. Such combinations direct attention to the ethics

of imagination and the history of the romance genre, in their uncomfortable entanglement with disciplinary regimes and authoritarian practices of reading and writing. As Tony Tanner observed, these reflexive devices make *The Scarlet Letter* an exemplary precursor of postwar experimental fiction, with its interest in "foreground," or "the use of language in such a way that it draws attention to itself."[4] For Kutz, the changing meanings of Hester's "A" refer us primarily to "the novel's realistic psychology," in which moral responses are determined by, and vary according to, patterns of social positioning vis-à-vis the moral agent.[5] In reading *The Scarlet Letter* through the lens of psychological realism, we risk missing the way it asks us to consider its moral components as inextricable from practices of reading and writing.

I draw attention to the examples of Arendt and Kutz to indicate the privileged role of realism as a mode of reading, and the nineteenth century as a literary-historical period, in post-1945 philosophical thinking on guilt and responsibility. We can readily understand why narrative, among all the literary forms, assumed this importance in view of its capacity to deal with questions raised in the discourses of ethics and law, about the interrelation of individual character, motive, causation and consequence. More narrowly, fiction, as Kutz and Arendt both suggest in their different ways, offers a distinctive latitude to its readers and writers in its delineation of irreducible moral complexity and contradiction, or what Kutz calls its "refractory nature."[6] Yet if, as John Guillory has recently argued, the moral/judicial rationale is an inescapable component of the response to fiction, then how does that response vary across modes, genres, and periods?[7] What insights might we gain by approaching the intersection of literature, ethics, and the law not from the perspective of nineteenth-century realism but from that of post-war metafiction, with its characteristic insistence that we take account of the fact of representation?

It is an irony of midcentury intellectual history that figures such as Arendt and Sartre, both of them readers of American literature deeply committed to its potential to illuminate

philosophical and political questions, did not engage substantively with the new wave of writers who used metafiction as a way of articulating and deliberating the very problems of post-war complicity they explored in their philosophical and political writing. Several novels published during the first wave of postmodernist metafiction between 1947 and 1962 represent historical situations of complicity arising from World War Two and the Holocaust. These include Nabokov's treatment of intellectual coordination under totalitarianism in *Bend Sinister* (1947), and the representation of denazification in John Hawkes' *The Cannibal* (1949) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Mother Night* (1961). What I want to bring into view is the distinctive contribution of self-reflexive fictional devices in grasping these situations.

The novels grouped together in this chapter collectively illustrate the way complicity became a problem *for writing itself* in the twenty years after World War Two. The responsibilities of fiction, they suggest, entailed not only descriptions of complicit situations in setting, plot, and character, but also the working through of complicity's more intractable ethical and political problems through formal experiments that pressed the fact of representation into the foreground. Some of the more estranging examples of these experiments include the interventions of Nabokov's otherworldly narrator in *Bend Sinister*, and the decisions by Hawkes and Vonnegut to have their novels narrated by professional Nazi propagandists. Less aggressive devices involve particular stagings of genre conventions, voice, and point of view. All, however, fall under the rubric of metafiction, since they self-consciously draw attention to their own status as textual artefacts mediating between a materially historical world and the imagination. In doing so, they interrupt the expectations of representational transparency and attentive absorption usually associated with realist modes of reading.

The marked rise of self-reflexive devices in post-World War Two US fiction was a foundational fact for many scholars of contemporary American literature from the late 1960s

through to the end of the twentieth century, and the basis for the creation of a new extension of the modernist canon into the present. Some of the most perspicacious literary critics of their generation, such as Robert Alter, Robert Scholes, and Tony Tanner cut their teeth in the first decade of this flowering, with enthusiastic accounts of an ongoing resurgence of self-reflexive fiction, or what Scholes named "fabulation."[8] All accorded special importance to the innovations of Nabokov, whose two novels of the 1960s—*Pale Fire* (1962) and *Ada* (1969)—were understood to be hugely influential.[9] Others held to be central to the new movement included Hawkes, Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon, alongside John Barth, Donald Barthelme, and Robert Coover. The studies that first noticed and described postwar metafiction tended to understand it as the outcome of a literary evolution deriving from earlier periods and writers, emerging in the contemporary as a logical continuation of modernist formal iconoclasm.[10] They were less interested in investigating its social-historical groundings than in documenting the intricacies of the formal structures themselves, together with their correlatives in states of paranoia, aesthetic exhilaration, and laughing despair.[11]

In the 1980s, a new wave of scholars in North America and the UK, including Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh, and Brian McHale, made influential interventions in the understanding of metafiction, drawing on the newly available theoretical resources provided by French thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard.[12] Now attention turned increasingly to the purported politics of metafiction, which as a category had been subsumed by a newly established term for the current cultural dominant operating across a multiplicity of media and discourses: *postmodernism*.[13] In Waugh's formulation, even if postmodernist metafiction conceded its own attenuated purchase on the material worlds of political struggle, it also educated its readers by identifying for them the kinds of ideologically constructed discourses through which they understood those worlds, and therefore modelling for them ways of noticing and interrogating

what she called "the organization of experience."[14] Hutcheon, meanwhile, described metafiction's politics as one of "complicitous critique," claiming that it contests liberal humanism from within the limits of its own assumptions: postmodernism "does not pretend to operate outside that system, for it knows it cannot; it therefore overtly acknowledges its complicity, only to work covertly to subvert the system's values from within."[15]

Hutcheon's theorization of postmodernist politics as "complicitous critique" is a critical event worth recovering, even while postmodernism has been largely abandoned by literary scholars as a theoretical resource or periodizing marker. The power of complicitous critique as a political concept has not weathered well over the intervening years, during which a politics of radical non-complicity has resurfaced both in literary criticism and the Left more broadly. The ethics of a complicitous liberalism have been made less palatable in the face of continuing racial domination in the US and neo-colonial violence on the part of its governing class. What Hutcheon's criticism work identified, however, and risks being forgotten, is the intertwined histories of liberal complicity and the forms of experimental metafiction after 1945. I propose in this chapter a more historically-specific account of that interrelationship, and to explain how it crystallized in response to the crises of guilt and responsibility precipitated by World War Two.

Hutcheon's discussion of postmodernist metafiction and its emancipatory valence articulated its political dimensions in terms she borrowed from the intellectual innovations of the 1960s, especially Foucault's discourse analysis and the developments in semiotics and philosophy of language that became known as poststructuralism. This meant that Hutcheon approached the fiction of the 1960s using a frame provided by the theory revolution that overtook English departments in North America during the 1970s and 80s. She saw agency dispersed everywhere and unavoidably across discursive and social systems, rather than located in individuals.[16] Cogent though it is, this account misses the actual practice of

metafictional techniques and devices by influential writers preceding these developments in the immediate post-war moment, when the first glimpses of what became postmodernist fiction emerged in works like Nabokov' *Bend Sinister* and Hawkes' *The Cannibal*. These novels proposed radical new forms of reflexivity in direct response to recent historical situations of complicity for writers under totalitarianism. They worked through some of the specific problems raised by Arendt and Sartre: how is an intellectual to respond to demands for total coordination with state ideology? When does literature shade into propaganda? In the face of state terror, what are the ethics entailed by withdrawal and resistance respectively? And perhaps most pressingly of all, what are the forms of knowledge and denial that make living with complicity possible for the liberal subject?

***Bend Sinister* and Co-ordination**

Bend Sinister was Nabokov's first American novel, begun during World War Two and belonging to the same period in his oeuvre as "Double Talk," with which it shares an interest in complicity. It is one of his more unloved works, landing, as the author put it, with a "dull thud" in 1947.[17] This has partly to do with its subject matter, for it deals with violence and cruelty on a scale hardly matched elsewhere in his fiction. It takes up a theme that Nabokov had treated on and off since, as an impoverished émigré living in 1930s Berlin, he had witnessed the rise of National Socialism: the destruction of the liberal intellectual subject in a totalitarian state. He wrote to his editor at Doubleday in 1944, "I propose to portray certain subtle achievements of the mind in modern times against a dull red background of nightmare oppression and persecution. The scholar, the poet, the scientist and the child—these are the victims and witnesses of a world that goes wrong in spite of its being graced with scholars, poets, scientists and children."[18] The novel's title evokes this sense of a world gone wrong,

bent out of joint in a way that its protagonists prove themselves unable to mend.[19] *Bend Sinister* presents a version of the classic dilemma of totalitarian complicity. The regime it portrays, in Nabokov's own account, was constructed from combined elements of the historical Nazi and Soviet states, featuring a single ruling party, ubiquitous propaganda, constant ideological pronouncements, and a racialized regime of terror maintained by the secret police.[20] Its main protagonist, Professor Krug, is a world-renowned philosopher faced with an unbearable choice: to collaborate or risk torture and death.

For much of *Bend Sinister*, the plot addresses the unfolding drama of this dilemma as it affects Krug's life. He is subjected to increasing pressure to collaborate, but refuses to compromise. The regime demands that Krug's university make a public statement that it will tow the ideological line. Azureus, the university President, makes for an instructive portrait of the reluctant collaborator, proclaiming how "distasteful the spirit of compromise is to me" but nevertheless worrying that "a government is a government and as such cannot be expected to suffer a tactless demonstration of unprovoked dissension or indifference"[21] A professor of French signs the draft statement, telling himself that "it was not his business to combat exotic politics."[22] Yet Krug refuses to sign, noting that "I never have signed, nor ever shall sign anything not written by myself."[23] An anxiety about the act of writing in relation to collective forms of subjectivity pervades the novel, providing a thematic route into its self-reflexivity and its accompanying concern with radical non-complicity. (In another episode, the dictator's father invents a typewriter that can reproduce the individualized handwriting of its owner, creating new possibilities for fraudulent crimes if it falls into the wrong hands). Krug's friend Ember attempts to warn him about the danger he faces, but Krug insists he is "invulnerable," saying that he will "lie *doggo*. In due time what intelligence I have left will be dovetailed into some leisurely book. Frankly I do not give a damn for this or any other university."[24] Krug, grieving the recent death of his wife from illness, indulges in a fantasy of non-participation

with both the regime and his professional institution, withdrawing into the solitude of thinking and writing in his personal residence. Even as his friends and colleagues are arrested around him, or disappeared by the secret police, he refuses to face the true nature of the risks and responsibilities entailed by intellectual life in the new political universe. This refusal eventually results in the death of his only child, David, who is kidnapped for leverage and then accidentally murdered by the secret police.

The situation described in *Bend Sinister* is familiar from a number of accounts of intellectual and academic life under totalitarianism. Among them is Arendt's 1964 essay "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship." There, she describes with hindsight how she and her coevals among German intellectuals failed in their moral responsibilities when faced with the early phase of National Socialist rule. Just as Krug experiences his own moral life as something entirely removed from the regime, and its rule of terror to be philistine but not fundamentally his concern, so Arendt's circle of intellectuals were at first "outraged, but not morally disturbed, by the behavior of the storm troopers in the concentration camps and the torture cellars of the secret police."[25] For Arendt and her peers, Nazism was "nothing more than a very complex political problem," one to be analyzed dispassionately from a position of external objectivity.[26] With hindsight, they failed to grasp their own implication in the problem they observed. The question of morality, in Arendt's account, only arose with the issue of co-ordination, whereby the party required institutions to fall into line with its ideology. "What disturbed us was not the behavior of our enemies but our friends, who had done nothing to bring this situation about."[27] As in *Bend Sinister*, a number of intellectuals co-operated with the regime by endorsing its political projects and accepting its pedagogical programs. Among them (though she does not discuss him in this essay), was Arendt's mentor and former lover, Martin Heidegger.

In this notorious case, one of Germany's leading philosophers joined the National Socialist Party, assumed the position of Rector of the University of Freiburg, made anti-Semitic statements, and led the institution's co-ordination program. Heidegger was an enthusiastic Nazi in the early years of the regime and his actual response to Nazi co-ordination resembled in several regards what the regime in the novel demands of the university.[28] Heidegger's proclamation to the Heidelberg Students Association in 1933 echoes the position taken by Azureus the university president in *Bend Sinister*:

> The possibility could exist that the university will suffer death through oblivion and forfeit the last vestige of its educational power. It must, however, *be integrated again into the Volksgemeinschaft* and *be joined together with the State*. The university must again become an educational force that draws on knowledge to educate the State's leaders to knowledge.[29]

Heidegger was drawing explicitly on his Platonic vision of the intertwined roles of philosophy and authoritarian state power. In *Bend Sinister*, the statement the regime prepares for Krug reads "we shall teach and learn that the dream of Plato has come true in the hands of the Head of our State." "This is sheer drivel," replies Krug, "take it away."

Bend Sinister is of special interest in the history of literary narratives dealing with collaboration because it portrays the position of radical non-complicity not as heroic but, as in Arendt's "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," as a failure of moral judgment. This failure causes not only Krug's own death but also that of his son. A curious feature of the plot is that Krug went to school with the dictator, Paduk, and bullied him remorselessly in the playground. Krug's conduct towards the regime suggests a continuation of this immature obduracy into adulthood. Again, Arendt's work helps us to see what is at stake in the kinds of judgments the novel asks of Krug and its readers. In "Collective Responsibility," she draws a

distinction between classical notions of ethics, in which "the question is never whether an individual *is* good but whether his conduct is good for the world he lives in," and a Christian conception in which "the emphasis shifted entirely from care of the world and the duties connected with it, to care for the soul and its salvation."[30] Nonparticipation in the political realm, such as Krug claims for himself when he withdraws to his home or to the countryside, is more likely to derive from the latter impulse, which makes it easier to live with oneself. Yet in the case of totalitarianism, as Krug discovers to his cost, "we deal here with a situation where participation, and that as we know can mean complicity in criminal activities, is a matter or course and nonparticipation a matter of decision."[31]

Krug attempts to opt out of what he still understands, in liberal fashion, as the external political sphere, not realizing that totalitarianism has essentially changed the rules of participation. Arendt has this to say about non-participants in Nazi Germany:

> They asked themselves to what extent they would still be able to live in peace with themselves after having committed certain deeds; and they decided it would be better to do nothing, not because the world would then be changed for the better, but simply because only on this condition could they go on living with themselves at all.[32]

Krug, the novel suggests to us, has little interest in changing the world for the better. According to the individualist ideology espoused by Nabokov in *Bend Sinister*, such aspirations would smack of the regime's vacuous and pseudo-Marxist ideology. Yet the philosopher does maintain what Arendt describes as the precondition for non-participation, the "disposition to live together explicitly with oneself, to have intercourse with oneself, that is, to be engaged in that silent dialogue between me and myself which, since Socrates and Plato, we usually call thinking."[33] Much of the novel, as we will see presently, is engaged in representing precisely this kind of reflexive dialogue.

Arendt was inclined to be forgiving of non-participants on the basis that responsibility for the world cannot and should not be assumed by those without political power.[34] The existentialist Sartre of the 1940s, as we have seen, would insist on Krug's freedom to choose even in the most agonizing and difficult of situations. In my reading, the novel implicitly invites us to judge Krug adversely for not taking the route that Nabokov himself had several years earlier, by seeking exile in Paris and then the United States with his wife and young son (Krug is advised to flee the regime on several occasions in the novel but ultimately demurs). Yet, to read *Bend Sinister* in this way, as we have so far done, is to read it through the kind of realist lens that Arendt and Kutz deploy in their discussions of complicity, as demanding the activation of our capacities for moral judgment in ways analogous to real-world cases. On its diegetic level, the novel exemplifies the kind of "refractory nature" that Kutz values in literary texts, and which, he says, makes them useful for deliberations on questions of agency and responsibility. Nabokov places Krug in what Arendt called an "unbearable position," and this is the very reason the text rewards this kind of attention.[35] Now let us adjust our lens to start taking account of the novel's remarkable formal inventiveness, which we have so far parenthesized.

"A Device Never Yet Attempted in Literature"

The importance Nabokov accorded to *Bend Sinister*'s experimentalism is evident in his correspondence with Doubleday's editor in 1944, and demonstrated in the difficulties he described in writing the prospectus. There was something about this novel that made it fundamentally resistant to description or summary:

> I am putting this rather bluntly, I am afraid, as it is difficult to give a synopsis of something, the rhythm and atmosphere of which are more essential than a physical

> outline. And the difficulty is increased by the fact of the idea of the book being far more than the discomfort experienced by free minds on the worst curves of a bumpy century; its idea being, in fact, something fundamentally new and thus demanding a treatment incompatible with the bare description of a general theme.[36]

The emphasis on the novelty of *Bend Sinister*'s "idea" and its resistance to description has clear echoes in high modernist aesthetic discourse and the Russian Formalist tradition which influenced Nabokov's early development as a writer. Yet it also indicates the historical particularity of the situation that called these formal experiments into being ("demanding" them, as Nabokov writes), and created the conditions for their perceived necessity. I have two self-reflexive aspects of this experiment in mind, which illuminate how complicity became a problem for writers to address by means of literary form. These are *Bend Sinister*'s unusual method for representing plurality of consciousness, and its deployment of a God-like author figure depicted in the act of intervening in the course of his own plot, what Nabokov hubristically described to his editor as "a device never yet attempted in literature."[37]

Earlier in this study, we discussed the broad significance of Sartre's notion of bad faith for literary production in postwar writing. Sartrean bad faith describes people's habit of fleeing from their own freedom to choose their actions by taking refuge in the false notion that they have no capacity to choose, or that their being is fixed in some way beyond their control. Bad faith is an essential means of conceptualizing complicity both as a subjective experience and as a political problem, because it accommodates the way complicity usually entails a tension between acknowledgement and denial of one's responsibility for oneself and the world one lives in. The philosophical way Sartre accommodates this tension poses a challenge to literary representation, for he posits a duality of consciousness, made up of a reflective and a pre-reflective *cogito*. While the reflective *cogito* takes itself as its own object and deliberates on its own choices, the more deeply-rooted pre-reflective *cogito* does not.

We know that Nabokov—like most intellectuals in the United States—read Sartre around this time. He wrote a scathing review of *Nausea* in 1940, and then went on to satirize existentialism in *Lolita*.[38] Regardless of his views, *Bend Sinister* grapples with the formal challenge issued by complicity in a parallel way to bad faith, insofar as it attempts to represent the paradox that Sartrean bad faith makes explicit: consciousness *understands* (pre-reflectively) the situation of the subject but does not *know* it (reflectively), thus acknowledging and denying responsibility for it at one and the same time. The problem is neatly condensed in one episode of the novel, which describes how a single shoe and a bloodstained cuff, evidence of a struggle between the secret police and an individual victim, are seen lying on the pavement of the capital city. Passersby "gave them a wide berth without, however, slowing down or looking at those two articles or indeed showing their awareness of them in any way beyond stepping off the curb into the mud and then stepping back onto the sidewalk."[39] This episode provides us with Krug's own situation in microcosm, as he tries not to reflect on what he understands to be true, that his stance of radical non-complicity is unsustainable in the new political world, that his friends are being disappeared one by one, that his son will die if he does not choose a different course.

Nabokov represents the denial of responsibility on the part of the liberal subject by hiving off one part of consciousness from another. As the novel explains for us, one part is distinguished from the other by its self-reflexivity. Thus, as Krug weeps for his dead wife, "he discriminated between the throbbing one and the one that looked on: looked on with concern, with sympathy, with a sigh, or with bland surprise. This was the last stronghold of the dualism he abhorred."[40] We can conjecture that the startling way Nabokov handles this dualism is part of the "rhythm and atmosphere" of the book that he claimed in the Doubleday letter to be more important than the plot outline, for it involves a series of disorientating oscillations between grammatical parts, by which Krug is sometimes located in the third

person and sometimes in the first within the same paragraph. The effect is that the narrative point of view alternates between two parts of his consciousness. The reflective, dispassionate one is able to subsume the other, which by contrast lacks the capacity to see itself. Having delved into Krug's non-reflexive consciousness as an "I", capable of memory, feeling, and abstract philosophical thought but not of placing itself in its own viewfinder, the reflexive consciousness of Krug resumes the process of observation: "Krug – for it was still he – walked on."[41] Krug means *circle* in Russian, and the non-reflexive Krug is described as contained by the other, "the circle in Krug, one Krug in another one," or elsewhere as "that cramped, uncomfortable 'I', that chess-Mephisto concealed in the *cogito*!"[42] In this way, Nabokov innovates a way of representing the complex psychology of bad faith complicity, with its several levels of awareness.

Nabokov presents Krug's alienated, self-reflexive consciousness in ample and unsettling detail, personifying it as a figure that enables reflection on self, and therefore as a quasi-divine or supernatural agent of self-representation:

> The stranger quietly watching the torrents of local grief from an abstract bank. A familiar figure, albeit anonymous and aloof. He saw me crying when I was ten and led me to a looking glass in an unused room (with an empty parrot cage in one corner) so that I might study my dissolving face. He has listened to me with raised eyebrows when I said things I had no business to say. In every mask I tried on, there were slits for his eyes. Even at the very moment when I was rocked by the convulsion men value most. My savior. My witness.[43]

There is an indeterminate slippage or resemblance here between Krug and Krug's reflexive consciousness, as if the two were related in some serial but non-identical way. Certainly, the notion of the narrator as intrusive but dispassionate voyeur prying into the thoughts and

affairs of private liberal individuals has a longer history in Nabokov's work going back to the short story "The Leonardo" (1933), in which the narrator's viewpoint is aligned with two Nazi thugs who terrorize and eventually murder the secretive Romantovski for the crime of not opening his life to them. This formal tendency seems closely related to the portrayal of totalitarian regimes aiming at the abolition of private subjectivity altogether, and suggests how Nabokov understands the function of his narrators to overlap with that of the surveillance regimes they describe.[44] *Bend Sinister* is distinctive, however, in Nabokov's decision to distribute the narrating function both across and seemingly beyond his protagonist's divided consciousness, reproducing the states of bad faith and denial induced in liberal subjects by totalitarian conditions.

Scholars assessing *Bend Sinister* have tended to follow Nabokov's own lead in judging the novel's formal experiments to be separate from its ostensible subject matter. "The story in *Bend Sinister* is not really about life and death in a grotesque police state," Nabokov assured readers of his 1964 introduction, before insisting that the characters representing the state, from Paduk the dictator down to the brutal and callous secret police "are only absurd mirages, illusions oppressive to Krug during his brief spell of being, but harmlessly fading away when I dismiss the cast."[45] Seen from a different angle, however, such pronouncements confirm what they appear to deny, that Nabokov's choice to foreground the fact of representation in the novel arises precisely from its historical groundings in totalitarianism. The novel should be understood as a project to take seriously Stephen Dedalus's pronouncement in James Joyce's *Ulysses*—one of *Bend Sinister*'s principal intertexts—that history is the "nightmare from which I am trying to awake."[46] If history is a nightmare, then like nightmares, like fictional worlds, it is a narrative fabulation made up of insubstantial bits and pieces that can be pulled apart just as easily they can be stitched together. Nabokov's pronouncement in his introduction positions him, then, as Prospero ("these our actors, / As I

foretold you, were all spirits and / Are melted into air, into thin air"), and *Bend Sinister*'s totalitarianism "the baseless fabric" of his vision, dispelled as the curtains fall.[47]

Nabokov exposes the construction of totalitarianism's nightmare as just what Arendt was simultaneously describing in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: a fraudulent world of lies told with such insistence that they assume the shape and appearance of a reality. It is worth reminding ourselves of Arendt's argument in this regard, for it is rarely noted in commentaries on her political philosophy. Her totalitarian dictators are not political figures so much as misguided artists. In a remarkable passage, she elaborates:

> Their art consists in using, and at the same time transcending, the elements of reality, of verifiable experiences, in the chosen fiction, and in generalizing them into regions which then are definitely removed from all possible control by individual experience. With such generalizations, totalitarian propaganda establishes a world fit to compete with the real one, whose main handicap is that it is not logical, consistent, and organized.[48]

This potent analogy between the totalitarian dictator and the writer of fiction is one that she shared with Nabokov, who pursued it explicitly several times. In a letter to Edmund Wilson, for example, he wrote that "Without its obscurities and abracadabra, without its pernicious reticences, shamanic incantations and magnetic trash, Marxism is not Marxism. The paradox which explodes Marxism and other dreams of the Ideal State is that the first author is potentially the first tyrant of the state."[49] Statements like these open the door to a different way of considering fiction and complicity. Our attention passes from the mimetic representation of complicit situations towards more allegorical modes of interpretation in which the act of world creation—a kind of demonic or supernatural power for Nabokov—is modelled on real-world forms of domination and oppression. "The design of my novel is fixed in my imagination and every character follows the course I have imagined for him," he

told Alfred Appel, Jr. "I am the perfect dictator in that private world insofar as I alone am responsible for its stability and truth."[50]

In the context of *Bend Sinister*, the author-figure who intervenes in his own fiction in "a device never yet attempted in literature" is presented in a metaphysical register as a demiurge, more competent and more powerful than Paduk, his equivalent in the material world. This god-like authority countermands the flimsy and insubstantial world of Paduk's regime, sending Krug insane in order to save him psychological distress after the murder of his son, and then later ceasing his writing abruptly, thus interrupting the process of Krug's execution when the bullets enter his body. Just as Paduk begins to dissolve and become transparent in the face of Krug's ebullient madness, so the wall against which Krug is to be shot "vanished, like a rapidly withdrawn slide, and I stretched myself, and I got up from among the chaos of written and rewritten pages."[51] "Well, that was all," remarks the author-figure as he surveys the scene of creation in his private bedroom. "The various parts of my comparative paradise—the bedside lamp, the sleeping tablets, the glass of milk—looked with perfect submission into my eyes. I knew the immortality I had conferred on the poor fellow was a slippery sophism, a play upon words. But the very last lap of his life had been happy and it had been proven to him that death was but a question of style."[52]

We are left with the awkward narratological question of how this authorial demiurge is related to Krug's reflective self, the stranger who observes him crying in the mirror and enables self-representation. There is a vital distinction between the two: one is a philosopher and the other a novelist, one an interpreter of worlds and the other a creator of them. This distinction is rehearsed in the novel's intertextual dialogue with Plato's *Republic*, with its notorious prescriptions for literary censorship, endorsement of an authoritarian state governed by ideocracy, and attacks on the Sophists. The author-figure of *Bend Sinister* confesses that he gifts immortality to Krug via a "slippery sophism, a play upon words," siding with the

Sophists over Plato and endorsing the autonomy of artistic creation over and above Plato's vision of thought's subservience to the purposes of the state. Krug's reflective self, in other words, transcends his philosophical vocation to become a writer of fiction, in a movement towards pure creativity where dilemmas of complicity evaporate, and where death becomes merely "a question of style." The book that Krug the academic is in the process of writing—he thinks—is called *The Philosophy of Sin*, a treatise on moral responsibility written under the illusion of withdrawal from totalitarianism and radical non-complicity. But the one his reflexive self evolves to write is a novel, *Bend Sinister*, in which the degraded moral universe of totalitarianism is not shut out so much as *simulated* in a grotesque, absurd fictional register. In this sense, the novel enacts Krug's metamorphosis from moral philosopher into the irrational self-authorizing creator of his own fictional existence. Plato's Socrates insists in *Ion* that "the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses and his mind is no longer in him."[53] The derangement of Krug's *cogito* into divine madness and his subsumption by the creative writer is both the process described by the book and the one which supplies its conditions of existence.

We find in *Bend Sinister* an exposition and negation of the proposition that writing provides an effective route for withdrawal from the dilemmas of guilt and responsibility issued to the liberal subject by totalitarianism. The novel describes a character facing the difficult choices imposed by the situation of intellectual co-ordination, with no way apparent way out of it. When, in the "device never yet attempted in literature," Nabokov does offer a resolution to Krug's unbearable situation—by having his author-figure intercede at a self-reflexive level—it comes at a tremendous cost. Total aesthetic autonomy is unmasked as sophistry, and the artist-creator becomes not a heroic resistor but the double of the dictator. As Eric Naiman puts it in his perceptive reading, "if the novel is about the oppression of art,

that term must mean a situation in which art is doing all the oppressing. . . . Artistic freedom and the ability of the author, unfettered, to work in perfect serenity turn out not to be the antitheses of dictatorship but its necessary complements.”[54] In this way, *Bend Sinister*’s metafictional conceit marks the historical breaching of the ivory tower as a spatial metaphor for the writer’s social location. “However one wants to hide in one’s ivory tower,” admitted Nabokov to his sister in 1946 during the period of *Bend Sinister*’s composition, “there are things which wound one too deeply, for example German atrocities, the burning of children in ovens, —children who are just as ravishingly entertaining and loved as our children.” But the logic of Nabokov’s ivory tower is not the move upwards towards transcendence, but rather the retreat inwards towards self-examination and ultimately self-disgust. “I retreat into myself,” he goes on, hoping to find in his own creative resources some sanctuary from the violence of the social world, “but I find there such hatred for the German, and for the concentr. camp, for every tyrant, that as a refuge, *ce n’est pas grand chose*.”[55] This moment exemplifies the turning inward of the self in moments of complicit recognition, and also shows how such moments typically complicate rather than resolve the problem. For if Nabokov saw himself as “the perfect dictator” of his fictional worlds, then here he is confronted with a hall of mirrors from which there is no escape.

Fictions of Denazification

If *Bend Sinister* is one of the first fictions of Nazi co-ordination in American literature, then John Hawkes’ *The Cannibal* and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Mother Night* are fictions of denazification, in which the narrative drive is generated by the question of responsibility for the German atrocities of World War Two, and by imagining what afterlives there might be for Nazism after the Third Reich. Denazification is one of World War Two’s neologisms, first used by military planners in the Pentagon in 1943, to refer to the campaign to eradicate

Nazism from influence in German society during and after the Allied occupation.[56] Denazification aimed at the undoing of co-ordination and evoked many of the same problems of complicity, concerning ideas of collective guilt and of how individual subjects related to large-scale systems of repression and domination. Several of the architects of denazification in the Office for War Information are well-known to today's scholars as members of the Frankfurt School: Franz Neumann and Herbert Marcuse wrote influential reports setting out strategies for denazification in post-war Germany, based on strategies they created for identifying Nazis on a scale of commitment to the party.[57] Denazification became a major bureaucratic operation in the three years following the end of the war, pursued by all the occupying Allied powers but most systematically by the Americans. It required vast numbers of Germans to submit a questionnaire—the notorious *Fragebogen*—detailing their past activities in relation to the party, which was examined by assessors trained in the history and ideology of Nazism.

Though not designed as a prompt for moral reflection, denazification often became one. The historian Mikkel Dack goes as far to describe the *Fragebogen* as a "self-reflective ego-document," as Germans were compelled by the questionnaire and subsequent interrogation to consider their past actions in the light of present knowledge about the crimes of Nazism, and thus to ask themselves questions about their complicity.[58] Denazification was a narrative process insofar as it demanded that subjects construe their own stories of responsibility in relation to much wider histories of social and political life. The assessors, meanwhile, were obliged to read, evaluate, and judge these narratives. For these readers, denazification always posed a common set of narrative dilemmas related to judgment: will the teller of this tale pose a risk to Germany's transition to liberal democracy? Based on their story, what is the potential future for Nazism in this subject? Or will she turn out to be a good liberal? Although it was primarily concerned with judging political responsibility rather than

criminality, denazification thus ran alongside, and in the narrative sense sometimes overlapped with, the Allied efforts to bring Nazi war criminals to justice after the war.[59] What the historical concept and practice of denazification brings into focus, however, is the process of self-reflection and its articulation in language. This, the archive suggests, was always part of Neumann and Marcuse's intention, since they considered denazification a largely internal transformation of the subject undertaken through a social critique of both the self and the nation, rather than an external coercion.[60]

In German literature, denazification generated a number of literary and cultural responses in the decade after World War Two, from popular songs and cartoons to novels and memoirs.[61] The most well-known is Ernst von Salomon's memoir *Die Fragebogen* (*The Questionnaire*, 1951). Salomon's book took the form of a series of extended answers to questions posed by assessors in the questionnaire used to identify Nazis, and deployed this formal device to satirize the process of denazification as an absurd farce that revealed the Americans themselves to be doubles of the Gestapo. Central to this approach was Salomon's conviction that the purposes of denazification were essentially and illegitimately moral above all, leading him to describe the process as an "examination of conscience."[62] In the United States, denazification received direct treatment in several examples of 1940s realist middlebrow fiction, such as Zelda Popkin's *Small Victory* (1947); Alan Marcus's *Straw to Make Brick* (1949); and David Davidson's *A Steeper Cliff* (1950). The common factor in such novels was the prompting of American occupiers to their own processes of anguished self-examination by their experiences of denazification. "I feel no pride, no satisfaction at the way our victory was achieved," remarks a US assessor in Popkin's *Small Victory*. "What shall I think and do in a world of such moral confusion?"[63] "How can be judge them," he wonders, "or trust our own judgment?"[64]

In the cases of Hawkes' *The Cannibal* and Vonnegut's *Mother Night*, denazification's moral and rhetorical concerns are transformed into a metafictional grammar of confession, duplicity, self-examination, and exculpation. Both writers served in Europe in the closing stages of the war, and likely witnessed the policy of denazification being implemented at first hand.[65] The invitation to read them together arrives with their choice to deploy Nazi propagandists as first-person narrators, selecting professional writers who deliberately create language artefacts in the service of a racially pure Reich. *The Cannibal* is narrated by a German named Zizendorf in 1945, immediately after the end of the war. Zizendorf is the editor of a defunct local newspaper in his small town of Spitzen-on-Dein, and is responsible for organizing an underground cell aiming to precipitate a Nazi uprising against the American occupiers and restore the Third Reich. His narrative tells the story of the uprising and the pre-history of one of its supporters, Madame Snow, as she experiences the events leading up to and including World War One. *Mother Night* is narrated by John Campbell, an American playwright and poet, who remains in Germany during the war as a Nazi propagandist broadcasting anti-Semitic speeches on the radio. The novel takes the form of Campbell's confessions, narrated from a Jerusalem prison where he awaits trial for "complicity in the murder of six million Jews."[66] He reflects on his life under National Socialism, his years in New York after the war, and confesses his "crimes against humanity, and crimes against my own conscience."[67] Vonnegut's use of the term *complicity* in 1961 aligns with the formalization and crystallization of the discourse of guilt and responsibility in the years after World War Two, one unavailable to Hawkes in the late 1940s. In its absence, *The Cannibal* articulates its concern with complicity in less direct ways, through its ambiguous representations of agency and responsibility, poisonous atmospheres, and deep suspicion of its own eloquence. In both cases, however, the novels' formal self-reflexivity as being *both*

about and constituted by racial prejudice indicates how postwar metafiction was invested from the beginning in the expression of complicity as a structure of feeling.

