David Palumbo-Liu

Reading Literature in a Global Age

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Preface

Although I am sure she has no recollection of this, the initial idea for this book occurred during a conversation I had with Regenia Gagnier many years ago. At that time, I had the pleasure of having her as a colleague at Stanford. Maybe it was partially because we both had been trained at Berkeley and shared some sense of displacement in Silicon Valley, but for some reason Regenia started talking about rational choice theory. Not only was she speaking about it with regard to her research interests, but she was also commenting on how, after having been what she felt a long time at Stanford, she sensed that this way of accounting for human behavior had become pervasive on campus. Eventually I came to feel that along with rational choice theory came an implicit set of values, which I later dubbed "rational choice thinking." By that I meant the belief that not only could human decision-making be formalized in rational choice's parsimonious and elegant formula, but also that its various manifestations could be widely articulated as "common sense" —"people" act on the basis of common ways of reasoning, and, what is more, they should be treated according to that logic. This kind of thinking undergirds our sense of how we behave toward each other and think about the world. Two incidents, which occurred a decade apart, illustrated this in a particularly dramatic fashion.

The first was Larry Summers's infamous World Bank memo of 1991.[1] During his tenure as chief economist for the World Bank, Summers issued a memo suggesting that there was indeed a problem with pollution —the First World had too much of it, and the Third World too little. He proffered a number of rational-choice type arguments, among them the rationale that since the life expectancy of those living in the Third World was so far below that of those living in the First World, the human cost of breathing toxic fumes and consuming toxic food and water would be much greater in the First World than in the Third. After all, those living

in the Third World couldn't expect to live as long as "we" do, so what would be wrong with reducing their lifetimes by a minuscule amount, when, on the other hand, if we ourselves were to breathe in the by-products of our First World lifestyle, it would decrease our lifetimes by a much greater proportion? As Summers puts it,

> "Dirty" Industries: Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging MORE migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [Less Developed Countries]? . . . The demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have very high income elasticity. The concern over an agent that causes a one in a million change in the odds of prostrate cancer is obviously going to be much higher in a country where people survive to get prostrate cancer than in a country where under 5 mortality is 200 per thousand. Also, much of the concern over industrial atmosphere discharge is about visibility impairing particulates. These discharges may have very little direct health impact. Clearly trade in goods that embody aesthetic pollution concerns could be welfare enhancing. While production is mobile the consumption of pretty air is a non-tradable.[2]

The response of Jose Lutzenberger, the Brazilian minister of the environment, on reading this leaked memo seems to sum it up well:

> Your reasoning is perfectly logical but totally insane. . . . Your thoughts [provide] a concrete example of the unbelievable alienation, reductionist thinking, social ruthlessness and the arrogant ignorance of many conventional "economists" concerning the nature of the world we live in. . . . If the World Bank keeps you as vice president it will lose all credibility. To me it would confirm what I often said . . . the best thing that could happen would be for the Bank to disappear.[3]

While one might applaud such a sentiment, Lutzenberger appears to offer a contradiction: aren't logic and sanity deeply affiliated? What could be their possible point of separation? Glossing the terms helps untease the "rational" from the sociopathic, the "impeccable" ethics of business based on some utilitarian notion of "the greater good" (particularly construed, of course) from the notion of an ethical system based on some sense of global community and the goal of a more democratic, just, and equal modality of interdependence. What were the respective fates of Summers and Lutzenberger? Lutzenberger was fired after sending his riposte, while Summers became President Bill

Clinton's secretary of the Treasury, then president of Harvard University, and then a chief economic advisor to President Barack Obama.

The second example took place shortly after 9/11: the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) proposed a "terrorism futures market." As one news article put it,

> It sounds jaw-droppingly callous, not to mention absurd: An Internet gambling parlor, sponsored by the U.S. government, on politics in the Middle East. Anyone, from Osama bin Laden to your grandmother, can bet over the Web on such questions as whether Yasser Arafat will be assassinated or Turkey's government will be overthrown.
>
> If the bettors are right, they'll win money; if they're wrong, they'll lose their wagers. The site itself will keep numerical tallies of the current "odds" for various events.
>
> Why not just ask the guys at the corner bar whether or not we should invade Jordan, or play SimCity to make foreign policy decisions? But experts say the DARPA-backed Policy Analysis Market . . . is based on a legitimate theory, the Efficient Market Hypothesis, that has a proven track record in predicting outcomes. Basically, the idea is that the collective consciousness is smarter than any single person. By forcing people to put their money where their mouth is, the wagers help weed out know-nothings and give more weight to the opinions of those in the know.
>
> "Markets are a great way of aggregating information that a lot of different people have," said Eric Zitzewitz, an assistant professor of economics at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. "One of the big issues with intelligence that was gathered before 9/11 was that information wasn't aggregated within the intelligence community. This is directly aimed at addressing that."[4]
>
> Although the idea sounds offensive to some, "to the extent this has even a small probability of using valuable information to help prevent tragedies, that's got to be the overriding ethical concern," he said.[5]

