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## Willful Parts: Problem Characters or the Problem of Character

Sara Ahmed

A FRIEND DESPERATELY WANTED a happy baby. Her own happiness seemed to depend on it. She wanted a happy baby before she even had a baby and then, when she had a baby, she was determined he would be the happy baby she wanted. Every time I saw her with her baby, he was crying. And she would always say: he is being so unlike himself. He is normally such a happy baby, she would say. If her baby was crying, he was out of character. However, I never actually saw the baby in character. Now, in family memory, her baby is recalled as a happy baby; now as a child, he is told what a happy baby he was. The happy nature of his character has even become a thing in the world, an account given to him of him. He can live up to it: or not.

An investment in character can teach us about the character of investment: how much an idea of character can be an attachment, can be what is held onto; how that idea can erase from memory all that is inconsistent with it. An idea of character is an idea of consistency. It is not simply that the idea removes inconsistency in the sense of removing all the signs of that which is not consistent with it. That idea is also an expectation of consistency, which can generate its own object even in its failure to be realized as object. Not to fulfill an expectation of character is to be out of character; but to be out of character is to be understood in relation to an expectation of character, however unfulfilled. If having this or that character is attributed to us, then our experiences might be characterized as a consequence of an attribution. An attribution of character is, in other words, *an experience of an attribution*. We might be fashioned with reference to an attribution. This is how we can be more or less like ourselves over time. This is how deviation can be framed as becoming unlike ourselves. An expectation of character can be experienced as a narrowing of possibility, such that rebellion can be a rebellion from a character we have been given.

So what of the fictional character? The fictional character might help us to reveal the fiction of character. Indeed, one could point to the difficulty of separating the meaning of character from the meaning of

fiction. The latter word, after all, derives from the Latin *ingere* “to shape, form, devise, feign,” originally “to knead, form out of clay.” To fiction (we might want to restore the verb here) is to give shape and form; fiction could be understood as giving character, whether or not that character is given an individual form. If the history of the word “fiction” relates directly to the question of character as an individual form, then the history of the word “character” relates directly to the question of fiction as a writing form. As Michael FitzGerald points out: “The original sense of *charassein* is ‘to inscribe or imprint,’ to produce something identifiable by marking an otherwise undifferentiated surface—as for instance the stamp of a coin gives it currency, or the inscription of a letter transforms a wax tablet into a text. By extension what is called ‘characteristic’ comes to encompass any distinguishing mark or feature by which something is known as what it is and set apart from others.”<sup>1</sup> Character is what creates something as a mark of or on a thing. Character is a system for creating distinctions between things.

A fictional character, in being given some form, might be recognizable as a character by its familiarity to what is already given. It is not, then, that we would expose the fictional character as an ideological failure of fiction; even if fictional characters do not and should not be read as expressing a truth of a character, they might still reveal the truth *about* character, as a system for creating truth. In his classic essay, Tzvetan Todorov suggested novels “do not imitate reality, they create it.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps by creating reality, the fictional world of the novel brings us close to a reality that exists before the act of creation; perhaps to create reality is to imitate reality by imitating its creation. More specifically: fictional characters might appear by imitating the creation of character. Todorov describes the role and function of psychological determinism: as soon as this determinism appears in the text, he suggests, then “the fictional character becomes endowed with character: he acts in a certain way, *because* he is shy, weak, courageous, etc. There is no such thing as character without determinism of this type” (RC 77). The “because logic” of character is what creates an illusion of a behind (a character appears behind an action, or as what is behind an action). Of course if a character is the one who lurks behind a scene (not just the character as an imagined person, but one whose characteristics determine the course of an action), then a character might be what we glimpse or be a glimpse (it is not that we have a glimpse of a character but that a character is a glimpse, what creates an impression that there is someone being glimpsed).

A character is created but not fully apprehended, existing only in profile.