The Cannibal was published by James Laughlin's New Directions press in 1949, alongside work by Tennessee Williams and William Carlos Williams, as well as the first English translation of Sartre's *Nausea*. Laughlin had published Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos* in 1948, which had been composed in an American detention center where Pound was being held for broadcasting anti-Semitic fascist propaganda during the war.[68] Laughlin had also brought out a chapbook of his own poems the same year, based on his visit to occupied Germany.[69] We can observe two facts about *The Cannibal*'s publishing context. First, New Directions signaled the young John Hawkes's intention to become an avant-garde writer opposed to commercial publishing. Second, the press aligned with Hawkes' interest in the intersection of avant-garde writing, fascism, and the war. This is not to suggest that Hawkes was, like Pound, a fascist. Rather, Hawkes's early project was, like Nabokov's, to use metafiction to explore the symmetries between the fascist and the literary author. At the heart of this project was the desire, in his own words to "destroy mere surface morality."[70] By this he seems to have meant reductive or simplistic moral codes and judgments such as those he perceived in American middlebrow writing, and in particular tendencies towards sympathy, pity and fellow-feeling. For Hawkes, the thread of the avant-garde ran through the vicious anti-Semitism of Céline, the cruelty of Flannery O'Connor, and the black humor of Nathaniel West. "This constant is a quality of coldness, detachment, ruthless determination," he remarked. "The function of a true innovator is to keep prose alive and constantly to test in the sharpest way possible the range of our human sympathies and constantly to destroy mere surface morality."[71] He added, "A writer who truly and greatly sustains us is Nabokov."[72]

The Cannibal's way of achieving this destruction of surface morality is through Hawkes' decision to make Zizendorf his narrator. He explained, "in revision I found myself

(perversely or not), wishing to project myself into the fiction and to become identified with its most criminal and, in a conventional sense, least sympathetic spokesman, the neo-Nazi leader of the hallucinated uprising."[73] The implications of the decision are far-reaching, ensuring that the novelist's eye for grotesque black comedy and his recondite prose style blend troublingly with the narrator's evident affinity for filth, excrement, and violence. Six years before Humbert Humbert proclaimed in *Lolita* that "you can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style," Hawkes had already realized Nabokov's gambit in his immersive fever-dream.[74] Zizendorf addresses us as accomplices not so much in his acts of violence as in his duplicitous propaganda project: "The honest man is the traitor to the State," he tells us, having concealed from a young girl the imminent murder of her brother. "The man with the voice only for those above him, not for citizens, tells all and spreads evil. His honesty is a hopeless misgiving. He makes the way intangible and petty, he hampers determination."[75] When we read the pamphlet he prints on his repaired press, we find commonplace racial propaganda prepared for the gullible masses: "The rise of the German people and their reconstruction is no longer questionable—the land, the Teutonic land, gives birth to the strongest of races, the Teutonic race." Yet when Zizendorf adds "From the ruins of Athens rise the spires of Berlin," he then gives the reader a wink: "Actually, I had never seen Berlin."[76]

Arendt saw in Nazi propaganda a concerted effort to induce states of complicity among the German populace, making them feel co-responsible for the crimes of their leaders and therefore compliant in following the dictates of the regime. National Socialism, she wrote in *Origins*, systematically confounded the orientation of innocence and guilt, perpetrator and victim, making them difficult to distinguish. In *The Cannibal*, we see this process being enacted on multiple levels. At the level of plot, we see the Mayor of the town caught up in

guilty confusion about the execution of Miller, on whom he had informed, and whose memory haunts him continually. Zizendorf describes him:

> The Mayor dreamed, heaping one on another all the atrocities his old heart could dig up, so that they rolled in a paroxysm in his throat. . . . Dream after dream the voices and the horses were the same, though they wore many figures, the Priest mixed up with the Officer, his own dead wife firing the rifle, a peculiar child pronouncing verdict as the Judge, the onlooking crowd all dressed as the condemned man.[77]

This passage suggests how the novel's Surrealist jumbles, in which characters and agents become fungible items in a predetermined historical nightmare, are Zizendorf's satiric renderings of an unhealthy and deluded liberal conscience unable to grasp Germany's destiny. Actually, it was not the Mayor but Zizendorf himself who fired the bullet that killed Miller. Zizendorf eventually murders the Mayor as well. Such is the manner of Hawkes' hallucinatory prose that the reader, too, is faced with the prospect of falling into the patterns of the Mayor's "surface morality," caught up in tortuous deliberations on guilt and responsibility for atrocity, while Zizendorf's incantatory propaganda beats a path unchallenged to the resurrected Reich.

Anxieties about readerly complicity in Hawkes only emerged explicitly in the criticism of the 1960s. This can be attributed partly to the reassessments invited by his growing reputation, but it was also due to New Critical styles of reading. Albert J. Guerard wrote in a preface to the 1962 edition of the tension between plot and style in which "a fine black humor and a nervous beauty of language play against the plot's impulse to imprison us unpleasantly in the nightmare, to implicate us in these crimes. We are indeed deeply involved. But we are outside, too, watching the work of art."[78] Such critical binaries of affecting plot and disciplined style, characteristic of the New Critical approach to fiction in the period, ramify rather than resolve the novel's engagement with complicity, however. A

comparable judgment was made by Scholes in his discussion of Hawkes' early work in 1967, writing of how "the reader's psyche is insulated from emotional complicity by a curtain of satiric detachment which Hawkes drops between reader and characters."[79] The fact of Zizendorf's narration renders this kind of redemptive reading doubtful, since satiric detachment is itself part of his habitus as a Nazi propagandist in the world of the novel. As Hawkes later explained, his choice to make Zizendorf the authorial consciousness in *The Cannibal* lent that figure, in addition to "an unusual omniscience," "specific definition, definition in terms of humor and 'black' intelligence."[80] It was always Hawkes' intention, in other words, to confound the notion of morally redemptive style by deploying irony and comedy as components of a fascist worldview. He suggested in another interview that dispositions of "extreme detachment" were not only a component of literary style, but also "might be a quality of the extreme authoritarian, the dictator, or the leader of a criminal gang."[81] He was thinking along very similar lines to Nabokov, who in *Bend Sinister* had fashioned his detached narrator as a double of the dictator.

In order to trace the logic of complicity in Hawkes' novel we can do no better than to follow the path suggested by its title. Superficially, the cannibal is a character named only as "the Duke," who stalks a young boy through the ruins of Spitzen-on-the-Dein throughout the novel, eventually killing and butchering him for meat. It is just one of the many corpses that litter the novel. The metafictional dimensions of the *Cannibal*, however, direct us to consider the work itself to be the product of a cannibalistic aesthetic, by which Hawkes' prose is turned inwards towards language, consuming and nourishing itself on its own kind. It is significant that the Duke wraps the pieces of his kill in stained discarded copies of Zizendorf's old newspaper, *The Crooked Zeitung.* The waste and ruin of postwar Germany is one of material language severed from its referential function. These signs without referents mingle with corpses, excrement, and organic detritus, to the extent that these categories

become virtually indistinguishable. Scraps of newspaper and advertisements drift around the town with the wind, while the ruined library is "charred and unpurged." The latrines are stuffed with "wads of wet newspaper" mingling with the "odor of burned flesh and hair.[82] In the belongings found with the body of the assassinated American officer are found "unintelligible military scrawl, columns of figures, personal resentments."[83] In the print room, "old broken headlines were scattered, mere metal words, about the floor."[84] Zizendorf, meanwhile, describes his mind as filled with textual litter, "heaped about by past years' correspondence, dead letters, fragments of broken type."[85] These are the materials upon which the novelist must feed in order to gain strength, and which are to be gathered, renovated and recombined to create new textual worlds.

The growth in the power and confidence of Zizendorf's narration as the novel progresses can be traced through the fortunes of his printing press. At the beginning, he observes it as another eviscerated corpse, where "each letter in the plates of type was butchered into the next" and "all the plates had been smashed with hammers."[86] The narrative conclusion, however, finds these materials reconfigured into a mass-production apparatus and the press repaired, transforming Zizendorf from editor to "compositor" of propaganda, a parodic midwife bringing a world into being:

> Stumpfegle stood by the delivery table, Fegelein by the feed table, while I, the Leader, the compositor, put the characters, the words of the new voice, into the stick. I wrote my message as I went, putting the letters into place with the tweezers, preparing my first message, creating on a stick the new word. The print fell into place, the engine spluttered, filling the shed with the fumes of stolen gasoline. I wrote, while my men waited by the press, and my message flared from the begrimed black type.[87]

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the novel we read is a product of this "new word" and "new voice," heralding the resurgence of an illiberal and antidemocratic regime fashioned

using ruined type, dead letters, and discarded text. If *Bend Sinister* concludes with the image of the author as grand demiurge interrupted in the process of world creation, then *The Cannibal* brings us to witness the act of fiction-making as a kind of birth, only in the guise of a petty Nazi war criminal believing himself to have transcended guilt and innocence, inviting us to participate in the repressive world of fascist terror he has brought into being.

Mother Night's Bad Faith

In his 1947 book *Psychological Warfare*, the CIA intelligence and black ops expert Paul M. A. Linebarger claimed that "almost all the best propagandists of almost all modern powers have been, to a greater or less degree, literary personalities. The artistic and cultural aspect of writing is readily converted to propaganda usage."[88] Linebarger was identifying both a literary-historical fact and a topic for metafictional exploration. In 1961, Vonnegut took up where Hawkes had left off by inventing another darkly comic narrator who combined the functions of literary writing and racial propaganda. Howard W. Campbell makes anti-Semitic speeches on the radio for the German masses during the war, but he also works for the Americans, secretly transmitting military codes as part of his broadcast. Vonnegut's idea came from a dinner party conversation with an American intelligence officer, in which the officer claimed of individuals recruited behind enemy lines that "he would be of more use to the enemy than he was to us, or he couldn't last for long."[89] Vonnegut chose, however, to make his compromised narrator a famous writer and in doing so opened up his third novel to new metafictional possibilities.

Vonnegut's first two novels, *Player Piano* (1952) and *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), had been much more conventional in adhering to the narrative conventions of midcentury speculative fiction. *Mother Night* was a considerable departure in that it presented a historical setting and a self-reflexive structure in the form of Campbell's own confessions. These

alternate between the present of his writing, as he awaits trial for "complicity in the murder of six million Jews," and his memories of the past, which include fragments from his literary works.[90] The novel thus takes the professional production of language artefacts as one of its primary interests and asks how that work reproduces racial domination in the real world.

Hawkes' *The Cannibal* aimed to destroy "mere surface morality" by rendering the motivation for acts of violence inscrutable, contradictory or even irrelevant. *Mother Night* also aims to puncture the US myth of the "good war" against Nazism, shored up by retrospective projections of righteousness and maleficence.[91] Vonnegut's 1966 introduction made this intention clear by recounting how he was handed a copy of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* by an American fascist in 1930s Indianapolis, and went on to remind the reader of the Allied bombing of Dresden. In terms of its plot, the novel refuses American chauvinism or moral reductionism by having its protagonist simultaneously aiding both sides. This was a conceit echoed in some of the British Cold War espionage fiction being produced around the same moment by writers like Graham Greene and John Le Carré, but it was rarely projected back to World War Two. *Mother Night*'s original contribution was to combine this narrative arrangement from espionage fiction with a parody of pulp confession. This genre component was made visible in the creation of the 1961 original paperback, which carried lurid marketing copy on the front cover: "An American traitor's astonishing confession."

The decision to work with the confessional form, one must suspect, was inspired at least in part by Nabokov's *Lolita*, which, like *Mother Night*, is supposedly composed in jail by a literary intellectual, and also features an ironic preface. The confessional form also aligned *Mother Night* with the process of denazification, with its emphasis on self-reflection and judgments on personal responsibility for past atrocities. Whatever its inspiration, the effect created by the combination of espionage plot and literary confession was to produce an essentially liberal frame for perceiving Nazism in general and the Holocaust in particular, as

horrors comprehensible as the moral failures of individual subjects. This was what Doris Lessing later described in a review for the *New York Times* as "a specifically Vonnegut identification with the ambiguities of complicity."[92] The author, meanwhile, was clear in his private correspondence that Campbell was "a stand-in for the Germans who participated in the Holocaust who said afterwards 'anyone who knows me knows that wasn't the real me.'"[93]

Mother Night is constructed around an apparent contradiction often confronted in representations of denazification, sometimes to the point of cliché: how can a cultured bourgeois devoted to literature and the arts participate indirectly in genocide? One source for this trope can be located in popular accounts of the Nuremberg Trials, where one of those in the dock, Baldur Von Shirach, professed himself astonished at diary extracts published by Hans Frank, the ex-governor of Poland: "he had such an amazing knowledge of music and art and literature—it was simply astounding that such a man could make such statements of outright acquiescence in mass murder."[94] "I'm not a soldier, not a political man," says Campbell before the war begins. "I'm an artist. . . . If war comes it'll find me still working at my peaceful trade."[95] (Humbert Humbert puts it more simply: "poets never kill."[96]) Once the war is underway, however, Campbell puts his imaginative capacities to work in his anti-Semitic radio broadcasts: "I had a certain amount of skill as a dramatist and Dr. Goebbels wanted me to use it."[97]

Another version of this riddle, more specifically focused on the identification of the literary anti-Semite with the fascist propagandist, played out among American intellectuals during the controversy surrounding Ezra Pound's receipt of the 1948 Bollingen Prize in Poetry for *The Pisan Cantos*. Pound was selected despite his fascist broadcasts in Italy during the war, and indeed the anti-Semitism contained in the poem itself.[98] Allen Tate, who had been responsible for publishing Nabokov's *Bend Sinister* at Henry Holt, was one of those on the prize committee who chose Pound. He defended his decision in *Partisan Review*, on the

basis of Pound's child-like innocence. Tate downplayed the real-world impact of the broadcasts while suggesting that Pound's anti-Semitism was essentially literary in its intent. To take it seriously and judge him complicit was a liberal delusion. "His anti-Semitism is not disciplined by an awareness of its sinister implications in the world of men," Tate claimed. "Just as Pound's broadcasts never influenced anybody in this country, and were chiefly an indignity perpetrated upon himself . . . I cannot suppose that the anti-Semitism of the Cantos will be taken seriously by anyone but liberal intellectuals. Antisemites will not 'use' it. It is too innocent."[99]

Mother Night refuses the legitimacy of such a defense in the case of Campbell. He insists that "I am neither ignorant nor insane," and that "I've always known what I did."[100] Campbell is fully aware of what Rudolf Hoess euphemistically refers to in conversation with him as the "little health resort for Jews in Poland."[101] In this way, *Mother Night* rehearses Sartre's riddle of bad faith.[102] Sartre insisted that authentic self-deception is logically impossible and incoherent, because consciousness cannot fall for ruses it has devised itself.[103] Campbell affirms a very similar position: "I always know when I tell a lie, am capable of imagining the consequences of anybody's believing my lies, know cruelty is wrong. I could no more lie without noticing it than I could unknowingly pass a kidney stone."[104] While Sartre's response to this riddle is to propose a pre-reflective cogito capable of understanding more than it knows, Vonnegut's requires "that simple and widespread boon to modern mankind—schizophrenia."[105] Campbell describes a "separation of my several selves" in order to facilitate his psychological survival: Campbell the liberal writer who is concerned by cruelty and individual wrongdoing, and Campbell the anti-Semitic Nazi, flattered by the party's attentions.[106] The introduction of schizophrenia to the narrative mechanics of the novel opens up a number of interpretive indeterminacies related to the reliability of Campbell as narrator and the status of the real in the historical world it fictionalizes.[107] What I want to

emphasize here, however, is the use of psychopathology as literary device in order to represent and resolve the social contradictions of complicity at the level of the individual subject. Vonnegut shares this approach with Nabokov in *Bend Sinister*, who has his author-figure intervene in Krug's tortured consciousness in order to grant him insanity.

The second way Vonnegut refuses the kind of defense of the complicit writer made by Tate is that he has Campbell repeatedly confronted by evidence of the effectiveness of his anti-Semitic broadcasts. An American white supremacist, Lionel Jones, reports that the fascist community in the United States owes Campbell "a debt of gratitude . . . For having the courage to tell the truth during the war."[108] A German police chief, meanwhile, tells Campbell "you could never have served the enemy as well as you served us. . . . almost all the ideas I that I hold now, that make me unashamed of anything I may have felt or done as a Nazi, came not from Hitler, not from Goebbels, not from Himmler—but from you."[109] These incidents contribute to *Mother Night*'s insistent dismantling of the myth endorsed by Tate's defense of Pound, that literary deceptions carry no responsibilities, since they have no real-world effects. In place of this myth, Vonnegut proposes that acts of cultural representation not only make complicity visible *but also generate it*. He signals this proposition in the opening of his introduction, where he declares, "this is the only story of mine whose moral I know. I don't think it's a marvelous moral; I simply happen to know what it is: We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."[110] On the face of it, this moral refers directly to the novel's plot, and to the way Campbell's pretense of Nazism is indistinguishable from real Nazism insofar as it materially benefitted the Nazis. However, it also speaks to the novel's wider commitment to the power of fictionality as such; to "pretending" as a process with its own ethics under threat from instrumentalization.

In the fictional "Editor's Note" prefacing Campbell's confession, Vonnegut writes that "lies told for the sake of artistic effect . . . can be, in a higher sense, the most beguiling

forms of truth."[111] *Mother Night*, however, self-consciously articulates the risk that apparently truthful representations of Nazism are exploitative, simply commodifying suffering and benefitting only those who produce them. Campbell leads us to this position in recounting his reading of a "girly magazine" while having his hair cut in Greenwich Village in the late 1950s.[112] One article includes a photograph showing his Nazi father-in-law being hanged in a post-war reprisal, printed alongside the pornographic content usually expected in the magazine. The same risk is later expressed in the black joke which finds Adolf Eichmann seeking council from Campbell about commercializing the memoir he, like Campbell, is composing in jail. "Do you think a literary agent is absolutely necessary?" Campbell advises: "For book club and movie sales in the United States of America, absolutely."[113] In details such as these, Vonnegut voices a concern more distinctive to the early 1960s than to the 1940s, when Nabokov and Hawkes had composed *Bend Sinister* and *The Cannibal*: that Nazis had become fuel for the US culture industry.

Vonnegut was folding his own sense of complicity into the novel's design, exposing the commercial logic of his shift away from science fiction themes towards historical fiction. Early in the composition, in January 1960, he wrote to a friend, "process this thing quickly and we will hit the Nazi revival right on the nose. Big black Hakenkreuz on the cover."[114] He was likely responding to media coverage of the "swastika epidemic" of 1959-60, when daubings of swastikas appeared on synagogues and other public places throughout West Germany and then the United States. One study by the Anti-Defamation League counted 649 incidents in the United States between late December 1959 and the end of February 1960.[115] Vonnegut's sense of an impending Nazi revival was prescient. In May 1960, Israel announced that it had arrested Eichmann in Argentina and intended to put him on public trial, setting off a wave of media interest that scarcely abated for several years. During that time,

Vonnegut introduced Eichmann as a character, a celebrity double for his main protagonist, who chats amiably with Campbell in jail and takes advice on advancing his literary career.

Vonnegut's hopes of profiting from the Nazi vogue of the early 1960s failed. The novel sank with no reviews.[116] By the time *Mother Night* came out in hardback later in the decade, Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* had dealt with several of the issues raised in the novel, claimed a far larger readership, and caused a much larger controversy. *Eichmann*, after all, has its own thesis about how apparently cultured Germans participated at a distance in the Holocaust, and about how they lived with themselves afterwards. Rather than rehearse the contours of the book's controversy here, it is illuminating to consider the terms on which one of Arendt's critics launched his objections to her book, for it tell us something further about the growing sense in the 1960s that complicity was becoming understood as a distinctively *literary* problem.[117]

In a 1963 article for *Commentary*, Norman Podhoretz described what he called Arendt's "tale of Jewish complicity" in terms usually reserved for praise.[118] "The story as she tells it is complex, unsentimental, riddled with paradox and ambiguity."[119] In this regard, *Eichmann* achieved what Nabokov, Hawkes and Vonnegut had apparently set out to do in their fiction: to overturn "mere surface morality" with a vision of intractable moral contradictions. "Anyone schooled in the modern in literature and philosophy," he added, "would be bound to consider it a much better story than the usual melodramatic version."[120] Here, however, is Podhoretz's point: complicity was in danger of becoming a literary rather than an authentically historical or philosophical question, one aimed at generating prestige and attention rather than truth. For a generation of intellectuals taught to view complexity as a value in its own right, encouraged by the New Criticism to parse ambiguous moral situations in the novels of Henry James, or indeed by Arendt to ponder *Billy Budd* and *The Brothers*

Karamazov for their hard-won moral lessons, these were attractive—even necessary—qualities.

> But if this version of hers can from one point of view be considered more interesting, can it by the same token be considered truer, or more illuminating, or more revealing of the general situation of man in the 20th century? Is the gain she achieves in literary interest a matter of titillation, or is it a gain to the understanding?[121]

Podhoretz's challenge to Arendt, that she indulged a seductive, literary version of complicity at the cost of true understanding and ethical clarity, is one which echoes through the literary and intellectual history of complicity of the post-war period. Its power lies in the suggestion that the discourse of complicity is at its base a kind of intellectual indulgence appealing to the habitus of a sophisticated liberal intelligentsia concerned for their own ability to exercise moral and aesthetic judgments, but fundamentally incapable of addressing the gross materiality of racial domination in the real world. Literary treatments of complicity, he is suggesting, had by 1963 started to win their own prestige in the cultural field.

The metafictional novels of Nabokov, Hawkes, and Vonnegut show us the logic of this process, by which complicity was understood to be at risk of becoming a purely literary phenomenon that obscured rather than illuminated the political world. They had taken historically new experiences of guilt and responsibility arising from World War Two and brought them into conversation with the concerns over radical aesthetic autonomy that preoccupied the avant-garde after modernism. These novels remind us how fiction not only represents situations of complicity though mimesis, but also *stages* at another diegetic level its own parallel problems of indirect guilt and responsibility for the processes of reading and writing text. It is the tension they set out to produce between the two that generates their extraordinary effects. The creation of imaginative worlds in language, they suggest, brings its own set of responsibilities for writers, which are neither divorced from nor reducible to the

real world of historical domination they refer to. The dispositions of irony, playfulness, withdrawal and detachment from suffering that such fictions exhibit in their creative freedom, and even elicit from their readers, are not, in the final analysis, positive affirmations of autonomy, but rather evasions that betray Fascistic traits lurking in the liberal conscience—in the basement of soul, as Myrdal would have it. The risk these metafictional novels run, however, as Podhoretz's arguments suggest, is that in pursuing their complex dramas of conscience and self-implication they lose sight of their historical moorings. Representations of subjective experiences of complicity turn back upon themselves in a short-circuit effect rather than reaching out into the social world from which they originated, giving rise to aesthetic gestures of solipsism, involution and recursivity, cannibalism and self-disgust that have only an attenuated purchase on the real.

[1] Hannah Arendt, "Reading List: Basic Moral Propositions," 1966, 1949-1975, Courses, University of Chicago, Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss11056dig.040660/?sp=26.

[2] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1965), 77.

[3] Christopher Kutz, *Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collective Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 13.

[4] Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), 20.

[5] Kutz, *Complicity*, 33.

[6] Ibid., 13.

[7] John Guillory, *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2022), 357.

[8] Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Robert Scholes, *The Fabulators* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Tanner, *City of Words*.

[9] Tanner, *City of Words*, 33–55. Alter, *Partial Magic*, 180–217. For Nabokov's influence on US metafictional writers in this period, see Maurice Couturier, "Nabokov in Postmodernist Land," *Critique* 34, no. 4 (1993): 247–60.

[10] Medieval fables for Scholes (*The Fabulators* 6-11), Cervantes for Alter (*Partial Magic,* 3-29), Hawthorne and Melville for Tanner (*City of Words*, 20-25).

[11] For an important exception, see Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[12] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988); Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989); Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984); Brian Mchale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987).

[13] Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[14] Waugh, *Metafiction*, 30.

[15] Hutcheon, *Poetics*, 224.

[16] François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

[17] Vladimir Nabokov, "*Bend Sinister,*" in *Novels and Memoirs, 1941-1951*, ed. Brian Boyd (New York: Library of America, 1996), 163.

[18] Vladimir Nabokov, *Vladimir Nabokov: Selected Letters, 1940-1977*, ed. Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 48.

[19] Will Norman, "Nabokov's Wrong Turns," *Nabokov Online Journal* 15 (2021): 1–20.

[20] Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*, 164.

[21] Ibid., 207.

[22] Ibid., 211.

[23] Ibid., 212.

[24] Ibid., 239.

[25] Arendt, "Personal Responsibility," 24.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Víctor Farías, *Heidegger and Nazism*, ed. Joseph Margolis and Tom Rockmore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). The publication of Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* in 2015 confirmed his enthusiasm for Nazism in the early years of the regime and his anti-Semitic prejudice throughout the Third Reich. See Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas, eds., *Reading Heidegger`s Black Notebooks 1931–1941* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

[29] Martin Heidegger, "The University in the Third Reich," in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 44.

[30] Hannah Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2003), 151-2.

[31] Ibid., 154.

[32] Arendt, "Personal Responsibility," 44.

[33] Ibid., 45.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” *Dissent* 6, no. 2 (1959), 45.

[36] Nabokov, *Selected Letters,* 48-9.

[37] Ibid., 50.

[38] Vladimir Nabokov, “Sartre’s First Try,” *New York Times Review of Books*, April 24, 1949.. On existentialism and *Lolita*, see Will Norman, *Transatlantic Aliens: Modernism, Exile, and Culture in Midcentury America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 139.

[39] Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*, 271.

[40] Ibid., 175.

[41] Ibid., 180.

[42] Ibid., 200, 205-6. See also Leona Toker, *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 183–97.

[43] Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*, 175.

[44] See Siggy Frank, “Under Surveillance: The Omniscient ‘I’ in ‘The Leonardo’, ‘Cloud, Castle, Lake’ and ‘Pnin,’” in *Nabokov and Berlin*, ed. Luke Parker and Lisa Ryoko Wakamiya, n.d. (Forthcoming).

[45] Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*, 165.

[46] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 34. Nabokov refers to the novel’s allusions to Joyce in his introduction. Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*, 168.

[47] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 180.

[48] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin, 2017), 473-4.

[49] Simon Karlinsky, ed., *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940-1971*, Revised, expanded edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 36.

[50] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 69.

[51] Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*, 357.

[52] Ibid., 358.

[53] Plato, "Ion," in *Plato: Selections*, ed. Raphael Demos (New York: Scribner's, 1927), 240.

[54] Eric Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 72.

[55] Vladimir Nabokov, *Perepiska s sestroi*, ed. Elena Sikorski (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1985), 41.My translation. French included in the original.

[56] Perry Biddiscombe, *The Denazification of Germany: A History 1945-1950* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 9–11; Mikkel Dack, *Everyday Denazification in Postwar Germany: The Fragebogen and Political Screening during the Allied Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 5–6.

[57] See Franz Neumann, Herbert Marcuse, and Otto Kirchheimer, *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany: The Frankfurt School Contribution to the War Effort*, ed. Raffaele Laudani (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). On the Frankfurt School's involvement in denazification, see Barry M. Katz, *Foreign Intelligence: Research and Analysis in the Office of Strategic Services 1942-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 11–52.

[58] Dack, *Everyday Denazification*, 227.

[59] In bureaucratic terms, denazification remained formally separate from judicial proceedings against war criminals. Dack, *Everyday Denazification*, 7. However, the term can also be used in a general sense to refer to "the full range of Allied Soviet/Allied reform and punishment measures in occupied Germany." Biddiscombe, *Denazification*, 8.

[60] Dack, *Everyday Denazification*, 209.

[61] Werner Sollors, "'Everybody Gets Fragebogened Sooner or Later': The Denazification Questionnaire as Cultural Text," *German Life and Letters* 71, no. 2 (2018): 139–53.

[62] Ibid., 149.

[63] Zelda Popkin, *Small Victory* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1947), 56.

[64] Ibid., 87-88.

[65] Vonnegut served in the 106th Infantry Division. His wartime experiences are related in Kurt Vonnegut, *Fates Worse Than Death: An Autobiographical Collage of the 1980s* (New York: Putnam's, 1991).Hawkes drove ambulances with the American Field Service in Italy and Germany in 1944 and 1945. Patrick McGrath, "Obituary: John Hawkes," *The Independent*, June 2, 1998, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/obituary-john-hawkes-1162597.html.

[66] Kurt Vonnegut, *Mother Night* (New York: Vintage, 1968), 93.

[67] Ibid., 20.

[68] On Laughlin's New Directions in this period, see George Hutchinson, *Facing the Abyss: American Literature and Culture in the 1940s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 64-69.

[69] James Laughlin, *Report on a Visit to Germany (American Zone)* (New York: New Directions, 1948).

[70] John J. Enck and John Hawkes, "John Hawkes: An Interview," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 6, no. 2 (1965): 143.

[71] Ibid., 143-4

[72] Ibid., 144

[73] Ibid., 150.

[74] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, in *Novels 1955-1962*, ed. Brian Boyd (New York: Library of America, 1996), 7.

[75] John Hawkes, *The Cannibal* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), 171.

[76] Ibid., 176-7.

[77] Ibid., 131.

[78] Albert J. Guerard, "Addendum," in *The Cannibal*, by John Hawkes (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), xvii.

[79] Scholes, *The Fabulators*, 78.

[80] Enck and Hawkes, "John Hawkes: An Interview," 150.

[81] Patrick O'Donnell, "Life and Art: An Interview with John Hawkes," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 3, no. 3 (1983): 126.

[82] Hawkes, *Cannibal*, 130, 125.

[83] Ibid., 130.

[84] Ibid., 167.

[85] Ibid., 130

[86] Ibid., 15.

[87] Ibid., 175-6.

[88] Paul M. A. Linebarger, *Psychological Warfare*, second edition (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1954), 290.

[89] Kurt Vonnegut, *Letters*, ed. Dan Wakefield (London: Vintage, 2013), 350.

[90] Vonnegut, *Mother Night*, 93.

[91] On World War Two as "the good war," see Elizabeth D. Samet, *Looking for the Good War: American Amnesia and the Violent Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

[92] Doris Lessing, "Vonnegut's Responsibility," *The New York Times*, February 4, 1973, 35.

[93] Vonnegut, *Letters*, 402.

[94] G. M. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary* (New York: Signet, 1961), 148.

[95] Vonnegut, *Mother Night*, 26–27.

[96] Nabokov, *Lolita*, 82.

[97] Vonnegut, *Mother Night*, 12.

[98] Robert A. Corrigan, "Ezra Pound and the Bollingen Prize Controversy," in *The Forties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*, ed. Warren A. French (Deland, FLA: Everett/Edwards, 1969), 287–98. Tanner conjectures that the Pound controversy may have partly inspired *Mother Night*. Tanner, *City of Words*, 186–87.

[99] Allen Tate, "Further Remarks on the Pound Award," *Partisan Review* 16, no. 6 (1949): 668.

[100] Vonnegut, *Mother Night*, 47.

[101] Ibid., 13.

[102] On *Mother Night* and existentialism, see Robert T. Tally Jr, *Kurt Vonnegut and the American Novel: A Postmodern Iconography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 37–53.

[103] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), 73.

[104] Vonnegut, *Mother Night*, 106.

[105] Ibid., 116.

[106] Ibid., 119.

[107] On schizophrenia in *Mother Night*, see Lawrence R. Broer, *Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), 45–56.

[108] Vonnegut, *Mother Night*, 55.

[109] Ibid., 65.

[110] Kurt Vonnegut, "Introduction," *Mother Night* (London: Vintage, 1968), vii.

[111] Kurt Vonnegut, "Editor's Note," *Mother Night* (London: Vintage, 1968), ix.

[112] Vonnegut, *Mother Night*, 70.

[113] Ibid., 108.

[114] Vonnegut*, Letters*, 78.

[115] Howard J. Ehrlich, "The Swastika Epidemic of 1959-1960: Anti-Semitism and Community Characteristics," *Social Problems* 9, no. 3 (1962): 265.

[116] Donald E. Morse, "The Curious Reception of Kurt Vonnegut," in *Kurt Vonnegut: Critical Insights*, ed. Robert T. Tally Jr. (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2013), 42–59.

[117] For an account of the book's key arguments and reception, see King, *Arendt and America*, 189–217.

[118] Norman Podhoretz, "Hannah Arendt on Eichmann: A Study in the Perversity of Brilliance," *Commentary Magazine*, September 1, 1963, https://www.commentary.org/articles/norman-podhoretz/hannah-arendt-on-eichmanna-study-in-the-perversity-of-brilliance/.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

Part II: The Sixties and After

Part II, Chapter 1

New Journalism and the Implicated Subject

In the twenty years between the liberation of the Nazi death camps in 1945 and President Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam War in 1965, liberal complicity with large-scale racial domination was an experience lacking a fully-formed concept. While transatlantic intellectuals trained in philosophy, such as Hannah Arendt, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Theodor W. Adorno, made serious and sustained efforts to theorize complicity, the results were neither comprehensive nor systematic. In the literary field, meanwhile, writers of fiction, from Saul Bellow and Mary McCarthy to Vladimir Nabokov and John Hawkes, had experimented with new forms in order to articulate positions of complicity. In their hands, the creation of atmospheric effects and the deployment of metafictional devices offered a formal grammar for the exploration of complicity as an emergent but indistinct problem for the liberal subject.

The years after 1965, however, saw a sea change in the consciousness of complicity in American literary and intellectual culture, in which the idea of liberals having indirect responsibility for systemic racial domination and violence became recognized across a swathe of cultural production. Complicity was no longer a subterranean current in intellectual discourse, visible only in oblique or refracted ways. Rather, it became a central and fully-fledged concept in the great ideological conflicts and social movements of the moment, from the civil rights movement to the Nation of Islam and the Black Panthers, from SDS, SNCC and the anti-war coalition to the hippie and drop-out cultures. The second part of this study expands on the purview of the first by shifting its historical centre of gravity into the 1960s and tracking the changing modes of articulating complicity across time. It examines how the structure of feeling we identified in the first part as provisional and experimental became

established in relation to US imperialism and domestic race conflict, to the extent that liberal complicity eventually became understood as a cliché. Moreover, it also addresses a new range of genres. For if we are to test the principal hypothesis of this book, that the problem of complicity determined formal and thematic developments across the US literary field in the second half of the twentieth century, then as we turn to the Sixties and after we must be prepared to consider a multiplicity of writing. To that end, the second part asks how complicity was articulated in detective stories, memoir, and the most distinctive literary genre to grow out of the 1960s, the New Journalism.

The New Journalism is an unsatisfactory term for the flowering of experimental non-fiction prose usually understood to have been inaugurated in 1965 by Truman Capote's true-crime narrative *In Cold Blood* and Tom Wolfe's first essay collection, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*. The claim that the New Journalism represented a self-defining, coherent movement was largely the creation of Wolfe himself. He understood the importance of generating a novel, marketable commodity for the cultural industries, but his account of the genre's formal logic was nevertheless incomplete and crude. For Wolfe, the principal innovation of the New Journalism was the application of the techniques of realist fiction to journalistic reportage.[1] Scene-setting, dramatic plot and character development, focalization and free indirect discourse became legitimate tools for reporting on various cultural and political milieux, such as Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters or Leonard Bernstein's fundraiser for the Black Panthers. Wolfe's attempts to give meaning to the term New Journalism failed to account, however, for the richness and breadth of formal license observable in the experimental non-fiction published in the decade after 1965. In his schema, New Journalism was the discovery by jaded journalists that they could rehabilitate the tradition of realism previously homed in fiction, and thereby "wipe out the novel as literature's main event."[2] This framing tells us more about Wolfe's instinctive *habitus*, his

"feel for the game" of literary prestige and position-taking, than it does about the range of aesthetic and epistemological possibility opened up in literary journalism during this period.[3] In James Baldwin's long essays, which combine jeremiads against American moral degeneration with memoir and reports from the front lines of the Civil Rights movement, or in Joan Didion's strange exercises in studied detachment from the historical currents of the counterculture, we find the production and articulation of a new consciousness of the writing subject's relationship to racial liberalism, and their responsibility to and for racial injustice in the United States.

The nature of that responsibility varied enormously among the practitioners of the New Journalism. Baldwin's passionate commitment to the movement, for example, contrasts dramatically with Didion's laconic style of ironic detachment. I want to suggest, though, that the formal distinctiveness of literary non-fiction as an emergent genre in this period is to be found in its characteristic dialectic between extremes of detachment and inwardly-focused self-examination. The attempt to maintain both an acute fidelity to the phenomenal world, and a view of objectivity as a questionable and even fraudulent liberal disposition, created some striking literary effects in the New Journalism. This contradiction was driven in some cases to the point at which the two impulses revealed their mutual identity: the best way to remain faithful to the object of report was for the writer to delve deep into the mysteries of private conscience, personal formation, and repressed memory in order to reveal the subject's social entanglement with the object. This dialectic is what makes the New Journalism the genre of liberal complicity *par excellence*, registering the uncomfortable impasse into which many intellectuals and writers had been driven by the radical social movements of the 1960s. The crisis of journalistic objectivity that precipitated the New Journalism can itself be understood from another angle as a crisis of *positionality*.[4] The New Journalists acknowledged that they wrote from a position located somehow within the structures they

described, and were implicated in the social problems they identified. In this sense, they can be understood as what Michael Rothberg calls "implicated subjects," occupying positions "aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes."[5]

The New Journalistic impulse toward self-conscious reflection on journalism's own purposes and ethics makes explicit meditations on its contradictory formal logic common in the genre. Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968) offers its most explicit formulation. Considering the ideal position from which to write his report on the 1967 March on the Pentagon, Mailer proposed that "an eyewitness who is a participant but not a partisan is required."[6] So far, so good: the situation mandates a liminal subject positioned at the margins of action, mediating between participation and disinterested observation. This position may involve conflict or tension, but it is recognizable in the conventions of reportage. However, in addition, the reporter should also be "an egotist of the most startling disproportions, outrageously and often unhappily self-assertive, yet in demand of a detachment classic in severity."[7] This contradictory set of qualities is required, Mailer argues, because,

> . . . such egotism, being two-headed, thrusting itself forward the better to study itself, finds itself therefore at home in a house of mirrors, since it has habits, even the talent, to regard itself. Once History inhabits a crazy house, egotism may be the last tool left to history."[8]

The writer's narcissistic self-regard ends up, counter-intuitively, as the guarantor of detachment and fidelity to his external object. This "two-headedness" of the writing subject, thrusting forwards if only to make room to see itself in newer and larger contexts,

underwrites the New Journalism and its relationship to the literary history of complicity. Michael Herr's comments in his New Journalism classic, *Dispatches*, sums up the strangeness of the paradox more succinctly. Describing his relation to the soldiers he wrote about while reporting from the Vietnam war, he wrote: "I stood as close to them as I could without actually becoming one of them, and then I stood back as far as I could without leaving the planet."[9] What are the effects of this dialectic of cool detachment and claustrophobic myopia in relation to complicity, and what is excluded from consideration by its characteristic shuttling between extremes?

