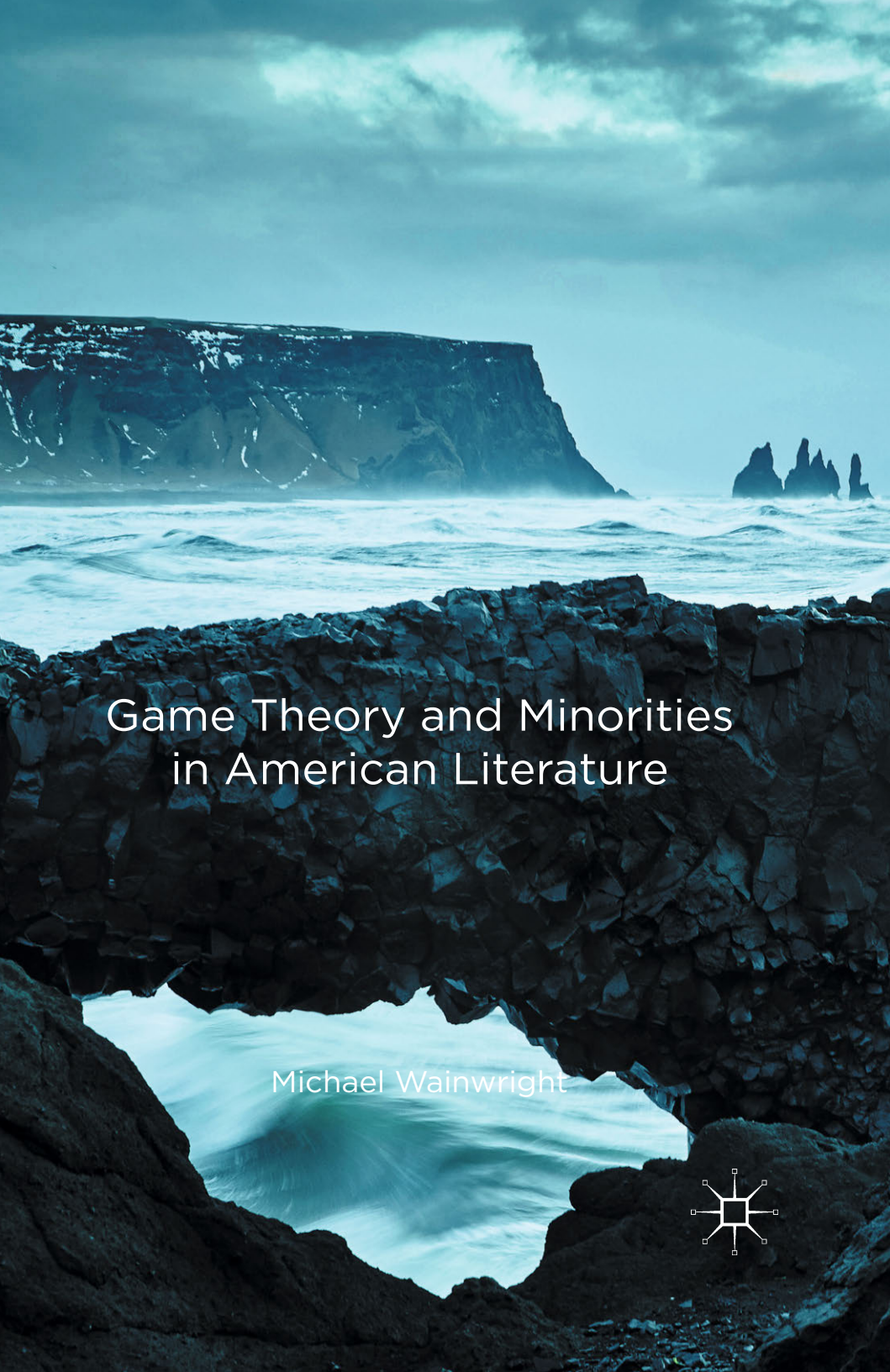

Game Theory and Minorities in American Literature

Michael Wainwright

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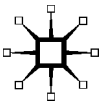

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In Memoriam
Roy Noel Wainwright
(1928–2013)
Whether or not you use it, it goes

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Preface

> Now, as there are many actions, arts, and sciences, their ends also are many; the end of the medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth.
>
> —Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* ($1094^{a}7$–10)