Nevertheless, what led to the scheme's downfall was not its sheer weirdness, but the fact that it was broadly publicized. Even Fox News commented,

> When the plan was disclosed Monday by Democratic Sens. Ron Wyden of Oregon and Byron Dorgan of North Dakota, the Pentagon defended it as a way to gain intelligence about potential terrorists' plans. Wyden

called it "a federal betting parlor on atrocities and terrorism." Dorgan described it as "unbelievably stupid."

Criticism mounted Tuesday. On the Senate floor, Democratic Leader Thomas Daschle of South Dakota denounced the program as "an incentive actually to commit acts of terrorism." "This is just wrong," declared Daschle, D-S.D. At an Armed Services Committee hearing, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton called it "a futures market in death." At the Foreign Relations hearing, [Deputy Defense Secretary Paul] Wolfowitz defended DARPA, saying "it is brilliantly imaginative in places where we want them to be imaginative. It sounds like maybe they got too imaginative," he said, smiling.[6]

While there is much here to comment on, I focus on two aspects that relate to the main concerns of this book. First, there were the rival metrics of the various cost-benefit analyses—moral, ethical, practical, and "aesthetic" (it just *sounded* wrong). *The Deliverance of Others* is intimately concerned with how literary aesthetics in particular help us meditate on the ways we are connected to, and act in relation to, others. Second, there was Wolfowitz's chilling suggestion that the notion of a terrorism futures market was perhaps just a case of too much imagination. Really? Where did DARPA cross the line? And do we really want to harness the imagination of the world in this way?[7] In this volume I tackle the problematic of what drives our imaginations, especially of others, and what limits our imagination, for both good and bad reasons. Indeed, I am interested in how literature helps us think through these judgments.

In these pages I look at the various modes of representing and analyzing how humans behave, make choices, express preferences, achieve goals, and assess their place in the world vis-à-vis their goals. However, *The Deliverance of Others* addresses not only rational choice theory, but also other modes of defining human commonality and interaction—the discourse of the human body and how bodies can interpenetrate in (even) nonsexual ways; the discourse of the emotions and sentiments, and how both are common properties of humans, yet flow between us as well. These questions form the building blocks of my reassessment of the role of contemporary narrative literature in imagining this "togetherness" in and with the other in a critical fashion that I believe should be central to any reading of and any teaching of what we now call "world literature." Let me provide another anecdote—a more generic one.

One of the first rites of being welcomed into a new community is often the cocktail party. I am sure what I am about to relate has happened, for example, to every teacher of literature. You are nibbling on your curried shrimp, swilling your chardonnay, and a nice person comes and asks what you do. You say, "I teach at X." You feel secure—you have a job, it's a good school, people like schools. But you don't feel that way for long. "Oh? What do you teach?" Here I would say, "Comparative literature." My new friend's eyes start scanning for an escape route—where is there a venture capitalist or engineer or, even better, both in the same body? I can see reeling through my soon-to-disappear friend's mind a flashback to the English A.P. exam: "Lord, he's going to ask me what I have been reading, and even worse, to *discuss my thoughts on it*!" OK, I feel the same way when I meet engineers. That's why we have cocktails, and lovely weather to point to here in the Valley.

For twenty-odd years now, I have been trying to see how certain powerful ways of describing how we are bound together have taken hold: we are the same because we all define, rationalize, and reach for our economic preferences and utilities in the same way; we all have a human body; we all have human emotions. These are baseline assumptions, and they help keep us talking to each other. But what has happened now, in this age of increased globalization, when more and more people—closer to us in real and virtual ways than before—need to be vetted on whether or not they are actually the same as us in these ways, precisely? Furthermore, what happens when we try to imagine the genesis and consequences of seeing others through the systems that deliver them to us? And how can the humanities, and literature in particular, aid us in understanding these new sets of problems of "deliverance" in this newly interconnected world?