The Two-Headed Beast

When Wolfe claimed that the self-conscious inclusion of the writing subject in New Journalism was an attempt to maintain the attention of readers distracted by constant media bombardment, the genre's formal qualities were reduced to their commodity function.[10] There were of course material determinants at play in its evolution. The institutional history of the New Journalism has much to tell us about its emergence and consolidation in American literary culture. Various mass-distribution cultural magazines of the era—*Esquire*, *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*— played influential roles by publishing experimental nonfiction for large readerships.[11] They had editors willing to devote substantial time and resources to the commissioning of reportage on contemporary affairs from major figures in American literary culture, and gave those figures considerable print space. The editors tended to respect authors' control over their own copy, too. As Didion put it, defending her decision to publish with the middlebrow *Saturday Evening Post* in the mid-1960s, "the *Post* is extremely receptive to what the writer wants to do, pays enough for him to be able to do it right, and is meticulous about not changing copy."[12]

Commercially, the commissioning of authors with existing reputations for fiction, such as Mailer and Baldwin, made a great deal of sense. Successful authors tended to repackage their journalism in book form several years later, selling the same material twice. From Didion’s *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968) to Herr’s *Dispatches* (1977), this strategy proved lucrative when the books themselves became bestsellers. The wide readership and attention garnered by experimental magazine reports in turn legitimized and expanded the market for journalism written directly for book form. But the editors who did so much to enable the rise of the New Journalism were also acting on their own principles, a professed commitment, as Willie May put it, to “act upon . . . the doubt and turmoil and uneasiness of his generation.”[13] While editors tended to grant their authors a relatively large degree of autonomy in the formal and stylistic choices they made, they were closely involved in determining appropriate topics for long-form journalism and finding the right author for the job.

Rather than viewing the genre’s logic from an exclusively commercial and institutional perspective, we can instead grasp the New Journalism as a space opened up in the literary field of the 1960s by a number of material determinants, which nevertheless afforded innovations too risky for the more prestigious and established set of conventions presented by the novel. In this way, it conforms to a pattern we have observed elsewhere, in which “minor” forms such as the short story and the occasional essay presented opportunities for articulating complicity that were less viable in “major” genres like the novel or systematic philosophy. In 1958, Norman Podhoretz had identified a comparable perspective on formal affordances when he noted the increasing prevalence of high-quality magazine articles by literary writers. In “The Article as Art,” published in *Harper’s* before it became a key venue for the New Journalism, he argued that the function of the magazine article as instruction on current affairs satisfied a contemporary demand for literary forms that seemed “practical,

designed for ‘use,’” but that in doing so it paradoxically made the article “free to assimilate as many ‘useless,’ ‘non-functional’ elements as it pleases. It is free, in other words, to become a work of art.”[14]

Podhoretz was right to see in the growing culture of literary non-fiction the draw of a new kind of circumscribed autonomy, a limited space in the literary field where experiment was licensed and rewarded. Yet the rigidity of his distinction between the functional and non-functional elements of magazine articles is misleading. Ten years later, readers of *Esquire* learned about life on the frontlines in Vietnam precisely *through* the formal strategies adopted by Herr in his celebrated reportage. The hallucinatory fragments of intense experience piled one on top of another, flashes of dialect and obscure military slang, and vertiginous temporal layering were not simply non-functional ornament. They were the very means by which Herr articulated fidelity to his own experiences and those of the “grunts” he embedded himself with. “Conventional journalism could no more reveal this war than conventional firepower could win it,” Herr claimed in one of *Dispatches*’ most famous passages.[15] The latitude offered to him by his editor Harold Hayes, and the broader institutional environment of large-circulation current affairs magazines, created an opportunity for an improvised formal response to the particular and novel types of historical experience with which Herr was confronted. “Okay, man, you go on, you go on out of here you cocksucker, but I mean it, you tell it! You tell it man.”[16] These words, which he reports were directed at him by a marine in the field, convey with special force the imperatives that Herr and many others involved in the New Journalism experienced as a powerful ethical obligation.

Once we loosen the New Journalism from its traditional framing, and approach it instead as a space within which ethical obligation and formal license co-existed, then we begin to recognize its distinctive attraction for a range of writers and thinkers, including some

not conventionally thought of as contributing to the genre. The case of Susan Sontag's 1968 article, "Trip to Hanoi," provides one instructive example. Sontag was by this time widely recognized following the publication of her iconoclastic *Against Interpretation* two years earlier, but the work for which she was best known seemed philosophical rather than journalistic, falling into the category of what she called "meta-criticism," focused primarily on aesthetic questions.[17] Sontag's natural home was in *Partisan Review* rather than in *Esquire*, where "Trip to Hanoi" appeared four issues after Herr's groundbreaking war report, "Hell Sucks." Yet by her own account, the existing forms she had previously used were unable to answer her expressive needs:

> Though I have been and am passionately opposed to the American aggression in Vietnam, I accepted the unexpected invitation to go to Hanoi that came in mid-April with the pretty firm idea that I wouldn't write about the trip upon my return. Being neither a journalist nor a political activist (though a veteran signer of petitions and anti-war demonstrator) nor an Asian specialist, but rather a stubbornly unspecialized writer who has so far been largely unable to incorporate into either novels or essays my evolving radical political convictions and sense of moral dilemma at being a citizen of the American empire, I doubted that my account of such a trip could add anything new to the already eloquent opposition to the war.[18]

In "A Trip to Hanoi," Sontag tells the story of how she discovers that she has much to say about Vietnam after all, once she had freed herself of those forms lacking the affordances she sought. The report is primarily concerned with the experience of the trip itself, but this serves as a prompt for more self-reflective analyses of its impact on her consciousness, her imaginative processes and her language choices, leading ultimately to a reassessment of her political commitments. In a gesture consistent with Sontag's style of "meta-criticism," "Trip

to Hanoi" features a secondary narrative, which tells of her discovery and inhabitation of its form.

The magazine report, it transpired, was the perfect genre in which for Sontag to work through her "moral dilemma at being a citizen of the American empire."[19] This was by virtue of its capacity to incorporate two empirical worlds and explore their interrelation. On the one hand there was her own interior world, or what she calls "the Vietnam inside my head"; on the other, the witnessed material effects of US imperialism, measured in napalmed corpses, razed cities, and bomb-shelters.[20] By placing extracts from her diaries alongside more distant reflections on the completed trip, Sontag oscillates between detached judgments and claustrophobic intimacy in search of "some change of awareness, of consciousness" that might reveal itself within her writing. She finishes the report with the suggestion that just such a shift has occurred, evident in the language that she has begun to use. "Capitalist" and "Imperialist," words that she hears in the mouths of the North Vietnamese, have returned to her own vocabulary decades after they were corrupted by "the philistine fraud of the American C.P. and "the special pathos of fellow-travelling in the 1940s."[21] She concludes,

> A great deal is involved in these recent linguistic decisions: a new connection with my historical memory, my aesthetic sensibility, my very idea of the future. That I've begun to use some elements of Marxist or neo-Marxist language again seems almost a miracle, an unexpected remission of historical muteness, a new chance to address problems that I'd renounced ever understanding.[22]

"Trip to Hanoi" narrates its own process of becoming, from an article never intended to be written to the expression of a rediscovered language and the document of a new historical consciousness. In the course of that process, Sontag's "moral dilemma" of complicity with American imperial violence is articulated in its confrontation with an objective reality, and

then transcended in the second flowering of forgotten Marxist concepts. The reportage essay, in this case, presents an idealist microcosm of the American Left's journey from discredited fellow-traveling, through the moral panic of the mid-1960s at its complicity with empire, to a new anti-imperialist objectivity established through encounter with North Vietnamese communists. It is a neatly and perhaps schematically Hegelian trajectory, and in this way characteristic of Sontag's philosophical proclivities. Few other writers managed to achieve—or even desired—such a formally recursive and politically optimistic narrative structure. Yet it serves as a remarkable demonstration of the formal flexibility of the reportage essay in the era of New Journalism, and its uses as a territory upon which complex moral entanglements could be worked through in the process of representation.

John Hersey's *The Algiers Motel Incident*, published the same year, offers a revealing comparison to Sontag's reportage. The book reconstructs the murder of three young Black men by police during the 1967 Detroit uprising. Based on extensive field work, the building of relationships with various of the protagonists, and the gathering of extensive documentary material through personal interviews, Hersey contextualized the night of brutality in the Algiers Motel within the lives of both police and victims, and reported on the prosecutions that followed. The book expresses the same dialectic of self-examination and fidelity to the external object that we have observed in Mailer and Sontag, but it is processed using a very different formal structure. If Sontag's essay unfolded as a journey of consciousness through a crisis of private moral conscience out into a reinvigorated Marxism, then Hersey's book presents a more disorientating, discontinuous, and ultimately inconclusive narrative structure. More than "Trip to Hanoi," *The Algiers Motel Incident* articulates the *discomfort* of complicit racial liberals in the late 1960s. The conflicted conscience is not transcended so much as dragged out of the shadows for inspection.

The work which had made Hersey's reputation was *Hiroshima*, famously published in 1946 in *The New Yorker* as the sole content for an entire issue. It has been described by some as an antecedent for the New Journalism, but it differs considerably from *The Algiers Hotel Incident*.[23] In *Hiroshima*, the profile of the observing subject remains unspoken but implicit in the report's voice, tone, and style.[24] The first chapter of *The Algiers Motel Incident* begins *in media res* with the events of the night in question, using reconstructed narrative and witness testimony, but the second opens with the words "at this point in the narrative, enter myself. Reluctantly."[25] It is a dramatic moment, which explicitly signals a turn away from the mode of immediacy towards the discomfort of self-consciousness. "I have always, before this, stayed out of my journalism," Hersey claims, "But this account is too urgent, too complex, too dangerous to too many people to be told in a way that might leave doubts strewn along its path; I cannot afford, this time, the luxury of invisibility."[26] During the course of the chapter, Hersey describes his own position in relation to his topic, justifies his methods, and offers wider reflections on race conflict in the United States. It is an unparalleled portrait of the complicit establishment race liberal compelled through an assumption of privilege and responsibility to painful self-examination.

Hersey explains how he was approached by the President's Commission on Civil Disorders to write an official report on the Detroit uprising and declined, before feeling that he nevertheless "owed some sort of debt of work to this, the most intransigent and fear-ridden issue in American life."[27] He thus decided to write his own piece of independent reportage journalism, but worried that he would appear "like a carpetbagging lawyer with cash in hand to purchase witnessings," and so spent much time developing relationships of trust with those affected by the incident.[28] In the process, he admits, "I learned how much more I have to learn about issues of race in my country."[29] Hersey's framing of these issues resemblances that of Gunnar Myrdal over twenty years earlier, at the dawn of racial liberalism's hegemony

among America's intellectuals. Just as Myrdal saw the "Negro problem" as a fundamentally irrational set of prejudices "lurking in the basement of man's soul," so Hersey confesses that "stereotypic thoughts lurked in the corners of my own mind, which I had hoped were more or less open, and that some of my own fears had been tinged by the irrational in our history."[30] The movement from irrational fear to enlightened progress is enabled for Hersey partly through integration—his personal exposure to the Black community in Detroit—but also through education. This is exemplified by his reading of Malcolm X, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and other Black authors who had "immeasurably aided in the ventilation of my mind."[31] Racial complicity, in a metaphor that is now familiar to us, is figured as atmospheric, a noxious gas in the basement which needs airing out, a spectral presence requiring exorcism.

The most distinctive aspect of this confessional chapter of *The Algiers Motel Incident* is Hersey's direct engagement with the question of collective racial guilt in relation to money and value. After declaring that he will not take any money from the book's publication, he writes:

> If this declaration suggests to anyone that part of my motive in writing it may have been guilt, so be it. There is plenty of guilt lying around for the taking. Perhaps the whole point of this book is that every white person in the country is in some degree guilty of the crimes committed at the Algiers.[32]

Hersey comes up hard against the insoluble paradox of complicity that haunted liberal America since Arendt articulated it in the wake of the death camps in 1945: "where all are guilty, nobody is."[33] In such a situation, the ubiquity of guilt for racial domination effectively severs it from responsibility, leaving it socially meaningless. The result of this paradox in Hersey's account is that guilt becomes allegorized as a devalued commodity, accumulating in

piles as liberal America's quintessential waste-product. If guilt is cheap, then all white people can have some, but the market is glutted. It is a throwaway passage in the book and Hersey does not pursue the subject any further. In the complicit structure where Hersey finds himself, liberal guilt is necessary but superfluous, demanding to be affirmed and disavowed simultaneously, remembered in order to be forgotten.

By 1969, the New Journalism's invocation of the implicated subject had already become a cliché, and its first phase of self-conscious invention was drawing to a close. That spring, Benjamin Demott published his essay "In and Out of Universal City" in the *Antioch Review*, and gave the discourse of journalistic complicity a new name: "involvedese." Demott's essay asks the reader to entertain a thought experiment, in which the author is sent to Hollywood to write a New Journalistic exposé of the studio system, only to discover that his detached skepticism of the culture industry is compromised by his seduction by its glamor. Demott sketches how such an account would be structured and satirizes the New Journalism's programmatic conventions of self-consciousness, "as tight as those of an aubade."[34] After an introductory scene or two, the writer must withdraw from the action for "a moment of perplexed search for self-understanding. Or for self-justification or for rationalization."[35] In the next stage of the piece, "we're turning towards The Deeper Guilt," as the writer confronts their contradictory impulses towards objective critique and self-interest.[36] And finally we reach "the kicker, the close. We need a moment wherein 'I' the Involved Reporter get it in the ear, am caught out in my fundamental insincerity and guilt":

> But though I acknowledge no complicity, turn away, I am – at least for an instant – nailed. And you know it, Reader, don't you? You wanted it. You want to whip me. Chew me. You're rejoicing because I got what I deserved, right? So you see? *You're another*. No compassion. We're all [obscenity] together and it was ever thus.[37]

Complicity is not spoken by the (imagined) author, but *performed*.

The force of Demott's satire on the New Journalism, with its echo of Baudelaire's famous "Hypocrite lecteur! Mon semblable! Mon frère!" is that such performances of complicity have become empty rituals, drawing reader and writer into a masochistic contract while neglecting the world they are supposed to illuminate. New Journalism's fundamental solipsism makes it for Demott an inferior form to the novel, which is capable of transcending the "literary mode of self-suspicion" and accessing thereby "a clearer, denser, fresher world."[38] For many of the New Journalism's defenders, both in its own day and in more recent scholarship, its value is located in the project of ideological demystification it pursued, and in its construction of countermyths to oppose the banal social complacencies of the Cold War era. As John C. Hartsock has written, "such a journalism served as an important corrective for the social blinders a society had donned, and, moreover, demonstrates how a society can engage in healthy self-critique."[39] What Demott's attack on it models, however, is the shift in perspective whereby "healthy self-critique" is unveiled as a paralyzing perversion. In his figuration, the complicit writer is placed in a discourse structured by hetero-normative sexuality, incapable of healthy reproductive engagement and turned in upon her/himself, in distinction to the practices of representational transparency adopted by the novelist.

Demott's reaction against the reification of New Journalism as "involvedese" and his reading of its erotics serves as a useful marker in the post-war history of literary complicity. Whereas, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, writers struggled to find a language and a form commensurate to the social experience of complicity, by 1969 not only had a form been found but it had seemingly already exhausted itself. If we are to consider complicity, using Raymond Williams' Marxist framework, as a structure of feeling naming complexes of thought and feeling that remain provisional and in the process of formation—"in solution" is his suggestive phrase—then this is the historical moment at which complicity calcified into

socially recognized forms of language and style.[40] It is notable, then, that race is absent from Demott's intervention, which concentrates on complicity with the commodifying processes of the Hollywood film industry rather than with the production and reproduction of the era's racial and imperial projects. To give credence to Demott's essay is to suggest that the wave of urban uprisings, the rise of Black nationalism, and the US escalation of the war in Vietnam were incidental to, rather than at the heart of, the emergence of "Involvedese." My own argument is to the contrary. We cannot grasp the eruption of complicity as a structure of feeling in the 1960s unless we understand racial domination—whether on the streets of Detroit or in the forests of Vietnam—to be the principal context in which it was recognized and wrestled to the surface of attention.

To be sure, a certain strain of the New Journalism had always fed knowingly upon mass culture and its spectacles, in a way that never challenged its commodity function. Tom Wolfe's 1963 breakthrough essay, "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby," about a "Teen Fair" in Burbank, California, provides one origin for this tendency, which can be observed also in Gay Talese's celebrated profiles of Frank Sinatra and Joe DiMaggio for *Esquire* in 1966. Both Wolfe and Talese, however, fall into what David Eason calls the "realist" tradition of the New Journalism. In this, image and reality remain separate, and reality is discoverable through the intervention of the journalist. Eason distinguishes such work from the "modernist" tendency in New Journalism, in which "reports reveal reporting to be an object of observation too."[41] The modernist strain, in which "reporter and reader are implicated in the social changes themselves," accounts for Demott's discovery of "involvedese" as the formal cliché degrading contemporary reportage, yet his essay has the effect of occluding both its racial content and its liberal logic. For writers from Sontag to Herr and Hersey, it was in different ways the unspoken imperialist and racist function of a superficially independent and disinterested liberal media that prompted their impulses to fold

themselves into their own writing in the late 1960s, and thus to express their ethical dilemmas in a series of formal paradoxes and riddles.

Joan Didion: Alienation and Involvement

How many prominent US writers of the Cold War era voted on Barry Goldwater's Republican ticket in 1964? The answer must be vanishingly few. Among the writers treated in this study, Nabokov might have been tempted, given his ferocious anti-Communism (he was certainly reassured, however, by Johnson's decision to bomb Vietnam the following year, and sent him a telegram of congratulation).[42] We know one person for sure: 29-year-old Joan Didion, an up-and-coming writer with Republican roots in Sacramento, who had served her apprenticeship at the conservative flagship magazine *The National Review*, edited by William Buckley Jr.[43] Didion stands out among the literary milieu of the 1960s for being unabashedly conservative, even if she became openly hostile to Reaganite conservatism later in her career.[44] Her conservatism, founded on strident individualism and an investment in the frontier mythologies of the West, is also what makes her such an interesting case-study in the New Journalism. Didion's nonfiction in the 1960s and 70s observed the emergence of complicity as a recognizable structure of feeling from the outside, with an irony and detachment that flowed from her skepticism of progressivist liberalism, the New Left, the women's movement, and Black radicalism. Yet she also exemplified the tendency towards formal self-implication in the New Journalism, and consistently folded reflections upon her own writing self into her work. Her particular version of the New Journalistic paradox I have been describing is that this self-implication was simultaneously a declaration of withdrawal. "I want you to know exactly who I am and where I am and what is on my mind. I want you to know, as you read me, precisely what you are getting," she declared in her essay "In the

Islands."[45] But she continues, "you are getting a woman who for some time now has felt radically separated from most of the ideas that seem to interest other people." Didion was implicated in the world she reported on only to the extent that she was alienated from it. This paradox infuses the nonfiction of her two first collections: *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968) and *The White Album* (1979). If we examine the mechanisms that sustained it, and trace its modulations through the period from 1965 to 1979, we stand to realize Didion's centrality to the history of complicity in American literature and politics. We will also grasp New Journalism's role in shaping that history in ways that extend beyond Demott's mockery of liberal "involvedese."

Didion's 1965 essay "On Morality" is the clearest statement of what she called her "wagon-train morality." The essay is an attack on the growing visibility of a politics of conscience in public life, a politics which began to see traps of complicity everywhere and advocated their avoidance as a moral imperative. It builds on the salvos against liberal sentimentalism that Didion had launched earlier in the decade in her *National Review* essays.[46] She explains: "The most disturbing aspect of 'morality' seems to me to be the frequency with which the word now appears in the press, on television, in the most perfunctory kinds of conversation."[47] This trend, by which issues in politics and policy are increasingly voiced and evaluated in terms of their moral valence, is seen by Didion as the sign of a crisis in American public life fueled by mass hysteria and facile self-indulgence. One of her targets is the nascent anti-war movement, and she alludes ironically to the "brave signatures in *The New York Times*" provided by writers and intellectuals in opposition to Johnson's bombing campaign in Vietnam.[48] "What could be more arrogant than to claim the primacy of personal conscience?"[49] By contrast, Didion offers her own, narrow view of morality as simply "our loyalties to those we love."[50] Her chief examples draw from Western frontier mythology and the actions of a Nevadan miner who stayed with the body of the

victim of a road traffic accident in the desert. "One of the promises we make to one another is that we will try to retrieve our casualties, try not to abandon our dead to the coyotes."[51] Beyond such concrete actions, undertaken in defiance of the inherent hostility of frontier country, any definition of morality becomes, since untestable against commonly agreed standards, unmanageable, and in danger of mutating into a "monstrous perversion."[52]

"On Morality" combines two recurrent aspects of Didion's concerns that are rarely discussed together: her prioritization of a racialized group identity that emerges from American frontier mythology (the *our* in "our casualties," "our dead"); and her investment in the Cold War liberalism of Lionel Trilling, with its skepticism of fellow-feeling. She quotes him approvingly here, as she does elsewhere in her work: in "Manners, Morals, and The Novel" (1948), Trilling had admonished his readers to "be aware of the dangers which lie in our most generous wishes," seeing the potential for seemingly benign affects such as pity to deteriorate without vigilance into coercion and authoritarianism.[53] The combination of these two commitments is a potent one in Didion's early work, underpinning her doubts about any form of affective bonds forged beyond one's immediate social experience, whether that be in the form of the women's movement or the dropout culture. This skepticism verged on cynicism when it applied to the immediate objects of her analysis, the individual men, women, and children whom she interviewed and profiled.

In the final words of the introduction to *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, Didion noted of the individuals she wrote about, "my presence runs counter to their best interests. And it always does. That is one last thing to remember: *writers are always selling someone out*."[54] Rather than delude ourselves into taking responsibility for the lives of others, we would do better to focus on our own, exhibiting the qualities she elsewhere described as "a certain toughness, a kind of moral nerve . . . the willingness to accept responsibility for one's own life."[55] Yet the pragmatist position in "On Morality" anticipates that sketched out two years

later by Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton in *Black Power: On the Politics of Black Liberation* (1967), in which they argue that "politics results from a conflict of interests, not consciences."[56] Similarly, Didion finds it absurd that "questions of straightforward power (or survival) politics, questions of quite indifferent public policy, questions of almost anything: they are all assigned these factitious moral burdens."[57] This counterintuitively shared ground between Didion's hard-headed wagon-train morality and the politics of Black Power (for which she held nothing but contempt) reveals to us an unlikely convergence of impatience towards the emergent politics of conscience among liberals and the New Left in the mid-1960s, which transcends traditional left-right polarization. If the Marxist Left and decolonization movements of the post-World War Two period provided one of the means by which liberal complicity was brought into view, then conservatism provided another.

This distance between Didion's individualist ethics and the emergent politics of conscience found its most widely-read expression in "Slouching Towards Bethlehem." This long essay, published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1967, became a classic of the New Journalism when it lent its title to Didion's first collection of essays the following year, and was then included in Wolfe's 1973 anthology. Didion spent several weeks in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco during the spring preceding the "Summer of Love," making acquaintance with a number of the young dropouts, acidheads and hippies that had been drawn there, talking with them about their lives and observing their social rituals. It was the type of "saturation reporting" for which the New Journalism was becoming known.[58] The technical distinctiveness of the essay lies in the ironic distance that Didion maintains between herself and the culture she describes at such close hand. This irony rehearses the New Journalistic dialectic of visibility and effacement. In obedience to the genre's conventions, Didion placed her own actions within the frame of observation, including a kind of detached participation in their daily rituals as they move around the neighborhood searching for one

another, consuming narcotics, and conducting their relationships. She gains the confidence of one pair of hungry teenagers by buying them hamburgers, and she shares one young woman's home-baked apple pie. But most of all, Didion asks a lot of questions and records the answers they give in the improvised vernacular of the counterculture, which contrasts dramatically with her own cool, precise prose. Not once in the essay do we hear Didion's own speech reported directly, but we do hear adolescents saying "it's a trip," "it's your trip," and "groovy" a number of times. These terms' meanings dissipate with every repetition, but Didion's disciplined control over her own prose is the mark of her difference. "Their only proficient vocabulary is in the society's platitudes," she claims in one of several passages where she steps back to reflect on her experiences in Haight-Ashbury. "As it happens, I am still committed to the idea that the ability to think for one's self depends on one's mastery of the language."[59]

The logic of "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" is that Didion's own mastery of the language, and therefore her intellectual self-possession, removes her from the ambit of complicity threatening to engulf the *naïfs* she observes. Her dropouts are portrayed as unwittingly entangled in the very social structures they claim to be virtuously free from. Barbara, for example, claims to be "on what is called the woman's trip to the exclusion of everything else," but Didion quietly savors the irony with which she notes Barbara keeping house and baking her pies:

> Whenever I hear about the women's trip, which is often, I think a lot of about nothin'-says-lovin'-like-something-from-the-oven and the Feminine Mystique and how it's possible for people to be unconscious instruments of values they would strenuously reject on a conscious level, but I do not mention this to Barbara.[60]

Betty Friedan had described domestic labor in *The Feminine Mystique* in allegorical terms incautiously borrowed from the Holocaust and in particular from Bruno Bettelheim's work on the psychology of its victims. The household was the "comfortable concentration camp," and the housewife a willing victim resigned to persecution, going "almost indifferently to her death."[61] For Didion to confront Barbara with evidence of her complicity with the patriarchy would be to break the rules of journalistic engagement she has established: ask questions, buy hamburgers if necessary, but never compromise your own scrupulous objectivity. *Don't get involved.*

Didion records a second, more explicitly racialized example of complicity in "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" when she observes a guerilla street-theater performance by the Diggers. A regular feature of the dropout scene in San Francisco, the Diggers were an anarchist group distinct from the New Left but committed to influencing it.[62] In addition to setting up free kitchens and acting as a distribution network for all kinds of items necessary for subsistence in Haight-Ashbury, they also maintained a Brechtian avant-garde performance wing, which "attacked people's consciousness" through disorientation and "raids on consensus reality."[63] They were led by Peter Berg, with whom Didion tried and failed to gain a meaningful interview. In the performance she describes, the Diggers appear in blackface, and distribute leaflets warning of a race-war to come, when "thousands of un-white un-suburban boppers" will turn Haight Street into a "cemetery."[64] The performers are provocateurs, harassing hippies in the park, including a young Black man who objects to their suggestion that white kids have stolen Chuck Berry's music. A girl in blackface jeers: "White kids here, they can sit in the Park all summer long, listening to the music they stole, because their bigshot parents keep sending them money. Who ever sends you money?"[65] The context suggests that the Diggers are cynically exploiting the politics of conscience among white middle-class hippies in order to sow racial discord. The absurdity of white blackface actors

trying to awaken race consciousness among Black youth does not merit comment from Didion, but she approaches one actor to ask what's going on. "'Well,' he says, 'I'm new at this, I'm just beginning to study it, but you see the capitalists are taking over the district, and that's what Peter—well, ask Peter.' I did not ask Peter."[66] She asks an onlooker, a little girl, what she thinks, and receives the reply that "It's something groovy called street-theater . . . Maybe it's some John Birch thing."[67]

Didion's inclusion of this episode aligns with the lessons she draws in "On Morality" from Trilling's warnings about good intentions. The naïve are in danger of being manipulated by the unscrupulous and persuaded of their complicity with injustice. In reality, they are being instrumentalized for a nefarious purpose. Pity for an oppressed group, in this version of a familiar narrative, is thus transformed into coercion of them. The familiarity owes much to Fyodor Dostoevsky's 1872 novel *The Possessed*, in which the cynical nihilist Stavrogin manipulates idealistic liberals in the town of Skvoreshniki in order to foment revolution. Intellectuals in the early Cold War found Dostoevsky's novel a useful template for describing the contemporary phenomenon of fellow-travelers drifting towards Communism. This trend began with Philip Rahv's 1938 essay on Dostoevsky in *Partisan Review*, where he declaimed its relevance to Stalin sympathizers following the Moscow trials.[68] McCarthy's *The Groves of Academia*, as we have seen, borrowed the plot of *The Possessed*, situating it in an American liberal arts college staffed by gullible liberals. Trilling likely had the novel in mind when wrote of "the dangers that lie in our most generous wishes." Certainly, in *The Opposing Self* (1955) he claimed that "to many of us the world today has the look and feel of a Dostoevski novel."[69]

In Didion's version, the Digger's leader Peter Berg plays the role of Stavrogin, persuading innocent hippies of their complicity in racism and attempting to precipitate a race war that none of them understood. It is crucial for Didion that the Diggers' anarchist theater

techniques make sense neither to the actors themselves, nor to their intended audience. This is the anarchy she had in mind when she chose lines from Yeats' "The Second Coming" for her title, and then quoted the whole poem in the book's epigraph: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world."[70] Race war was not inconceivable in the summer of 1967, which had seen a tide of Black uprisings in cities across the nation. For some, such as those involved in the Kerner Commission, these uprisings were proof of the urgent need for reform in employment and housing policy. For the intellectuals of the growing Black militancy, they were a symbol of resistance against white supremacy. For Didion, they carried no message beyond their own senselessness. When Watts burned in 1965, she noted the flames in the distance as merely another example of Los Angeles' periodic fires.[71]

"Slouching Towards Bethlehem" brings together a set of aesthetic and political forms sharing the figure of centrifugal disintegration. As the opening sentence tells us, "the center was not holding." The civilizational collapse that Didion saw emblematized in the Haight-Ashbury scene is also a collapse of literary and narrative structure. The decontextualized and recursive fragments of scenes, episodes and conversations that make up the essay are arranged to prevent narrative coherence or character development. Attention is directed instead to that mastery of language and style on which Didion founded her sense of intellectual self-possession. Didion's chief point of reference, both for her politics and her fragmented style, is not Yeats but T. S. Eliot, and especially his 1922 poem, *The Waste Land*. Like Eliot's, Didion's visceral disgust at civilizational decline is expressed through images of failed reproduction.[72] Abortion is a powerful metaphor for both, in the Lil episode in "A Game of Chess" in *The Waste Land* and in Didion's appalling description of American social disintegration as a self-administered operation gone wrong: "All that seemed clear was that at some point we had aborted ourselves and butchered the job."[73] The influence of *The Waste*

Land is evident in the way Didion records and aestheticizes the vernacular, transforming it into a kind of nonsense poetry, and in her literary montage, which includes cultural ephemera such as popular songs, bill-posters, magazine articles and the like. If Wolfe saw the New Journalism as borrowing the techniques of the realist novel, for Didion it was rather the high modernist poem.

Eliot alluded to his own convalescence from mental illness in *The Waste Land*, sitting on Margate Sands able to "connect nothing with nothing."[74] Comparably, Didion described herself in "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" as suffering from a condition that meant she found it difficult to make narrative sense of the world she observed. She tells one hippie, "I am unstable," and admits that, as time passes, "I lose the thread."[75] The inclusion of her own psychological state in her journalism, and its relation to a particular kind of narrative disorientation, was an enabling gesture. It allowed her to resolve, at least superficially, an uncomfortable contradiction in her orientation towards the emerging social and cultural impulses of the 1960s. How could she claim to be attuned to the *zeitgeist*, and yet remain so detached from it? The answer lay in her pathologizing of modernist alienation, which made Didion into an affective barometer for the cultural currents of the long Sixties without the obligation to imitate their principal actors, or even to understand their causes. In "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," this maneuver was particularly successful because of the drug culture Didion described among the dropouts of Haight-Ashbury. This meant that her own narrative disorientation and inability to follow "the thread" found itself in tune with the narcotized confusion of her subjects, despite the social and ideological distance between them.

Didion transformed this self-positioning into the organizing principle behind her next collection of essays, *The White Album*. The eponymous opening essay of the collection explains, in an oft-quoted passage, that between the years of 1966 and 1971 she "began to doubt the premises of all the stories I had ever told myself."

> I was meant to know the plot, but all I knew was what I saw: flash pictures in variable sequence, images with no 'meaning' beyond their temporary arrangement, not a movie but a cutting room experience. In what would probably be the middle of my life I wanted still to believe in the narrative and in the narrative's intelligibility, but to know that one could change the sense with every cut was to begin to perceive the experience as rather more electrical than ethical.[76]

Didion's loss of faith in the stories that had structured her sense of self and world seems to invite her readers to identify her with a quintessentially postmodern disposition, after Jean-François Lyotard's diagnosis of the "postmodern condition" as one in which metanarratives lose their authority.[77] In the context of Didion's indebtedness to Eliot, however, we might more accurately say that it describes a strictly *aesthetic* response to social and cultural change, albeit an anachronistic one belonging as much to the high modernist 1920s as to the 1960s. Its alienating function is revealed in the odd, half-rhyming opposition Didion sets up between the electrical and the ethical. The New Journalist becomes here the electrified automaton in the cutting room, animated by external currents that pass though her, but which do not engage her ethical faculties at all.

In an extraordinary gesture of self-involvement, Didion offers an excerpt—a "flash-cut," in her words—from a psychiatric report on herself prepared in the summer of 1968, describing a patient who was suffering from attacks of nausea and vertigo, who "has alienated herself almost entirely from the world of other human beings."[78] While "basic affective controls appear to be intact," they are maintained only tenuously by a series of defense mechanisms which are "in the process of failure." The report describes Didion's

> Fundamentally pessimistic, fatalistic, and depressive view of the world around her. It is as though she feels deeply that all human effort is foredoomed to failure, a

> conviction which seems to push her further into a dependent, passive withdrawal. In her view she lives in a world of people moved by strange, conflicted, poorly comprehended, and, above all, devious motivations which commit them inevitably to conflict and failure.[79]

The withdrawal described here is paradoxically the means by which Didion claimed her privileged engagement with the world of the Sixties. The key lies in the ambiguity Didion orchestrates concerning the aetiology of her condition. Does she see the world this way because of a personal condition caused by physiological or neurological malfunctions? Or is she merely registering the effects of a radical shift in historical conditions, to which she is uncommonly attuned, like the electrified automaton in the cutting room? She dares us to lean toward the latter: "By way of comment, I offer only that an attack of vertigo and nausea does not now seem to me an inappropriate response to the summer of 1968."[80]

It is clear enough that the ideological profile supplied by Didion's psychiatrist in the summer of 1968 describes a disposition at odds both with the utopianism of the New Left and with the proceduralism of Great Society liberalism. Rather, Didion's report reads as a parody of the type of Cold War liberalism we have already examined, espoused by the anti-Communist Left and ex-Trotskyites of the 1940s and 50s, who were impatient with the naivety of the previous generation of liberals and wary of their apparently unreflexive faith in progress and perfectibility. These same intellectuals, it must be added, played a key role in the canonization of European high modernism in American culture, an event that, as we have seen, had a formative effect on Didion. In "On the Morning After the Sixties," she signaled as much to her readers, recalling "an afternoon early in my sophomore year at Berkeley, a bright autumn Saturday in 1953," spent alone "reading a book by Lionel Trilling," a scenario she now finds implausible in every detail.[81]

Didion's recollection of Trilling is intended to introduce the theme of her essay, the acute disjunction between the worldview she adopted as an adolescent and that of the countercultural Left, which shut down the Berkeley campus fifteen years later. The insurgent students of SDS and SNCC were reading Paul Goodman and Frantz Fanon, not meditations on the complexity of Henry James. Didion declares that she adheres to a generational belief, seemingly obsolete by 1970, "that the heart of darkness lay not in some error of social organization but in man's own blood."[82] It was a position comparable to that espoused by another admirer of Trilling, James Baldwin, whose work we will examine in the next chapter. For Didion, the evocation of Trilling, James, the fifties, and a generational divide is intended to establish a crucial aspect of her identity, what we might term her residuality. Although one recent reading of Didion's journalism has grasped her alienated subjectivity as a product of a nascent neoliberalism in post-war America, it was given traction by its rootedness in the past. For Didion carried forward a set of values, assumptions, and cultural practices formed in previous eras, whether the high modernism of the 1920s or the bleak Cold War liberalism of the early 1950s.[83] This residuality entailed the redeployment of certain literary forms, but also skepticism about the profession of good intentions, about affective bonds of solidarity, and about all notions of social progress.