> All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players.
>
> —William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (2.7.139–40)

If the theory of games of strategy (or game theory), the mathematical simulation of rational decision-making first axiomatically established by John von Neumann (1903–1957) in "Zur Theorie der Gesellschaftsspiele" (December 1928), is to prove worthy of literary hermeneutics, then critics must be able to apply its principles, models, and formulae to texts written without a working knowledge of von Neumann's discipline in mind.[1] Certainly, recondite analysis does not guarantee useful insight, but the underlying principles of von Neumann's theory are neither unimaginatively abstruse nor unsuited to the field of literary criticism.[2] "Claims about reasons and rationality," as Samuel Scheffler acknowledges in prefacing Derek Parfit's (1942–) *On What Matters* (2011), "are scarcely less controversial than claims about right and wrong" (xxiii), literary portrayals of cognition demand greater critical attention than scholars of literature have heretofore provided, and game theory answers this call with its ability to model *coordination problems*. In these strategic situations, people must make choices in the knowledge that other people face the same options and that the outcome for each person will result from everybody's decisions. The most frequently encountered coordination problems are Deadlock, the Prisoner's Dilemma, the Stag Hunt, and Chicken. The following monograph illustrates each of these situations, which come under the collective category of *social dilemmas*,

with reference to one or more literary works. These illustrations do not offer a mathematical extension of game theory; instead, they provide the most concerted yet readable and hermeneutically rounded consideration to date of the social dilemmas found in a particular subset of American literature: *minoritarian* texts.

Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) and Félix Guattari (1930–1992) introduce the concepts of "major" and "minor" literature during their detailed discussion of Franz Kafka's work. "A minor literature," they explain, "doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's provenance, but developing that source for specific needs, the following study employs the terms *majoritarian*, *minoritarian*, and their derivatives. Majoritarians, whether or not the most populous group in a social formation, regulate official discourses, control both repressive and ideological state apparatuses, and so maintain socioeconomic authority. Although this power at once targets and marginalizes minoritarians as *others*, the environing social, economic, and political coordinates of majoritarianism have psychopathological consequences for both societal sectors. This psychic outfall cannot help but find literary expression. The canon of American letters, therefore, includes not only the works in English of African Americans, Jewish Americans, and tribal Americans, but also those of majoritarian authors with a minoritarian sensibility. Explicitly drawing on the first and last of these groups, and implicitly representing the third of these groups, the present volume also recognizes the Jewish-American voice. For, von Neumann's game theory, as a mathematical subdiscipline practically abandoned by its founder after the publication of "Zur Theorie der Gesellschaftsspiele," but purposefully reengaged with on his permanent relocation to America in 1938, carries the minoritarian credentials of a Hungarian-born national of Jewish descent.

The state of international politics in the late 1930s certainly contributed to von Neumann's renewed interest in the theory of games of strategy, but socioeconomics as well as warfare prompted this recommitment, which would last until shortly before his death. Appropriately, the foremost discussion of the environing conditions that would emerge to prompt von Neumann's investigative prolongation dates to an earlier (or alien) time and originates from an alien (or minoritarian) perspective. Influenced by the philosophy of the Geneva-born Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), but rejecting the fanaticism that emerged from certain aspects of Rousseauan thought during the Revolution of 1789, the French political historian Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) "turned from the

spectacle of European egalitarian disorder," as Allan Bloom chronicles, "to the United States." He envisaged America "as the model of orderly liberty." Tocqueville soon learned, however, to judge the Founding Fathers "as men whose characters expressed a higher morality that may not have been contained in their principles" (165). To Tocqueville's sorrow, this discrepancy had sown a contaminated seed, now fully germinated, with the distorted self-confidence of American majoritarians vaunting their advantageous but dubiously achieved socioeconomic situation. They "have a very high opinion of themselves," he remarked, "and they are not far from believing that they constitute a distinct species within the human race" (432). This delusion supported the equally fallacious conviction that racial superiority sanctioned the master-slave relationship. At one level, misinterpreted essentialism rationalized the construction of an asymmetric social formation. At another level, the supposed rationality of the master was a safeguard against the assumed irrationality of the subaltern. This double rationalization sustained a twofold practice: "the American 'revolutionary nation,'" as Etienne Balibar argues, "built its original ideals on a double repression: that of the extermination of the Amerindian 'natives' and that of the difference between free 'White' men and 'Black' slaves" (104). Commodification through interpellation solidified the majoritarian-minoritarian divide. Mastery addressed the rationality and reflexivity of the pre-ideological subordinate, forcing that individual to accept oppression, with the rational and reflexive aspects of an oppressed mind eroded through self-effacement. The cerebral myopia thus engendered safeguarded slavery against its victims' recognition of their social incongruousness, maintaining African Americans as moveable and usable commodities, or individual units of cognitive insentience, within the discursive structures on which majoritarians built their own success.