I admit that the phrase "the deliverance of others" has a strong biblical air and tradition, as it refers to how others can be lead into "the light." While this volume does not emphasize that connotation of the phrase, because of the import of its clear ethical connotations, neither does it disavow it. What happens when we take on the call to embrace others and take responsibility for them? Put more precisely, this book seeks to delve into the shape, nature, and structure of systems that deliver otherness to us—taking people from "different" worlds and importing them into ours—and analyze those systems when even the most benign and seemingly neutral ones of them actually work to filter out "excessive" otherness for the sake of the functioning of the system. The questions

then come to be about what "difference" gets siphoned off and where it goes, and, more important, what stays in to change the system, showing its limitations when it comes to actually presenting others to us and creating an *ethical* global community. I look to literature—specifically, modern and contemporary prose narratives—as a unique mode of understanding a world comprised of new peoples, new choices, new data, all seeking to interact in the best way possible. It would be my hope that, at the cocktail party, I would pull out a literary example and show how its treatment of some issue about which my interlocutor surely knows (economics, choice theory, healthcare, biomedicine, advertising, information, media) not only describes how those systems work (or don't), but also how the literary imagination and literary art sees, from a point outside the system, another way of conceiving of those relations between people in those delivery systems. In my most hopeful moments, and if my friend is still there, I would close with some discussion of what this experience has tried to teach us about living together ethically. This is a short book, meant to be almost a kind of primer. I hope you find it useful.

Acknowledgments

I want to express my gratitude to a number of people. I have had the great benefit of talking about the subjects treated in this study, in direct and indirect ways, with many wonderful colleagues and friends. Renato Rosaldo and Mary Pratt welcomed me to Stanford and their cultural studies reading group two decades ago, and I will never forget the intellectual buzz, the comradely good humor, and the sense of doing something important in the curriculum and in our writing that kept their house aglow. It was in that context that I first met Regenia Gagnier, to whom I owe the kernel of inspiration for this book. I also want to thank two people who, along with their intellectual brilliance, exemplify for me the warmth, humor, and humaneness one would want to aspire to: Linda Hutcheon and Roland Greene. I also want to thank Heather Houser, whose work in a graduate seminar and in the fine dissertation that followed opened my eyes to so much, and whose work is now doing the same for all its readers. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has been a core inspiration for many years, and nothing has delighted me more than now working with her in various venues. Her notion of literature's "unverifiability" has always stayed with me, along with the need to actually read, and read, and read, and to think first, before anything else, ethically.

Lastly, there are some people without whom in all honesty this book really would not have been written. I thank Karen Kuo for patiently working out so many issues and sharing so much with me. Ruth Ozeki was kind enough not only to share her films and fiction with me, but also, over the course of a term here at Stanford, to discuss at length and with humor and insight her creative process. I owe a huge debt to Shumei Shih, Rob Wilson, Wai Chee Dimock, Bruce Robbins, Nirvana Tanoukhi, and Françoise Lionnet for their wonderful and inspiring

enthusiasm, support, and friendship in many venues and encounters—much of what you find in these pages is in fact as much their thinking as mine. Each of these people has immensely broadened my sense of literature, helped me make my ideas as clear and compelling as possible, and lifted my spirits when I really wondered what in the world I thought I was doing. Finally, I owe a debt to Ken Wissoker, of Duke University Press, whose enthusiasm for and appreciation of the idea for this book did much to make it more than just an idea. I was also fortunate in the two press readers that Ken enlisted—their engaged, serious, and rigorous comments helped immeasurably in guiding revision of the manuscript.

As always, my greatest debt is to my wife, Sylvie, and to our son, Fabrice. Sylvie, with her deep love of the intellect and especially of literature, showed me, in conversation and action over these decades, how life and art are not separate, and that strolling down any avenue or oceanside can animate conversation about what, for instance, we had debated at a recent graduate seminar, or lectured about in class, or tried to prove to our son, and how what we experience in life can enhance our understanding of the lessons we try to teach our students (and ourselves) as we pick up a work of literature and open a page. My one wish is that the world becomes more aware of this truth about life and art, and ethics and pleasure, for our son's tremendous talent, creativity, and love of the arts deserves a home, too.