Didion presented this project sometimes as a coherent stance adopted in principled opposition to a barbarous present, and sometimes as a psychological condition precipitated involuntarily by obscure historical determinants. In either case, it would be a mistake to consider her investments in ironic distance and aestheticized alienation as anachronistic, for they were very much alive in the cultural process of the long 1960s. They provided a formal and affective grammar with which for white, middle-class readers of the *Saturday Evening Post* to observe complicity as an irony which would inevitably befall others, but never themselves. The ideological power wielded by this point of view is considerable when set

alongside one of the principal strategies pursued by civil rights and then the New Left in the preceding years: to mobilize the conscience and transform the recognition of one's own complicity into a desire for radical reform. Didion's nonfiction offered a viewpoint on the counterculture, women's movement, and Black Power movement that, while critical of their perceived lapses into complicity and incoherence, was obliged neither to examine their causes nor to propose alternative programs. Rather, as she commented in her report on the Third World Liberation Strikes of 1968 at San Francisco State College, "disorder was its own point."[84] This, in Edward Said's concise phrase, constituted Didion's "non-political politics," an aestheticization of politics which migrated from the high modernist poems being studied in the 1950s academy into the pages of the middlebrow popular press.[85]

Salvador and US Neocolonialism

So far, we have considered Didion's engagement with complicity as an external one performed at a safe distance from its reaches. The aggressively individualist ethics she proposed in the 1960s, alongside her belief that the "heart of darkness lay not in some error of social organization, but in man's blood," effectively removed complicity from the range of experiences she made available to herself. In her journalism from this era, the assumption of ironic detachment, the deployment of a modernist aesthetics of disorder, and her pathology of alienation managed to sustain this stance. The question her work begs, however, returns us to the dilemma posed by Arendt in "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," and Nabokov in *Bend Sinister*: at what point does withdrawal from political engagement itself become a form of complicity? Her collection of reports from the civil war in El Salvador in 1982 provides one answer. In *Salvador*, we observe Didion experiencing a crisis of both conscience and literary practice, which throws into relief the limits afforded by her formal

approach. Witnessing the effects of US neocolonial policy on the Salvadoran people, she begins to doubt the legitimacy of the irony that had always underpinned her journalism. The dominant affects of her journalism from the 1960s and 70s—apathy, bewilderment, and arch humor—are accented by the new one that comes to join them: shame. By no means does *Salvador* represent a substantive departure in Didion's technique. On the contrary, the essays are recognizably, even painfully, Didionesque. Rather, in *Salvador* her formal strategies are pushed to breaking point by their encounter with a particular set of historical conditions very different to those in which she made her name. In place of the domestic struggles of the long 1960s, we find ourselves in the terrifying and bloody neocolonial scenario fostered by Reagan's Central American policy. Here, amid the carnage wrought by anti-Communist death squads, and an opaque Salvadoran administration propped up by US support, Didion is confronted by a different set of dilemmas about responsibility and accountability which, as she begins to realize, her wagon-train morality and modernist alienation are unequipped to answer.

As Greg Grandin explains, US intelligence had been engaged in sponsoring and influencing Salvadoran military and government institutions since the early 1960s, when the Cuban revolution had prompted them to guard against left-wing movements elsewhere in the Americas.[86] In US foreign policy under the new Reagan administration of the early 1980s, when Didion's trip took place, this process expanded to see the United States provide the right-wing government in El Salvador with a million dollars a day to devote to counterinsurgency directed at leftist peasant movements. This policy was part of a larger vision for Central America created by conservative hawks close to the administration, which saw intervention in the region as an opportunity to remoralize the Cold War and roll back Soviet influence. It also demonstrated US power without the necessity of undertaking large-scale military operations, a prospect made unattractive largely because of the lessons of

Vietnam. The methods involved a "good cop, bad cop" approach, whereby the United States sponsored modest land-reform and developmental aid on the one hand, and countersubversive military activities (including death squads) on the other. Many of the strategies deployed by Salvadoran government forces in repressing the leftist guerilla movement, for example, were adapted from those used in Vietnam and transmitted by US training. A few months before Didion's arrival, the American-trained Atlacatl Battalion systematically executed over 750 civilians in the Salvadoran village of El Mozote, using bullets manufactured in Missouri for the US government.[87] The violence required to enforce the imperial order was effectively farmed out, while the rhetorical timbre of the Reagan administration cast intervention in El Salvador as a moral necessity, a defense of democratic freedom and human rights against venal Soviet imperialism.[88]

Just as Eliot and Dostoevsky provided Didion with templates for the literary and ideological forms of "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," so in *Salvador* another important set of forms derive from Joseph Conrad. Didion signals as much with her epigraph, which is a passage taken from *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Marlowe describes the report written by Kurtz for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, in which the exhortations to benevolence and "moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment" are contradicted by the footnote Kurtz has scrawled at the end of the document, reading "Exterminate all the brutes!"[89] Didion thus begins *Salvador* by framing US intervention in Central America allegorically in relation to nineteenth-century European colonialism in Africa, and specifically to racial extermination.

This framing is worth paying attention to. In searching for available means with which to explore the ethical dilemmas surrounding responsibility for racial domination, US writers in the post-1945 period looked to two historical experiences in particular. The first, the Holocaust, was recent history, in the sense that it had occurred within the lifetimes of the

writers themselves. The second was a more distant one, which made it especially appropriate for Didion's cultivated residuality: late-nineteenth-century European imperialism and its representation by Conrad. In the early Cold War, such a comparison was inadmissible for liberals. For Arendt, who admired Conrad greatly, the brutal racism of the "Scramble for Africa" had no relevance for race conflict in the United States. Similarly, for Baldwin in the fifties, as we will see in the next chapter, domestic racism in the US was a distinctive national problem separate from European colonialism. In this context, the choice to deploy a Conradian aesthetic in *Salvador* opens up a wider frame for considering complicity, one which had previously belonged more to Marxist radicals like W. E. B. Du Bois and Jean-Paul Sartre than to instinctive conservatives like Didion. The US was now, unambiguously, an *empire*.

In the Conradian drama sketched out in *Salvador*, the part of Kurtz is played not by an American but by the representatives of ARENA, the far-right alliance that organized many of the death squads operating in the early 1980s. Didion does not gain access to Roberto D'Aubuisson, its founder and leader, who at the time of her trip had recently led ARENA to electoral victory. The phrase "Exterminate the brutes!" refers us to him, however: D'Aubuisson was widely known as a death-squad leader, and was in all likelihood responsible for the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980, among many victims. The other Kurtz-like figure treated in *Salvador* is General Maximiliano Hernandez Martínez, who prefigures D'Aubuisson. General Martínez was dictator of El Salvador in 1932, when he authorized *la Matanza*, a large-scale massacre of between 10 000 and 40 000 indigenous Salvadoran peasants. Didion dines with his sinister grandson, Victor Barriere, and reports Barriere's insistence on his grandfather's cultivation, his education in the classics, and his reading of German philosophy. These details echo Kurtz's great learning and eloquence, as alluded to in Didion's epigraph. If "all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz," then the

United States contributed to the making of D'Aubuisson and Barriere, both of whom were educated at US institutions (UC San Diego and the School of the Americas respectively).[90]

Beyond these Conradian echoes, what are the affordances of Didion's literary-formal approach in attributing responsibility for neocolonial violence? As a number of commentators on *Salvador* have noted, the reports effectively position El Salvador itself as a black hole for epistemological stability.[91] Didion describes it as a "state in which no ground is solid, no depth of field reliable," making the country inherently alien and unknowable from the outside, a place from which "the rest of the world tended to recede, and words from the United States seemed profoundly remote, even inexplicable."[92] As such, the very notion of responsibility seems to be dissolved by the place itself. Didion quotes the US embassy's weekly memo to Washington DC, which equivocates on who is responsible for the bodies of death-squad victims: "the uncertainty involved here can be seen in the fact that responsibility cannot be determined in the majority of cases."[93] Though everyone suspects that government forces are the "primary agents of murder . . . El Salvador's tangled web of attack and vengeance, traditional criminal violence and political mayhem make this an impossible charge to sustain."[94] Didion reproduces this vision of the country as inherently and irredeemably violent, claiming that "terror is the given of the place."[95] She writes on *Salvador*'s first page, describing her arrival at the airport, "the only logic was that of acquiescence," a remark that holds true for anyone alive on Salvadoran soil for the rest of the book, the author included. The logic of terror and acquiescence should give us pause, for it belongs historically as much to the concentration camp as it does to the colony. In the "gray zone" inside the camps, as Primo Levi testified in *The Drowned and the Saved*, conventional notions of responsibility were flattened out, leaving an atmosphere of ubiquitous complicity to fill the space, within which the distinction between victim and perpetrator became

unstable.[96] This instability is the risk created by Didion's Conradian representational strategy in *Salvador*.

Outside El Salvador the possibility of innocence remains, just as it does in *Heart of Darkness*, where the figure of the beloved continues to believe in Kurtz's "noble heart" from the safe distance of her home in Brussels.[97] We have seen that Didion's political imagination was structured around the figure of the naïve and easily-manipulated liberal, deceived by good intentions into complicity with illiberal forces. In *Salvador*, improbably enough, Didion positions the Reagan government itself in this role, its neocolonial mission spurred by benevolent intentions and its good will exploited by a venal Salvadoran Right, who to bait it with anticommunist talk: "That we had been drawn, both by a misapprehension of the local rhetoric and by manipulation of our own rhetorical weaknesses, into a game we did not understand, a play of power in a political tropic alien to us, seemed apparent, and yet there we remained."[98] In one of the most arresting metaphors in the book, US intelligence agencies are described as conducting a kind of "dreamwork" in relation to the federal government, "devised to obscure any intelligence that might trouble the dreamer."[99] In using this Freudian concept, referring to the process of transforming unconscious thoughts into manifest dream content, Didion is able to maintain the innocence of her administration while assuming the intelligence agencies to submit to the reigning logic of acquiescence. Subsequent studies of the US intervention have confirmed what many suspected at the time, but Didion will not countenance: that Reagan's foreign policy-makers understood the game they were playing very well, and were willing to play because they judged the stakes—primarily Salvadoran civilian casualties—negligible enough to risk.[100] Strictly speaking, then, this was a case of Sartrean bad faith rather than the Freudian unconscious.

To be clear, I am not interested in challenging Didion's judgment, questionable though it is. Rather, I want to identify the limits of her journalistic reportage, which organized

the political world according to a certain repertoire of forms made available by the midcentury literary canon. The category of "industrious self-delusion," as she called it in relation to the student movement of the late 1960s, is a flexible and capacious one with a rich lineage running through Trilling and midcentury bleak liberalism back to a constellation of novels.[101] Dostoevsky provides one essential point of orientation, and Henry James another. We can find another modulation of it in the disposition of Kurtz's beloved in the final pages of *Heart of Darkness*. The representation of industrious self-delusion called up a set of literary techniques for Didion, including laconic alienation and the ironic deployment of quotation. In addressing the political movements and countercultures of the 1960s and 70s, these devices had helped establish her reputation to the extent that they came to represent a signature style. But in the context of El Salvador their limits became apparent insofar as they proved simply incapable of accounting for the new strategies of neocolonialism being developed by the United States, which actively sought to secure and maintain domination without the responsibilities entailed by occupation.

In order to see the limits of Didion's formal strategies in her reportage we must return to her paradoxical combination of involvement and detachment, by which she includes herself within the frame of observation while attempting to avoid the complicit "involvedese" that became a New Journalism cliché. When she spatializes complicity in *Salvador* as a zone of epistemological instability corresponding to the geographical boundaries of the state in which "the only logic is that of acquiescence," Didion creates a problem for her own position in relation to responsibility. The country was, in her own phrase, a place which "brings everything into question," and while there her intellectual self-possession and independence are undermined in ways she shows awareness of.[102] *Salvador* displays the same preoccupation with language as did "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," in which independence of thought is guaranteed by mastery of language, and its misuse is a sign of deeper ethical and moral

crises. "Language as it is used in El Salvador," she observes, "is the language of advertising, of persuasion, the product being one or another of the *soluciones* crafted in Washington or Panama or Mexico, which is part of the place's pervasive obscenity."[103] The difficulty, however, is that Didion herself, by virtue of her physical presence in the country, is in danger of becoming entangled in such linguistic degeneration, with consequences for her independence. She provides a telling example:

> Even *la verdad*, the truth, was a degenerated phrase in El Salvador: on my first evening in the country I was asked by a Salvadoran woman at an embassy party what I hoped to find out in El Salvador. I said that ideally I hoped to find out *la verdad*, and she beamed approvingly . . . I realized that I had stumbled into a code, that these women used *la verdad* as it was used on the bumper stickers favored that spring and summer by ARENA people. "JOURNALISTS, TELL THE TRUTH!" the bumper stickers warned in Spanish, and they meant the truth according to Roberto D'Aubuisson.[104]

This is one moment at which it becomes apparent that, in the process of reporting from El Salvador, Didion reaches a newly self-reflexive consciousness of complicity as a problem not only for deluded liberals, but also for those who write about them. For if she stumbles unknowingly into a code that means her professional ethos serves, in however attenuated a form, the interests of a death-squad leader, then she opens the door to a fundamental doubt about the genre of reportage itself. This is not to suggest that Didion undergoes, as Mary McCarthy did in Hanoi in 1967, a full-blown crisis of literary ethics expressed in confessional mode. Her new awareness of complicity leads to a self-conscious hollowing of the genre. Its conventions are maintained, but emptied of their domestic confidence. Mary Louise Pratt wrote that *Salvador* "reads above all like an attempt to finally dismantle the

genre," but it is not so much a dismantling as a revelation that the form it relies on has become ruins, neither fit for use nor capable of modification.[105]

This hollowing is most evident in a passage where Didion describes her visit to a shopping mall in San Salvador, and offers a metacommentary about its effect on her writing practice. The mall functions straightforwardly as a symptom and symbol of American colonial power realized in the cultural sphere, or as she puts it, "the future for which El Salvador was presumably being saved."[106] It brings Didion back to familiar territory in the sense that it is a US cultural export, playing Don McLean's "American Pie" and selling beach towels printed with images of Manhattan, but also in the sense that mass culture had been one of the topics upon which Didion, like other New Journalists, had developed her powers in the Sixties. She describes herself making notes on the objects and activities she observes, "this being the kind of 'color' I knew how to interpret, the kind of inductive irony, the detail that was supposed to illuminate the story." Yet she goes on to explain:

> As I wrote it down, I realized I was no longer much interested in this kind of irony, that this was a story that would not be illuminated by such details, that this was a story that would perhaps not be illuminated at all, that this was perhaps even less a 'story' than a true *noche obscura*. As I waited to cross back over the Boulevard de los Heroes to the Camino Real I noticed soldiers herding a young civilian into a van, their guns at the boy's back, and I walked straight ahead, not wanting to see anything at all.[107]

Deborah Nelson, in her astute reading of this passage, observes how Didion still gives us the very details that she claims are no longer illuminating. Rather than abandoning the whole process of "inductive irony," by which concrete details accumulate in their incongruity with their context, Didion makes the decision to follow it through in any case, while at the same time disavowing the enterprise as futile.[108] A comparable contradiction applies to the sight of

the police arrest, which, she tells us, she tries not to see even while she reports that she does. These two sentences offer a version of the same impasse, in which Didion's forms continue to function and to reproduce themselves even after abandonment by their author as futile.

We can see here how the "logic of acquiescence" functions at the level of literary form as well as personal conduct, with Didion obeying the laws of her own style despite their obsolescence. Nelson attributes Didion's loss of confidence in her technique to the scale of feeling she experiences as terror.[109] Irony, while appropriate to the conveyance of everyday unease, as in her domestic journalism, is an inadequate tool for conveying the overwhelming horror of murder in El Salvador. In the context of our study of complicity, however, we might also consider the way this passage rehearses another of the potent archetypes to emerge from the Holocaust in the post-war American literary imagination: the "good German" who struggles to maintain her innocence in the face of growing evidence of a full-scale genocide occurring around her, and the knowledge that she is powerless to challenge it on an individual level. In simultaneously seeing and not seeing the police abduction, Didion knowingly places herself in this uncomfortable position and thereby acknowledges a dimension of shame hitherto unseen in her nonfiction: the shame of looking away but writing of the experience nonetheless.

There is another question to pose about the way Didion invokes nineteenth-century European imperialism and the Holocaust in seeking a language with which to articulate complicity in Reagan's "dirty wars." Didion explicitly evoked the racial dimensions of the Salvadoran conflict, but also understood them to be in some sense unspeakable. She notes ARENA's anti-Semitism, "an undercurrent in Salvadoran life that is not much discussed and probably worth some study," and the striking whiteness of the winner of the "Miss Salvador" competition. At slightly greater length, she observes how the repression of the revolutionary peasant movement was understood, sometimes explicitly and sometimes in coded ways, as a

war on El Salvador's indigenous people waged by its Europeanized elites.[110] "In many ways," she writes in discussing the genocidal intentions behind *la Matanza* of 1932, "race remains the ineffable element at the heart of this particular darkness."[111] The claim that race is both an ultimate determinant of the violence in El Salvador but also an unspeakable one for which an adequate means of expression does not exist reminds us to ask what Didion's particular framework allows her to leave unsaid, as well as what it enables to be spoken.

The metaphysics of race conjured here serve to displace the complex settler-colonial logic that underpinned the parallel processes of dispossession and elimination of indigenous people in El Salvador as elsewhere in Latin America, by which they were forced to work on their own expropriated land, systematically murdered, and subjected to racial mixing (*mestizaje*).[112] It also obscures how such settler-colonial practices intersected with other colonial forms. These practices of dispossession and elimination, after all, were being supported *at a distance* by US neocolonial power as it searched for access to new markets, resources and cheap labor. They also gave ideological succor to the US right's domestic support base. Didion's evocations of Holocaust complicity and allusions to European imperialism, in other words, allowed Didion to preserve US innocence by burying another story. This buried story was about the United States' own history of settler-colonialism, and the extension of its home-grown, white-supremacist logics into contemporary foreign interventions. It was a story that risked unsettling that irreducible otherness of El Salvador in her imagination and bring it closer to home, where detachment might not so easily be accomplished.[113]

These are considerable omissions, given the centrality of settler mythology and settler-indigenous conflict to Didion's moral imagination. In "On Self-Respect" (1961), she identified that quality with nineteenth-century pioneers in the West, who had accepted that "the Indians will be hostile, and the venture will go bankrupt," but were undeterred.[114] Indians

in Didion's mind were symbols of the risk and contingency that must be borne and overcome in order for business to succeed, an attitude that somewhat resembled that of the Salvadoran right. This is a useful reminder that the discourse of complicity was always polyvalent, providing a means to express urgent thoughts, feelings, and experiences, but also shaping and producing structures of feeling that obscured and obfuscated a materialist analysis of the distribution of power. The discourse of complicity, uncomfortable though it makes its subjects, has also served as a means to preserve innocence, and to contain and defuse revolutionary modes of thought.

[1] Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," in *The New Journalism*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (London: Picador, 1996), 15–68.

[2] Ibid., 22.

[3] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and Field," *Sociocriticism* 2, no. 2 (1985): 14. For more on *habitus,* see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

[4] On New Journalism and the crisis of objectivity, see Ronald Weber, *The Literature of Fact* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980), 22–26; Daniel W. Lehman, *Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction Over the Edge* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), 81–83; John J. Pauly, "The New Journalism and the Struggle for Interpretation," *Journalism* 15, no. 5 (2014): 589–604.

[5] Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*, 1.

[6] Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night: History as a Novel the Novel as History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 53.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (London: Picador, 2015), 63.

[10] Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 31.

[11] Pauly, "The New Journalism."

[12] Joan Didion, "*Slouching Towards Bethlehem*," in *Live and Learn* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 10.

[13] Pauly, "The New Journalism," 590.

[14] Norman Podhoretz, "The Article as Art," in *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*, ed. Ronald Weber (New York: Communication Arts Books, 1974), 136.

[15] Herr, *Dispatches*, 220.

[16] Ibid., 63.

[17]Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Vintage, 2001), viii.

[18] Susan Sontag, "Trip to Hanoi: Notes on the Enemy Camp," *Esquire*, December 1968. https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a12241193/trip-to-hanoi/.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Daniel Lehman, "New Journalism," in *American Literature in Transition, 1960-1970*, ed. David Wyatt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 60.

[24] Ibid.

[25] John Hersey, *The Algiers Motel Incident* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 30.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 31.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 32.

[30] Ibid. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), xlv.

[31] Hersey, *The Algiers Motel Incident*, 32.

[32] Ibid., 35.

[33] Hannah Arendt, “Collective Responsibility,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2003), 147.

[34] Benjamin Demott, “In and Out of Universal City,” in *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*, ed. Ronald Weber (New York: Hastings House, 1974), 272.

[35] Ibid., 274.

[36] Ibid., 275.

[37] Ibid., 276-277. Demott’s emphasis.

[38] Ibid., 280.

[39] John C. Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 151. For a similar view on Didion, see Kathleen M. Vandenberg, *Joan Didion: Substance and Style* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 2–3.

[40] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 133.

[41] David Eason, “The New Journalism and the Image World,” in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 191.

[42] Vladimir Nabokov, *Vladimir Nabokov: Selected Letters, 1940-1977*, ed. Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 378.

[43] On Didion at *The National Review*, see Stephen Schryer, "Writers for Goldwater," *Post45: Peer Reviewed*, January 20, 2020, https://post45.org/2020/01/writers-for-goldwater/.

[44] The shift in Didion's politics is traced in Louis Menand, "Out of Bethlehem: The Radicalization of Joan Didion," *The New Yorker*, August 17, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/08/24/out-of-bethlehem.

[45]Joan Didion, "*The White Album*," in *Live and Learn* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 293.

[46] See Schryer.

[47] Didion, *Slouching*, 129.

[48] Ibid., 130

[49] Ibid., 129.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 126-7

[52] Ibid., 128.

[53] Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and The Novel," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays in Literature and Society* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2008), 221

[54] Didion, *Slouching*, 11. Didion's emphasis.

[55] Ibid., 117.

[56] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), 24.

[57] Didion, *Slouching*, 129-30.

[58] Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 68.

[59] Didion, *Slouching*, 99.

[60] Ibid., 92.

[61] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, ed. Kirsten Fermaglich and Lisa Fine (New York: Norton, 2013), 305.

[62] Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, revised edition (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1993), 222–41.

[63] Sean Steele, "Playing for Keeps: The Diggers, Life-Acting and Guerrilla Theater in San Francisco's Psychedelic '60s," *ASJ Occasional Papers*, November 10, 2020, http://op.asjournal.org/playing-for-keeps-the-diggers-life-acting-and-guerrilla-theater-in-san-franciscos-psychedelic-60s/.

[64] Didion, *Slouching*, 100.

[65] Ibid., 101.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., 102.

[68] Philip Rahv, "Dostoevsky and Politics: Notes on *The Possessed*," *Partisan Review* 5, no. 2 (1938): 25–36.

[69] Lionel Trilling, *The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 71.

[70] Didion, *Slouching*, 7.

[71] Ibid., 172.

[72] On Eliot's figurative use of reproduction and abortion, see Christina Hauck, "Abortion and the Individual Talent," *ELH* 70, no. 1 (2003): 223–66.

[73] Didion, *Slouching*, 72.

[74] T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," in *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 1963), 77.

[75] Didion, *Slouching*, 79, 80.

[76] Didion, *White Album*, 196.

[77] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[78] Didion, *White Album*, 197.

[79] Ibid., 198.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 347.

[82] Ibid., 348.

[83] Daniel Worden, *Neo-Liberal Nonfictions: The Documentary Aesthetic from Joan Didion to Jay-Z* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 52.

[84] Didion, *White Album*, 215.

[85] Edward Said, "Miami Twice," *London Review of Books*, December 10, 1987, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v09/n22/edward-said/miami-twice.

[86] Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 95.

[87] Ibid., 90.

[88] Ibid., 88.

[89] Joan Didion, *Salvador* (London: Granta, 2006), 3. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness, with The Congo Diary*, ed. Robert Hampson (London: Penguin, 1995), 84. In "The Morning After the Sixties," Didion identified Kurtz's postscript as "the central line" of *Heart of Darkness*. Didion, *White Album*, 349.

[90] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 83.

[91] See, for example, John A. McClure, *Late Imperial Romance* (London: Verso, 1994), 56–87; Jane Harred, "The Heart of Darkness in Joan Didion's *Salvador*," *College Literature: A Journal of Critical Literary Studies* 25, no. 2 (1998): 1–16.

[92] Didion, *Salvador*, 13, 70.

[93] Didion, 16.

[94] Didion, 16.

[95] Didion, 13.

[96] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 25–56.

[97] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 121.

[98] Didion, *Salvador*, 96.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Raymond Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit: U.S. Policy and El Salvador* (New York: Times Books, 1988); Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, 71–86.

[101] Didion, *White Album*, 216.

[102] Didion, *Salvador*, 35.

[103] Ibid. 65.

[104] Ibid., 66-67.

[105] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 225.

[106] Didion, *Salvador*, 36.

[107] Ibid., 36.

[108] Nelson, *Tough Enough*, 157–58.

[109] Nelson, 159.

[110] Didion, *Salvador*, 32.

[111] Didion, 74.

[112] On settler colonialism in Central and South America, see Richard Gott, "Latin America as a White Settler Society," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 26, no. 2 (2007): 269–89. On settler colonialism in El Salvador, see Jorge E. Cuéllar, "Elimination/Deracination: Colonial Terror, La Matanza, and the 1930s Race Laws in El Salvador," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (2018): 39–56.

[113] On the "artificial divide in the thinking on indigenous peoples north and south," see Shannon Speed, "Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2017): 783–84.

[114] Didion, *Slouching*, 118.

Part II, Chapter 2

James Baldwin, Liberalism, and Survivor Guilt

If, for Mary McCarthy in North Vietnam in the spring of 1967, "the plea of being elsewhere . . . when the crime was committed" could no longer stand, then she was exemplifying a discourse of liberal guilt that pervaded American culture in the period.[1] This discourse often focused on how physical absence from the zone of racialized suffering affected the individual's sense of responsibility. Four years earlier, Hannah Arendt had reported with approval in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* the court's judgment that "the extent to which any one of the many criminals was close to or remote from actual killer of the victim means nothing, as far as the measure of his responsibility is concerned."[2] In 1965, James Baldwin published an essay entitled "The White Man's Guilt," which articulated the problem in similar terms. White Americans, he explained, were impaled by their history, unable to break from the lies they were telling themselves about the past. The effect of such a failure was what Baldwin called "personal incoherence":

> This incoherence is heard nowhere more plainly than in those stammering, terrified dialogues which white Americans sometimes entertain with that black conscience, the black man in America. The nature of this stammering can be reduced to a plea: Do not blame *me*, I was not there. I did not do it.[3]

I was not there. The guilty consciences of white liberals are troubled by the thought that absence does not grant absolution.

Baldwin's essay, written for the primarily Black readership of *Ebony* magazine, describes with exasperation the "inescapable responsibility" borne by all white Americans for white supremacy, and castigates them for being unable to face up to their dependency on

Black subordination.[4] Among many portraits of complicity with racism in the Sixties, by writers from Amiri Baraka and Stokely Carmichael to McCarthy and John Hersey, "The White Man's Guilt" is surely one of the most devastating. It drew on themes that pervade Baldwin's oeuvre: self-deception, bad faith, and the lie of liberal innocence: "What have *you* got against *me*?" he imagines a white American retorting to their imaginary Black interlocutor. "*What do you want?* But, on the same day, in another gathering, and in the most private chamber of his heart, always, the white American remains proud of that history for which he does not wish to pay and from which, materially, he has profited so much."[5]

Complicity was Baldwin's great topic, and as several commentators averred during his lifetime, it was in his non-fiction rather than in his stories, plays and novels, that he discovered the forms that best suited his intellectual temperament.[6] The remarkable durability of this interest in complicity, from the early 1950s through to his 1972 book *No Name in the Street*, offers us an example of how a particular author's response to it evolved over time. Put simply, Baldwin's first-person non-fiction provides us with a valuable history of post-war liberal subjectivity in its relation to literary form. In some cases, as in "The White Man's Guilt," complicity is described from the outside as a structure containing the deluded white subject. In other cases, often in parallel and most determinedly in *No Name*, Baldwin articulates states of complicity from within, as an implicated subject himself. In these latter instances, Baldwin's kinship to the New Journalism, as well as his ability to surpass its insights, becomes visible. Here, Baldwin acknowledges the limitations imposed by his own position within the liberal cultural and intellectual establishment, even while he attempts to transcend them through a process of self-examination.

In 1974, Seymour Krim summarized the phenomenon of the New Journalism as "the acting out in print . . . of the subjective being as it collides with objective happenings." Noting that "we live in an age when the intersection between public events and private

response is becoming the whole mortal show for everyone," Krim highlights for us how Baldwin's work can be seen as proleptic in its formal as well as its thematic concerns.[7] Baldwin had forged his reputation on his ability to articulate the encounter between the private self and the unfolding national drama of racial struggle and the civil rights movement. Beginning with his *Harper's* essay "Notes of a Native Son" (1955), in which his account of his father's funeral is synchronized with that of the 1943 Harlem uprising, Baldwin placed what he called "the private life" in constant and often uncomfortable relation with public events, and reflected on that relation in moral terms.[8] In this way, to use Benjamin Demott's term, Baldwin was a pioneer of the "involvedese" style that came to typify the New Journalism, and several contemporary commentators identified him as such.[9] Certainly, in the decade leading up to 1965 he was influentially shaping sub-genres such as the subjectively-narrated celebrity profile and the "letter from" report from a particular geographical location. He published these essays in magazines such as *Harper's* and *Esquire*, which were to become prominent venues for the New Journalism.[10] The use of memoir in combination with more publicly-oriented forms of writing has its own long history in Black US writing, including most obviously in the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, and Richard Wright (whose autobiographical work was also solicited by *Harper's* in the 1950s), but Baldwin was finding a new audience for it in the expanding white middle classes of the post-war era.

Baldwin scholarship, while it has paid extensive attention to his polemical critiques of American innocence and white guilt, has sometimes been reluctant to acknowledge that he often placed himself within the ambit of complicity.[11] It is an understandable omission, and follows in part from the powerful taboo set on the topic of aggressor identification in left-liberal discourse on racial domination, with roots in the history of Holocaust reception. Aggressor identification, as Ruth Leys explains, names a process identified in the Freudian psychoanalytic tradition and widely used in relation to Holocaust survivors in the 1960s and

70s, in which victims of extreme oppression survive by deploying psychic functions that internalize the authority of the aggressor.[12] As the controversy surrounding Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* showed, the perception of "victim-blaming" with which such approaches became associated has a record of provoking anger and discomfort, which in turn disincentivizes exploration of this aspect of complicity's ideological history.[13] Whilst I do not wish to judge the clinical value of aggressor identification as a concept, I am committed to evaluating its importance in literary and intellectual history, and will argue that the psychiatric response to Holocaust survivors in the American post-war had an influence on Baldwin's work. To evade Baldwin's evident exploration of his own complicity in structures of racial domination is to miss a crucial component of his oeuvre. If we ignore it, we risk misrecognizing the issue of complicity by rehearsing a version of the liberal innocence that he decried so compellingly.

An analysis of Baldwin's treatment of complicity demands that we revisit several themes: the influence of Lionel Trilling and the New York Intellectuals on the literary concern with complicity in the first two decades after World War Two; the turn to the Holocaust as an available resource with which to think and write about complicity; and the impact of militant Black nationalism and decolonization movements in precipitating a new, uncomfortable level of self-consciousness about complicity. Most pressingly, we must return to the relationship between the dominant cultures of liberalism in the American post-war and the problem of complicity. Baldwin's work serves as an invitation to synthesize the historical, philosophical, and literary concerns which I have been discussing in relation to a broad sweep of literary and intellectual history, telescoping them into a reading of a single author. This method brings its own risks, not least in suggesting how a single author might be understood as typifying or representing a larger structure of feeling across three decades. Nevertheless, there is justification for reading Baldwin's nonfiction in this way. I have chosen to devote a

chapter to him not only because of his deep engagement with questions of complicity, but also because the shape of his career and reception rehearses in condensed form the larger story of this book, that of complicity as a structure of feeling.

Structures of feeling, in Raymond Williams' formulation, are to be grasped not as fixed or even stable objects, but as patterns of thought and response that are always in motion, forming and reforming in dialogue with "the specificity of present being," a constantly shifting field of historical experience.[14] If we recognize this, then we also concede the necessarily narrative component in attempts to identify and characterize a structure of feeling. Baldwin's career, with its varied phases, throws into relief a broader history of complicity in American writing which with we are now acquainted. In this narrative, new notions of racial complicity emerged from the liberal response to the Holocaust and took provisional form in a variety of literary and philosophical genres. These notions, expressed unsystematically in the first two decades after World War Two, underwent a process of crystallization and formalization under the pressure exerted by anti-racist, materialist, and anti-colonial movements at home and abroad during the Sixties. Baldwin's literary career adds to this story of complicity by showing how *it only became narratable retrospectively*, once the events of the Sixties had brought complicity into focus as a definite, if troublesome, concept.

Complicity resembles all structures of feeling insofar as, by their very nature, they can only be fully grasped retrospectively, once they have crystallized into a fixed form and passed into history. This retrospective structure is discernable in the Vietnam reports by Susan Sontag and McCarthy, where their confrontations with American imperialism in 1967-8 produced in them a new awareness of their complicity with it in the past. Baldwin's *No Name in the Street* performs this kind of maneuver with particular clarity, using modes of memoir, history and confession to look back over his life and work since World War Two

and to renarrativize it in the light of the crises of the late 1960s. Told from the perspective of a subject suffering from survivor guilt, *No Name in the Street* names the complicity that was there in solution all along in Baldwin's work, allowing us to retrace its emergence as an object of the writing consciousness, and thus to understand it anew as a structure he approached both from within and without.