We are used to thinking of character profiles as profiles *of* characters. We could think of character profiles in another sense: a profile is what characters are composed of. To be given a character is to be given a profile. Edmund Husserl shows in the first volume of *Ideas* that we do not perceive an object “all at once”: a profile of the object is what we can perceive from a specific viewing point.<sup>3</sup> We do not see what is behind the object. The object’s unity or totality is thus imputed. A character profile might also require an act of intentionality for its completion. It is not that we would then reduce any character to its profile: a three-dimensionality of character is possible because what is revealed is always exceeded. We “intend” the roundedness of characters, by *giving them a behind*, arriving as we do, with an expectation of what this or that profile might reveal. A character profile that seems convincing is one that *fulfills this intentionality*, our expectation of what a given profile (what is given as a profile) would or even should reveal. In “The Character of Character” Hélène Cixous describes how fulfillment (of norms that enable recognition) is what establishes “the commerce” between the reader and text.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this commerce can be extended to relations between characters in and out of fictional worlds.

Of course, when characters are convincing, we might attend to them less, or attend less to what makes them a character. We might learn more from or about character when a character poses a problem. Put simply: when someone becomes a problem, *we tend to question their character*. We might be concerned more with what is behind an action, when this action is not one we are behind. I want to consider “problem characters” by reflecting specifically on the attribution of willfulness to certain characters, as an explanation of the problem they are assumed to be behind. Drawing on analysis of educational writings, as well as a discussion of novels by George Eliot, who can be described as a novelist of the will,<sup>5</sup> I offer an account of how the “problem character” can teach us about the problem of character. In particular, I want to explore what Alex Woloch might call “distributed character” in terms of the distribution of will.<sup>6</sup> This system of distribution creates a distinction between characters in terms not only of the nature of their will (that a character description *can proceed* as a description of will is a point of interest), but also in terms of the relationship between individual will (the character of an individual) and the general will (the character of a community). The willful character is the one who poses a problem for a community of characters, such that willfulness becomes that which must be resolved and even eliminated. My reading strategy will not be to offer a character analysis of problem characters, but to analyze characterization as a technology of attribution.

## Character and Will

Why pose the question of character through the question of will and willfulness? One can begin with a simple point: the idea of will is central to modern understandings of character. An often cited quote from the late eighteenth-century German Romantic philosopher Novalis is “character is a completely fashioned will.”<sup>7</sup> The achievement of character *is* the fashioning of a will, which is also described in terms of cultivation and application. Novalis suggests that the more character “is dependent on chance and circumstances” then “the less I have a determinate, cultivated-*applied* will. The more it has these qualities, the more independent it is in those respects.”<sup>8</sup> The will becomes understood here as a kind of “internal influence”: *as that which can influence character to be less influenced*. An independence of character—to be less dependent on both circumstance and happenstance—requires the application of will. The will is defined here against contingency, and might even offer a defence against contingency.

We could reflect on the coevolution of the idea of character and the idea of the will. It is beyond the scope of this essay to offer a full account of this coevolution. But we can think more about how the description of character as a “fashioned will” suggests a particular idea of character. In his essay on “Freedom of the Will” John Stuart Mill describes character as “amenable to the will,” which means that we can, “by employing the proper means, improve our character.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed he argues that we are “under the moral obligation to seek the improvement of our moral character” (CW 466). To improve the character is an imperative of the will. An improvement would be an effect of willing the right way (a way that is in accordance with what is right), but would also be dependent on being willing to put one’s energy into improvement. If a character can be thought of as a will product, as that which is brought into existence by will, then character might even be the material, or provide the material, that is *given form* through will, in the sense of given an end, shape, or purpose.

We could thus describe character in terms of plasticity: plastic is a material that can yield to an influence. The idea of character being achieved by, or even as, the “direction of matter” was central to the work of the psychologist William James, particularly in his influential reflections on habit. His arguments rested on a thesis of plasticity as “the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once” (PP 105). William James describes the gradual formation of character as the gradual loss of plasticity: over time, a person yields less or becomes less yielding. As Gail Weiss describes, for James,

"this initial plasticity is lost and people get more set in their ways."<sup>10</sup> James cites the work of a M. Léon Dumont on habit:

Everyone knows how a garment, after having been worn a certain time, clings to the shape of the body better than when it was new. . . . A lock works better after being used some time; at the outset a certain force was required to overcome certain roughness in the mechanism. The overcoming of their resistance is a phenomenon of habituation. It costs less trouble to fold a paper after it has been folded already. This saving of trouble is due to the essential nature of habit, which brings it about that, to reproduce the effect, a less amount of the outward cause is required. (*PP* 105)

Although William James considers habits as socially conservative (he famously describes habit as "the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent" [*PP* 105–06]) he is also suggesting that habits enable the conservation of energy. When more actions become habitual, subjects are more free to attend to other matters, including those matters that might matter in a morally significant way. For James, even if habits are socially conservative, they make a dynamic psychic life possible.