Introduction

One of the chief aims of this study is to help us arrive at a sense of responsibility toward others by learning to read contemporary literature in a way that includes a critical reappraisal of systems and discourses of "sameness" that deliver others to us. Specifically, I look to ideas of rationality, of the family, of the body, and of affect—each of these notions holds within it some sign of human commonality and communicability, or "deliverance." I show how these discursive "delivery systems" imply commensurate relations between selves and others, and yet how these relatively simple systems become less and less stable as they interact with, and try to accommodate, a more radical type of otherness produced in contemporary historical contexts. Each of the novels treated in this book rigorously tests the faith these systems place in commonality and commensurateness; each text offers a vivid and often troubling view of the disruption of such a belief in our contemporary age. Nonetheless, there is in each of these novels also a redemptive moment that, while certainly not unproblematic, gives a different view of each "delivery system," and this vision resides precisely in the deliverance available through the literary aesthetic. However, and critically, I update the idea of the aesthetic to include the specific problems literary aesthetics face in this age of increased "otherness" and virtual proximity.

I begin, in this introduction, by showing how the notion of empathy has defined the relation between self and other in rhetorical, social-philosophical, and finally literary discourses. The first two of these argue that similarity and identification are necessary between orator and listener, or between social actors. I juxtapose this to modern literature's valorization of difference—the aim of literature is precisely to deliver to us "others" with lives unlike our own. This makes literature qualitatively different in aim and scope. However, this also presents a historical

problem today. The notion that literature should mobilize (or even instantiate) empathy for others and enhance our ethical capabilities is rooted in the early modern period, wherein "otherness," while certainly increasingly present, was not nearly as immediately, insistently, and intensely pressing itself into the here and now of everyday social, cultural, and political life. This voluminous influx, quantitatively and qualitatively new, is a distinct feature of the late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century age of globalization. We now have to deal with this question: if we still adhere to the modern valorization of literature as bringing the lives of others to us in a vivid way, once we admit "others" into "our" world and place value in the difference they bring into our lives, where do we set the limit of *how much* otherness is required, as opposed to how much is excessive, disruptive, disturbing, in ways that damage us, rather than enhance our lives? This forces us into taking an ethical position, and calls on us to address another kind of "selfishness": we take so much and then leave the rest, but at what cost? How have we learned anything more about "us" and the situation in which we find ourselves? Contemporary literary narratives generate worlds in which we must puzzle out these questions in particular manners.

Previously, people were thought to be able to identify with each other according to the fact they could "feel" as if they too could be in "the situation" of the other depicted in the orator's speech, in the social imaginary, or the narrator's text. In the present study I update that understanding. Aren't we all living in the same global "situation"? Don't we all perform rationally as economic subjects in the global economy that transfers goods, materials, bodies, images to all of us across real time and huge distances? Don't we now all ingest materials that we find from the same sources, transported laterally across the world without absolute regard to borders? Not only food, but also drugs and medical practices have become nearly universal. In the most intense form of sharing human experience, organ transplants disclose the new commonness, as elements from one body can be inserted into another. And haven't global media fed on and produced similar human affect? Don't people share a common register and repertoire in the realm of feelings, feelings that are touched and produced by worldwide representations of contemporary lives? Finally, hasn't the political world incorporated all sorts of previously disenfranchised people? "Our" situation now cannot so easily bracket off more distant parts of the planet or deny the par-

ticipation of those close to us, even though separated by race, gender, sexual preference, religion.

Globalization has delivered to us far more distant spaces and peoples than ever before, with greater regularity and integration on multiple fronts—economic, political, social, cultural, ecological, epidemiological, and so on. "Otherness" is thus not only increasingly in contact with the "same," but the points of contact and contagion with otherness are far more numerous. Therefore, the degree to which we are the same as or different from others is discernible only in very specific manners that demand to be carefully and critically scrutinized. I am thus interested in otherness as both a "thing," manifested in various forms, and as a relation.

Essentially, the problems of otherness press up against the mainstays of Western liberal thought. The primacy of the individual, the safeguarding of her prerogatives to act freely in the world so as to manifest in the fullest way possible her distinctive humanity, is negotiated against the recognition of our being together as social creatures. The problematics of otherness, as taken up in the course of this study, are therefore played out in the realms of rationality and choice-making, the integrity of the body, the freedom to feel. And yet "sameness" (and "equality"), though declared, is not guaranteed, and calling attention not only to inequality, but also to its sources, is as old as liberalism. However, events of the postwar era set the stage for ever more potent insistence on "otherness," which paralleled the emergence of new structures that drew people together.