"In his own day and long after," laments Jim Cullen, "Tocqueville was a minority voice" (72). That "some of his acuity was a byproduct of his outsider status" (72) muted Tocqueville's declarations; as a result, his alien prescience remained largely untapped by the custodians of American thought. Even the American Civil War, which removed slavery from the statute books, failed to restructure the socioeconomic game. America remained at the forefront of what Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein terms "the ongoing capitalist world-economy" (107), and much of this preeminence remained silently indebted to minoritarian production. In defying ideological state apparatuses by colonizing the confines of printed discourse, however, some minoritarian literature from Tocqueville's contemporaries penetrated this silence. A game-theoretically inflected

perspective, which emphasizes the strategic state of human interrelations, helps to identify and analyze these texts. Most surprisingly, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1791), the prototypical account of American self-actualization that opens the canon of modern American letters, appeals to this process. Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) manages to mature into a self-made majoritarian thanks to the game-theoretic struggles of his lowly youth. What is more, Franklin's account of mastering social dilemmas foreshadows comparable autobiographical tales of strategic mastery from Frederick Douglass (c. 1818–1895) and Harriet A. Jacobs (1813–1897). The social dilemmas addressed by these authors—writers of fundamental importance to nineteenth-century American letters—find their twentieth-century complement in works by Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), William Faulkner (1897–1962), and Toni Morrison (1931–).

While the overarching shape to the present volume owes much to the publication dates of primary texts from these sources, the progressive introduction of each social dilemma provides a secondary level of marshalling. That logic prefigures human existence, with rationality operating on that principled basis, helps to mitigate the few anachronisms that result from this twofold construction. The variety of genres presented by this material—the short story, the autobiography, documentary fiction, the novel, and the philosophical discourse—would tax most interpretative methods. In contrast, a game-theoretically inflected hermeneutic not only accommodates this range of genres, but also forwards another goal: an interpretative reduction of the figurative gap between fictional and nonfictional representations. That Parfit also has recourse to game theory during his similarly oriented *Reasons and Persons* (1984) should calm those traditional scholars of literature who regret this aim. They should consider the hermeneutical benefit of placing the experiential quality of minoritarianism before and above subjective experience. The occasional deferral to the Parfitian in the present study, therefore, should come as no surprise. Indeed, the chapter headings echo at once the title from the English translation of von Neumann's seminal paper ("On the Theory of Games of Strategy") and the title of Parfit's latest publication (*On What Matters*).

Three introductory sections spell out the methodological basics for the volume. Chapter 1, "On Preliminary Matters," defines the relevant game-theoretic terminology, calls for a critical focus on literary portrayals of reasons for human behavior, and identifies the structural basis of coordinative situations. This chapter answers the interdisciplinarity demanded by intersubjectivity with reference to psychological theories of human motivation, psychoanalytical theories of intra- and interpsychic

relays, and philosophical theories of ethics. Abraham H. Maslow (1908–1970), Jacques Lacan (1901–1981), and Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900) supply these respective additions. The "Three Viewpoints Argument," as a development of Sidgwick's focus on rational decision-making and conscience in his "Two Viewpoints Argument" from *The Methods of Ethics* (1874), results. This updated perspective readjusts the analytical prominence afforded to the constituents of the human psyche, paying special attention to the determining force of rationality, recognizing the contribution of the unconscious, and acknowledging the influence of conscience. This widening of the game-theoretic perspective would have appealed to von Neumann, whose "later probing into the relationship between the computer and the brain," as Norman Macrae reports, "was sometimes criticized as too Freudian" (56), and whose conscience had prompted not only his resignation from the German Mathematical Society in 1935, but also his decision to refuse election to the German Academy of Sciences in 1950.