Baldwin's Liberalism

We begin with the thorny question of Baldwin's liberalism. Baldwin discussed liberals in his nonfiction with increasing frequency through the Sixties. Liberals were the subject of consistent irony, frustration, and finally despair in his work, coming to constitute the ideological focus for his critique of bad-faith innocence about American history and the reality of American racism. In an essay for *Esquire*, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter from Harlem," he treated the building of Riverton, Harlem's first social housing project. He described how Harlemites came to despise and then vandalize it. "Liberals, both white and black, were appalled at the spectacle. I was appalled by the liberal innocence—or cynicism, which comes out in practice as much the same thing."[15] The passage sums up Baldwin's characteristic portrayal of liberals in his work, as collapsing the distinction between innocent and cynical. In this and in other essays, Baldwin identified American liberals principally with a specious idea of progress in racial relations. Progress for Baldwin's liberals is quantifiable and achieved through the appliance of technocratic solutions in the social sphere, such as the building of new infrastructure, the provision of state aid and subsidies, and legal reforms. Implicitly, they are Democrats allied to the Kennedy administration or to Johnson's Great Society program. Liberals, for Baldwin, are nearly always from the North, and, unless he

states otherwise, white. They are people who, as he put it in "The Uses of the Blues," "still prefer to read statistics, charts, Gallup polls, rather than deal with the reality."[16]

One of the most revealing sources for Baldwin's thinking about liberals is a 1964 roundtable conducted for *Commentary* magazine, in which he debated "Liberalism and the Negro." Challenged by Sydney Hook on his misuse of the term "liberals," and his association of them with "the myth of collective guilt," Baldwin responded that, on the contrary, he knew exactly what he meant:

> The liberal assumption is that once you arrive at a certain level of social and economic status in American life, there's nothing left to worry about. What I mean by a liberal is someone who accepts these mechanistic terms and someone, furthermore, whose real attitudes are revealed when the chips are down—someone who thinks you're pushing too hard when you rock the boat, who thinks you are bitter when you are vehement, who has a set of attitudes so deep that they're almost unconscious.[17]

These comments give us an unrehearsed but valuable insight into Baldwin's thinking. Firstly, it confirms the way he understood liberals to be defined primarily by the way they judge racial progress in quantifiable, "mechanistic" terms. It also suggests a second defining characteristic: the distance between their principles and their actions (this point, as we will see, effectively recuperates Gunnar Myrdal's characterization of white Americans generally in *An American Dilemma*). This distance, moreover, was in some sense invisible to liberals, being "almost unconscious." The *almost* is important here, since it is crucial for Baldwin's critique of liberals that a fundamental paradox be sustained: that they should be held responsible for what they choose not to see. Baldwin's liberals, then, are characterized by their "chicken-shit goodwill," and faith in the universal validity of their own social reason, but this faith is premised on a disavowal of what they, at another level, *understand*: that

American nationhood has been and is still determined by a deeply embedded and irrational impulse towards racial exclusion.[18] This "willful not-seeing" of the fundamental moral contradictions at the heart of American identity is what leads liberals to their simultaneous cynicism and innocence: they both know and don't know, at different levels of their consciousness, that the Riverton project in Harlem will be vandalized.[19] Intentionally or not, Baldwin was rehearsing with some precision the contours of Sartrean bad faith in describing how liberals concealed their own responsibility. Their refusal of internal complexity and dissonance, whether in the form of a depth model consciousness, or of multiple conflicting motivations and intentions, meant that their idea of progress must always be material and quantitative. They tinkered with the arrangement of the external world, when radical shifts in conscience— "conversion," in Sartre's language, borrowed from Kierkegaard—were required.

The majority of Baldwin scholarship has taken such trenchant criticisms of technocratic progressive liberals as the substance of Baldwin's engagement with the politics of liberalism itself. In fact, it addresses only a narrow version of it bound by the Democrat administrations of the 1960s.[20] As Jack Turner has pointed out, nowhere in Baldwin's writing do we find references to *liberalism* as a body of political or philosophical thought; only to liberals themselves, understood as a particular category of intellectuals.[21] If we shift to a broader view of the landscape of liberal ideas in the early Cold War, however, then we see the multiplicity of ways and forms in which its foundational principles were articulated, thought and felt across institutions and formations. Liberal priorities, concerning for example personal liberty, self-improvement, economic freedom, and the right to property, suffused American society in all the spheres of life, from business, the economy, and education to the private, interpersonal, and domestic, constituting a lived system of values and meanings. This is not to suggest that anything resembling an internally consistent liberalism was articulated

or even imagined operating across the social totality. Liberal values were tested and challenged throughout by left and right, as well as by minority groups of various kinds. There were numerous points of argument and disagreement (understood by many as liberal virtues in themselves), most notoriously over the appropriate response to McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare, but also on the issues of social conformism, national identity, and mass culture.

Neither should we imagine that the liberal hegemony remained static. Rather, as Williams reminds us, hegemonic power must be renewed and recreated constantly through new activities, experiences, and relationships.[22] The story of post-war liberalism in US intellectual life, Amanda Anderson and Ira Katznelson have shown, is one in which an older pragmatist and progressivist strain of liberal thought co-existed with the emergence a newer, more pessimistic and skeptical one exemplified in this study by writers such as Arendt, McCarthy, and Didion. In this strain of thought, simple assumptions about human perfectibility and personal coherence were put under scrutiny, and doubts raised about the achievability of any project to properly grasp the internal workings of the self. There was also a new awareness of the limits of reason in determining human behavior.[23] Anderson sees this strain of "bleak liberalism" represented in the work of Trilling, a figure holding tremendous importance for Baldwin's development, but we might also discern it in a range of humanistic thinkers from Arendt and McCarthy to Arthur Schlesinger, Richard Hofstadter, and Reinhold Niebuhr.

The distinction between progressivist and bleak liberalism is one upheld in large part by the intellectual division of labor between applied social sciences on one side, and literary, historical, and philosophical modes of thought on the other, but we should not see them in purely oppositional terms. The Cold War liberalism of a figure like Trilling is best understood not as rival to progressivist liberalism but rather as its complement, offering not

an alternative political program, but rather an internal critique of liberalism itself. This critique was partly, as Anderson argues, aimed at bringing experiences conventionally marginalized in the liberal tradition—such as aesthetic experience, compulsion by irrational impulses, or ungovernable negative affects—within its purview. Nevertheless, at a more comprehensive level, the internal critique was its own justification: for figures such as Trilling and Baldwin, self-scrutiny was a value in its own right.

Using this expanded perspective on US post-war liberalism, it becomes clear that the frame that Baldwin used for thinking through questions of race in relation to US history and society was itself liberal, deriving in large part from the influence of Trilling and the New York intelligentsia of the early Cold War.[24] Baldwin's attacks on liberal innocence should be grasped as an internal critique of liberalism launched from within its domain, both in ideological and institutional terms. The formation we know as the New York Intellectuals was itself undergoing a transformation at the time, from a broadly socialist, anti-Stalinist disposition in the late 1930s and early 1940s towards the stance that effectively created and articulated the new humanistic liberalism of the early Cold War. This shift triangulated the New York Intellectuals in relation to totalitarian systems of domination and the emergence of a debased mass consumer society. They saw both as significant threats to the integrity and freedom of the individual, which they placed at the center of their value system. A quotation from Baldwin's first published essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1949) encapsulates this commitment: "Let us say, then, that truth, as used here, is meant to imply a devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfillment; freedom which cannot be legislated, fulfillment which cannot be charted."[25] A more classically liberal statement can hardly be imagined.

Although Baldwin later distanced himself from the New York Intellectuals, they were nevertheless instrumental in launching his career. In the years immediately after the war, he entered into the literary and intellectual milieu circulating around the journals *The New*

Leader, *Commentary*, and *Partisan Review* (the latter published "Many Thousands Gone"). This brought his fiction and essays to the attention of the small but influential coterie of intellectuals from McCarthy and Philip Rahv to Dwight Macdonald and Robert Warshow.[26] After moving to Paris in 1948, Baldwin continued to correspond with them and publish in their journals, but his relationship to the New York intellectuals is often neglected.[27] Essays like "Everybody's Protest Novel," known for its attack on his one-time mentor Richard Wright, reveals a much broader transition in the cultural field: the essay, along with "Many Thousands Gone," is a transparent effort to join in the repudiation of proletarian and popular front culture that enabled and indeed defined the new liberal formation of the early Cold War.[28] Irving Howe was likely thinking in these terms when he described Baldwin's early work as "part of an outlook so many American intellectuals took over during the years of a postwar liberalism not very different from conservatism."[29] Once we take into account Baldwin's participation in the New York Intellectuals formation during his emergence, then his provisional attempts to conceptualize racial complicity appear in context. His figuring of racial complicity in high literary rather than sociological fashion, his use of a Freudian register of suppressed threats and internalized conflict, and his allusions to Henry James, place him firmly within the ambit of liberal intellectual life in the early Cold War.

In order to see how Baldwin's aesthetics of complicity emerged from post-war liberalism, we must return to one of its founding documents, Myrdal's *An American Dilemma.*[30] This influential book combined elements from both of the strains of liberal thought we have been discussing. Myrdal argued that progress in race relations had already been made, judging the elimination of racial inequality in the US to be achievable as irrational prejudice was gradually eliminated. An incremental process of integration and legal reform was a necessary part of the process. *An American Dilemma* engaged aspects of the progressive liberal tradition in the United States, which had always seen racism as a

rectifiable fault in American society rather than an inherent component of it. However, as we saw in the introduction to this study, Myrdal also framed racial conflict in the United States as operating, at its most fundamental level, as contradiction internal to the conscience of the white subject, who struggles to reconcile an abstract commitment to the "American Creed" of racial equality with the observable reality of racial injustice in everyday life. This disjunction created great anxiety among white subjects, "mingled with a feeling of individual and collective guilt."[31] Occasionally, an exceptional individual "may recognize, even if only for a moment, the incongruence of his state of mind and find it so intolerable that the whole organization of his moral precepts is shaken. But most people, most of the time, suppress such threats to their moral integrity together with all the confusion, the ambiguity, and inconsistency which lurks in the basement of man's soul."[32] This psycho-ethical way of framing America's race problems brought Myrdal's analysis closer to the new humanistic style of liberal thought observable in other interventions of the 1940s, such as Schlesinger's *The Vital Center* (1949), which understood state interventions to be of limited utility and focused rather on the examination and reform of the individual conscience.

As Ralph Ellison argued in a contemporaneous review, Myrdal's emphasis on the moral psychology of American racism was both a virtue and a weakness. It showed how "the mechanism of prejudice operates to disguise the moral conflict in the minds of whites produced by the clash on the social level between the American Creed and anti-Negro practices."[33] But it also allowed Myrdal "to deny the existence of an American class struggle," and thereby to efface any trace of racism's material determinants, along with its beneficiaries.[34] The terms of Ellison's analysis can be useful applied to Baldwin's nonfiction. The threat to moral integrity that Myrdal located as the pressure point between the practice of American white supremacy and its denial became what Baldwin called "personal incoherence."[35] He saw his task to be confronting and illuminating it, "to locate the terror

within."[36] Baldwin nevertheless came to emphasize during the Sixties the very factor that Myrdal avoided. As he put it the *Commentary* roundtable, "Negroes were a source of cheap labor and everything white people did thereafter in relation to Negroes was a way of justifying this."[37] Thereafter, this tension between the psycho-ethical frame Baldwin developed early in his career and the Marxist-materialist one that emerged in his 1960s work became increasingly pronounced. Ellison had remarked that Myrdal's dilemma called for a meeting of Marx and Freud. For Baldwin, that meeting was deferred until he wrote *No Name in the Street* in the late 1960s. Before we reach that moment, however, we need to track the development of his ideas about race and responsibility in the earlier part of his career.

Race, Consciousness, and Morality 1949-1962

An early example of Baldwin's interest in "personal incoherence" can be found in "Many Thousands Gone," published in *Partisan Review* in 1951. He expressed his concern that "the Negro in America . . . his history and his progress, his relationship to all other Americans, has been kept in the social arena. He is a social and not a personal or a human problem."[38] Baldwin felt an imperative to rectify this situation by wresting the existential drama of race relations away from the abstract discourse of sociology and investing it with the moral language of guilt and responsibility. He went about this task by enriching it with accounts of concrete social encounters and the private crises they generate. "Many Thousands Gone" ruminates on the racial violence of American history, in particular chattel slavery, and its suppression in contemporary everyday life:

> In our image of the Negro breathes the past we deny, not dead but living yet and powerful, the beast in our jungle of statistics. It is this which defeats us, which continues to defeat us, which lends to interracial cocktail parties their rattling, genteel,

> nervously smiling air: in any drawing room at such a gathering the beast may spring, filling the air with flying things and an unenlightened wailing. Wherever the problem touches, there is confusion, there is danger.[39]

Baldwin's way of registering complicity is highly representative of this moment in American literary history and of the milieu in which he was moving. As in work by Nabokov, Bellow, and McCarthy, the embarrassment produced in moments of bourgeois social encounter became one the principal scenarios through which liberal writers explored the experience of racial complicity in the decade after World War Two. Baldwin combines it with a model of suppressed, unformed, and unarticulated historical knowledge straining at its containment by social conventions and waiting to disrupt and confuse the coherent surface of social life.

This mode of conceptualizing American racial violence in relation to the everyday recalls Myrdal's description, seven years earlier, of the "confusion, the ambiguity, the inconsistency which lurks in the basement of man's soul."[40] In "Many Thousands Gone," though, Baldwin makes more explicit the Freudian register in Myrdal's writing. The recognition of complicity in racial domination, despite one's professed commitment to equality, is suppressed by consciousness but continues to produce affective responses. Baldwin compares this to a repressed childhood trauma: "The man does not remember the hand that struck him, the darkness that frightened him, as a child; nevertheless, the hand and the darkness remain with him, indivisible from himself for ever, part of the passion that drives him wherever he thinks to take flight."[41] It is worth considering the stakes involved in deploying this kind of discourse when articulating states of racial complicity. For Freud, such contents of the repressed unconscious are by definition unrepresentable in direct or intentional ways, and can only be grasped indirectly through the interpretation of its displaced and condensed proxies in dreams, gestures, maladies, and slips. Accordingly, the repressed knowledge that would force America's cocktail-drinking classes to confront and

acknowledge their complicity in the unfolding of that history in the present becomes an *unspeakable* part of the self, available to the subject only obliquely. It follows that the project of describing or recovering it becomes a distinctly literary one, requiring an understanding of condensation and displacement, and a facility with metaphor, synecdoche, and metonymy, those figurative formations upon which the discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis itself was made intelligible. As Trilling remarked in 1940, "of all the mental systems, the Freudian psychology is the one which makes poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind."[42]

In Baldwin's nonfiction, this Freudian style of conceptualizing complicity as a problem of self-knowledge and representability was combined with his intense engagement with James's fiction.[43] In an interview, Baldwin later declared James's importance to him, not merely as a stylistic influence, but as a resource for his exploration of racial domination after Myrdal. He explained, "James was the only American writer—literally, for me, the only American writer—who seemed to have some sense of what was later to be called 'the American Dilemma.'" It makes sense, then, that in "Many Thousands Gone," James' short story "The Beast in the Jungle" provides Baldwin with a literary correlative for the Freudian register. It is a story based around a man's inexplicable conviction that he is destined for some terrible misfortune that cannot be determined, described figuratively as the "beast in the jungle" waiting for the moment to pounce. Only at the end of his life does John Marcher realize that the beast lay within him rather than in some external contingency, and see his own inability to recognize love. As Marcher comes to his moment of self-revelation at the grave of May Bartram, it is too late to act, and his past life is shown to him as a vista of blindness and self-deception. Baldwin's allusion to this story gestures to the deferred recognition of racial complicity as an unspeakable terror buried in regions of the self that are conventionally inaccessible. The story also models the way Baldwin understood the relegation of the "Negro problem" to the realms of liberal social policy—a "social and not a

personal or a human problem”— to be a misrecognition of its true nature.[44] Like James’ beast, American racism was rather to be understood as an internal phenomenon, grasped through introspection. He worried that, as in James’ story, the moment of revelation would arrive too late.

Trilling was a consistent admirer and supporter of Baldwin’s work in this period, writing warm reviews of his fiction and even a reference for his successful application to the Guggenheim Foundation for a fellowship in 1953 (Bellow and Rahv also wrote in support).[45] Trilling’s rethinking of liberalism in the early Cold War was indebted to his reading of Freud and his consequent conviction that cultural conflict and critique were inevitable products of the contradictory drives contained within the self. These foundational commitments to “the Freudian tragic” in his ideas combined with a commitment, forged in part through his reading of James, to the value of literature in elucidating complex moral problems. Trilling’s rejection of an older progressive and proceduralist liberalism in favour of one alive to contradiction and ambivalence, based on scrupulous criticism of motives and intentions, surely informed his admiration for what he called, in his letter of recommendation, Baldwin’s “insight, subtlety and flexibility of mind.”[46] Above all, though, in thinking through the affinities between Trilling and Baldwin in the 1950s, I want to emphasize the importance of self-implication and self-scrutiny. In “The Meaning of a Literary Idea” (1950), Trilling voiced his concern that American critics were failing to implicate themselves in their own analysis of literature, to “put the scrutinizer of it under scrutiny.”[47] Baldwin provided perhaps the fullest answer in midcentury American literature to this call for self-implication in the personal style he developed in his nonfiction.

His frequent and ambiguous use of the first person is one obvious place to start: in “Many Thousands Gone” Baldwin wrote of how “*our* dehumanization of the negro . . . is indivisible from *our* dehumanization of *ourselves*” and claims that “it is *we*, who, every hour

that *we* live, reinvest the black face with *our* guilt."[48] In the earlier part of his career, in the essays collected in *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) and *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), Baldwin used the first person to indicate his simultaneous occupation of several subject-positions. This allowed him to draw on his personal experiences of prejudice and injustice while also indicating the necessity of accepting collective responsibility for racial domination on the national scale. Baldwin explained his disorientating use of pronouns as his refusal to "write, essentially, from the position of the victim," and from his rejection of a them/us binary.[49] The undoing of the victim/perpetrator distinction, as we have seen, was a common feature of the efforts to articulate states of complicity across many literary genres in the postwar United States. Nowhere does it find more sustained and acute expression, however, than in Baldwin's deliberately ambiguous pronouns. These implicate his own self in the processes of flight, denial, and silencing that he claimed were perpetuating racial violence and injustice.

We can track Baldwin's emerging language of complicity on the microcosmic level through his grammatical choices, but on the macrocosmic level it is visible in the structuring of his key ideas about race. Several times in his career, he proposed a dialectic by which categories of Black and white were understood as rhetorically provisional and co-dependent, the fate of one always in the process of determining that of the other. We glimpse this as early as 1949 in "Everybody's Protest Novel," where Baldwin reminds his readers that "it must be remembered that the oppressed and the oppressor are bound together within the same society; they accept the same criteria, they share the same beliefs, they both alike depend on the same reality."[50] In this case, he describes a static model of human interdependence, emphasizing how oppressor and oppressed are bound by their ties not to one another but to a common, third object—a society, a belief system, a "reality"—that contains them. Oppressor

and oppressed in this spatial figure for complicity are folded together within a larger structure that frustrates any dreams of autonomy.

By the early 1960s, the co-constitution of racial categories in Baldwin's nonfiction had taken on a more dynamic and sophisticated cast. The landmark essay "Down at the Cross" (1962), for instance, expresses a conviction that America's racial nightmare can be ended through the mutual creation of consciousness:

> If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world.[51]

This characteristically ambiguous passage hesitates between two versions of the dialectic of consciousness, depending on the meaning of the word *others*. In one, it is white and Black who each create the consciousness of the other through interracial recognition. In a second, less radically, it is the conscious who bestow consciousness upon the masses of their own particular race (an echo of Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, who determines to "forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.")[52] In either reading, the Hegelian idea remains active: intersubjective relations have the power to create consciousness.

In this new formulation, one is inevitably confronted with one's implication and responsibility. The subject, once possessing consciousness, possesses also the ability to create consciousness in others. Likewise, one's own consciousness arrives not *sui generis*, but as a gift from the other. At this moment in 1962, like most writers, Baldwin was not yet using the term "complicity" in an organized way. Yet we can see how, at the historical zenith of hope for the civil rights movement, he uses the dialectic as a means to create a vision of racial

interdependence endorsing collective responsibility and solidarity, while at the same time affirming his commitment to the mysterious inner self, to the need to "complicate all battles by insisting on the human riddle."[53] This is a reparative vision of complicity as interfolded consciousness, which Baldwin believes could lead to a shift in world history. In its orientation towards justice, it resembles the versions of complicity proposed by several contemporary scholars, who see in the concept's conventional associations with resignation and disavowal a latent and reversible potential for new modes of political affiliation. For Debarati Sanyal, for example, "complicity and solidarity may be two sides of same coin."[54] The difficulty is that once we begin the work of historicizing complicity as a structure of feeling, it become quickly apparent that the moment of its crystallization in the United States in the mid-to-late Sixties was also the moment at which its reparative dimensions became impossible to sustain. Baldwin's work in that moment, as we will now see, illuminates the problem very clearly.

Survivor Guilt and Retrospection: The Sixties and After

Much has been written about the shift in Baldwin's reputation and politics during the Sixties, when what had once appeared as the universalist position from which he spoke came under increasing pressure from political and racial polarization.[55] White liberals, who had once constituted his core readership, became alienated by his increasingly frustrated polemics and his refusal to concede that racial progress was underway. Sidney Hook accused him in 1964 of propagating a "myth of collective guilt" that was "doing a disservice to the whole cause of liberalism."[56] Meanwhile, writers affiliated to the Black Panthers and Black Arts Movement, such as Amiri Baraka, Calvin C. Hernton, and Eldridge Cleaver, portrayed Baldwin as an Uncle Tom, and attacked him in undisguisedly homophobic terms.[57] An issue of *The Black*

Panther magazine in 1967 labeled him a "bootlicker."[58] It was clear enough, to Baldwin as much as to his detractors, that he had become, in his own words, "of too much use to the Establishment to be trusted by blacks."[59] He appeared a critical but ultimately unthreatening figure, found on the front cover of *Time* as well as in meetings with Bobby Kennedy about ghetto violence.

At the same time, Baldwin's aesthetics of complicity shifted away from the quasi-Hegelian model he articulated in "Down at the Cross." His attention began to turn towards the kinds of material questions that the Black Left and Martin Luther King Jr were advancing, about the value extracted from Black labor in the past and present, about the politics of unemployment, and about the role of the police as part of a repressive state apparatus.[60] Baldwin also emphasized the colonial structures underpinning American racism, and suggested parallels between the race wars being fought in the domestic ghetto and abroad. Harlem, as he wrote in a 1966 essay, should now be considered "occupied territory."[61] Finally, when discussing guilt and responsibility, in essays such as "Nothing Personal" (1964) and "The White Man's Guilt," he abandoned the universal "we" and attributed "inescapable responsibility" to white America.[62] The question was whether they recognized it or not. Poor whites in the Deep South were both perpetrators and victims of the myth of white supremacy, and were therefore "unable to examine the myth, or even to suspect, much less recognize, that it is a myth which controls and blasts their lives."[63] Yet the ideological blindness resulting from being "locked in the past" was preferable to the bad-faith innocence of Northern liberals. "The Northern liberal considers himself already saved, whereas the white Southerner has to pay the price for his soul's salvation out of his own anguish and his own flesh and in the only time he has."[64] Of the two models of white responsibility, it was the Northern liberal one, based on bad faith, that exercised Baldwin the most. As he wrote in "My Dungeon Shook," "It is the innocence which constitutes the crime."[65]

Against this set of contexts we must evaluate Baldwin's longest and most explicit treatment of complicity, *No Name in the Street* (1972). Until recently, *No Name* has received far less attention than his earlier volumes of non-fiction.[66] The lack of scholarly attention, we must surmise, has partly to do with *No Name*'s pessimism about the possibility of redemption for the United States and its entrenched cultures of white supremacy, which differs markedly from Baldwin's previous book, *The Fire Next Time* (1963). *No Name*'s bleak outlook is unassimilable to the ameliorative narratives of racial progress that held sway in the era of neoliberal colorblindness, in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, showing instead an "attunement to a darkening post-Civil Rights reality" corresponding to its composition between 1968 and 1971.[67] In addition, its formal properties present considerable challenges to the reader: *No Name* is narratively discontinuous, and shifts disorientatingly between multiple geographical locations. The book is often categorized as a memoir, but it combines that mode with several others, from confession and elegy to jeremiad, and from political commentary to history and reportage.

Taken together, these qualities make *No Name* Baldwin's most formally experimental work, and a landmark in the broader history of narrative non-fiction. It was a response not only to his own past writings, but also to those of his most prominent peers working in the New Journalism in the immediately preceding years. One was Norman Mailer, his friendship with whom he had documented in a 1961 essay, and who had published *The Armies of the Night* in 1967. Another was Joan Didion, who like Baldwin engaged Trilling's complex legacy using experimental journalism, and whose *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* had also appeared in 1967. If Baldwin had anticipated the "involvedese" of the New Journalism in his earlier work, now he reabsorbed its techniques. *No Name* returned to the poetics of self-implication and pushed it toward new insights, in the light of the racial crises of the turn of the decade and new developments in psychiatry.

No Name contains coruscating external denunciations of American ideological blindness, white supremacy and moral bankruptcy, which reprise and extend those expressed in his occasional essays and reportage earlier in the decade. Baldwin is clear from the beginning, however, that the book carries a confessional component, suggesting that its interest in the responsibility of others is to be grasped only in relation to the author's own hypertrophied sense of guilt. Early in the first part, he describes his ascent from roots in the Harlem ghetto to affluence and status as producing an experience of survivor guilt. "The guilt of the survivor," he explains, "is a real guilt." "The fact that I had 'made it' . . . meant that I had betrayed the people who had produced me."[68] Racial betrayal was the crime Cleaver had accused Baldwin of in *Soul on Ice*. The most striking aspect of Baldwin's confession is not his guilt at his affluence, however, but rather the historical associations with which it comes, for survivor guilt is a concept with a particular history.

"Survivor syndrome" was first identified by a Jewish émigré psychoanalyst called William Niederland in a 1961 paper based on his study of Holocaust survivors.[69] Baldwin's use of the term and his insistence on its reality likely refer to its popularization in the years that followed, during the "Golden Age" of Freudianism in the United States.[70] Niederland's work was given legitimacy by the mainstream press. The *New York Times* reported in 1965 that its evidence base had been bolstered by new studies of Holocaust survivors.[71] In 1967, Niederland began to argue that his ideas had applications that ran beyond the Holocaust to include survivors of fires, floods, and other disasters.[72] By the time Baldwin wrote *No Name*, the contexts in which it was used had broadened, as the frequency of its use increased. Given Baldwin's frequent allusions to the Holocaust in relation to guilt and responsibility throughout the Sixties, it seems implausible that he would emphasize the term "survivor guilt" without knowing something of its origins. He transfigured the ghetto from which he

had` escaped into the camps. Later in the book, he says of New York "I didn't love it, at least not any more, but I was going to have to survive it."[73]

The *New York Times* article explained that among the symptoms of survivor guilt were "disturbances of memory" and a "general expectation of catastrophe."[74] Survivors feared a renewal of persecution and felt compelled to exercise constant vigilance. In Niederland's own words, "survivor guilt is a form of pathological mourning . . . the survivor is stuck in a magnification of the guilt which is present in every bereaved person."[75] "Pathological mourning" and "a general expectation of catastrophe" are apt phrases to describe the affective tenor and temporal orientation of *No Name*. Baldwin performs an elegy for the movement that had ground to a halt, and confronts unprocessed grief for the Black leaders murdered in the preceding years. Survivor guilt is fundamentally retroactive in its structure. The feelings of guilt and shame may remain repressed long after the trauma occurs, only to be activated by an event years later. This retroactive structure, by which one's past is reconceived and re-narrativized in the light of a self-revelation triggered by a recent event, is a variation on Freudian *Nachträglichkeit,* or deferred action. It also provides a narrative model for *No Name*'s dealings with Baldwin's past and the history of the Black struggle in his lifetime. If we are to take seriously Baldwin's confession of survivor syndrome in the book's opening, then we must also take account of his compulsive and recursive routes back into the past, where episodes are recast as scenes of guilt and complicity, from his dealings with Algerians in Paris in the 1950s to his journey through the Deep South in 1957.

In *No Name* Baldwin worries that Black Americans, along with the New Left student movement, have entered into an unfolding catastrophe comparable to that of the Holocaust of the European Jewry. He describes the United States as a "Fourth Reich" that would "plow under the flower children—in all their variations—before getting round to the blacks and the rest of the world."[76] He worries that affluent Northern liberals are complicit in that ongoing

catastrophe. But most of all, he worries that he is one of those Northern liberals, making him both surviving victim *and* perpetrator of the escalating assault on the Black proletariat into which he was born. The concept of survivor guilt, as Ruth Leys explains, was understood to be inseparable from imitation of the aggressor:

> The humiliated prisoner, in the moment of shock, regressively defends against the persecutor's violence by unconsciously yielding to, or imitatively incorporating, the violent other. And since under camp conditions of abject powerlessness the incorporated aggression cannot be projected onto the aggressor, the violence is turned back against the victim, who experiences it in the form of a self-lacerating conscience.[77]

There are two themes to be noted here, which have significance for our reading of Baldwin. One is that of imitative identification, by which survivors identified with their oppressors and imitated their behavior. The other is what Leys calls the "unconscious bond of collusion with the situation of terror," the sense the survivor has of somehow having caused the camps.[78] Both of these themes relate to ideas shaped in Baldwin's earlier writing on racial complicity. We can see, for example, how the reparative Hegelian-style co-creation of consciousness might, in situations of extreme violence and domination, become warped into the kind of aggressor identification found in survivor guilt. In 1965, Baldwin had expressed his concern that Black Americans had come to internalize the derogatory view of them held by whites, to the extent that they felt deserving of the treatment they were given.[79] Baldwin's evocation of survivor guilt, then, fits into a larger pattern of thinking about anti-Black racism in America. The concept will help us to make sense of *No Name*'s formal complexity as a historically-specific way of *experiencing* as well as articulating complicity in the late 1960s.

The first memory in the book to address Baldwin's guilt can be understood as the trigger event or catalyst for the survivor syndrome that structures the rest of the narrative as self-consciously retroactive. The historical plotting of this moment is important. It occurs shortly after the murder of Martin Luther King Jr in April 1968, and at the beginning of the period of the book's composition (1968-1971). Baldwin thus frames his narrative by beginning with his most recent memories, before plunging, in Proustian fashion, into the more distant past. He describes his meeting with a childhood friend, and the fight they have over Vietnam. The friend supports the war, but Baldwin sees it terms that echo those of the Black Panthers, as an attempt by "the slave master" to "enslave yet more millions of dark people." Charging his friend with an attempt to "defend . . . one's murder and one's murderers," Baldwin threatens him with a beating but then withdraws, ashamed of his language and conduct.[80]

Baldwin's guilt in this episode derives in part from his behavior, but also from his status: he shared a life with his friend in the Harlem Ghetto in the Thirties and Forties, but is now a celebrity while the friend remains in the working class. Baldwin's awkward encounter with his old friend, which condenses a knot of historical, psychological, and biographical concerns—his celebrity, the ghetto, Vietnam, and the end of the Movement—precipitates all the reminiscence that follows. *No Name* is emblematic of narrative non-fiction's function in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the most promising path for American writers to discover a means of expression for complicity, by virtue of the conjunction between subjective self-reflection and the witnessing of unfolding historical events. But for Baldwin, as we will now see, it was the retrospective structure of Freudian thinking that best captured the temporality of complicity. The element of deferral in survivor guilt offered both a way of grasping the concept itself as a static entity, and a second-order means of narrativizing its emergence into

the writing consciousness. In *No Name*, in other words, complicity is the problem that was always there but can only now be recognized and named as such.

Empire, the Red Scare, and Sexual Confession

Having used it just once before in his non-fiction, the term *complicity* is used twice in *No Name*.[81] The first occasion is his account of his relationship with the New York Intellectuals in 1952 at the height of McCarthyism, and it is worthwhile to approach it in the context in which it appears. "Some of the things written during those years," Baldwin observes, "justifying, for example, the execution of the Rosenbergs, or the crucifixion of Alger Hiss (and the beatification of Whittaker Chambers) taught me something about the irresponsibility and cowardice of the liberal community which I will never forget."[82] The unspoken target of this attack is Leslie Fiedler, whose 1951 essay, "Hiss, Chambers, and the Age of Innocence," had been published in *Commentary* at a time when Baldwin was a regular contributor. Fiedler had cast the spectacle of McCarthyism as a grand drama of liberal innocence lost, accusing those of his contemporaries who had defended Hiss of sentimental fellow-travelling. His model of Cold War complicity was one of willful innocence to the brutal realities of an illiberal world, a "half-deliberate blindness" to its threat.[83] "American liberalism," he wrote, "has been reluctant to leave the garden of its illusion; but it can dally no longer: the age of innocence is dead."[84] Fiedler had seen Chambers' testimony at his trial as the object of deep longing for liberals, who "demanded of him that he speak aloud a common recognition of complicity," but were ultimately disappointed by his confession, which failed to draw the web of implication far enough.[85] For all Baldwin's evident disgust at Fiedler for having written this essay, we can see that his model of complicity resembles Fiedler's. Both were representative of their intellectual class in the Cold War insofar as they understood liberal

complicity to be founded on innocence and ignorance in the face of visible evidence of social and political harms. Fiedler saw some liberals as authentically gullible, acting in good faith on bad principles, like Ethel Rosenberg, who had "substituted sentimentality for intelligence."[86] His main target, though, was those who lack the moral strength to face up to their responsibilities and confess their failure, blocking what he saw a political imperative: the shift "from a liberalism of innocence to a liberalism of responsibility."[87] As we have seen, these words could just have easily come from Baldwin's pen in the 1960s, when his criticism of Kennedy-era and Great Society liberals was based on their disavowal of responsibility.

In *No Name*, Baldwin retained this model of complicity, but turned it against his old mentors among the liberal intellectuals of post-war New York. He accused them of the same failures they had identified in fellow-travelers:

> It seemed very clear to me that they were lying about their motives and were being blackmailed by their guilt; were, in fact, at bottom, nothing more than the respectable issue of various immigrants, struggling to hold on to what they had acquired. For, intellectual activity, according to me, is, and must be, disinterested—the truth *is* a two-edged sword—and if one is not willing to be pierced by that sword, even to the extreme of dying on it, then all of one's intellectual activity is a masturbatory delusion and a wicked and dangerous fraud.[88]

This passage makes very clear the way Baldwin's critique of post-war American liberalism was a critique from within, and that the fractious debates about guilt and responsibility consuming the mainstream of American intellectual and literary life for twenty years were really part of an internecine war within liberalism. It was precipitated from without, to be sure, by the material pressures exerted first by Communism and then by Black nationalism, but it found both its main players and its audience from among its own.

For Baldwin, the impulses that had distinguished humanistic liberalism in the early Cold War had been the right ones all along: disinterested scrutiny; the analysis of motives and intentions; empathetic attention to the suffering of others; and continuity between action and conscience. The problem was that New York intellectuals had failed to live up to their own ideals. The critical distinction he makes between himself and those contemporaries such as Harold Rosenberg, who had argued back to Fiedler, is that, in the wake of Vietnam and the Black militancy, he was returning the Cold War liberal complicity debates of the early 1950s to what they had always been about: not Communist infiltration but proximity to fascism and open race war.[89] The foundation for his argument is a continuity that became retrospectively visible from the vantage point of the early 1970s between the McCarthy era and the present. "Everything that New York has become, in 1971, was visibly and swiftly beginning to happen in 1952: one only had to take a bus from the top of the city to see how it was darkening and deteriorating."[90] The Red Scare was a red herring. The problem had been white supremacy all along.

At this point, having returned himself and his readers to the febrile atmosphere of intellectual life in New York in the era dominated by McCarthyism, Baldwin summons the term *complicity*. The liberal intellectuals bore responsibility for their ignorance because they never took that bus ride through the city, whether figuratively or literally; they did not witness the way New York's racialization had been mapped onto the city's physical spaces, and policed by the state:

> Of course, these liberals were not, as I was, forever being found by the police in the 'wrong' neighborhood, and so could not have had first-hand knowledge of how gleefully a policeman translates his orders from above. But they had no right not to know that; if they did not know that, they knew nothing and had no right to speak as

> though they were responsible actors in their society; for their complicity with the patriots of that hour meant that the policeman was acting on *their* orders too.[91]

This passage echoes Arendt's account of the Eichmann trial in the *New Yorker*, at the conclusion of which the court had judged that "the degree of responsibility increases as we draw further away from the man who uses the fatal instrument with his own hands."[92] "I never killed any human being," Eichmann had insisted. "I never gave an order to kill either a Jew or a non-Jew; I just did not do it."[93] In this passage, Baldwin echoes ideas about the structures of authority in the Third Reich which were explored in depth in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. As Arendt explained, orders to kill were not always given directly from above, but were rather authorized implicitly by the creation and maintenance of an institutional infrastructure across which responsibility could be diffused. The social deterioration Baldwin saw in New York City in 1951, and which had enabled the eruptions of racial violence in the late 1960s, presaged a collapse of social responsibility analogous to that described by Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In failing to recognize or resist this process, the liberal New York intellectuals had entered into complicity with the worst excesses of white supremacist authoritarianism, and helped to birth the calamitous present. In the American version of this story, Baldwin wrote, the ghetto had become a "rehearsal for a concentration camp."[94]

This episode about liberals and McCarthyism is embedded in a longer account of Baldwin's experiences in Paris, where he was based from 1948 to 1957 and continued to visit long after. Here he discusses the Algerians of Paris, of whom there were approximately 150 000. Although Baldwin had previously written of his Paris life, his encounters with Algerians had not commanded sustained attention. In *No Name*, however, meditations on his social and political relations with Algerians are given extensive coverage. We can conjecture that Baldwin was prompted in part by the conclusion of the Algerian War of Independence in

1962 and Algeria's decolonization. He was also likely inspired by the symbolic importance of the Algerian anti-colonial struggle to subsequent third-world independence movements and to Black nationalists in the United States (his dealings with the Black Panthers are detailed in the second part of *No Name*). He may also have been compelled by William Gardner's 1963 novel *The Stone Face*, which had dealt with the complex relationship between Black Americans and Algerians living in Paris in the period.