The idea that habits function as "trouble savers" is particularly suggestive for a reflection on character. The acquisition of character could be understood as a means of saving trouble: to have a character is a preferred route (there is a route in routine), which allows a subject to make their way in the world without having to think about their way. If to acquire a habit is to become relatively set in your ways, then character could be redescribed as "becoming set." Given that habits are what tend to stick, the aim of moral education is to direct the subject the "right way" before they are stuck. For James the conservative nature of habits means foregrounding the importance of education as a way of "directing" or orienting the child who as a not-yet adult is not yet set in his or her ways.

What we might call "the plastic child" thus became the object of moral education. It is for this reason that moral education came to place considerable importance on the will as that which can direct character. Accepting as he does Novalis's description of character as "a completely fashioned will," John Stuart Mill concludes that the task of moral education must be "the education of the will" (*CW* 453). The history of educational philosophy, from John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (first published in 1693) onward, could be described in terms of the development of an education of the will. What I called "the plastic child" is continuous with the Lockean metaphor of the "white paper." The paper waits for an impression, and is thus impressionable; the matter

of the paper matters as that which can be impressed upon. In Locke's educational treatise, the child certainly appears as impressionable, as the one who is easily turned: "I imagine the minds of children, as easily turned, this or that way, as water itself."<sup>11</sup>

Moral training begins with this impressionable child. The aim of education is to teach the child in such a way that what they receive becomes set as a way: "Every man must some time or other be trusted to himself, and his own conduct; and he that is a good, virtuous and able man, must be made so within. And therefore, what he is to receive from education, what is to sway and influence his life, must be something put into him, betimes, habits woven into the very principle of his nature" (ST 34). Locke suggests that becoming virtuous requires not only learning obedience, but also learning to master one's own inclinations and desires. Virtue, he suggests, "lies in a power of denying ourselves the satisfaction of our own desires" so that we learn to "go without [their] longings" (ST 31). The will becomes key to moral character as that which allows the mastery of desire.

Locke offers a set of pedagogical methods for the parents of young children. He suggests that "awe" is crucial to directing the child. To be in awe of those with authority is how authority can be given: "A compliance and suppleness of their wills, being by a steady hand introduced by their parents, before children have memories to retain the beginnings of it, and will seem natural to them and work afterwards in them, as if it were so, preventing all occasions of struggling or repining" (ST 34). The aim of this willing compliance is to save the child trouble, to avoid the struggle with authority; this compliance through awe is installed without a memory of the origin of its existence. If willing compliance is a trouble saver, then will comes to function as habit. Locke indeed suggests that the moral aim is to install the right habits in the child, which is not simply about making the child compliant, but about making the child willing to will the right thing, so that the willing right becomes habitual. The idea of "habits of the will" might seem counterintuitive, given that we might associate "the will" with voluntary aspects of experience. The idea here is not only that it would become a habit *to* will (to exercise, as it were, the muscle of the voluntary), but that through habit, the will can be directed in the right way, so that it does right of its own accord, without too much exertion or effort. Virtues have often been defined as "habits of the will."<sup>12</sup>

If the will of the child is amenable to redirection, then the will of the child becomes crucial to the development of moral character. The pedagogic aim is to achieve a *compliance of the will*. The will, in other words, becomes both an object and a method of education: what it works on,

what it works through. In the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* was crucial for how it redefined the purpose of education in relation to will. The child's will remains the object of the educator's will. Unlike many other such treatises of the time, however, Rousseau emphasized the importance of not subjugating the child's will: he argues that the child should "never act from obedience but from necessity," suggesting that words such as "obey," "command," "duty," and "obligation" be excluded from the vocabulary of the educator.<sup>13</sup> If for Locke the child's will must become compliant, for Rousseau the child must be encouraged to develop its own will more freely (although, as we shall see, the freedom of will involves another form of compliance). As Simon Dentith argues, Rousseau's educational philosophy is "more famous for encouraging children in their own self-will than discouraging it."<sup>14</sup> One crucial aspect of his argument was that the child will not learn by being compelled by the will of others. Rousseau notes in a footnote: "You may be sure the child will regard as caprice any will which opposes his own or any will which he does not understand" (*É* 56). And yet, at the same time, the will of the child is presented as a problem that needs to be resolved; by implication, the will of this child will be misdirected without proper instruction.