"On the Theory of Games of Strategy," the second of the prolegomenous chapters, examines von Neumann's conception of game theory, with reference to his brace of founding papers from 1928. At the forefront of "Sur la théorie des jeux" lies a simple visualization of fair division, the Cake Cutting Dilemma. This model, which enables John Davis Williams's innovative interpretation of the casket scene from William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1600), prefaces von Neumann's thoughts on coordinative relations in "Zur Theorie der Gesellschaftsspiele." In this second paper, von Neumann observes that the problem of intersubjective coordination "is well known, and there is hardly a situation in daily life into which this problem does not enter" (13). Von Neumann's professional life confirmed this observation in practice. He retained links to various academies and associations in Germany until the end of the decade, notwithstanding his conscientious gesture concerning his membership of the German Mathematical Society, and despite his appointment to Princeton University in 1930 and his election to the Institute of Advanced Study (IAS) three years later. Reinforced by the deterioration of his married relations, on the one hand, and by his appointment to the Los Alamos atomic bomb team, on the other hand, von Neumann's *weltanschauung* bore game-theoretic dividends with *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (1944). This collaborative volume with the economist Oskar Morgenstern (1902–1977) encouraged the emergence of a new generation of game theorists. Part of their remit became the investigation of those coordination problems that *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* does not cover: social dilemmas.

Chapter 3, "On Game Theory and Aesthetics," contemplates the structural issues of form, symmetry, and efficacy in the humanities and sciences by working back from the televised thoughts of von Neumann's colleague and friend J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904–1967) to the beginnings of modern American literature with Franklin's *Autobiography*. This consideration places game theory in mutual relation to aesthetics, understanding von Neumann's strategic insight to have transcended its titular origin as the logical simulation of parlor games. A critical appreciation of literature ought to appeal to this transcendence, but few scholars have answered this call, and those who have replied have generally failed to provide interpretations of literary worth. Promoting minoritarian literature as a particularly appropriate source from which to remedy this failure, chapter 3 demonstrates that suitability by cross-referencing Franklin's *Autobiography* to the mathematical matrices so often deployed in game theory. Finally, in returning to Williams's interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*, this final introductory chapter closes in conducting a mathematically similar, but literarily more rigorous consideration of Faulkner's Chickasaw tale of strategic sexual relations in "A Courtship" (1948).

Although the threefold prolegomenon on theory makes each of the six main sections that follow practically autonomous, these textually focused chapters introduce the four social dilemmas identified by game theory in apposite succession; as a result, these sections read best as a series of linked and developing papers. The first of these chapters, "On Douglass and Dialectics," provides a game-theoretic variation on the standard Hegelian interpretation of master-slave relations. A brief analysis of the self-confessed "strategist" Nat Turner's (1800–1831) "Confessions" (1831) precedes a detailed examination of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845). In tracing the strategic actions of Douglass, this investigation effectively breaches the hermeneutical confines of conventional psychoanalysis, with game theory providing an altogether more insightful commentary on the major events in Douglass's *Narrative*: Deadlock helps to interrogate Douglass's initial, singular, and rationally irrational rebellion; David Hume's (1711–1776) *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740) sets the interpretative groundwork for the collaborative escape that Douglass then organizes; and the concept of collaboration demonstrates how slavery encourages rational but unreasonable behavior among those in servitude.

The chapter that follows, "On Rousseau and Minoritarian Inequality," continues the game-theoretic analysis of antebellum texts that actively

reduce the representational gap between fiction and nonfiction, setting the Prisoner's Dilemma within that primary milieu. This contextualization facilitates an analysis of three minoritarian approaches to the Prisoner's Dilemma. Franklin's *Autobiography* provides the first case, Douglass's *Narrative* the second, and Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) the third. While Franklin's account indicates how a political manifestation of this dilemma was unavailing in discouraging his rebelliously cooperative resolve, Douglass's autobiography traces the fear-invoking effect that prefigured his experience of this dilemma, and Jacobs's nonfiction novel reveals how the passivity of female slaves did not necessarily circumscribe their strategic acuity. Having opened with Franklin's account of a Prisoner's Dilemma, chapter 5 closes in symmetrical fashion by presenting a postbellum delineation of the same strategy from a second majoritarian author with minoritarian sensibilities, as evidenced in Faulkner's "Centaur in Brass" (1932). In conclusion, the majoritarian failure to institute a Prisoner's Dilemma spares their prospective victims, who remain free to formulate their strategic desire for equality among humankind, as posited by Rousseau's influence on minoritarian strategizing in America.