These developments informed Baldwin's retroactive narrativization of his own coming to consciousness of complicity. The Algerian material in *No Name* forms a conceptual as well as chronological continuity with the account of the New York intellectuals during the Red Scare, creating a constellation of personal and world-historical events drawn into relation by the force of the subject's newly acquired consciousness of complicity. The fact of their juxtaposition speaks to Baldwin's determination to understand US domestic and foreign policies as part of the same imperialist process.[95] While in the Red Scare episode Baldwin took pains to indicate his own growing distance from the Jewish liberal intellectuals who had first published his work, his reflections on Algerians in Paris bring into focus his discomfort at his implication in US imperialism and draw his own self into the ambit of complicity.

Baldwin's recollections of what he calls the "Algerian-French complexity" emphasize a combination of shared racial history on the one hand and the radical difference presented by his Americanness on the other.[96] He confronts the fact that, although both he and the Algerians shared a set of colonial origins in Africa, his green passport afforded him privileges not available to them, whom he describes as being harassed, and then, after the beginning of the war in 1954, beaten and killed by French police.[97] Their situation, he admitted, wretched though it was, "was far more coherent than mine."[98] We know that "personal incoherence" was Baldwin's favored term for describing the conflict of conscience that he saw

underpinning racial complicity, and the social encounters he had with Algerians provoked in him his own crisis of coherence. The French, he explained, categorized him and other expatriate Black Americans in contrast to the uncivilized North African Arabs as *évolué*, a term with a particular history in the French and Belgian colonies of Central and West Africa, designating the class of Black white-collar workers, or petty bourgeoisie, who had benefitted materially from colonization, and whose interests were taken to be aligned with the colonizer.[99] Baldwin's interpellation by the French as an *évolué* conflicted with his own identity as a potential ally of the Algerian independence movement, someone who had experienced prejudice in the US comparable to that which they suffered in France, "in another language, in another country [but] listening to the same old song."[100] As a result, "the question of my identity had never before seemed so crucially allied with the reality—the doom—of moral choice."[101]

As in so many of Baldwin's reflections on complicity in the 1960s and 70s, his historical model for considering and judging situations of racial complicity was provided by the Holocaust. He describes Algerians disappearing from the streets, and rumors circulating that they were being placed in camps, tortured, and murdered. He is referring to what historians now describe as the Paris Massacre of 1961. In the fall of that year, between 100 and 150 Algerians were murdered by police in Paris, either in the course of repressing street demonstrations or by death squads working clandestinely.[102] As "a member of the American colony," Baldwin explains, "we were, in general, slow to pick up what was going on around us."[103] In 1968, Baldwin had evoked the Holocaust and the myth of the "good German" in relation to Vietnam, claiming that "these are crimes committed in the name of the Christian Church, and no more than we have absolved the Germans for saying 'I didn't know it,' 'I didn't know what it was about,' 'I knew of people being taken away in the night, but it has nothing to do with me.' . . . There is no guarantee that we are not doing that, right now."[104]

Baldwin's memoir of his Paris years echoed, then, a previous set of atrocities, the rounding up of Jews during *les années noirs*. He situates himself as the good German, caught between a desire for innocence—"no one wished to believe any of this, it made us exceedingly uncomfortable"—and an insistent suspicion of racist horrors being perpetrated by the state just out of sight.[105] The parallels that Baldwin leaves implicit between *les années noirs* and the Algerian repression in Paris have been vindicated by subsequent historical revelations. Maurice Papon, the Prefect of police in Paris from 1958 to 1965, was found guilty in 1998 for his complicity in the arrest and deportation of Jews from Bordeaux under the Vichy regime. Many of the strategies used in Paris in 1961 had been developed by Papon in that earlier context, and numerous senior officers and administrators in the French police were involved in both.[106]

Baldwin's sense of helpless implication in the plight of the French Algerians serves as a definition of complicity in its own right, setting up very precisely the binary between concrete action and conscience that all versions of liberal complicity are structured by: "I could not affect their destiny in any degree. And yet, their destiny was somehow tied to mine, their battle was not theirs alone but was my battle also, and it began to be a matter of my honor not to attempt to avoid this loaded fact."[107] In one way of thinking, this is what the post-war liberal debate over complicity consists of when reduced to its barest stakes: a satisfaction of conscience's demand for guilt in lieu of fighting to change the material conditions of social and political life. Arendt had described much the same dilemma in relation to those Germans who had withdrawn from political life in the Third Reich, neither collaborating actively with National Socialism nor joining the resistance movements. Such people, Arendt judged, were motivated not by the desire for a better world, but rather from the need to be able to "go on living with themselves."[108] Baldwin could tell himself, at least,

that his uncomfortable confrontation with "the loaded fact" of his implication in the Algerian struggle was preferable to the bad faith innocence of New York liberals during the Red Scare.

For all the critique of French colonialism in *No Name*, what acknowledgement is given to the project of US imperialism, and Baldwin's place within it? Immediately after the conclusion to the Algerian episode of *No Name*, Baldwin begins a new section: "In the fall of 1956, I was covering, for *Encounter* (or for the CIA), the First International Conference for Black Writers and Artists, at the Sorbonne, in Paris." These words introduce another of the episodes of complicity activated retrospectively from the perspective of the years 1968-1971 in which he wrote. *Encounter* was a prominent cultural and intellectual magazine in the early Cold War, featuring a range of liberal editors and contributors mainly from Britain and the United States, including several members of the New York Intellectuals set with which Baldwin had moved. In 1967, *Ramparts* magazine revealed that *Encounter* had been funded by the CIA in order to project the United States as a benign power on the world stage, a champion and exemplar of cultural freedom.[109] The free-thinking, liberal independence of the magazine had been carefully enabled and instrumentalized by the state as part of its imperial project. The fall-out led to much anguish among its many contributors, who were forced to examine their consciences in a gesture we now know to be characteristic of Cold War liberal ideology itself. Baldwin, *No Name* suggests, was among them.

The long report he had written for *Encounter*, published under the title "Princes and Powers," gives an account of the conference and its speeches, which were given by some of the major figures of Black anti-colonialism, from Leopold Senghor and Alioune Diop to George Lamming and Aimé Cesaire. Baldwin reports how the conference listened to a message from W. E. B. Du Bois, read in his absence after he was refused a visa by the State Department. Du Bois denounced the American delegation: "Any American Negro traveling abroad today must either not care about Negroes or say what the State Department wishes

him to say." Baldwin judged Du Bois's words to be "ill-considered," but this view must have appeared ironic after the *Ramparts* revelations had shown Baldwin himself to have acted, indirectly and perhaps unconsciously, on behalf of the state.[110]

"Princes and Powers" emphasized the ideological and experiential distance evident between members of the American delegation and those who had experienced European colonialism directly. The United States, for all its history of racial domination and violence, was *not* to be considered an imperialist state. It remained amenable to reform: "We had been dealing with, had been made and mangled by, another machinery altogether. It had never been in our interest to overthrow it. It had been necessary to make the machinery work for our benefit and the possibility of its doing so had been, so to speak, built in."[111] It was a text-book example of both racial liberalism and the Cold War exceptionalist defense of the United States against charges, often made by Communists and the international anti-colonial Left in the period, of systemic and structural racism both at home and abroad.[112] The United States had a troubled domestic history, the line ran, but progress could be and was being made. In some abstract way, the nation remained fundamentally and constitutionally opposed to imperialism, and was always on its way towards realizing the democratic promise of its founders. Racism, here as for Myrdal in *The American Dilemma*, was external to its essential nature, disfiguring but not inherent.

Baldwin's distancing of the US situation from that of its European counterparts registered the distinctive features of American neocolonialism—its use of proxies, its financialization, its deployment of mass media strategies—but it also served to elide the counterrevolutionary activities the United States had pursued across the Global South in the long 1950s, and its support for French colonialism in Indochina and North Africa. Baldwin's implicit faith in the possibility of racial reform from within the machinery of the liberal state echoes the position simultaneously being adopted by King, for example in his 1957

Highlander speech, which emphasized the "evolutionary growth" evident "over the long sweep of race relations in America."[113] The conventionalism of this line notwithstanding, it is salutary to find Baldwin rehearsing it in the pages of a CIA-funded magazine in the wake of the Red Scare. By the time he came to write *No Name*, the deep contradictions lurking in claims to American exceptionalism were painfully visible. The Vietnam War had been raging for years and reports of American atrocities were mounting. Black radicals were increasingly voicing their solidarity with anti-colonial struggles throughout the world. Baldwin was likely moved in particular by the rhetorical shift in King's writings and speeches in the final years before his murder. King had begun to see American racism as only one of what he described as the "giant triplets" in US society, alongside "materialism and militarism."[114] From the vantage point of the early seventies, Baldwin's *Encounter* article necessarily formed another part of his constellation of retroactive complicity and liberal innocence.

Baldwin's second use of the term complicity arrives hard on the *Encounter* episode, and his explanation for why he felt compelled to return from Paris to the United States: a sighting on the Boulevard St Germain of the famous photograph of Dorothy Counts, a fifteen-year-old Black girl, being jeered on her way to School by a white mob. "Some one of us should have been there with her!" he exclaims.[115] The Counts photograph serves as Baldwin's opportunity for redemption after the moral failures of the Algerian repression and the *Encounters* episode. "I was not there" was the refrain he had liberals repeat in "The White Man's Guilt."[116] The return from Paris, Baldwin suggests, was his chance to place his body at the site of conflict, and thus to attempt what, elsewhere, he tells us that no American appears able to achieve: a "viable, organic connection between his public stance and his private life."[117] There follows Baldwin's anguished account of his journey through the Deep South in the fall of 1957.

In keeping with the retrospective temporality Baldwin employs throughout *No Name*, this section describes the return from the trip South before the trip itself, telling of his arrival at Grand Central Station, shaken by "a kind of retrospective terror." This terror, he goes on to explain, was at his discovery of a particular kind of complicity in South, existing between Black Southerners and "the Negro's friend." "I was forced to discover that, so long as your friend thinks of you as a Negro, you do not have a friend, and neither does he—your friend. You have become accomplices."[118] The articulation of this complicit relationship, in an echo of the unspoken "beast in the jungle" haunting the cocktail parties of "Many Thousands Gone," emphasizes the role of silence. "Everything between you depends on what he cannot say to you, and what you will not say to him."[119] The reason why this revelation should be such a source of terror for Baldwin is shown in the next paragraph, where he confesses his own implication. He admits having written about this trip before, "but from a distance more or less impersonal."[120] With the distance afforded by the intervening period, and with the new sexual license that had emerged in the Sixties, a new mode becomes possible and he shifts into sexual confession:

> I have never . . . written about my unbelieving shock when I realized that I was being groped by one of the most powerful men in one of the states I visited. He had got himself sweating drunk in order to arrive at this despairing titillation. With his wet eyes staring up at my face, and his wet hands groping for my cock, we were both, abruptly, in history's ass-pocket. It was very frightening—not the gesture itself, but the abjectness of it, and the assumption of a swift and grim complicity: as my identity was defined by his power, so was my humanity to be placed at the service of his fantasies.[121]

This passage synthesizes several of the themes and formal problems we have identified in Baldwin's writing, and in post-1945 American literature more generally. *No*

Name displays the retroactive temporality of complicity, by which the anti-colonial and anti-racist revolutions of the 1960s created a new language with which to redescribe and renarrativize the historical experiences of racial domination that took place in the 1940s and 50s. In a comparable way, as Leslie Fiedler's essay on Whittaker Chambers showed, liberal intellectuals of the 1950s had discovered the retroactive temporal structure of complicity, caused them to guiltily revisit their fellow-travelling of the 1930s. In this sense, the liberal discourse of postwar complicity was always and ever on the point of exchanging innocence for hard-boiled disenchantment, recognizing and renouncing the naiveties of the past in order to take up a new burden of responsibility in the present. The sexual encounter, following the popularization of Freudianism and the extension of sexual license in literary writing during the period, provided a rich terrain upon which to stage this loss-of-innocence narrative at the level of private experience. Baldwin's sexual encounter in the South is explicitly such an attempt to read from the standpoint of a ruined present the cultural hieroglyphs of the Jim Crow era he lived through. He does so by distilling and crystallizing it into a singular experience of abjection and confusion, evoking the shame, taboos, and silences surrounding both interracial sex and homosexuality.[122] He makes this experience gesture outwards to that which contains it, but which its subject cannot yet see: impersonal historical process as such. To be complicit here, in Baldwin's wonderful metaphor, is to be "in history's ass pocket," stuck inside a structure you can intuit but not leave, like a sexually profaned version of Walter Benjamin's angel of history, helplessly condemned to a rear view as the wreckage mounts.[123]

This passage and the long reflections on race and sexuality that follow it also dramatize for us how the experience of complicity *summoned* for post-war writers the necessity for a literary discourse of complexity. We can grasp here, in other words, the way in which the historical experience of complicity determined one of the high literary styles of

post-war America. Identified, excavated, and reinvented by the New York intellectuals, this style abandoned the modes of proletarian realism pioneered during the Great Depression, just as it left behind the depersonalizing modernist technologies of fragmentation found in Dos Passos, in favor of modes affording access to the involuted interior world of the individual. This mode took inspiration from the poetics of anamnesis developed by Proust and Freud, and the epiphanies of Woolf and Joyce. It drew on Dostoevskian melodrama, and, at the level of the sentence, a Jamesian complexity sensitive to ambiguity and contradiction in intentions, capable of rendering self-deception, as well as multiple and overlapping layers of consciousness. Baldwin had first been drawn into the ambit of *Partisan Review* and *Commentary* by his affinity for this mode, and it compelled the devastating critique of Wright's *Native Son* in "Everybody's Protest Novel," the essay that helped establish his reputation in 1949. Wright, Baldwin had charged, was "overlooking, denying, evading his complexity," which he saw figured as a "web of ambiguity, paradox."[124] Twenty years later in *No Name*, despite the shift in Baldwin's politics towards a more pessimistic and uncompromising vision of race politics, his fundamental commitment to the literary value of articulating this web was unchanged, and his awareness of complicity as a major issue for American culture had only developed new levels of self-reflexivity. Accordingly, we might take the term *complicity* in *No Name* to rename that latent, unarticulated complexity conjured by Baldwin in 1949, patiently awaiting the arrival of its writer many years later.

It's never made clear, however, *who* assumes complicity in that passage from *No Name*, or indeed how we are to interpret the word *assumption*. It is an aesthetically vertiginous reading experience, but one, we must suspect, that does little to illuminate the scene it reports. Baldwin is more interested in spinning the web of ambiguity than in cutting through it, for the complexity itself is the point. Complicity, in the high style of post-war liberal America that Baldwin practiced and refined perhaps more than any other writer,

demands oblique and ambiguous figurative language to represent its correspondence to the social and the historical; it requires passive moods that obscure intention; and for subject-object positions to be reversible. Clauses will accumulate over the course of the sentence, each crossing over the senses of the one before, modifying or contradicting them. Agency drifts into indeterminacy in this tangled conjunction of power, desire, humanity, identity, and fantasy. Yet we are told that there is value in the process of scrutinizing and reporting on the internal world in relation to the others that give it shape, regardless of the ends to which this exercise might lend itself. "I watched his eyes, thinking, with great sorrow, *The unexamined life is not worth living*."[125]

[1] Mary McCarthy, *Hanoi* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 129.

[2] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin, 2006), 247.

[3] James Baldwin, "The White Man's Guilt," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 723. Baldwin's emphasis.

[4] Ibid., 722.

[5] Ibid., 724. Baldwin's emphasis.

[6] See, for example, Langston Hughes' view: "To my way of thinking, he is much better at provoking thought in the essay than he is in arousing emotion in fiction. . . . In his essays, words and material suit each other." Langston Hughes, "From Harlem to Paris," in *James Baldwin: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 9.

[7] Seymour Krim, "The Newspaper as Literature / Literature as Leadership," in *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*, ed. Ronald Weber (New York: Hastings House, 1974), 180.

[8] Baldwin used the term “the private life” to refer to the process of intimate self-examination and internal dialogue that grants the individual access to their authentic or core self. See James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 386.

[9] Demott, “In and Out of Universal City,” 272. Mel Watkins, “The Fire Next Time This Time,” in *Critical Essays on James Baldwin*, ed. Fred L. Standley and Nancy V. Burt (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1988), 234. Harold Hayes, “Editor’s Notes on the New Journalism,” in *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*, ed. Ronald Weber (New York: Hastings House, 1974), 261.

[10] See Baldwin’s 1961 profile of Martin Luther King, Jr. for *Harper's*, “The Dangerous Road Before Martin Luther King”; and his 1960 report from Harlem for *Esquire*, “Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter from the South.”

[11] On Baldwin’s critique of innocence, see Jack Turner, “Baldwin’s Individualism and Critique of Property,” in *A Political Companion to James Baldwin*, ed. Susan J. McWilliams (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 301–33; George Schulman, “Baldwin, Prophecy and Politics,” in *A Political Companion to James Baldwin* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 151–70; Eddie S. Glaude Jr, *Begin Again: James Bal* *America and Its Lessons for Today* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2021).

[12] Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 32-38.

[13] Arendt's arguments that German Jews should be judged for not having mounted more substantive resistance to anti-Semitic violence, and in some cases for having "cooperated" with their oppressors, provoked widespread condemnation. For a succinct overview, see

Michael Ezra, "The Eichmann Polemics: Hannah Arendt and Her Critics," *Democratiya / Dissent* 9 (Summer 2007): 141–65.

[14] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128.

[15] James Baldwin, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter from Harlem," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 175.

[16] James Baldwin, "The Uses of the Blues," in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Essays*, ed. Randall Kenan (New York: Vintage, 2011), 77.

[17] James Baldwin et al., "Liberalism & the Negro: A Round-Table Discussion," *Commentary Magazine* 37, no. 3 (1964): 39.

[18] Baldwin, "No Name," 377.

[19] Schulman, "Baldwin, Prophecy and Politics," 152.

[20] Schulman, "Baldwin, Prophecy and Politics"; Turner, "Baldwin's Individualism"; Vaughn Rasberry, "'Now Describing You': James Baldwin and Cold War Liberalism," in *James Baldwin: America and Beyond*, ed. Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwarz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 84–105.

[21] Turner, "Baldwin's Individualism," 306.

[22] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 112.

[23] Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016); Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge After Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[24] On Baldwin and Trilling, see Michael Nowlin, "Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and the Liberal Imagination," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and*

Theory 60, no. 2 (2004): 117–40; Jay Garcia, "James Baldwin, Lionel Trilling, American Studies, and the Freudian Tragic," *James Baldwin Review* 3, no. 1 (2017): 65–88.

[25] James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 12.

[26] James Campbell, *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin* (London: Faber, 2009), 35–45.

[27] A notable exception is Douglas Field, "James Baldwin's Life on the Left: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young New York Intellectual," *ELH* 78, no. 4 (2011): 833–62.

[28] Geraldine Murphy, "Subversive Anti-Stalinism: Race and Sexuality in the Early Essays of James Baldwin," *ELH* 63, no. 4 (1996): 1024.

[29] Irving Howe, *A World More Attractive: A View of Modern Literature and Politics* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 109.

[30] On Myrdal and racial liberalism see Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscien*
Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Zeigler, *Red Scare Racism*.

[31]Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), xlv.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ralph Ellison, "An American Dilemma: A Review," in *Shadow and Act* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1967), 304.

[34] Ibid., 315.

[35] Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, xlv; Baldwin, "The White Man's Guilt," 723.

[36] James Baldwin, "Nothing Personal," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 694.

[37] Baldwin et al., "Liberalism & the Negro."

[38] James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 19.

[39] Ibid., 22.

[40] Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, xlv.

[41] Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," 22–23.

[42] Lionel Trilling, "Freud and Literature," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2008), 52.

[43] On Baldwin and James, see Field, "James Baldwin's Life on the Left," 840–42; Lyall H. Powers, "Henry James and James Baldwin: The Complex Figure," *Modern Fiction Studies* 30, no. 4 (1984): 651–67; Charles Newman, "The Lesson of the Master: Henry James and James Baldwin," in *James Baldwin: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 52–65.

[44] Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," 19.

[45] Garcia, "James Baldwin, Lionel Trilling," 74.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Lionel Trilling, "The Meaning of a Literary Idea," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York Review of Books: New York, 2008), 291.

[48] Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," 20.

[49] Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt, eds., *Conversations with James Baldwin* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 275.

[50] Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," 17.

[51] James Baldwin, "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 346–47.

[52] James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 213.

[53] James Baldwin, "'This Nettle, Danger . . .,'" in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 691.

[54] Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 1.

[55] Dan Sinykin, *American Literature and the Long Downturn: Neoliberal Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 23–46; Campbell, *Talking at the Gates*, 180–85; Glaude, *Begin Again*, 85–115.

[56] Baldwin et al., "Liberalism & the Negro," 39.

[57] Douglas Field, "Looking for Jimmy Baldwin: Sex, Privacy, and Black Nationalist Fervor," *Callaloo* 27, no. 2 (2004): 457–80.

[58] Glaude, *Begin Again*, 86.

[59] Baldwin, "No Name," 459.

[60] Sinykin, *American Literature*, 23–46.

[61] James Baldwin, "Report from Occupied Territory," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 728–38.

[62] Baldwin, "The White Man's Guilt," 722.

[63] Baldwin, "Nothing Personal," 694.

[64] Baldwin, "Report from Occupied Territory," 730.

[65] James Baldwin, "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 292.

[66] For two recent exceptions, see Sinykin, *American Literature*; Glaude, *Begin Again*.

[67] Carter Mathes, "'The Mind Is a Strange and Terrible Vehicle': Fractured Time and Multidimensional Sound in *No Name in the Street*," *African American Review* 46, no. 4 (2013): 588.

[68] Baldwin, "No Name," 359.

[69] W.G. Niederland, "The Problem of the Survivor: Part I, Some Remarks on the Pysychiatric Evaluation of Emotional Disorders in the Survivors of Nazi Persecution," *Journal of the Hillside Hospital* 10 (1961): 233–47.

[70] Nathan G. Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[71] Raymond H. Anderson, "Study Confirms Survivor Guilt: Two Doctors Describe Anxieties of Nazi Camp Survivors," *New York Times*, June 5, 1965, 21.

[72] John Leo, "Survivor Guilt Shared By Many: Study of Nazi Victims Turns Up Recurring Symptoms Finding Cause Difficult Many Wear 'Masks,'" *New York Times*, 1967, 52.

[73] Baldwin, "No Name," 384.

[74] Anderson, "Study Confirms Survivor Guilt," 21.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Baldwin, "No Name," 467, 453.

[77] Leys, *From Guilt to Shame*, 5.

[78] Ibid., 5.

[79] Baldwin, "The White Man's Guilt," 724.

[80] Baldwin, "No Name," 364.

[81] For the first, see James Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 75.

[82] Baldwin, "No Name," 371.

[83] Fiedler, "Hiss, Chambers," 22.

[84] Ibid., 24.

[85] Ibid., 23.

[86] Ibid., 21.

[87] Ibid., 24.

[88] Baldwin, "No Name," 371. Baldwin's emphasis.

[89] Harold Rosenberg, "Couch Liberalism and the Guilty Past," in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Da Capo, 1994), 221–40.

[90] Baldwin, "No Name," 373.

[91] Ibid. Baldwin's emphasis.

[92] Arendt, *Eichmann*, 247.

[93] Ibid., 22.

[94] Baldwin, "No Name," 453.

[95] On the tendency of US imperialism to conceal itself by domesticating its global concerns, see Hosam Aboul-Ela, *Domestications: American Empire, Literary Culture, and the Postcolonial Lens* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 21–22.

[96] Baldwin, "No Name," 378.

[97] Ibid., 377

[98] Ibid., 367.

[99] Ibid., 368 On the evolué, see Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Political Thought of Patrice Lumumba," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, ed. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (New York: Routledge, 2001), 156–200.

[100] Baldwin, "No Name," 368.

[101] Ibid., 377.

[102] Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[103] Baldwin, "No Name," 375.

[104] James Baldwin, "White Racism or World Community?," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 756.

[105] Baldwin, "No Name," 375.

[106] House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, 34.

[107] Baldwin, "No Name," 377–78.

[108] Arendt, "Personal Responsibility," 44.

[109] Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (The New Press, 2013), 320–33.

[110] James Baldwin, "Princes and Powers," in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 146.

[111] Ibid., 148.

[112] On Baldwin's "strategic American exceptionalism," see Cheryl A. Wall, "Stranger at Home: James Baldwin on What It Means to Be an American.," in *James Baldwin: America and Beyond*, ed. Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwarz (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2011), 35–52.

[113] Zeigler, *Red Scare Racism*, 36–44.

[114] Martin Luther King Jr., *All Labor Has Dignity*, ed. Michael K. Honey (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2011), 9. Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 240.

[115] Baldwin, "No Name," 383.

[116] Baldwin, "The White Man's Guilt," 723.

[117] Baldwin, "No Name," 385.

[118] Ibid., 388.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid., 390

[121] Ibid.

[122] On Baldwin's discussion of his homosexuality, see Field, "Looking for Jimmy Baldwin."

[123] See also Kevin Birmingham, "'History's Ass Pocket': The Sources of Baldwinian Diaspora," ed. Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwarz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 141–58.

[124] Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel."

[125] Baldwin, "No Name," 391. Baldwin's emphasis.

Part 2, Chapter 3

The Complicities of Black Crime Fiction

Hardboiled and noir crime fiction was always about complicity. In the process of crime fiction's evolution from the nineteenth century to the present, the introduction of complicity as a major theme is a milepost. The thematization of complicity distinguished the blood-and-thunder violence of the early pulp detective narratives from the ethical melodramas of private conscience that gave Dashiell Hammett and then Raymond Chandler access to the realms of highbrow literary fiction in the 1930s and 40s.[1] Hammett's Continental Op and Chandler's Philip Marlowe are troubled by the suspicion that their investigations have compromised them in some ethical sense, making them obscurely culpable for the very crimes they are tasked with investigating. They have been touched and tainted by something from which they ought to have remained separate. Worrying, in the novel's most famous line, that he will go "blood-simple, like the natives," Hammett's Op admits that he has "arranged a killing or two in my time, when they were necessary. But this is the first time I've ever got the fever. It's this damned burg. You can't go straight here. I got myself tangled at the beginning."[2] Chandler's equivalent of the Op's feverish entanglement is most explicitly expressed at the conclusion to *The Big Sleep* (1939), when Marlowe muses on his own position compared to that of Rusty Regan, the missing person he had sought, only to discover that he had been dead all along, his body decaying in the Sternwoods' oil sump: "You just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of where you died or where you fell. Me, I was part of the nastiness now."[3]

The experience of recognizing that one is "part of the nastiness," is, in the classic existentialist reading of hardboiled fiction, a factor in its universal philosophical relevance

and its articulation of a fallen world in which moral certitude is unavailable.[4] Yet this ahistorical frame obscures the centrality of both big business and racial projects to crime fiction's turn to complicity in the interwar period. The plots of *Red Harvest* and *The Big Sleep* turn on the detective's agreement to serve old white men grown rich on the appropriation of natural resources: Elihu Willsson (mining of minerals) and General Sternwood (extraction of oil). In each case, the detective's complicity is bound up with the industry itself, in which the authors themselves were historically implicated. The Op's "burg" in which one "can't go straight" is a mining town called Personville, modelled on the Butte and Anaconda districts in Montana, where Hammett had worked as a strike-breaker for the Pinkerton agency in the early 1920s.[5] In writing *The Big Sleep*, Chandler drew on his previous experience as an executive in the Dabney Oil Company, and his knowledge of the La Brea Tar Pits on which the Sternwoods' oil field is based.[6] The choice of an oil sump as the location for Regan's decaying body allowed Chandler to bring the moral corruption of the criminal underworld into dialogue with the material impact of burgeoning capitalism in the US, built on the appropriation of natural resources. To be tangled up, to be "part of the nastiness," was in classic hardboiled to be caught up in the web of interwar capitalism, and the harms it causes.

Yet these considerations of primitive accumulation in the interwar United States tell only part of the story. We need to return to Hammett's simile, "blood-simple like the natives," to access a more comprehensive sense of the way classic hardboiled conceptualized complicity as entanglement. The Ops fears not only that he is becoming tangled in the violent web of capital, but also that his white racial identity is compromised by his interactions with the ethnic working-class of Personville, betokened by the "swarthy foreign-looking men in laborers' clothes" he sees in the streets.[7] This concern that his own trajectory might be bound up with those of the "natives" introduces a distinctively colonial component to the ideology

of classic hardboiled.[8] The Op dreams of hunting down a "small brown man who wore an immense sombrero," catching him just as the man throws himself from tall building.[9] The Op's violent impulses align him with the very object of his racial hatred and cause both parties to plummet together, locked into in a shaming public spectacle: "we dropped giddily down towards the millions of upturned faces in the plaza, miles down." For Chandler, meanwhile, the identification of an oilfield as the symbolic center of *The Big Sleep* invites a reading of Marlowe's initiation into "the nastiness" as a figurative blackening of his pristine pseudo-English identity as the chivalric knight, an oily smear on his racial self-identity.[10] Certainly, Chandler's own sense of privileged white Englishness, obtained during his youth in early-twentieth-century London, required constant reaffirmation. He, too, thought of the ethnic working class in straightforwardly colonial terms: "I arrived in California with a beautiful wardrobe," he wrote in 1950, "a public school accent . . . and a contempt for the natives which, I am sorry to say, has persisted to this day."[11]

The reliance of classic hardboiled fiction on the racist tropes of its day are well-known, as is its project of constructing and shoring up a white male subjectivity.[12] What I want to highlight is the way the core codes and formulas of the genre—its DNA—were formed in the image of the structure we have been calling complicity. The genre's very distinctiveness lies in the way it affords a narrative grammar and a set of aesthetic resources for articulating this structure of feeling. Hardboiled fiction's dependence upon complicity cannot be overstated, constituting a relationship so deeply embedded—so *naturalized*—that it takes an effort to wrestle it to the surface of our attention. Once recognized, however, it cannot be unseen. Without the disorientating narrative of ever-increasing entanglement, without the repertoire of complicit motifs haunting the urban environment, and without the ethical melodrama of the detective figure's participation in actions they know to cause harm, our grasp of the genre as a coherent set of expectations begins to fall apart. For this reason,

the hard-boiled tradition promises a literary history of complicity that reaches past the watershed of the Sixties all the way to the present.

Throughout its history, the genre has remained remarkably durable even as the historical factors that determined its origins have long since faded. The New Deal liberalism that underpinned it in the 1930s gave way in the post-war years to the strictures and disciplines of the Cold War liberalism we have spent much of this study discussing.[13] This in turn was superseded by the neoliberal consensus of the 1980s, which produced its own thematizations of complicity in crime fiction. We will see that hard-boiled and noir fiction have also registered historical shifts in the nature of racial ideologies in the US: the visceral biological racism evident in Hammett's work was gradually superseded in the postwar period by the "ethnicity paradigm" for conceptualizing race culturally, leading eventually to the "colorblind racism" of the neoliberal era, represented in twenty-first century crime fiction by writers like Attica Locke.[14] We should be alert, however, to the possibility that such historical distinctions mask deeper continuities that come into view only once we recalibrate our historical lenses and recognize the long histories of racial projects against non-white peoples in the United States, and the longevity of classically liberal principles—the privileged autonomy of the (white, male) individual, the sanctity of property rights, deep skepticism of state governmentality and so on—since the nation's founding. From this perspective, the obdurate persistence of complicit tropes, codes, and motifs in American crime fiction is less surprising than it is predictable.

The tensions undergirding these two perspectives on genre and history, between long continuities and finer period distinctions, carry a particular valence when it comes to Black crime fiction. In Black post-1945 history, the question of progress is moot. The meliorist narrative of the overcoming of Jim Crow during the civil rights struggle, overreach by Black militants in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and finally the arrival of a post-racial age in the

late-twentieth century, with Barack Obama serving as its apotheosis in the twenty-first, was as ideologically blind as it was historically inaccurate. Versions of this fairytale, however, have been expressed consistently since the outbreak of World War Two, forming the keystone of racial liberalism in the United States for decades.[15] This framework for narrativizing postwar Black history through reform articulates racial progress, Nikhil Pal Singh has argued, as “something that is paradoxically already accomplished and never quite complete,” obscuring more compelling long histories of unfinished struggle spanning the last eighty years.[16] From Michelle Alexander’s naming of contemporary mass incarceration as “the new Jim Crow,” and assessments of Obama’s use of technologies of violence against non-white people at home and abroad, to the resurgence of Afro-Pessimist thought in the twenty-first century, the overall tenor of the broad spectrum of radical scholarship on the state and Black America since 1945 has emphasized continuity above historical change.[17]

In turning to the literary history of Black crime fiction since World War Two, then, we might hypothesize that a comparable dialectic of impasse and progress might be observed in the evolution of the genre itself. The literary-historical logic of modern mass genres makes them ideal case studies for examining this dialectic. I am thinking here of what Theodore Martin calls the “double lives” of genre fictions: “with one foot in the past and the other in the present; they contain the entire abridged history of an aesthetic form while also staking a claim to the form’s contemporary relevance.”[18] Genre fictions, in Martin’s formulation, allow aesthetic objects to “think historically,” navigating between histories that appear concluded and a contemporary moment that is not yet past. A reading of Black crime fiction allows us to place the history of racial complicity we have built in the course of this study within an expanded frame that extends into the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and testifies to its continued relevance under evolving historical conditions.

In the following analyses, then, I will be tracking the history of a genre and the history of Black revolutionary struggle. They confirm the rise of Black radicalism in the second half of the 1960s as a watershed moment for both, at which racial complicity, a concept still "in solution" in the discourse of post-war liberalism, crystalized as its defining contradiction.[19] The tide of urban uprisings between the Watts Rebellion in August 1965 and the Attica Prison Rebellion in September 1971, brought complicity into focus and changed its meaning for Black crime fiction. I begin by explaining how Himes' crime fiction registered this moment with particular force, and how it precipitated the end of his genre experiment. Following that, we will see how it shaped Mosley's "Easy Rawlins" series and Locke's debut novel *Black Water Rising* (2009). Both writers use historical settings in the Sixties as a means to access and examine the predicament of the complicit race liberal and to put ethical and political pressure on that figure. Their fictions articulate, however, a later evolution in complicity as a structure of feeling, one that coincides with the arrival and consolidation of the new Black middle class and the arrival of the neoliberal consensus. We glimpsed a preview of these concerns in James Baldwin's retrospective guilt in *No Name in the Street* about escaping the Harlem ghetto into material security. It was a view that drew on but further complicated the older one by introducing a new self-consciousness about class and wealth accumulation in the wake of the Movement.