Rousseau is very explicit about how the child's will can be directed without being compelled. In one rather famous example, the narrator in *Émile* describes how he undertook the charge of a child who "was accustomed not only to have his own way, but to make everyone else do as he pleased" (*É* 101). He calls this child "capricious" (*É* 101). The narrator describes how whenever the child wanted to go out, his tutors would take him out. The child's will thus determines what happens; the child's will is the ruler of the house. When the child insists on going out, the narrator does not go with him, but nor does he forbid the child from going. When the child goes out (exercising his own free will), he arranges for people to oppress and tease the child (although he also arranges for a stranger to follow him and ensure the child's well-being—the implication is that he does not want to harm the child, even if there must be severity in this lesson). The narrator arranges for the child to experience *firsthand* the unpleasant consequences of insisting on his own will. The narrator comments rather triumphantly that he had "succeeded . . . in getting him to do everything I wanted without bidding him or forbidding him to do anything" (*É* 105). The child thus comes to will what the narrator wants him to will, without that will being subjected to a command. Rousseau suggests the child must *come to will freely what the child should will*: "There is no subjection so complete, as that which preserves the form of freedom: it is thus that the will itself

is taken captive" (*É* 100). The child should be obedient or subject to parental will, but in a way that does not feel like obedience, as it involves a sense of freedom, that sense of being willing.

The subjection of will can thus take place under the sign of freedom. It is quite clear from the example how freedom of will is preserved as an idea that works to conceal the work of its creation. The child is made to will according to the will of those in authority, without ever being conscious of the circumstances of this making. In the nineteenth century, James Mill's educational philosophy offers a harsher set of solutions to the problem of directing the child's will. For Mill, the child is always potentially tyrannical; the child by implication would become a tyrant without the intervention of the educator. The task is not necessarily to break the child's will, but to make the child align their will with the will of the parents. Mill describes the tyrannical child in the following way: "There is not one child in fifty, who has not learned to make its cries and wailings an instrument of power; very often they are an instrument of absolute tyranny. When the evil grows to excess, the vulgar say the child is spoiled. Not only is the child allowed to exert an influence over the wills of others, by means of their pains, it finds, that frequently, sometimes most frequently, its own will is needlessly and unduly commanded by the same means, pain, and the fear of pain."<sup>15</sup> The child who is allowed to influence the wills of others is in turn under the command of the pain and fear of pain that is engendered. Mill's approach to moral training is a training in affect: the child comes to feel happiness in the happiness of others, and to feel misery in response to the misery of others (*PW* 180). A good character would be "affectively" aligned. This affective alignment could be redescribed as a will alignment: to will as others will, and as others will you to will. The aim of education is to bring the will of the child into line not only with parental will, but with moral law, upon which parental will is assumed to rest.

### The Willful Child

Within educational theory, the plasticity of the child is translated into an ethical imperative to shape the character of the child by directing the child's will. As we might note, and especially in the writings of James Mill, this moral imperative rests on a narrative of danger, which in Mill's terms would be represented as the child realizing its natural potential for tyranny. In this section, my aim is to explore how moral danger is located in the character of the willful child. If willfulness describes the consequences of an incompletely fashioned will, then this character

can also function as a reminder of the necessity of the ethical task of self-completion.