Chapter 6, "On Rousseau's Stag Hunt and Douglass," pursues the outline of Rousseauan influence sketched in the previous section with a detailed consideration of *A Discourse Upon the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality Among Mankind* (1755). Rousseau's treatise posits collective action as a developmental shift critical to civilized man's evolution from his primitive forebears. Simply put, the Stag Hunt promoted societal evolution, with cooperation not only making the satisfaction of human needs more certain, but also presenting humankind with unwonted desires. The Stag Hunt, which models self-interested mutualism, provides a means of analyzing the contradiction between envy and empathy that defines the civilized condition. In applying this social dilemma to Douglass's *Narrative*, chapter 6 brings the strategic argument back to philosophy, with the outcome of a Stag Hunt revealing whether its participants are Lockean or Rousseauan. While John Locke's (1632–1704) interpretation of self-interest focuses on material well-being and risk aversion, Rousseau's interpretation of self-interest acknowledges material well-being and risk aversion, but includes an element of common humanity, which a moral recompense rather than a material reward attends. The brutality of slavery steered Douglass toward the Lockean, but freedom from bondage reoriented him toward the Rousseauan, and this realignment directed Douglass's strategic activities as a race leader who wished all Americans to benefit from such enlightenment.

The Stag Hunt dominates the present volume at this point. This prominence bespeaks the crucial role played by this social dilemma in establishing, developing, and maintaining human intersubjectivity. Coordination problems often prevent a reasoning player from anticipating a reasoning opponent. Each participant, as Lacan remarks in his "Parenthesis of Parentheses" (1966), "can only resort to something beyond the[ir] dyadic relationship" as psychological subjects. "In other words," as Lacan admits, and as the Three Viewpoints Argument implies, the participants must defer "to some law which presides over the succession of the rounds of the game" (44). Because the (Lacanian) passage from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, as Rousseau implicitly acknowledges, was an almost negligible psychological move for primitive men, their Stag Hunts unwittingly deferred to such laws.[3] The intersubjectivity that appeals to Lacanians—on the one hand, that of the subject having his unconsciousness relayed back to him in inverted form by the *other*; on the other hand, that of the conscious introjection formative of conscience—played no part in intersubjective development at this time.[4] That the Stag Hunt earned its name some 200 years before the Prisoner's Dilemma and Chicken—and accepting that Deadlock is not a coordination problem in the strictest game-theoretic sense—is no coincidence. This chronological ordering points to the initial social preeminence of the Stag Hunt despite the mathematical relationship between the social dilemmas (including Deadlock) that posits the Prisoner's Dilemma as their centre of strategic gravity.

The seventh chapter, "On Faulkner's Rousseauan Bear Hunt," shows why Rousseau's minoritarian philosophy would have resonated with the philosophically maturing Faulkner of the 1930s. "Golden Land" (1935) offers fleeting evidence of this meditative reciprocity: the golden land of California embodies a tarnished extrapolation from that halcyon period in the development of human faculties between primitive individualism and modern selfishness that Rousseau calls the *juste milieu* (or golden mean). Further textual endorsement for the proposition that Faulkner parallels if not responds to the Rousseauan comes from a detailed analysis of Faulkner's "A Bear Hunt" (1934) alongside Rousseau's "A Stag Hunt" from *A Discourse Upon the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality Among Mankind*. At first glance, Faulkner's short story offers a comical parallel to Rousseau's visualization of emergent cooperation among primitive men, with a bear taking the part of a stag, and humor taking the part of philosophy. On closer inspection, however, Faulkner's story reveals profounder aspects. These serious sides, which concern social classification, racial segregation, interpersonal cohesion, and ecological respect, recommend "A Bear Hunt" as not only a significant precursor to Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942), but also a more

meticulously yet less tortuously crafted piece of work than the subsequent novel. The fair division of the spoils from Stag Hunts precludes ecological thoughtlessness, but Faulkner's tale clearly shows how landownership has betrayed the sensitive dependence of tribal Americans on the (Rousseauan) ideal of cooperative strategies. That majoritarians in the South favored self-interest over ecological constraint mortified Faulkner. "A Bear Hunt," as a rejoinder, propounds the Rousseauan assertion that stable societies must conform to their material situations.