Chester Himes: 'There Ain't No Other Side"

Perhaps the most famous statement of complicity in the canon of African-American literature comes not from Himes but his one-time friend and rival, Ralph Ellison. In first chapter of *Invisible Man* (1952), the narrator's grandfather admits to being a "spy in the enemy's country," and counsels his grandson to "live with your head in the lion's mouth": "I want you

to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open."[20] Ellison draws here on the tradition of the trickster figure in the African-American folk tradition, suggesting how deception, duplicity and disguise can be deployed by Black Americans as strategic resources for negotiating Jim Crow America.[21] The way the narrator develops into adulthood indicates that Ellison was also interested in the limits to political action launched from such a position of complicity. Invisible man's compliance with the prescribed social roles he is offered in childhood are superseded by his migration to Harlem and his turn to radical non-complicity in the form of the Brotherhood, loosely based on the Communist Party USA. This affiliation is in turn discarded for the experiments with individualist identity that form the latter part of his *bildung*. Yet *Invisible Man* never entirely sheds its concern with the grandfather's strategy of complicit resistance. The novel's conclusion, which finds the narrator sheltering in the basement of a white building and tapping its electricity supply, tells us that some form of complicit resistance may still offer a legitimate strategy of tactical deferral if not radical action, a historical hibernation before awakenings to come.

The friendship of Ellison and Himes, despite their shared commitments to the anti-racist Left during the wartime period, broke down at the close of the Forties.[22] Ellison was on the verge of recognition by the cultural establishment, but Himes was disaffected with the white-controlled publishing industry and departed the US for Paris. From the perspective of the crime fiction he published there, Himes appears as Ellison's mass-genre double, a disreputable and undisciplined counterpoint to the highbrow liberal that Ellison was in danger of becoming. Crime fiction, in this schema, was Himes' way of continuing his dialogue with Ellison by other means. He retained the focus on the race politics of Harlem evident in *Invisible Man*, and that novel's preoccupation with the position of the complicit Black subject, but he did so through the absurd hyperbolic violence of American hard-boiled pulp,

and with his masterstroke: having his Black detectives working for the New York Police Department, with their heads firmly in the mouth of the lion.

The contrast between the two is instructive: while for Ellison the recognition of racial complicity represented a moment to be subsumed in a Hegelian-style journey of Black consciousness, for Himes it was an impasse that generated the very absurdity and excess that fueled his crime fiction. In the Harlem cycle, positions of complicity are no longer chosen or taken up strategically as they are in *Invisible Man*. There is no long game, no deferral of action. They are, rather, inhabited perforce as a social and material fact of ghetto life in Harlem. The effect of this distinction is to remove from Himes' work the dramas of ethical dilemma that we have observed elsewhere in the literature of complicity, and to return in one sense to the naturalist mode associated with his mentor Richard Wright, in which the criminal actions of his protagonists are determined in the last instance by the degraded conditions of the environment in which they are obliged to live, making them simultaneously victims *and* perpetrators of violence. For the effect of poverty and prejudice is to compel Harlem's inhabitants to turn their violent impulses in upon themselves.

Like John Hawkes in the previous decade, Himes used the motif of cannibalism within a degraded environment to articulate situations of complicity. This is evident in one of his characteristic bird's-eye descriptions of the city, which assume a synoptic viewpoint seemingly located outside the zone of complicit abjection from which to look in:

> Looking eastwards from the towers of Riverside Church, perched among the university buildings on the high banks of the Hudson River, in a valley far below, waves of gray rooftops distort the perspective like the surface of the sea. Below the surface, in the murky waters of fetid tenements, a city of black people who are convulsed in desperate living, like the voracious churning of millions of hungry

> cannibal fish. Blind mouths eating their own guts. Stick in a hand and draw back a nub.[23]

Himes' depiction of a depraved "city of black people . . . convulsed in desperate living" makes it clear that Harlem is in effect an impoverished domestic colony of the United States. Later, in *Blind Man with a Pistol*, he has a white cop compare arriving in Harlem to "having fallen into the middle of the Congo."[24] This conceptualization of poor Black inner-city neighborhoods as domestic colonies generating their own internal logic of violence later became common among the radical Black intellectuals. By 1967, Black Panther founder Huey P. Newton was talking of "the Black colony of Afro-America."[25] Chronologically, however, Himes's representation of Harlem coincides with work in the Francosphere by Jean-Paul Sartre in his anti-colonial essays of the 1950s, and by Frantz Fanon, one of the most powerful influences on the Sixties generation of the Black Left.[26] These were figures who, as we saw in Part I, shared at this time a more materialist view on race prejudice and criminality as determined by objective structural conditions rather than, as racial liberals held, by moral failures.

Himes later published an article on Harlem in *Présence Africaine*, a French radical periodical with which both Fanon and Sartre were associated.[27] He and Fanon certainly knew one another's work well: Fanon read Himes's early fiction and cited it approvingly in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952), while Himes later endorsed Fanon's work in a 1970 interview with John A. Williams.[28] In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon's description of the "native zone," with its claustrophobic atmosphere of immiseration, sounds remarkably like Himes' Harlem:

> A world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of

> meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire.[29]

In Fanon's account of decolonization, as in Himes' account of post-war Harlem, the material depredations of the colonial ghetto, with its filth and hunger, are the cause of internal violence between its inhabitants. But for Fanon, who like Ellison took his cues from the Hegelian dialectical method, the stage of internal violence among the colonized was to be transcended as revolutionary anger turned towards the colonizer and developed into a new stage. In Himes' crime fiction, by contrast, there is no transition toward revolutionary maturity for the people of Harlem. Instead of the latent liberatory power expressed in Fanon's dialectic imagination we find an airless space of self-inflicted pain and damage.

Once we begin to read Himes' Harlem in terms of domestic colonialism—as the abject "native town" to the prosperous settler zone of a booming post-war Manhattan south of 110th street—then it becomes possible to grasp his Black cops as part of a longer history of racially complicit roles, encompassing those created to assist in maintaining the hierarchy imposed by the occupation. In the American context, this group might include figures from the nineteenth century and earlier, such as the "Indian Scouts" which assisted the US army or the Black slave-driver on the Southern plantation. Yet, in the wake of the Holocaust and Nazi occupations of European nations during World War Two, a new context suggested itself among Black radicals. The *Sonderkommando* was the most degraded and extreme version of the post-war figures of complicity, naming a Jew compelled through the threat of death to assist in the running of the concentration camps. In post-war Paris, however, where Himes made his decision to write crime fiction set in Harlem with Black cops, the more obvious example was that of the wartime collaborator discussed by Sartre. James Boggs was one of the earliest among Black radicals to make the connection between European wartime collaboration and Black cooperation in domestic colonialism in the United States. In "The

City is the Black Man's Land," Boggs wrote scathingly of what he called "safe negroes" in the political apparatus of US cities, who were "appointed to administrative posts or hand-picked to run for elective office. In Hitler-occupied Europe such safe members of the native population were called collaborators or Quislings."[30] In the context of Black radical discourse in the long Sixties, as well as of Himes' Parisian expatriation, it makes sense to reframe Coffin Ed and Grave Digger Jones in terms of a global reconsideration of racialized collaboration that included both the international decolonization movement and the aftermath of World War Two.

In *The Real Cool Killers* (1959), several of the tensions inherent in Ed and Grave Digger's pseudo-colonial structural complicity are made explicit. The two cops are tasked with finding the killer of Ulysses Galen, a white sales manager shot down on 127th Street. As the plot unravels, it becomes clear that Galen, in an allusion to the character of Geiger in Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, is a depraved pornographer. His victims are young Black women, whom he photographs in bondage scenarios with whips and chains. The investigation reveals that that one of the young women caught up in Galen's pornography racket is Coffin Ed's own daughter, and that Galen was killed by her friend Sissie Dunbar as revenge. Grave Digger and Ed are thus caught in the uncomfortable position of being compelled to achieve justice for a man who has committed racially-motivated crimes against one of their own children. Galen's murder exemplifies the risks undertaken by any rich white man entering the colony of Harlem and consorting with the "natives." Grave Digger explains to the Police Commissioner, "it's only once in a blue moon they get to see a white man being chased by one of them. A big white man at that. A chance to see some white blood spilled for a change, and spilled by a black man, at that." Yet, as Grave Digger goes on to admit, it is precisely his job to facilitate white incursions into Harlem: "That's what Ed and I are up against when we try to make Harlem safe for white people."[31] These incursions, as is made clear in another

exchange between Grave Digger and a white patron at a brothel, are in Himes' world typically made for hedonistic leisure: "If you white people insist on coming up to Harlem where you force people to live in vice-and-crime ridden slums, it's my job to see that you are safe."[32] This typically hard-boiled emphasis on the tension between "the job" and the ethics of the detective signals how Himes adapted the crime genre to articulate the violent impasse in which he saw racial liberalism dying.

Grave Digger at one stage confronts Ready the pimp, who provided Galen with access to women in the neighborhood. He leaves Ready with an outburst of frustration:

> I'm going to try to find out who killed Galen because that's what I'm paid for and that was my oath when I took this job. But if I had my way I'd pin a medal on him and I'd string up every single goddamn one of you who were up with Galen. You've turned my stomach and it's all I can do right now to keep from beating out your brains.[33]

This is a moment at which the precise nature of the unbearable position in which Grave Digger and Ed are placed is expressed with unusual clarity and directness. Grave Digger's turning stomach and his efforts to "get his temper under control" register the barely-repressed affective excesses generated by this position.[34] The exercise of discipline over unruly affects, and the danger that those affects may erupt regardless, has always been a prominent component in the melodramatic logic of hard-boiled fiction, and successful negotiation of this challenge is the guarantor of the detective's heroism. Himes' achievement in his use of the genre, then, is to transform the figure of racial complicity into a positive if fraught model of hard-boiled masculinity.

This process of humanization, Himes made clear in a 1970 interview, was intentionally undertaken. "Most genuine black detectives are reactionary, fascist-minded, and very unlikeable," he explained. "I had to create a pair of characters the reader would like."

Challenged by Michael Fabre on whether Grave Digger and Ed "betray the black community," he answered: "Not the way I created them. This is what makes my creation unique. . . I replaced a stereotype. I've taken two people who would be anti-black in real life, and made them sympathetic."[35] The question of betrayal returns us once again to the specter of the race traitor in *Invisible Man*'s grandfather, the "spy in the enemy's country" who had been "a traitor all my days," as well as to those other historical figures such as the Black slave-driver or more recently for Himes, the Quisling under Nazi rule. Reading Himes' interview response alongside the evidence of *The Real Cool Killers*, it is evident that Grave Digger and Ed were intended to inhabit an uncomfortable space of complicity in relation to the state they distrusted. However, that very inhospitality, and the claustrophobic structural pressure exerted by the ghetto, presented an opportunity for their creator to humanize rather than, as the orthodoxy would have it, to dehumanize the figure of complicity.[36] This opportunity disrupted the mass-cultural reproduction of stereotypes, of both the Uncle Tom and the inhuman fascist-minded cop.

During next decade, as Himes continued to publish crime novels in Marcel Duhamel's *Série Noir*, racial tensions erupted into urban violence across the United States, and decolonizing wars were fought by revolutionary groups across Africa, from Algeria to Kenya. The ideological foundations of Himes' genre gambit, that the inhabitation of claustrophobic positions of structural complicity with state power might be presented as heroic hard-boiled masculinity, became increasingly difficult to maintain. The room for maneuver within the confines of that position diminished, pushing it beyond discomfort to suffocation. After the Newark Rebellion of July 1967, Himes published "On the Use of Force" in the French magazine *Le nouveau Candide*, comparing the treatment of Black Americans by whites with that of Jews by Nazis during the Holocaust. It was a common enough rhetorical move among

Black intellectuals of the period. Writing of how "the majority of whites feel they didn't make this problem," he claims,

> That, of course, is as nonsensical as the German people rejecting responsibility for the Nazi's extermination of the Jews. For all their seemingly political naiveté, social irresponsibility, and overall stupidity, American whites know this. They have a problem which they can not dismiss, can not keep hidden, and do not wish to solve. The only thing left to them is to kill it.[37]

Newark represented a watershed moment for Himes, after which the racial tensions suppressed by white America were in the open for all to see, in the form of a Holocaust against the Black urban underclass. In terms that echoed those of Newton and the Black Panther Party, Himes advocated armed and violent resistance. The space in which complicity could remain a legitimate form of resistance was closing. Sides had to be taken.

This set of historical circumstances makes of Himes' final two Harlem novels, *Plan B* and *Blind Man with a Pistol*, both composed in the late Sixties, fascinating case-studies of genre evolution. In the theory of genres, from the work of the Russian Formalists of the early-twentieth century onwards, the question of what determines the evolution of genres has long been a topic of debate. In particular, how should one conceptualize the interrelationship of internal formal determinants—the sense in which the literary system has its own autonomous formal logic, which demands new adaptations of its conventions—with external social factors such as shifts in class dynamics or modes of production?[38] In Himes' final Harlem novels, the fundamental structures of hardboiled masculinity and ethics that he had adapted from the genre in his representation of racial complicity were radically undermined by social upheavals of the Sixties. Arguments for the rights of Black communities in the United States to undertake their own policing had long been part of Black thought, exemplified by W. E. B

Du Bois and James Stemons in the 1920s and 30s, and running as far as the establishment of the Organization for Black Power in 1965.[39] These arguments had provided Grave Digger and Coffin Ed with legitimacy as genre protagonists, offering the Harlem novels a fragile if recognizable ideological coherence. After the uprisings of summer 1967, however, radicals such as Boggs were writing of a new Civil War, "to be fought over who should control the cities," in which the "blue occupation army" of the police department were the vanguard troops.[40]

Accordingly, Grave Digger and Coffin Ed, as Harlem's own Black cops, witness their own redundancy in terms of both plot and genre logic, their function as shock absorbers for the material pressures of ghetto life in a racist state obsolete. Himes himself expressed the problem baldly in *Plan B*:

> They had worked for the establishment as hatchet men on their race, had kissed the white man's ass, and now that they were considered no longer useful and had been thrown out in the street, they had turned on him with hatred and resentment, venomous and murderous like blind snakes in the heat of August.[41]

Grave Digger and Coffin Ed are presented as race traitors who spent their lives in anticipation of a historical role that never arrived. *Plan B*, started in 1967, was Himes' attempt to imagine the consequences of a world in which positions of complicity were no longer available, in which a race war was fought without compromise or concession by a single-minded cadre of revolutionary Black Americans. The result was that Grave Digger and Coffin Ed were obliged to die in the novel's strange, abrupt conclusion. Digger shoots Ed because of Ed's refusal to endorse the revolutionary violence proposed by Tomsson Black, a consequence of his fear that "I got to live here with the white man . . . and all my family and friends got to live here. And you're gonna get us killed."[42] Digger, in turn, is executed by Black as an

insupportable risk to the movement, and someone who might give up information under torture.

Himes abandoned his attempt to adapt the hardboiled genre to address an armed Black rebellion in 1969, claiming “I’ve tried to imagine what would happen, and write it as a documentary. But I’ve had to stop. The violence shocks even me.”[43] The novel he turned to instead, and which transpired to be the final installment of the Harlem cycle, addressed itself directly to the urban uprisings of the previous several years. If *Plan B* explored organized violence in a world without complicity, then *Blind Man with a Pistol* explored the futility of spontaneous, disorganized violence. The tangle of plot threads is drawn together only by their resistance to resolution within the formal conventions made available by the genre. Murders are either unsolved or else result from absurd misunderstandings. At the heart of the tangle, however, lies the riddle which Grave Digger and Coffin Ed are tasked with solving by their white superiors in the NYPD: who is responsible for the Harlem riot that unfolds throughout the narrative? Himes had long been preoccupied with the causes of urban uprisings. In an early essay on the so-called “Zoot Suit Riots” of 1943, he admitted “your guess is as good as mine on how they began.”[44] In “On the Use of Force,” he once again posed “the principal question; what is it, exactly, that precipitates a riot in the United States?” This time he was unequivocal: “Every race riot in the United States has stemmed from the one single fact that a white law enforcement officer has committed a brutality against a black citizen. This is a flat statement of fact. There are no exceptions.”[45]

In *Blind Man with a Pistol*, Himes took an absurdist approach to the question he had answered so straightforwardly before, deliberately invoking the crisis of guilt and responsibility which had resurfaced in the late 1960s, and emphasizing the obsolescence of individualized notions of culpability. In an italicized “interlude” breaking up the narrative between chapters fifteen and sixteen, he provides a conversation between Ed, Digger, and

their superior officer, Lieutenant Anderson. In response to Anderson's demand that they explain who started the riot, they tell him it was Abraham Lincoln: "he hadn't ought to have freed us if he didn't want to make provisions to feed us." Trying again, Anderson asks "All right, all right, who's the culprit this night, here, in Harlem." Digger answers: "Skin."[46] Several chapters later, the scenario and the question are repeated, leading to a series of cryptic answers followed by the same conclusion:

> Some call him lack of respect for law and order, some lack of opportunity, some the teachings of the Bible, some the sins of their fathers,' Grave Digger expounded. 'Some call him ignorance, some poverty, some rebellion. Me and Ed look at him with compassion. We're victims.'
>
> 'Victims of what?' Anderson asked foolishly.
>
> 'Victims of your skin,' Coffin Ed shouted brutally, his own patchwork of grafted black skin twitching with passion.
>
> Anderson's skin turned blood red.
>
> 'That's the mother-raper at the bottom of it,' Grave Digger said. 'That's what's making these people run rampage on the streets.'[47]

In this way, Himes' final Harlem novel satirizes and dispenses with the drama of individual culpability upon which the genre of crime fiction usually subsists, offering instead a plethora of materialist and crudely ideological explanations for racial inequality in America, all of them underpinned in the final analysis by the project of white supremacy. After ten years and eight published crime novels, this is the moment at which Himes judged that the crime genre was no longer equipped to represent the contemporary crisis. The violence on the streets of US cities could not be understood as the responsibility of individuals, but rather emanated from the deep ideological commitment of white Americans to white supremacy.

From this moment, there is no coming back for Grave Digger and Coffin Ed. *Plan B* had already explored the apocalyptic consequences Himes foresaw for his Harlem cops if they followed the revolutionary implications of their rejection of personal culpability in dealing with Black violence. In *Blind Man with a Pistol*, they resign themselves to the *status quo* but are shorn of all their hardboiled heroism. When confronted with a gang of rioters, Ed proclaims "we're the law," but receives in return the rebuke "then you on whitey's side." Ed responds, "you'll find there ain't no other side."[48] This is Himes' expression of the complicit impasse, in which the situation precludes entirely the possibility of finding other positions from which a politics of resistance might be launched. As Huey Newton had written just two years earlier: "the police should be the people of the community in uniform. There should be no division or conflict of interest between the people and the police. Once there is a division then the police become the enemy of the people."[49]

Walter Mosley: The Watts Rebellion and Class Complicity

The Newark Rebellion of 1967 affected Himes in a way that unsettled the logic of his crime writing practice by removing complicity from the range of available positions for the anti-racist Left. In a comparable way, the Watts Rebellion of 1965 shaped the crime fiction of Walter Mosley. Mosley was just 13 at the time, but had lived most of his childhood in Watts. When he later came to write a series of hard-boiled detective novels set in the neighborhood during the immediate post-World War Two era, they were saturated with historical prolepsis, written from the perspective of one who could not unlearn the lessons of the uprisings. The Easy Rawlins novels are deeply concerned with complicity, and in particular with a form of it that was only brought fully to the surface by the radicalisms of that period: that of a liberal Black middle class caught between a desire to advance the cause of Black freedom and a fear

of losing the privileges they had gained for themselves. The Watts Rebellion emblematized the historical contradictions that structured Mosley's creation of Easy Rawlins, a Black unemployed migrant from Louisiana via Houston, who reads Du Bois and Claude MacKay in his spare time, but enters the *rentier* class by doing detective work for the LAPD and the white business elite.

In a 2009 essay on Hammett's *Red Harvest*, Mosley set out his view that the hard-boiled world is one in which there is "no innocence," but "a choice between evils."[50] His vision of hard-boiled complicity is conventional, understanding it as ubiquitous, transhistorical and even universal. He draws on the standard atmospheric tropes discussed earlier in this study. In a hard-boiled nation like the United States, he writes, we are all "breathing the same air of corruption" wherever we are in the social hierarchy, in a way that flattens the distribution of responsibility.[51] In the opening of his debut novel *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990), DeWitt Albright, the violent underworld boss, makes a comparable remark when persuading Easy to work for him: "walk out your door in the morning and you're mixed up in something. The only thing you can really worry about is if you get mixed up to the top or not."[52] The language used here reaches into the historical DNA of the genre and its codes of complicit enfoldedness within large but indeterminate systems of harm. Hammett's Op got "tangled up in something," just as Easy gets "mixed up in something."[53]

In reading Mosley's fiction it becomes clear that his representation of complicity is racialized in a way his essay does not explicitly recognize. When Easy gets mixed up with Albright in order to pay his mortgage, he is not only implicating himself in the criminal underworld. He is also choosing for himself a boss whose very essence seems to crystallize Mosley's hallucinatory vision of whiteness:

> I was surprised to see a white man walk into Joppy's bar. It's not just that he was white but he wore an off-white linen suit and shirt, with a Panama straw hat and bone shoes over flashing white silk socks. His skin was smooth and pale with just a few freckles. One lick of strawberry-blond hair escaped the band of his hat. He stopped in the doorway, filling it with a large frame, and surveyed the room with pale eyes; not a color I'd ever seen in a man's eyes.[54]

This passage self-consciously reverses the valence of the opening to Chandler's *Farewell My Lovely* (1940), in which Marlowe and his Irish companion Moose Malloy enter a Black club on Central Avenue, which prompts a notoriously racist physiological description of the club's bouncer. Mosley inverts the genre's convention of fetishizing the visible signs of blackness by focusing instead on the oppressive, unsettling, and totalizing whiteness of the power elite in Los Angeles. Easy's willingness to work for Albright in *Devil in a Blue Dress* sets the pattern for his accommodations with white power throughout the series, whether that is investigating murders for the racist Los Angeles Police Department, informing on Jewish communists for the FBI, or finding missing persons for wealthy white businessmen. Easy's acknowledgement of his complicity, and its costs for the Black residents of South Central Los Angeles, are essential components of his hard-boiled disposition, by which he reproduces at the level of personal conduct the structural injustices visited on Black Los Angeles. As he explains in *Black Betty* (1994), "It was a tough life that we lived and I couldn't deny my own complicity with the pain."[55]

The Easy Rawlins series is distinguished from most earlier iterations of the US hard-boiled tradition by its unusual interest in its detective's ownership of real estate. While the tension between the domestic and criminal worlds has been a long been a feature of hard-boiled fictions, the Easy Rawlins novels dwell extensively on their protagonist's shifting status as both an owner of his own home *and* as an entrepreneurial landlord. When we first

encounter Easy in 1948 in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, he is drawn reluctantly into the criminal world in order to make mortgage repayments on his newly-acquired, modest house in Watts. By his next appearance in 1953 in *A Red Death* (1991), he has invested in rental properties, including an apartment building in Compton, at the time a fast-developing more respectable alternative to South Central and Watts for Black Angelinos. His own home moves too: Easy leaves Watts in 1956 for the Black middle-class View Park area, before ending up in an integrated neighborhood between La Brea and Fairfax in the early 1960s.[56] In each novel, his decision to engage the criminal world is made at least in part in response to some threat to his real-estate portfolio, whether through taxes (*A Red Death*), redevelopment projects (*Black Betty*), and even the Watts Rebellion itself (*Little Scarlet*, 2004). These novels are by no means ghetto pulps. If Himes' Harlem cycle focused almost exclusively on degraded ghetto life, the Easy Rawlins series, by contrast, engages a narrative of Black uplift in a booming Los Angeles, where opportunities increased for the new migrant population to enter an expanding if precarious Black middle class.[57]

The novel that most clearly foregrounds the knot of complicit entanglements that Easy is caught up in is *A Red Death*. Its mystery plot is generated by Easy's decision at the height of the Red Scare to inform for the FBI on a Jewish communist, Chaim Wenzler, despite developing an admiring friendship with him. In addition, *A Red Death* highlights how Easy's role as landlord with a "secret financial life" is haunted by the possibility that one of his tenants, Poinsettia Jackson, has committed suicide because of her inability to pay Easy's rent.[58] Poinsettia appears in the novel's opening, begging for flexibility on her payments, and shortly after is discovered hanging dead in her apartment. "Poinsettia took her own life because she lost her beauty and her job, and when she begged me to let her at least have a roof over her head I took that too."[59] These two strands of responsibility come together in

what Easy describes as a “weird scene,” in which the detective attempts to evade his conscience by getting drunk on whiskey, and then poisons a set of ants’ nests:

> I saw no more than four of them actually die, but I knew that the hives were full of the dead. I knew that they had fallen where they stood, because poison is very deadly in close quarters. Like in Dachau when we got there, the dead strewn like chips of wood at a lumberyard.[60]

That Mosley should choose to evoke the Holocaust here should perhaps not surprise us. As we have observed several times, the Holocaust remained throughout the second half of the twentieth century a privileged reference point for writers and thinkers addressing racial complicity. Mosley gave Easy his father’s record of service in the European theater during World War Two, a past he alludes to in every novel in the series. This enables frequent comparative perspectives to be articulated between Nazi anti-Semitism and American anti-Black racism. The allegorical passage featuring the ants is striking for the way Easy positions himself not as Holocaust victim, as in the common identification between European Jews and African Americans proposed by Himes, Baldwin, and others in the discourse of the post-war anti-racist Left, but rather as *perpetrator*. Easy takes up the role of camp guard at Dachau, gassing his prisoners and then surveying them with horrified fascination. The red ants, accordingly, play out the roles both of Poinsettia, who also died in the process of being evicted from her home, and of Wenzler, the “red” Jew, who is betrayed by Easy and then murdered later in the novel. In this way, Easy’s role shuttles between his racist treatment at the hands of white power and his own sense of responsibility for the suffering of the Jewish and Black Americans that form his community.

There are two distinct levels, then, to Mosley’s articulation of hard-boiled complicity in the Easy Rawlins novels. On the one hand, we find the genre’s familiar narrative motif in

which the detective's labor indirectly benefits the unjust systems of power and profit sustained by his employer. This is the same logic we see in the Op's work for Elihu Willsson, or Marlowe's for General Sternwood. On the other, we discover a more unusual form of complicity, in which the detective's social and financial advantages, gained though his labor, are leveraged as a means to enter a new social class, and thus to exchange the means of bare subsistence for the means of accumulation. Easy becomes a landlord for the aspiring Black middle class and moves his residence to West Los Angeles, but continues to operate his private-eye business from Watts. He makes his money from a combination of privileged access to the street cultures and underworlds around Central Avenue, and middle-class flight from Los Angeles' historically Black neighborhoods.

Easy is benefitting from a system comparable to the one Cedric J. Robinson influentially identified as "racial capitalism." Robinson's pioneering work used the term to name a system in which the function of racial projects is principally to maximize the appropriation of surplus labor for capital, so that "capitalists required racism in order to be able to police and exploit workers."[61] Easy may not exploit workers directly, but his success as a *rentier* depends upon income generated by his property assets as a result of racial hierarchy and segregation. His success as a detective, meanwhile, derives from his ability to inhabit and exploit the social divides created by racial inequality. When Mosley began the series, the consensus view among US sociologists, most prominently William Julius Wilson in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), was that Black middle-class out-migration and the creation of deprived racialized ghettos were mutually reinforcing processes.[62] Mosley's own biography followed the pattern of out-migration from Watts, his own family moving west to the more affluent Pico-Fairfax area around the time of the Rebellion.[63] In *A Red Death*, Easy also holds himself responsible for a symbolic betrayal of left-wing Jewish organizers operating in the Black community. This carries additional historical freight, given the

targeting of Jewish businesses during the course of the Watts Rebellion, which weakened the coalition between Blacks and Jews that had sustained the post-war anti-racist Left and the long civil rights movement. The way Easy benefits from the very structures and processes that led to the Watts Rebellion and the Great Uprising of the following years brings a new dimension to the history of complicity in Black crime fiction.

The political and ethical stakes of the Easy Rawlins novels can be clarified by reading them alongside the powerful critique of a complicit Black middle class that gathered momentum in the second half of the 1960s. This critique was evident in the formation of a new political bloc of Black proletarians in northern and western cities, which rose up and set about the destruction of privately-owned property. Yet we can also access that critique in the archive of Black radical thought in the period, taking impetus from E. Franklin Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957). Among Black Nationalists such as Amiri Baraka and Harold Cruse, the intellectuals of the Black Panther Party, and independent Marxists such as Boggs, what united an otherwise diverse set of views and priorities was a consistent attack on the Black middle class as complicit in structural racism. This complicity derived from their cultural integration, their allegiance to a gradualist racial liberalism, and their desertion of the Black proletariat, evidenced by their flight from historically Black inner-city neighborhoods.

Frazier had claimed that "the black bourgeoisie suffers from 'nothingness' because when negroes attain middle-class status, their lives generally lose both content and significance."[64] But in the thinking of Boggs, the integrationism of the Black middle class was more straightforwardly "class collaboration." In 1968 he castigated the Kerner report, set up to investigate racial unrest in the wake of Newark, for its emphasis on the role of Black professionals in rebuilding inner city communities:

> These black collaborators, like the African rulers who recruited their own people for slave traders, or the 'house n*****s' and drivers who identified with 'old Massa' on the plantation, or the black elite today governing the neo-colonies in Africa, are supposed to have enough of a stake in the operation of the system to cooperate in pacification programs against their black brothers and sisters.[65]

To be sure, Easy Rawlins is not part of the Los Angeles political elite. In the wake of the Great Uprising, however, Black figures did appear with greater frequency and prominence among the political elite, such as Los Angeles's first and only Black mayor, Tom Bradley. Bradley followed a comparable trajectory to Easy, from Texas to South Central during the Great Migration, and then west to the affluent Black Los Angeles suburbs. The LAPD played a crucial role for both: while Easy works unofficially for them as a private investigator, Bradley joined their payroll and rose up the ranks, before becoming mayor in 1973. Bradley's long reign in the mayor's office ended abruptly in the wake of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising, between the publication of the third and fourth Easy Rawlins novels. What Mosley does give to Easy, however, through his real-estate investments and middle-class status is precisely what Bogg's calls "enough of a stake in the operation of the system" to draw him into positions of reluctant complicity with white power. In this way, Mosley's work takes a political problem identified in the Black radical discourse of the late Sixties and projects it backwards to an earlier period of relative stability and even innocence for Black Los Angeles, where it foreshadows what is to come.

Little Scarlet (2004) finally sees Easy live through 1965 and the Watts Rebellion itself. In a television interview, Mosley described his personal experience of arriving home on the first day of the Rebellion to find his father "drinking and almost crying," riven by the conflict between his desire as a member of the Black proletariat to join the uprising, and his knowledge that the actions of those involved were, in a moral sense, "individually wrong."[66]

It is a classic moment of hard-boiled melodrama generated by the contradiction between personal ethics and material conditions. In the opening pages of *Little Scarlet*, Mosley adapted this conflict for Easy, describing the tension of his character's efforts to restrain his revolutionary impulses: "It had been like that for the past five days: me holding myself in check while South Los Angeles went up in the flames of a race riot. . . . I stayed shut up in my home, in peaceful West L.A., not drinking and not going out with a trunk full of Molotov cocktails."[67] As with Coffin Ed and Gravedigger Jones, Easy painfully embodies and contains a set of social contradictions in his conflicted hardboiled persona, his masculinity tested by its ability to repress the affective manifestations they precipitate. Like Himes' cops, his desire to protect his family rubs against his anger about racial injustice. The new factor, however, is the impulse to defend his private property: "I hated the destruction of property and life," he explains, sounding for all the world like a reasonable liberal, "but what good was law and order if it meant I was supposed to ignore the fact that our children were treated like little hoodlums and whores? My patience was as thin as a Liberty dime, but still I stayed in the house to protect my makeshift family."[68]

In *Blind Man with a Pistol*, Himes plunges us directly into midst of an urban riot, but Mosley gives us an uprising that is always happening elsewhere. Although at their peak, Easy remarks that "nothing will ever be the same again," by the end of the novel, "the riots were beginning to wear off. Life was becoming what was to become normal after all of the stores had been burned down. . . . The black revolutionary scattershot aimed at overthrowing the oppression of white America was over, or at least it seemed to be.[69] Despite this failure, the Rebellion does have consequences, which are experienced as a shift in the structures of class and race affiliation, whereby the integrity of a non-white coalition in the South Central community is threatened by the emergence of new forms of social consciousness with conflicting interests. One iteration of this ideological fracture is introduced when Easy

confronts a Black looter abusing the Jewish owner of a community shoe shop, but it is most visible when Easy is denied entry to a high school in which he serves as the building supervisor, because it is being protected by the National Guard. A white superior intervenes to allow Easy into the building and the Black sentry scowls at Easy as he passes:

> And there I was again, caught in the contradictions brought to the surface by the riots.
>
> The sentry took his job seriously. Who was the enemy? Black people. Even though he was colored himself it was his job to bar our entry and he intended to keep us out. Even though I didn't know it at the time, that was the beginning of the breakup of our community. It was the first time you could see there was another side to be on. If you identified with white people, you had a place where you were welcomed in.[70]

Easy reflects the way the social realignments of the Sixties "brought to the surface" contradictions that pre-existed the crisis. Although he identifies the sentry as the collaborator, it is Easy himself who is folded into—"caught"—in these contradictions. Mosley hints at the complicity of Easy's own fluid positionality, shuttling between street hood and respectable property owner, middle-class family man and hardboiled private eye, with one foot in South Central and another in the integrated western suburbs. He thus gives Easy a role akin to the "spy in the enemy's country" proposed in *Invisible Man*. It is likely that Mosley had this malleable set of identities and loyalties in mind when he identified his protagonist in one interview as "a concretized *Invisible Man*."[71] What Easy discovers in 1965 is that the cultural fluidity of that persona, and its ability to hold multiple conflicting interests in tension, no longer proffered the liberatory impulses they once did, but rather led to crises of conscience.

Easy possesses an acute self-consciousness, which leads him to recognize his complicity with Black and Jewish suffering, to experience dreams and anxieties articulating his racial guilt, and to map with some precision his own ethical conflicts. This is in sharp

contrast to his friend Mouse, a character who features in every novel in the series. Mouse is Easy's foil, a childhood friend from the ghettos of Houston, whose willingness to use extreme violence without troubling his conscience throws Easy's tendencies and dispositions into relief. Mouse also helps Easy to complete his cases successfully, since he undertakes acts of cold-blooded violence that Easy cannot countenance, and he often intervenes to save Easy from dangerous situations. The creation of Mouse is a powerful and original innovation within the conventions of the hard-boiled genre, in which the detective conventionally acts alone. It also disrupts the nineteenth-century formula established by Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle, in which the detective's companion serves as observer without agency in the development of plot. From the perspective of our focus on the question of complicity, Mouse's importance lies in his absolute inability to grasp or even give credence to the crises of conscience that mark Easy off as a classically liberal subject.

Easy is an accomplice to Mouse's many murders, often witnessing and benefitting from them, but Mouse responds to his misgivings with comic incomprehension: "'Guilt?' He said the word as if it had no meaning. 'You mean like what *I* did makes you feel bad?'"[72] Mouse defamiliarizes complicity as an alien structure of feeling, with the effect of heightening its prominence in the fiction. For Mouse, Easy's scruples are risible, belonging entirely to white culture. As he puts it at the close of *Devil in a Blue Dress*, when Easy criticizes him for unnecessarily killing another character, "you learn stuff and you be thinkin' like white men be thinkin'. You be thinkin' that what's right fo' them is right fo' you."[73] Mouse does in fact possess a strong sense of responsibility, but his commitments to others are entirely determined by the contingencies of everyday life, and are directed at the individuals with whom he shares that life, such as his family and Easy himself. Easy remarks: "Mouse didn't understand guilt or abstract responsibility. . . . He'd shoot it out with the law for his own people but Mouse couldn't hold a moral concept in his brain."[74] These remarks establish

a potential dialectic between an abstract, conceptual ethics represented by Easy's omnipresent dilemmas of complicity, and an instinctive street morality represented by Mouse, which coheres through intimacies of shared blood and shared spaces. The political limits of the Easy Rawlins novels lie in the novels' inability to imagine a way past this binary, which serves well enough in generating the tensions of narrative and characterization demanded by the genre, but cannot articulate its own politics of justice or liberation.