The construction of the moral and social danger of willfulness has been central to popular narratives and fables of the modern period. Take the following Grimm story:

Once upon a time there was a child who was wilful, and would not do as her mother wished. For this reason God had no pleasure in her, and let her become ill, and no doctor could do her any good, and in a short time she lay on her death-bed. When she had been lowered into her grave, and the earth was spread over her, all at once her arm came out again, and stretched upwards, and when they had put it in and spread fresh earth over it, it was all to no purpose, for the arm always came out again. Then the mother herself was obliged to go to the grave, and strike the arm with a rod, and when she had done that, it was drawn in, and then at last the child had rest beneath the ground.<sup>16</sup>

In this Grimm story, which is certainly a grim story, the willful child is the one who is disobedient, who will not do as her mother wishes. If authority assumes the right to turn a wish into a command, then willfulness arises as a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given. The costs of such a diagnosis are high: through a chain of command (the mother, God, the doctors) the child's fate is sealed. It is ill-will that responds to willfulness; the child is allowed to become ill in such a way that no one can "do her any good." Willfulness is thus compromising; it compromises the capacity of the subject to survive, let alone flourish. The punishment for willfulness is a passive willing of death, an allowing of death. Note that willfulness is also that which persists even after death: displaced onto an arm, from a body onto a body part. The arm inherits the willfulness of the child insofar as it will not be kept down, insofar as it keeps coming up, acquiring a life of its own, even after the death of the body of which it is a part. Willfulness involves a persistence in the face of having been brought down, where simply to "keep going" or to "keep coming up" is to be stubborn and obstinate. Mere persistence can be an act of disobedience.

This story helps us to consider the relation between willfulness and the will. It seems here that will and willfulness are externalized, that they acquire life by not being or at least staying within subjects. They are not proper to subjects insofar as they become property, what can be alienated or externalized into a part or thing. The different acts of willing are reduced to a battle between an arm and a rod. If the arm inherits the child's willfulness, what can we say about the rod? The rod is an externalization of the mother's wish, but also of God's command, which transforms a wish into *fiat*, a "let it be done," thus determining what will

happen to the child. The rod could be thought of as an embodiment of will, where the sovereignty of will is the right to command. And yet, the rod does not appear under the sign of willfulness; it becomes instead an instrument for its elimination. One form of will seems to involve the rendering of other wills *as* willful; one form of will thus assumes the right to eliminate the others.

What a story. The willful child: she has a story to tell. The willful child as a figure is painfully familiar, appearing everywhere in our literary as well as scholarly archives, under the sign not only of willfulness but of the strong-willed, self-willed, or the spoiled child (recall James Mill's earlier description: "the vulgar say the child is spoiled"). In reading these archives, it is important that we do not assume that willfulness simply describes a disposition: although as a description (of disposition) it might have certain effects (on disposition). To be attributed as being willful is to be compelled to live (and even die) in proximity to this category. One definition of willfulness is: "Asserting or disposed to assert one's own will against, persuasion, construction or command; governed by will without regard to reason; determined to take one's own way; obstinately self-willed or perverse."<sup>17</sup> The willful character insists on willing their own way, without reference to reason or command. Willfulness could be described as a character perversion: to be willful is to deviate, to will one's own way is to will the wrong way.

In classic realist novels of the nineteenth century, the figure of the willful or spoiled child often appears. Take George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, which offers a portrait of the character Gwendolyn. The title of the first book is "the spoiled child." The book itself thus takes on the attribution of Gwendolyn as spoiled; this character trait is given as if it is just another feature of an unremarkable social and moral landscape. The attribution of character takes the form of assertion. A character trait appears as the quality of an object, what is tangible, perceivable by others, given and thus shared. If the book gives form to this attribution, so too do the other characters in the book. Gwendolyn is repeatedly characterized with reference to her will: her mother says to her, "Your will was always too strong for me—if everything else had been different."<sup>18</sup> An excess of will easily stands in for an excess of character: "too strong" as "too much." The description of Gwendolyn's character as "spoiled" evokes a moral economy of will: even if her will appears as "too strong" in profile, it is also represented as a form of moral weakness, determined by what is agreeable: "Gwendolyn . . . was kindly disposed to anyone who could make life agreeable for her" (*DD* 45). The kindness of this disposal is a weakness in disposition.