In learning an ecological lesson from minoritarian wisdom—seemingly from the foreign (or alien) Rousseau and assuredly from the Chickasaw of Mississippi—Faulkner was an exception to the majoritarian rule. Chapter 8, "On Minoritarian Stag Hunts," analyzes Faulkner's aesthetic rendition of this tuition in "A Bear Hunt" before shifting the focus of such tutelage to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). This change in emphasis from one Nobel laureate to another both reinvokes Douglass's *Narrative* and Jacobs's *Incidents*—two testimonies with which Morrison was cognizant when she wrote *Beloved*—and illustrates Morrison's Faulknerian-like appreciation of strategic situations; indeed, the Stag Hunt effectively emerges as one of Morrison's self-defined clichés. Such an expression is not hackneyed; "otherwise," as Morrison explains to Claudia Tate, "it would have been discarded" (159). This form of cliché, she insists, "can never be overwritten; it's still mysterious" (160). In terms of the theory of games of strategy, the variations between Stag Hunt versions, renderings that include alterations in context, different participants, and similarly ordered yet dissimilarly proportioned outcomes, ensure differences that offset the mundanity of simple repetition. Appropriately, as this chapter then demonstrates, Morrison's creative translation of a Stag Hunt exemplifies the strategy that Henry Louis Gates Jr. terms "Signifyin(g)": an African-American variation on a majoritarian figuration that retains enough of the original model to emphasize socioeconomically engendered differences. The vestiges of ludic self-interest, suggest Faulkner and Morrison, enable persecuted individuals to collaborate, and such cooperation helps to reestablish unselfish individualism. This minoritarian attitude toward intersubjectivity concerns options, risks, and choosing—the type of positive resistance that strategic acuity admirably serves.

Chapter 9, "On Minoritarian Chicken and Majoritarian Bullying," closes the present volume in promoting this minoritarian defiance. The strategic games facilitated by the preference structures of social dilemmas need not adopt destructive physical expression, but can inscribe themselves more playfully, though no less significantly, in language. The minoritarian (or vernacular) English of African Americans provides a

telling example of this inscription in Hurston's repeated illustrations of *playing the dozens* in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). This arresting form of verbal Chicken retains the combative but not the violent physical nature of the common majoritarian expression with which it plays. That Hurston must end her novel with a return to that strategic standard, however, points to the truly tragic endgame that continued to circumscribe so many minoritarian lives during the period in which her novel closes (the late 1910s to early 1920s). In bringing this tragedy up to date, chapter 9 considers how a once inward-looking America emerged from World War II as a self-appointed arbiter of international justice and how the assumption of this role redounded in another instance of rational irrationality from a minoritarian source: the unreasonable terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In answering this terrorism, as an analysis of Mohsin Hamid's (1971–) *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) demonstrates, a different strategic attitude to the same historical context proffers the reasonableness of an outright gift.

Ironically, as minoritarian confinement reveals in resisting that detention, strategic habituation threatens majoritarian practice. While human rationality has evolved as a mechanism for making practical and effective use of logic, evolution has simultaneously worked to hide that application for reasons of efficiency, and that evolutionary process is both biological and cultural. The resultant concealment baffles traditionalists in the arts. Literary scholars are among their number. Unlike the sciences, which appreciate and exploit this covert mechanism, the humanities need to unearth the basics of rationality. Circumstances forced antebellum minoritarians to rediscover these fundamentals; postbellum minoritarians have sustained this revival; minoritarian literature records this revolutionary trajectory; and game theory helps to retrace that record profitably. This hermeneutical achievement respectively confirms and forwards those discoveries for which psychoanalysis earns both credit and censure. "While psychoanalysis cannot, since its experience is limited to the individual, claim to grasp the totality of any sociological object or even the whole set of forces currently operating in our society," muse Jacques Lacan and Michel Cénac, "the fact remains that it discovered in analytic experience relational tensions that seem to play a basic role in all societies, as if the discontent in civilization went so far as to lay bare the very meeting point of nature and culture" (104). In contrast, the theory of games of strategy appreciates the relational tensions between societal members, on the one hand, and between encompassing social formations, on the other hand, tensions that tend to cultivate respective internal and external divides of a minoritarian-majoritarian nature.