The seeds of enfranchisement sown in the eighteenth century were more fully manifested in the postwar era of decolonization and eventually in the anti-apartheid era, bringing forth widespread tension over the distribution of wealth and resources not only in terms of the "Third World," but also according to the different mappings of hemispheres and peripheries. Widespread liberatory movements called up issues of race, gender, and sexuality. One example of the crisis of expanding and disruptive otherness was evident in the seventies, as described in a report by the Trilateral Commission, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (1975). In it, Samuel Huntington remarks, "The essence of the democratic surge of the 1960s was a general challenge to existing systems of authority, public and private. In one form or another, the challenge manifested

itself in the family, the university, business, public and private institutions, politics, the government bureaucracy, and the military service. People no longer felt the same obligation to obey those whom they had previously considered superior to themselves in age, rank, status, expertise, character, or talents. . . . Each group claimed its right to participate equally—in the decision which affected itself."[1] In short, while lauding the active participation of an increasing number of diverse populations on the one hand, Huntington is concerned that there may be *too much* of a good thing (or, in the language of this volume, too much otherness): "The vitality of democracy in the 1960s raised questions about the governability of democracy in the 1970s."[2] This increase in political participation is "primarily the result of the increased salience which citizens perceive politics to have for their own immediate concerns."[3]

So what's wrong with that? Isn't this precisely the picture of a robust democratic society? Not exactly, for this vigor is largely made up of minority voices and viewpoints demanding attention to their particular needs, and acted on the basis of other kinds of rationality. This puts pressure on the political institutions of the state: "In the United States, the strength of democracy poses a problem for the governability of democracy. . . . We have come to recognize that there are potentially desirable limits to the indefinite extension of political democracy. Democracy will have a longer life if it has a more balanced existence."[4] This ominous phrase is indeed Huntington's concluding statement, and is emblematic of the kind of swelling up of anti-authoritarian "otherness" that shows the tipping point of liberalism that occurred not only in the United States, but globally. Where were those limits to be drawn? How was "balance" going to be achieved? Liberal values, seen both in the ethos of modern literature's role in diversifying our frames of reference and in liberal democratic rule, become challenged by others who insist on entering the system as full participants, with their otherness fully intact. Hence the crisis of governability. This hugely revealing statement from the mid-seventies signals the historical instantiation of a problematic of otherness that spreads into other realms as well, and has only intensified as new technologies have created both the promise of new kinds of commonality and new ethical dilemmas. In today's world, the hierarchical recognition of some rationalities as existing below the threshold of the rational, of some bodies as harvestable and commodifiable, and of some affects as dangerous to the psychic and somatic

health of the self occur precisely within global delivery systems that owe their existence to contemporary politics and technologies.

Today we find new political economies of organs, tissues, genetic materials that build on and indeed reinforce preexisting structures of inequality, affluence, need. The value placed on "the body" is now negotiated in ways once unheard of; now what is up for sale is not only a cadaver, but parts of living beings. The very psychic equilibrium of the "self" is put into greater and greater affect of contact, virtually and in face-to-face encounters with others who now appear on our everyday communications apparatuses. The sale and transfer of goods and commodities is premised on continually produced affect in a global market. Given these imperatives, which are facilitated by the logic of neoliberalism, how do we regulate the influx of otherness so as not to destabilize the system? How much of this goes beyond the pale of what liberal ideology, so protective of the self, can allow? How much variance in the exercise of rational acts can we tolerate? How do we both facilitate the transfer and mobilization of bodies and body parts across borders (to satisfy our needs for labor and bodily rejuvenation, even survival), and create walls and barriers to stop autonomous flows of bodies across borders? How do we hope to tap into an "oceanic feeling," so as to instantiate need and desire for the products we wish to sell, yet stem the influx of affect that emanates from disruptive others and circulates back to us?

This study shows how contemporary literary texts register this new historical "situation" differently and asks us to reexamine more closely the grounds for those claims of commonness and to see the still vital resistance of otherness to it. Not only do the texts I have selected for this study vividly illustrate the precise ways that globalization today differs from that of the past, but reading them in the ways I undertake to do helps us to critically reflect on how we negotiate this new being with otherness.