This is only another way of saying that the world of the Easy Rawlins novels cannot afford the conditions for its own abolition. Indeed, we might suggest that the logic of the genre cycle itself, which Himes by contrast was willing to terminate in recognition of its limitations, demands just such a suspension of this dialectic of moral responsibility in order for it to follow its commercial logic. Mouse's sexually aggressive masculinity, his insistence a radically separate Black identity with its own moral code, and his criticism of Easy's tendency to think "like white men" align him with a crude vision of Black Nationalism. In a tantalizing detail, the name and age of Mouse's son LaMarque seems to echo that of Marquette Fry, whose arrest is widely understood to have sparked the Watts Rebellion. Yet in reality the Black Nationalist rejection of complicity as a legitimate disposition towards race politics went far beyond Mouse's street morality. It demanded a strategic approach to coalition building, endorsing an identification of shared material interests between parties that is inimical to Mouse's instinctive moral style. The Easy Rawlins novels cannot acknowledge the arguments advanced by the intellectuals of the Black Power movement, such as Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton in 1968, that liberal morality of the type that troubles Easy's conscience can never provide the basis for a politics of liberation, since "politics results from a conflict of interests, not of consciences."[75] Rather, as we will see echoed in the more recent crime fiction of Locke, Mosley's insistence on the crises of conscience experienced by the Black middle class serves to throw into relief the limits imposed by the

genre's conventions, and highlights those areas of political and historical experience for which it cannot account.

Attica Locke: "I Remember Only to Speak Up" that I

If Mosley's historical crime fiction was inspired by the experiences of his father, a Black World War Two veteran who refused to take part in the Watts Rebellion, something very similar is true of Locke. Her 2009 debut *Black Water Rising* is set in Houston in 1981, and features her detective-protagonist Jay Porter. Nearing middle-age when *Black Water Rising* takes place, Jay was a member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the late Sixties and a radical activist in the Movement. Now a lawyer with a pregnant wife and one foot in the middle class, chance events lead him to investigate the criminal activities of a large oil corporation at the peak of Houston's oil boom. As a coda to the novel, Locke published a statement later included in the paperback edition, "Behind *Black Water Rising*," in which she emphasized the significance for the novel of her parents' experiences as part of the Black generation born during and just after World War Two. She describes how, in the 1980s, her parents separated and exchanged the trappings of student radicalism for the signifiers of middle-class life. "It was as if they, and the other members of the new 'Cosby' era had decided that if politics couldn't completely free a race of people, then surely economic prosperity would."[76] Though Locke explains that the chance event with which *Black Water Rising*'s plot begins is lifted directly from her family history, the more deeply rooted influence on her crime fiction, as in Mosley's work, is her attempt to understand and dramatize a transitional moment in the Black US history that her parents represent. In Locke's case, this transition is from the political commitments of the Black middle class in

the long civil rights era to the accommodations with neoliberalism and colorblindness of the "Cosby era."[77]

When we read Locke's work alongside that of Himes and Mosley, it becomes clear that crime fiction has long provided a narrative and stylistic grammar with which to reckon with the most uncomfortable truths about racial liberalism. More particularly, this comparative triangulation sheds light on how the mid-to-late Sixties has become a compulsive site of return for Black crime fiction, because of the way Black militancy simultaneously recognized and delegitimized that complicit structure of feeling the genre had always reproduced. If the Newark Uprising of 1967 determined the course of Himes' crime fiction, and the Watts Rebellion of 1965 shaped Mosley's, then we need to pay attention to the cue indicated by Attica Locke's name, chosen for the Attica Prison Rebellion of 1971. The legal indictment made against her protagonist Jay Porter, when he is arrested as a student activist in the late Sixties, is "inciting a riot."[78] Locke's engagement with crime genre conventions addresses the social mystery we have already observed in Himes and Mosley, as well as in a succession of government reports reaching back past the Kerner Commission to Gunnar Myrdal in 1944: what is the social logic of spontaneous uprisings by the Black proletariat, and how is the rest of America—including the Black middle class—to respond? It would be easy enough to imagine the machinery of *Black Water Rising*'s mystery plot functioning effectively without Jay's backstory. However, his participation in the SNCC, his contact with Carmichael, and his arrest following a COINTELPRO sting, allow Locke to place her critique of Reaganite neoliberalism and big oil within a more expansive history of racial capitalism. Jay's task in the present of the novel, as he uncovers the inner workings of corrupt city politics and price fixing, is to recover and repurpose his youthful commitments to radical non-complicity, developed amid the discourse of Black Power.

The passages in *Black Water Rising* that narrate Jay's student radicalism take us directly to the novel's political stakes. Locke describes Jay's gradual disillusionment with SNCC and the principle derived from King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, that "moralism is a real and potent weapon."[79] In reaction, Jay attempts to set up his own organization focused on the global, imperial dimensions of the Black struggle in the United States. This work is driven by his conviction that racism in the United States should be addressed as part of a global imperialist problem: "Which meant that the problems in Africa, say—poverty and the imperialism that created it—were as important as the problems here at home; they were actually one and same."[80] These words recall efforts by Newton, Davis, Carmichael and others to transnationalize the politics of Black Power in the US by forging alliances between anti-colonial movements throughout the world. Locke is especially interested in Carmichael and includes him in the novel's plot. He gives his speech "Toward Black Liberation" at the University of Houston and intoxicates Jay with a combination of intellectual force and hip style. Locke quotes directly from the historical speech, choosing those parts in which Carmichael directs his anger at Black middle-class integration, by which "a few more Negroes, armed with their passports—their university degrees—escape into middle-class America."[81] This moment speaks to Locke's concern with her parents' own entry into the middle class in "the Cosby era," and suggests how the discourse of Black Power anticipated their relinquishing of Movement radicalism in return for material comforts and securities.

The principal conflict that *Black Water Rising* stages, then, is between Jay's recuperation of Movement radicalism and his desire to shore up his precarious standing as a member of the new middle class. He achieves the latter by keeping his head down, wearing a suit and playing by the rules. The parallels with Easy Rawlins are apparent: for both, the situation of complicity is generated by the desire for shelter from precarity—from debt,

homelessness, arrest and imprisonment—reached via accommodations with the dominant social order and access to the Black middle class. While the dilemmas faced by Easy in the Forties and Fifties are proleptic, Locke's association of these concerns with the post-civil rights generation corresponds to the sociological scholarship.

Since Bart Landry's landmark study in 1988, sociologists have found a broad consensus over the development of an expanded "New Black Middle Class" in the Sixties and Seventies following the legal gains won during the civil rights struggle.[82] This new class is understood as qualitatively different from the old Black middle class by virtue of the changed expectations of its members, who no longer feared violence, intimidation and social restriction in the way their parents did.[83] In "Behind *Black Water Rising*," Locke's describes the United States of the early Reagan era as "caught up in a collective fit of amnesia over the wounds and hurt feelings of the 1960s and '70s,"[84] but this problem of forgetting has particular valence for the Black middle class. As bell hooks argued, for example, the Black middle class became guilty of a "historical amnesia," which, in the changed post-civil rights landscape, made them unable to see how "their class power mediates racial injustice in a way that it does not for the poor and underprivileged." The members of the new Black middle class thus "collude in the nation's refusal to acknowledge the solace and protection class privilege affords them."[85] The mediating effect described by hooks means that what Jay Porter experiences as racial discrimination might be experienced by the Black working class as class discrimination. Jay partially recognizes this transition in the experience of the Black middle class when he looks around in an expensive club in Houston and realizes he is the only Black man in the room. "Money, it seems, is the New Jim Crow."[86]

Scholars of the new Black middle class have also concluded that this social stratum was disproportionately precarious, since its members tended to fall back into poverty at a greater rate than the white middle class.[87] Jay's anxieties about maintaining his recent gains

in lifestyle and security are thus representative. When he takes $25,000 of “hush money” from the Cole Oil corporation, intended to buy his silence over their instigation of a murder, Locke notes, “in this envelope is Jay’s first house. A downpayment, maybe, with money left over to pay off his car and the loan he took out to start his practice. . . . It’s a way out of the tight spot he is in. All just for keeping his mouth shut.”[88] As this quotation suggests, for Locke, complicity becomes equated straightforwardly and almost literally with oral silence. *“Keep your fucking mouth shut,”* he admits to himself, is the law he’s lived by.[89] Jay keeps his hush money, in the knowledge that “his greed makes him look complicit in a crime much bigger than the one he first imagined.”[90] Acts of public speaking, by contrast, are represented by Locke as displays of political and moral strength. It is notable that the moment of Jay’s arrest and downfall in 1969 corresponds to the interruption and hijacking of his activist speech by Cynthia Maddox, his then-girlfriend and suspected FBI snitch. Accordingly, *Black Water Rising* ends with Jay’s resolution to launch a case against Cole Oil, despite knowing that he has little chance of success, in a symbolic resumption of his earlier truncated speech: “It doesn’t matter, not really. It only matters that I remember to speak up.”[91]

The political vision of *Black Water Rising* is thus circumscribed by this displacement of justice by an affirmation of speech and protest as values in themselves. The tension between Locke’s political commitments to an unfinished struggle for justice and her fidelity to the conventions of the crime novel—in which justice, in however limited a sense, must be served in the conclusion—becomes awkwardly visible here. The emphasis on voice and speech over and above direct action as a step towards dissolving the folds of complicity is to be found in other fictional representations of the afterlife of the Movement, most strikingly in Alice Walker’s *Meridian* (1976). There, the eponymous protagonist rejects the imperative toward violence espoused by more militant factions of the Movement after King’s murder, and devotes herself instead to getting out the Black vote. She tells one doubter: “It [voting]

may be useless. Or it may be the beginning of the use of your voice. You have to get used to using your voice, you know. You start on simple things and move on . . ."[92] Whether knowingly or not, Locke's work takes its place in a post-civil rights literary tradition that has grappled with the question of how to respond to the radical rejection of complicity in the late Sixties while remaining faithful to non-violence. She writes:

> I understand where the Panthers were coming from. You can only see your people beaten up, cheated and murdered so many times before you want to pick up a gun. But the older I get, the more I believe that Dr. King's philosophy of non-violence is the only sustaining principle. Violence is always a dead end—a spiritual dead end. Holding a gun only proves how scared you are.[93]

It is doubtful that a fully-elucidated politics of social justice can legitimately be expected from a novel so clearly identifying itself with the hard-boiled tradition. *Black Water Rising* takes us back to the primary mythologies of primitive accumulation that we noted in Hammett's *Red Harvest* and Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, where the appropriation of natural resources for the benefit of private interests provides both a material economic grounding for the plot and a metaphoric register with which to express complex problems of guilt and responsibility (Robert Towne's screenplay for *Chinatown* [1974] is another key landmark in this genealogy). The crimes that Jay uncovers during the course of the novel are not limited to murder. On a macro-economic scale, they include Cole Oil's price gouging, by which it secretly stores vast quantities of oil in an old salt mine during periods of low prices in order to create scarcity and artificially inflate its value. Locke describes how such lucrative deceptions are dependent upon the working-class labor of Black longshoremen in the Port of Houston, who, in one of the novel's subplots, wage an industrial dispute against racially discriminative employment practices. This component of *Black Water Rising* enables a complex interplay of metaphorical possibilities. The crude oil that Jay discovers bubbling

above the surface of the mine refers us to his own commitments to racial justice, repressed since his arrest as a radical student, and to a Black proletariat he is always trying to leave behind. Jay's discomfort at this neo-Gothic return of the repressed is palpable as he gets the oil, "loose but thick," all over his hands and "finds that it coats his skin completely, covering his pores, clinging like a parasite that has found an unsuspecting host."[94] Yet the manner by which Locke's "black water" bubbles up into plain sight and attaches itself to Jay also points to the persistence of structural racism in a United States that had supposedly become colorblind and left its discriminatory past behind in its embrace of neoliberal ideologies.[95]

Cynthia Maddox, who in the present of *Black Water Rising* has since become mayor of Houston, explains to an assembly of protesting Black longshoremen: "I want us to reach Dr. King's dream, where race doesn't matter, where black men and white men can get equal pay and benefits, overtime and a chance at management." Locke's narrator adds wryly: "Jay doesn't remember that part of King's speech."[96] Cynthia's plan "is to simply wipe the slate clean from this moment forward, to wipe out three hundred years of racial discrimination in a single afternoon."[97] This aspect of the plot corresponds to the racial amnesia Locke describes in the "Behind *Black Water Rising*" essay. This aggressive forgetting, combined with the increasing prevalence of abstract liberal frames for thinking about race in that period—ones insisting on the prioritization of individual choice and meritocracy above systemic and structural accounts of social inequalities—is what made Reaganite neoliberalism a new kind of racial project.[98] Locke's novel takes account of this historical development in an explicit way, but its imaginative world, like that of Mosley's Easy Rawlins series, is unable to plot routes out of it. At the conclusion of the novel, even if Jay has resolved to launch his case against Cole Oil, the longshoremen's union appears to have been outmaneuvered by Maddox's colorblind rhetoric.

The temporal logic of the hard-boiled novel has always made it difficult for the form to articulate possible futures, at least just ones. Its gaze is a rear-facing one, which registers with melancholy the passing of obsolescent forms of sociality while searching for ways of coping in the alienating world of the present.[99] Locke manages this genre logic self-consciously and with uncommon skill, turning both union organizing and the civil rights movement into objects of mourning, but ones which nevertheless might be understood as resources for some future struggle against twenty-first-century capitalism. The structure of complicity we observed in classic hard-boiled fiction has thus been effectively reversed. For Chandler and Hammett, the autonomous white liberal male gradually finds himself, in the course of his investigations, enfolded in a web of criminality, blackened and destined to become "part of the nastiness." Jay Porter's complicity with a corrupt corporate capitalism lies precisely in his atomization and false sense of fully responsibilized liberal autonomy. These must be overcome through the realization that his lifeworld and its future is entangled with those of others in his community, forming a relationship of co-dependence and collective care in which histories of racial identity remain visible.

[1] On Hammett and highbrow, seeMark McGurl, "Making 'Literature' of It: Hammett and High Culture," *American Literary History* 9, no. 4 (1997): 702–17. On Chandler and highbrow, see Will Norman, "The Big Empty: Chandler's Transatlantic Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 20, no. 4 (2013): 747–70..

[2] Dashiell Hammett, "*Red Harvest*," in *The Complete Novels*, ed. Steven Marcus (New York: Library of America, 1999), 135.

[3] Raymond Chandler, "*The Big Sleep*," in *Stories and Early Novels*, ed. Frank MacShane (New York: Library of America, 1995), 763–64.

[4] Stephen E. Faison, *Existentialism, Film Noir, and Hard-Boiled Fiction* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008).

[5] Thomas Heise, "'Going Blood-Simple like the Natives': Contagious Urban Spaces and Modern Power in Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 51, no. 3 (2005): 485–512.

[6] Raymond Chandler, *The Annotated Big Sleep*, ed. Owen Hill, Pamela Jackson, and Anthony Rizzuto (New York: Vintage Crime, 2018), n.55-57.

[7] Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 108.

[8] On colonialism and hard-boiled fiction, see Stanley Orr, *Darkly Perfect World: Colonial Adventure, Postmodernism, and American Noir* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010).

[9] Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 142.

[10] On Marlowe becoming "less than white," see Liam Kennedy, "Black *Noir*: Race and Urban Space in Walter Mosley's Detective Fiction," in *Criminal Proceedings: The Contemporary American Crime Novel*, ed. Peter Messent (London: Pluto, 1997), 44.

[11]Raymond Chandler, *The Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler*, ed. Frank MacShane (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), 236.

[12] Selected key studies of race and gender in hard-boiled fiction include Megan E. Abbott, *The Street Was Mine: White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Christopher Breu, *Hardboiled Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2005); Maureen T. Reddy, *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

[13] Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

[14] On "the ethnicity paradigm," see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 1994), 14-23. On "color-blind racism," see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, fifth edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018).

[15] Joseph Darda, *The Strange Career of Racial Liberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022).

[16] Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 39.

[17]Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 203–17. For an overview and evaluation of Afropessimist thought, see Jesse McCarthy, "On Afropessimism," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 20, 2020, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/on-afropessimism.

[18] Theodore Martin, *Contemporary Drift: Genre, Historicism, and the Problem of the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 6–7.

[19] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 133.

[20] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (London: Penguin, 1965), 17.

[21] Houston A. Baker Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 187; Julia Sun-Joo Lee, "Knucklebones and Knocking Bones: The Accidental Trickster in Ellison's *Invisible Man*," *African American Review* 40, no. 1 (2006): 461–74.

[22] On the relationship between Himes and Ellison, see Lawrence P. Jackson, *Chester B. Himes: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 2017).

[23] Chester Himes, "*A Rage in Harlem*," in *The Harlem Cycle*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Payback, 1996), 102.

[24] Chester Himes, "*Blind Man with a Pistol*," in *The Harlem Cycle*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Payback, 1997), 198.

[25] Huey P. Newton, *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Writers and Readers, 1972), 87.

[26] On Himes and Fanon, see Michael Denning, "Topographies of Violence: Chester Himes' Harlem Domestic Novels," *Critical Texts: A Review of Theory and Criticism* 5, no. 1 (1998): 10–18; Christopher Raczkowski, "Chester Himes, Frantz Fanon and the Literary Decolonization of Harlem," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 23, no. 1 (2012): 1–25.

[27] Chester Himes, "Harlem, Ou Le Cancer de l'Amérique," *Présence Africaine* 45 (1963): 46–81.

[28] Raczkowski, "Chester Himes," 1.

[29] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 32.

[30] Boggs, "City," 40.

[31] Chester Himes, "*The Real Cool Killers*," in *The Harlem Cycle*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Payback, 1996), 320.

[32] Ibid., 238-9.

[33] Ibid., 274.

[34] Ibid., 274.

[35] Michael Fabre and Robert E. Skinner, eds., *Conversations with Chester Himes* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 85.

[36] On Chester Himes' detective fiction and the state, see Margaret Hunt Gram, "Chester Himes and the Capacities of State," *Studies in American Fiction* 39, no. 2 (2012): 243–68; Andrew Pepper, *Unwilling Executioner: Crime Fiction and the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 180–202.

[37] Chester Himes, "On the Use of Force," *PMLA* 132, no. 2 (2017): 474.

[38] See, for example, Yury Tynianov, "On Literary Evolution," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 66–78.. On Russian Formalism's account of genre evolution, see Jurij Streidter, *Literary Structure, Evolution and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Revisited* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[39] Khalil Gibran Muhammed, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 227–28.

[40] James Boggs, "The Basic Issues and the State of the Nation," in *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker'* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 75.

[41] Chester Himes, "*Plan B*," in *The Harlem Cycle*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Payback, 1997), 527.

[42] Himes, *Plan B*, 533. Himes started the novel in 1967, abandoned it in 1969, and returned to it in the early 1970s, publishing several sections as short stories before abandoning it again. Robert E. Skinner and Michael Fabre, "Introduction to *Plan B*," in *The Harlem Cycle*, by Chester Himes, ed. Robert E. Skinner and Michael Fabre, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Payback, 1997), 383–400.

[43] Himes, *Conversations*, 22.

[44] Chester Himes, "Zoot Riots Are Race Riots," in *Black on Black: Baby Sister and Other Writings* (London: Michael Joseph, 1975), 224–25.

[45] Himes, "On the Use of Force," 475.

[46] Himes, *Blind Man with a Pistol*, 323.

[47] Ibid., 342.

[48] Ibid., 328.

[49] Huey P. Newton, "Functional Definition of Politics," in *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1995), 47.

[50] Walter Mosley, "Poisonville," in *A New Literary History of America*, ed. Werner Sollors and Greil Marcus (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 598.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (London: Serpent, 1990), 27.

[53] Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 104.

[54] Mosley, *Devil*, 9.

[55] Walter Mosley, *Black Betty* (New York: Norton, 1994), 21.

[56] Walter Mosley, "*White Butterfly*," in *The Walter Mosley Omnibus* (London: Picador, 1996), 650. Mosley, *Black Betty*, 32.

[57] On Easy's middle-class aspirations in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, see Nicole King, "'You Think like You White': Questioning Race and Racial Community through the Lens of Middle-Class Desire(s)," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 35, no. 2–3 (2002): 211–30.

[58] Walter Mosley, "*A Red Death*," in *The Walter Mosley Omnibus* (London: Picador, 1996), 199.

[59] Ibid., 309.

[60] Ibid., 310.

[61] Cedric J. Robinson, “Oliver Cromwell Cox and the Historiography of the West,” in *On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance*, ed. H. L. T. Quan (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 75–86. For a fuller account of racial capitalism, see Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Press, 1983).

[62] This view was later discredited in Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 143.

[63] Elaine Woo, “Mystery Writer Remembers His Days at Hamilton High,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 18 1997, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-06-18-me-4511-story.html.

[64] E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Free Press, 1957), 238.

[65] James Boggs, “Democracy: Capitalism’s Last Battle Cry,” in *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker’* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 158.

[66] Author Walter Mosley on Writing Mystery Novels, Political Revelation, Racism, and Pushing Obama, television, February 27, 2012, Democracy Now, https://www.democracynow.org/2012/2/27/author_walter_mosley_on_writing_mystery.

[67] Walter Mosley, *Little Scarlet* (London: Phoenix, 2004), 5.

[68] Ibid., 43.

[69] Ibid., 78, 218.

[70] Ibid., 77.

[71] Owen Edward Brady, ed., *Conversations with Walter Mosley* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 79.

[72] Mosley, *Devil*, 159. Mosley's emphasis.

[73] Ibid., 209.

[74] Mosley, *White Butterfly*, 598.

[75] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), 72.

[76] Attica Locke, "About *Black Water Rising*," personal website, Attica Locke, accessed September 7, 2020, http://www.atticalocke.com/about-black-water-rising/.

[77] On the politics of significance of Bill Cosby, see Ta-Nehisi Coates, "'This Is How We Lost to the White Man': The Audacity of Bill Cosby's Black Conservatism," *Atlantic* 30, no. 4 (May 2008): 52–62.

[78] Attica Locke, *Black Water Rising* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 275.

[79] Ibid., 198.

[80] Ibid., 204.

[81]Stokely Carmichael, "Toward Black Liberation," *The Massachusetts Review* 7, no. 4 (1966): 647. Locke, *Black Water Rising*, 202.

[82] Bart Landry, *The New Black Middle Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Bart Landry and Kris Marsh, "The Evolution of the New Black Middle Class," *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (2011): 373–94; Elizabeth R. Cole and Safiya R. Omari, "Race, Class and the Dilemmas of Upward Mobility for African Americans," *Journal of Social Issues* 59, no. 4 (2003): 785–802; Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Class and Race in the City* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008).

[83] Landry, *The New Black Middle Class*, 91.

[84] Locke, "Behind *Black Water Rising*."

[85] bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 93, 94.

[86] Locke, *Black Water Rising*, 75.

[87] Landry and Marsh, "The Evolution of the New Black Middle Class," 382–83.

[88] Locke, *Black Water Rising*, 173.

[89] Ibid., 68.

[90] Ibid., 368.

[91] Ibid., 424.

[92] Alice Walker, *Meridian* (London: The Women's Press, 1983), 210.

[93] "The Books Interview: Attica Locke," *New Statesman*, May 28, 2010, accessed August 28, 2020, https://www.newstatesman.com/fiction/2010/05/interview-movement-black.

[94] Locke, *Black Water Rising*, 318.

[95] On *Black Water Rising*'s critique of neoliberalism, see Ryan Poll, "The Rising Tide of Neoliberalism: Attica Locke's Black Water Rising and 'the New Jim Crow,'" in *Class and Culture in Crime Fiction: Essays on Works in English since the 1970s*, ed. Julie H. Kim (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 175–200.

[96] Locke, *Black Water Rising*, 341.

[97] Ibid., 343.

[98] On "abstract liberalism" as the ideological frame for colorblind racism, see Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, 54-76.

[99] Will Norman, "Hard-Boiled Literary History: Labor and Style in Fictions of the Culture Industry," *American Literature* 90, no. 1 (2018): 27–54.

Conclusion: Complicity Now

The history of complicity is the history of liberalism. This truth has been largely invisible to contemporary scholarship because of liberalism's long ideological dominance in the academy, particularly in literary studies. So long as we believe that we should read great literature to provoke searching self-examination in the individual conscience, and that such activities in turn translate into the assumption of a political responsibility capable of transforming the world, then it will remain difficult if not impossible to step outside of complicity's folds long enough to see it clearly as a structure with its own ideological valences, functions, and limitations. Rather, complicity will remain something experienced only from the inside, a claustrophobic but infinitely expanding interior akin to those nightmarish atmospheres represented in the works of midcentury fiction we examined in Part I, Chapter 2. We will be stuck circling at Mrs. Hall's genteel drinks party in Nabokov's story, unable to find the exit. There will be lots to say, but much of it will be double talk.

It was the revolutions of the Sixties, undertaken by people of color in the United States and across the world, that first made it possible to see postwar complicity as a liberal structure of feeling. We've seen that the anti-colonial Communists of North Vietnam performed the role for McCarthy and Sontag. Fanon and the Algerian National Liberation Front did it for Sartre. For Himes and Baldwin, it was the urban uprisings in American cities and the intellectuals of the Black Power movement. I have wanted to recover these moments in literary history because liberalism, as Charles Mills and others have been insisting for some time, has a memory problem when it comes to empire and racial domination, a "cultivated amnesia, a set of constructed deafnesses and blindnesses."[1] He is describing a kind of bad faith, of course. Such is the effectiveness of liberalism's strategies of deflection, denial, and distortion that this history of complicity remains untold up to now. It may even

come as a surprise to some that complicity has a history at all. But it does, and our forgetting means we are repeating it.

The surfacing of complicity as a major concern for literature and culture corresponds to crises in liberalism's claims to ideological hegemony. In the United States, these crises have been occasioned by the spectacle of liberalism's periodic failure to contain and legitimize the racial projects upon which it has always subsisted, and which collectively define what Nikhil Pal Singh has described as the continuous "long war" the state has fought since its inception against people of color at home and abroad.[2] If we can identify the mid-nineteenth century and the long Sixties as two such moments, then we can also recognize the present as a third. The marked increase in scholarly interest in complicity from legal, philosophical, and political perspectives in the twenty-first century is just one indication of the way in which it has resurfaced to stake a claim to contemporary relevance. In the United States, the frequency with which the term complicity is used in media discourse increased dramatically during the term of Donald Trump as president in 2016, which can be seen as the highpoint of a large-scale political project aimed at the flouting of democratic liberal norms, the endorsement of police violence against people of color, and the destruction of liberal institutions. As that presidency came to a chaotic end amid insurrection and violence, middle-class liberals once again asked themselves how they were responsible for this renewal of the long war, now being fought in plain sight.

One example is provided by Erica Newland, an attorney who worked in the Justice Department from 2016 to 2018 and then wrote an opinion piece for the *New York Times* following Trump's election defeat in 2020. Newland admitted to being "haunted" by her work during the early years of the Trump presidency, which included tailoring executive actions, such as the so called "Muslim ban" against citizens of certain predominantly Muslim

states entering the United States, so as to give them lawful form and thus make them palatable to the courts.

> No matter our intentions, we were complicit. We collectively perpetuated an anti-democratic leader by conforming to his assault on reality. We may have been victims of the system, but we were also its instruments. No matter how much any one of us pushed back from within, we did so as members of a professional class of government lawyers who enabled an assault on our democracy—an assault that nearly ended it.[3]

With a retrospective gesture that might be compared to McCarthy's in Vietnam in 1967, Newland realizes that her commitments to dispassionate objectivity in her professional work have served to distract her from her implication in a racist, anti-democratic project. Like McCarthy, her self-recognition takes a confessional form directed both at herself and her readers. She presents herself as occupying simultaneously the roles of both "victim" and "instrument." Newland's testimony indicates a contemporary echo of the midcentury structure of feeling we have been discussing.

Just as the radicals of the Sixties looked back to the Holocaust and nineteenth-century Abolitionism in search for concepts and language for dealing with complicity, so do many contemporary discussions of complicity reach back to the midcentury period. The available frames of reference for the consideration of guilt and responsibility among government officials, lawyers, police, and federal employees for the policies enacted under the Trump administration are those dating from the liberal response to totalitarianism in the 1940s and 50s. Such is the force of Anne Applebaum's 2020 article for *The Atlantic*, entitled "History Will Judge the Complicit":

> The point is not to compare Trump to Hitler or Stalin; the point is to compare the experiences of high-ranking members of the American Republican Party, especially

> those who work most closely with the White House, to the experiences of Frenchmen in 1940, or of East Germans in 1945, or of Czesław Miłosz in 1947. These are experiences of people who are forced to accept an alien ideology or a set of values that are in sharp conflict with their own.[4]

Applebaum's analysis and conclusions in this essay, in accordance with her liberal perspective on the problem, are more interested in the dynamics and contrasts of individual personalities than in the historical conditions underlying the dilemmas she investigates. There is no single reason for collaboration, she argues, but a range of possible motivations that depend on private scruples and individual morality. The heroes of her essay are those, like the Republican senator Mitt Romney, who refused to endorse the collective lies that totalitarian regimes impose on their people. Despite the brief references to Vichy France, Applebaum's chief interest is not in National Socialism but in the regime that Cold War intellectuals understood as its sinistral totalitarian double: Soviet Communism. It is a distinctly Cold War melodrama that structures the essay's judgments, with Romney's historical equivalent emerging as the East German intellectual Wolfgang Leonhard, who defected in 1949, left behind a promising career in the Communist party, and eventually taught Applebaum Soviet history at Yale in the 1980s. The essay exemplifies liberalism's blind spot in thinking about complicity, since the focus on Soviet communism as historical comparison to Trumpism in Applebaum's essay allows her to evade race and empire almost completely. Seductive as heroic defection narratives might be, they tell us little about positions like those occupied in the justice department, where professional lawyers are engaged in legitimizing a policy targeting a specific racial group.

The identification of the present as another historical moment for liberal crisis and anxieties over complicity raises a question about periodization. What does it mean to see complicity as a contemporary liberal structure of feeling at a time when—in some accounts at

least—liberalism is already dead? The radical abolitionism of the mid-nineteenth century exemplified in Thoreau's work, and the revolutionary movements of the Sixties that brought complicity into view after World War Two, emerged in climates of hegemonic dominance for liberalism in the United States and the world system more generally, what Immanuel Wallerstein called "the era of the triumph and domination of liberal ideology" between the French Revolution of 1789 and the collapse of Communism 1989.[5] For Wallerstein, the "Second World Revolution" of 1968 undid the existing liberal consensus on incremental freedoms and self-determination for oppressed groups, unleashing a conservative drive towards unconstrained free markets and the rolling back of state welfare that we now call neoliberalism. The collapse of Communism thirty years later was not liberalism's triumph, but—paradoxically— rather its death knell, since the old-style Communist parties in the Eastern Bloc were the last hope for the liberal program of determining and controlling a process of reform for the oppressed and working classes.

Structures of feeling are, above all, historical. What then of complicity after the end of liberalism's ideological dominance on a global scale? What of complicity in the "dark age" of corporate domination, extreme individualism, and resurgent nationalisms?[6] Firstly, it must be noted that if liberalism as a hegemonic political program took a long time to crumble, then its ideological residuum will take much longer to fade. The discourse of complicity among middle-class US liberals—including intellectuals in the academy and para-academic world—may be one of its most persistent afterimages. As we saw in discussing work by Walter Mosley and Attica Locke in the 1990s and 2000s, shifts in the US economy after the retreat of Great Society liberalism, in combination with neoliberal emphases on highly individualized notions of personal responsibility and entrepreneurship of the self, have meant that the structure of complicity has adjusted to incorporate problems of class formation and class precarity much more prominently than before. As a result, it has become clear that the

discourse of complicity belongs to a shrinking but still disproportionately influential middle class, anxious about the preservation of both its assets and its moral integrity.

At the beginning of this study, we observed one of the earliest and clearest expressions of midcentury complicity in Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma*, where feelings of guilt and anxiety arose in white people as a result of the dissonance between the "American Creed" of equality and the reality of racial injustice evident in the conduct of everyday life. We saw how anxieties about complicity tend to erupt when it becomes painfully apparent that liberalism is not delivering on its own promises, the gap between its creed and its material impact on the world too wide to paper over. In our contemporary moment, a comparable situation can be observed in the deployment of the language and concept of "privilege," one of the most visible faces of contemporary complicity. Here the dissonance comes from the distance between the myth of meritocracy in the United States and reality of structural racism.

Peggy McIntosh's influential 1988 essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," an important and oft-cited origin point for the term's later usage, illuminates its close connection with the discourses of liberal complicity belonging to an earlier era. As with Myrdal and various of the authors we have examined in this study, McIntosh is concerned with the relation between structural injustice and the events of everyday life, grasping it as an indeterminate problem resistant to articulation, needing to be worked through first at the level of the individual conscience through self-examination. "White privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject," she notes.

> The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their

> own. These perceptions mean also that my moral condition is not what I had been led to believe.[7]

The solution, McIntosh suggests, is to “try to work on myself” by scrutinizing the conduct of her daily life for advantages that had previously not been apparent to her. What makes this account of complicity distinct from Myrdal’s, however, is the use of financial metaphors.

The use of figurative language is especially notable given that McIntosh’s formative training was in literary studies: she had obtained a PhD from Harvard in the 1960s on the poetry of Emily Dickinson.[8] The privilege that she came to recognize in herself is defined as “an invisible package of unearned assets that I could count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious.”[9] If, as in Wendy Brown’s formulation, neoliberalism is the extension of market logic and market principles into all spheres of life, then we see an example here in the figuring of white privilege as a kind of trust fund, the possession of unearned assets to be exchanged for cash.[10] Though the concrete reality of meritocracy in the United States transpired to be a myth, its logic underpins the concept of privilege, nevertheless. There are legitimate assets earned through one’s own hard work and talent, and there are illegitimate unearned ones. The problem is not privilege as such, it is that it might be bestowed on the undeserving. As Phoebe Maltz Bovy suggests in her 2017 study of privilege as the “word and concept of our age,” the risk is that the labor demanded by privilege is not directed towards changing the world at large, but simply at demonstrating that one has earned one’s privilege through introspection and self-examination.[11] McIntosh ends her essay with a hesitation over what those who have undergone such a process of self-implication in structural inequality might do with their newly-won consciousness. “It’s an open question,” she proposes, acknowledging that the realization of comparative advantage in an unjust world is very different from changing the conditions that created it.[12]

This book indicates that the historical record on transforming consideration of one's complicity into decisive action to change the world is not an auspicious one. The outcome that words about complicity are most likely to generate is, in fact, more words about complicity. The story of American literature after World War Two bears testament to this self-perpetuating logic. It can be seen in the long and convoluted Jamesian style adopted by writers as diverse as Baldwin and McCarthy, in the dizzying formal reflexivity of Nabokovian metafiction, and in the long persistence of hard-boiled crime narratives. It is visible in the long-form essays of the New Journalists and in the explosion of auto-fiction and the "personal essay" that took up its legacy in the twenty-first century. Once we see complicity as a literary problem and not simply an ethical one, a vista of textual production can be seen anew in the process of its historical evolution.

[1] Mills, "Racial Liberalism," 1391. On liberal denial about empire, see also Jeanne Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[2] Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and Amer* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

[3] Erica Newland, "I'm Haunted by What I Did as a Lawyer in the Trump Justice Department," *The New York Times*, December 20, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/20/opinion/trump-justice-department-lawyer.html.

[4] Anne Applebaum, "History Will Judge the Complicit," *The Atlantic*, August 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/07/trumps-collaborators/612250/.

[5] Immanuel Wallerstein, *After Liberalism* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 331.

[6] "The Dark Age" is Wallerstein's term for the era after the collapse of liberalism in 1989.

[7] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Peace and Freedom*, August 1989, 11.

[8] For a profile of McIntosh, see Joshua Rothman, "The Origins of 'Privilege,'" *The New Yorker*, May 12, 2014, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-origins-of-privilege.

[9] McIntosh, "White Privilege," 10.

[10] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's St* (New York: Zone, 2015).On complicity and neoliberalism, see also Adam Kelly and Will Norman, "Literature and Complicity: Then and Now," *Comparative Literature Studies* 56, no. 4 (2019): 673–92.

[11] Phoebe Maltz Bovy, *The Perils of "Privilege": Why Inj* *Others of Advantage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017), 15. See also Sean McCann, "Choose and Be Damned: Responsibility and Privilege in a Neoliberal Age," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 2, 2017, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/choose-and-be-damned-responsibility-and-privilege-in-a-neoliberal-age/.

[12] McIntosh, "White Privilege," 12.