Acknowledgments

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Papers on Language & Literature for "Coordination Problems in the Work of William Faulkner" (Winter 2007): 89–112.

Mississippi Quarterly for "Ecological Issues: Rousseau's 'A Stag Hunt' and Faulkner's 'A Bear Hunt'" (Spring 2016): n.p.

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CHAPTER 1

On Preliminary Matters*

> Es giebt eine Reihe idealischer Begebenheiten, die der Wirklichkeit parallel lauft. Selten fallen sie zusammen. Menschen und Züfalle modificiren gewöhnlich die idealische Begebenheit, so dass sie unvollkommen erscheint, und ihre Folgen gleichfalls unvollkommen sind.
>
> —Novalis, *Schriften* (274)

> There are few persons, even among the calmest thinkers, who have not occasionally been startled into a vague yet thrilling half-credence in the supernatural, by *coincidences* of so seemingly marvellous a character that, as *mere* coincidences, the intellect has been unable to receive them. Such sentiments—for the half-credences of which I speak have never the full force of *thought*—are seldom thoroughly stifled unless by reference to the doctrine of chance, or, as it is technically termed, the Calculus of Probabilities. Now this Calculus is, in its essence, purely mathematical; and thus we have the anomaly of the most rigidly exact in science applied to the shadow and spirituality of the most intangible in speculation.
>
> —Edgar Allan Poe, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (506–507; emphasis original)

"*Game Theory*," as John Davis Williams (1909–1964) elucidates in *The Compleat Strategyst* (1954), is shorthand for "the *Theory of Games of Strategy*" (3; emphasis original). The word strategy, "as used in its everyday sense, carries the connotation of a particularly skillful or adroit plan, whereas in Game Theory it designates any *complete* plan." In short, "*a strategy is a plan so complete that it cannot be upset by enemy action or Nature*; for everything that the enemy or Nature may choose to do, together with a set of possible actions for yourself, is just part of the description of the strategy" (16; emphasis original). Each strategic participant is a self-interested *player*. Individual players or

teams of individuals are distinct (or atomistic) agents. "In some models," as Paisley Livingston notes, "a single 'player' is comprised of a number of 'agents' that are not even aware of each other's moves and strategic rationales" (69). Situations that involve two or more players who cannot or will not communicate definitively are acutely relevant to the human condition.[1] In these *coordination problems*, players must make choices in the knowledge that other parties face the same options, that a *coordination condition* equivalent to silence pertains between the players, and that the outcome for each party will result from the decisions of every player. "Coordination games," as Michael S. Alvard and David A. Nolin emphasize, "are characterized by common interest among players" (534); most game-theoretic modeling, as Williams observes, deals with two-player dilemmas, because "many situations which are not strictly two-person games may be treated as if they were" (13); and "whether the outcome of a game is comic or tragic, fun or serious, fair or unfair," as Steven J. Brams (1940–) states in *Biblical Games* (1980), "it depends on individual *choices*" (6; emphasis original). Each logically minded player in a self-interested situation has to anticipate the other players' choices and pick a strategy according to the prospects of preference-satisfaction. Coordination problems often present each player with only two choices; these options concern *cooperation* or *defection* with regard to the other players; some games present a wider range of choices, but the theory of games of strategy can break these options down into a series of paired decisions. That two-choice two-player scenarios are common in game-theoretical modeling is, therefore, unsurprising. A *utility* (or *payoff*) describes the preference-satisfaction for each possible outcome, which may comprise a material gain (or *narrow utility*) or a combination of material and psychological gain; a *banker*—who is either extrinsic or intrinsic to the play, and who comprises an agency, authority, or a combination of the players themselves—sets this value.[2] The banker may rank the possible outcomes of a game according to a basic ordinal scale, a more detailed discrete scale, or a finely nuanced continuum.

"Nothing, in effect, can be grounded on chance—the calculation of chances, strategies—that does not involve at the outset a limited structuring of the situation," complains Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1977).[3] "When modern games [*sic*] theory elaborates the strategy of the two partners, each meets the other with the maximum chances of winning on condition that each reasons in the same way as the other. What is the value of an operation of this kind," remarks Lacan, "if not that one's bearings are already laid down, the signifying reference-points of the problem are already

marked in it and the solution will never go beyond them?" (40). While game theorists do not necessarily assume "that one's bearings are already laid down" in a coordination problem, because underdevelopment of a person's rational faculty might offset that player's game-theoretic bearings, they do accept that "the signifying reference-points of the problem are already marked." This assumption, however, does not predetermine limited, obvious, and uninteresting outcomes to situations of strategic self-interest.