That others occupy the "system" differently is not hard to recognize. Despite the celebratory gestures of "globalization," this occupation discloses the fissures and residual differences that remain beneath the surface of systems of sameness. Literary aesthetics today thus involve a recombinatory poetics that would not have been possible without the friction, resistance, autonomy that otherness still insinuates into the "same." In this study I show how the selected novels each reveal the

effort to deliver others to us within the contingencies of our historical condition. I start by examining closely how "sameness" has been a linchpin in social thought, variously evident in rhetorical treatises and social philosophical writings, and then consider the premium modern literature has placed on "difference." I then move to a discussion of the relation between the notion of "situation" that englobes self and other in classical rhetoric and in Adam Smith's social philosophy, and adapt that notion to my idea of contemporary "delivery systems."

The Sameness Requirement

"Stepping into the other guy's shoes works best when you resemble him. . . . If you are structurally analogous to the empathee, then accurate inputs generate accurate outputs—The greater the isomorphism, the more dependable and precise the results." Or so says Ray Sorensen, writing on what he calls "Self-Strengthening Empathy" in the journal *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Thank goodness, then, that Sorensen believes "Mother Nature has made your mind isomorphic to mine," because this isomorphism aids in the perpetuation of the species.[5] To put it another way: we empathize, therefore we survive. The pragmatic aspect of empathy has not been lost to thinkers from the classical age on. Empathy—feeling the pain or joy or fear experienced by others—is *useful*, whether it be to convince one's audience of the rightness of one's position, or as a key element in fostering moral sentiment and social equilibrium, or, indeed, in propagating human kind.

　In *The Rhetoric* we find Aristotle claiming that effective acts of rhetoric rely on the listener feeling that he could find himself in the very situation being described in the speech of the orator. Chapters 1 through 10 of the Second Book of *The Rhetoric* are devoted to discussing the emotions and the way they may be enlisted in rhetorical argumentation. The eighth chapter takes as its subject Pity, and Aristotle's discussion seems to touch on familiar ground: "We pity those who are like us in age, character, disposition, social standing, or birth; for in all these cases it appears more likely that the same misfortune might befall us also" (114). Self-interest and indeed self-empathy is not slightly a part of this receptivity.

　In their discussion of *The Rhetoric*, William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth

Brooks raise three useful points. First, they say, one should regard the text as "an approach to knowledge."[6] I will argue that a large part of this knowledge is eminently social; Aristotle's meditation on language and discourse has everything to do with how members of a social group present themselves—their ideas, desires, needs, fears—to others, and how that presentation can be best effected. This notion is supported by another claim Wimsatt and Brooks make, that *The Rhetoric* can be regarded as an offshoot of dialectic and also of ethical studies.[7] In that respect the logic attending *The Rhetoric* is embedded in both dialectical thinking—reasoning out the exchanges of assertions and responses— and a consideration of the ethical and moral bases and implications of taking certain positions vis-à-vis the orator's discourse. Finally, Wimsatt and Brooks point out that *The Rhetoric* "presents alternatives, things that might have been."[8] In that sense the epistemological and ethical realms are enriched by a set of data that exceeds the empirical. So we might raise the question anew—the imagination of "things that might have been" seems in *The Rhetoric* tightly bonded to a realist logic—as to whether "things that might be" are contained within the scope of experiences we might plausibly imagine happening to us. Simply put, if we cannot "relate" to it, the situation the speaker puts before us falls flat. We might well react to it, but Aristotle says that our response and our receptivity will be less than if it were something we could imagine happening to us. Now what kind of moral does that teach, what kind of *action* can take place, given this new requirement for identification?

Aristotle's basic premise regarding rhetorical effect and the emotions in the classical age—that we feel most strongly about and are most receptive to the stories or topoi that we could imagine inhabiting—is found as well in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Indeed, Smith's text likewise connects this topic to the issue of social exchange and norms—feeling "the same" is a powerful force in social interaction. And Smith also turns his attention to the imagination and the kinds of imaginings made possible solely by feeling that one could be affected in similar ways that others are. Critically, in the course of his disquisition, the "original" situation that prompts our identification with the sufferer recedes into the background as our imaginations latch onto that event in order to launch a separate set of sensations in our own bodies. We can never actually feel the pain of others, but we can *imagine* what it *must* feel like. Smith even goes so far as to say that since we can

never empirically verify what the other is feeling, it really doesn't matter what he or she feels. We dwell instead in our own imagined sense of what we, in the situation of the other, would feel. Indeed, in the following passage, "we" are channeled into the imagined body of the other person.