A logical approach to certain coordination problems, as Oskar Morgenstern (1902–1977) explains, will provoke "an endless chain of reciprocally conjectural reactions and counter-reactions" (174), which demands what often amounts to an unsatisfactory conclusion: an arbitrary choice from the solutions on offer. What is more, as Derek Parfit (1942–) avows in *On What Matters* (2011), "we can respond to reasons [. . .] without knowing that this is what we are doing" (2:461), and the work of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), so often resorted to by behavioral analysts, offers limited enlightenment in such cases. "The main reason we know little about the cognitive impulses, their dynamics, or their pathology, is that they are not important in the clinic," admits Abraham H. Maslow (1908–1970) in *Motivation and Personality* (1954), "and certainly not in the clinic dominated by the medical-therapeutic tradition, i.e., getting rid of disease." Whereas the split subject's societal interrelations are the object of psychoanalysis, the unified subject is the object of psychological monitoring and administration—but neither approach provides the insight proffered by game theory. Freudian psychoanalysts tend to overlook the importance of cognition, ignore the rational thought processes of the human subject, and search exclusively for signs of severe repression. "As a consequence," declares Maslow, "we find nothing on the subject [of conscious impulses] in the writings of the great inventors of psychotherapy and psychodynamics, Freud, Adler, Jung, etc." (48)—a point that Lacan concedes in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*: "Freud has told us often enough that he would have to go back to the function of consciousness, but he never did" (57); even Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), which presents a theory of identity, one on which the majority of early ego psychologists relied, does not provide a theory of consciousness. Filling this conceptual gap adds additional contours to the psychical map. These additions help to identify behavioral triggers that psychoanalytical practices often overlook. Lack of a rational solution to an intersubjective dilemma, where such an answer is a contextual expectation, can incite compulsive actions, obsessive behavior, hysteria, or paranoia. "There is," as Ian

Parker's Lacanian reading of this coordinative predicament explains, "a tension [. . .] between the 'subject' and 'structure'" (338). This tension, or absence of expected closure, helps to explain why, as David Metzger reports, there is a "curiously logical range of behaviors identified in the psychoanalytic clinic" (81).

Although the unconscious was a topic that absorbed Freud's terrific energies, "to make the id the sum total of the subject's innate dispositions," as Lacan and Michel Cénac admit, "is a purely abstract definition devoid of use value" (121); as a result, Freudian subject matter need not obsess present-day epistemological, hermeneutical, or psychological studies. "If physicists can change their minds about the correctness and accuracy of their theories," submits Henry C. Plotkin in *The Imagined World Made Real* (2002), "who would bet against our theories about the mind/brain altering, and altering in a big way, as novel empirical methods are developed and fresh theoretical insights arise. For example," propounds Plotkin, "it is extraordinary that psychology came to realize the huge importance of the human ability to understand that others have intentional mental states, so called Theory of Mind [. . .], only about 20 years ago" (166–167). This lack of insight seems particularly remarkable when psychologists readily admit that "there is no evidence that any non-human animal, chimp or otherwise, understands that others of its kind know things or want things in the same way that it itself knows or wants things" (198).

The history of debates concerning self-interest further magnifies the noteworthiness of this nescience. "The resolute application of the assumption of self-interest to social actions and institutions," as Russell Hardin summarizes in "Rational Choice Theory" (1998), "began with Hobbes and Machiavelli, who are sometimes therefore seen as the figures who divide modern from early political philosophy. Machiavelli commended the assumption of self interest to the prince; Hobbes applied it to everyone" (64). In *The Prince* (1531–1532), Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) does not renounce the influence of God on human affairs, but unlike most Renaissance scholars, he charges individuals with significant responsibility for their personal circumstances. "I believe that it is probably true that fortune is the arbiter of half the things we do," states Machiavelli, "leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves" (105). One matter of pure self-interest, according to Machiavelli's judgment, is an individual's loyalty to an alliance. The utility "for being a true friend" is "prestige," and employing this strategy in collaborative games "is always more advantageous than neutrality" (96).