> As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have adopted and made them our own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels.[9]

One notes how this passage ends in sketching out the grey areas of this merging of self and other. This points to a key element in the problematic examined in this study and which achieves full force in this concise statement from Smith's text: "Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it. We sometimes feel for another; because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality."[10] We cannot be the other, but we can try to imagine what her or his situation would make *us* feel like. However, we then need to ask, on what basis do we assume to be able to feel anything like they are feeling? What norms, assumptions, presumptions, what notions of mimesis, what norms of "human behavior" do we intuitively draw on to make sense of our bold statement that "we feel your pain"? Let me be clear—I am not suggesting that we should or that

we even could avoid such attempts at sympathy and empathy. My point, rather, is to examine closely the ethical and political nature of those acts of empathy, and conversely, those moments when we assume we cannot "relate."

These concerns are evident as well (though not expressed in that fashion) in the social pragmatic of Smith's treatise, which is made clear in the title of section 1: "Of the Sense of Propriety." The key use to which these insights into sympathy are put is not unlike the one found in *The Rhetoric*: emotions, intersubjective feeling, identification are all considered in light of what kinds of social norms need to be maintained among individual emotions. Smith describes in detail how individual emotions are to be contained and disciplined by social norms—without this moderation, emotions can run amok in their excessive difference. And it is precisely through a complex process of imagining what *others* might think of *our* emotions that social emotional norms are installed in individuals. The following passage from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* reminds us not a little of Sartre's notion of the "gaze": it is not that we actually believe someone is looking at us and hence we adjust our behavior, but rather that as social beings we have internalized the gaze of others and act *as if* someone were always watching us, as through a keyhole. Smith's subject finds himself watching himself and "abating" the power of his emotions, abashedly, under the gaze of others.

> As they are constantly considering what they themselves would feel, if they actually were the sufferers, so he is constantly led to imagine in what manner he would be affected if he was only one of the spectators of his own situation. As their sympathy makes them look at it in some measure with his eyes, so his sympathy makes him look at it, in some measure, with theirs, especially when in their presence, and acting under their observation: and, as the reflected passion which he thus conceives is much weaker than the original one, it necessarily abates the violence of what he felt before he came into their presence, before he began to recollect in what manner they would be affected by it, and to view his situation in this candid and impartial light.[11]

All this is to enable the individual to ascertain the correct level at which to express his emotions. As with Aristotle, this has a pragmatic purpose—too much or too little will result in the individual not gaining the empathy of his audience: "He can only hope to obtain this by

lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him. He must flatten, if I may be allowed to say so, the sharpness of its natural tone, in order to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him."[12]

Smith expresses the desired outcome of all this as being therapeutic for the individual, emanating from a Freudian super-ego: "Society and conversation, therefore, are the most powerful remedies for restoring the mind to its tranquility."[13] And yet the barely concealed complement to this curative imagined negotiation is also social tranquility. Individual emotions circulate dynamically and also smoothly; encounters, real or imagined, with an other's pain, suffering, joy, happiness are, after an initial expansion, ultimately contracted, drawn back into the "proper" register. In the terms of this book, we find here a "delivery system": a social discourse—that set of conventions for both communication and behavior—creates and maintains norms that convert otherness to sameness. Extreme behavior on the part of the individual is tamped down and readjusted to the system of behaviors and emotional expression proper to society.

The Difference Requirement

The valuing of sameness in Aristotle and Smith contrasts sharply with literature's privileging of difference, which gives the literary work of art an opposite role to play. Rather than holding to the values of rhetoric, which relies on sameness to realize its persuasive force, or those of Smith's moral sentiments, which rely on sameness to understand and facilitate practical moral action, or even those of Sorenson's "preservation of the species" theory, in which sameness is required for the empathy that will continue, precisely, "us," literature is supposed to deliver us out of our "comfort zone." Literature has another purpose—to become something else, something better: "The sole advantage in possessing great works of literature lies in what they can help us become."[14]

The tradition of regarding literature as a particularly powerful vehicle for conveying a sense of another's life, and of believing that being put in touch with that dissimilar life is important for one's moral growth, is well established and specifically attached to realist narrative. One of the most famous statements on the matter comes from George Eliot's review essay on *The Natural History of German Life* (1895).