Willfulness as a character attribution refers to subjects who not only insist on their way, but who will only what is agreeable to them, whose will is in accordance with their own desire. Spoiling provides an explanation of this insistence: the willful character is the one who has been allowed to get and have her own way. Gwendolyn's will thus becomes key to the presentation of her character: "Gwendolyn's will had seemed imperious in its small girlish sway; but it was the will of a creature with a large discourse of imaginative fears: a shadow would have been enough to relax its hold. And she had found a will like that of a crab or a boa-constrictor which goes on pinching or crushing without alarm at thunder" (DD 423). The use of will analogies is a central technique of characterization: if the will of someone is like x (and "like x," as we can see from this example, can take the form of a dramatic description), then we can decipher or tell what they are like. In Gwendolyn's case, her will is represented as swaying and easily swayed, ruled by passion, as giving way, as easily bent. The narrative bends according to the bends of Gwendolyn's will. The failure to become a subject of will rather than subject to it is presented as "behind" the plot, in particular behind the disaster of her marriage to Grandcourt. She marries him even though she knows he has a mistress and children, even though she has been visited in secret by his mistress whom he keeps secret.

The drama unfolds as a consequence of her swayable will: she lacks the firmness of resolve required to do the right thing. Indeed, she *willingly does wrong*, and in being accused as such, is cursed as such: "You took him with your eyes open. The willing wrong you have done me will be your curse" (DD 359). Evoking the pedagogic style of *Émile* in which the narrator arranges circumstances so that the student can identify the apparently "natural" consequences of self-will, the artifice of the novel is to arrange circumstances so that Gwendolyn as a character is forced to confront the unhappy consequences of her own will. The weakness of her resolve, in other words, is what leads her down an unhappy path, into combat with a husband whose strength of will is determined as a social strength: "Grandcourt had become a blank uncertainty to her in everything but this, that he would do just what he willed, and that she had neither the devices at her command to determine his will, nor any rational means of escaping it" (DD 426). Her situation is one in which *she cannot will her way out*. That her will does not mature, that it has the fragility of being whimlike or wishlike, is what allows her to become the object of another's will: "He had not repented of his marriage; it had really brought more of aim into his life, new objects to exert his will upon; and he had not repented of his choice" (DD 584–85).

Even if Gwendolyn's will causes her own unhappiness, it is also suggested that the unhappiness of her will is caused. After all, the very implication of the description of her own will as "girlish" is to assign this character of will to the character of femininity. The novel thus offers a social diagnosis of will distributions as gendered distributions. In the ending, Gwendolyn's will acquires the status of a moral event: in a moment of crisis, she is presented with the possibility to will her way out of her unhappiness (by killing Grandcourt). Though she does not follow her will into action, though her hands are not commanded by a wish to an act of murder, she experiences guilt that her hesitation in this moment of crisis allows her wish to be externalized. In her confession to Daniel Deronda she admits: "I only knew that I saw my wish outside of me" (DD 696). And then: "But if I had not had that murderous will—that moment—if I had thrown the rope on the instant—perhaps it would have hindered death?" (DD 699). Daniel offers the voice of compassion (we could describe this voice as an authorial voice) by seeking to absolve Gwendolyn from her guilt: "That momentary murderous will cannot, I think, have altered the course of events" (DD 699). She acquires strength from her personal effort to become a good woman, however much that effort is inspired by her desire not to be forsaken by Daniel Deronda (DD 701). Gwendolyn ends her plot with an enunciation of desire, but a desire that is directed toward being good: "At least, I want to be good—not like what I have been," she says to Daniel Deronda (DD 767). Giving up one's own will by willing what is good according to others becomes a moral lesson, experientiable as the gradual lessening of agitation: "She was experiencing some of that peaceful melancholy which comes from the renunciation of demands for self" (DD 795). My aim in the following section is to reconsider what is at stake in the lesson of willfulness.

### The Rebellious Part

Narratives of the willful or spoiled child seem to rest on a basic moral distinction between the will and willfulness, as if willfulness is a perversion of the promise of will. However, I would argue that the distinction between will and willfulness is unstable: a genealogy of will teaches us that will is framed as potentially willful, or even is already willful. In other words, the problem of willfulness relates directly to the problem of will.

The willful potentiality of will is central not only to the emergence of "an education of will" from the seventeenth century onward, but is a central idea within the history of Christian theology. The late fourteenth-century monk Thomas à Kempis, in his influential book *The Imitation of*

*Christ*, suggests that the category of the will, in referring to the self, is already willful. Will is represented as a kind of self-refentiality: insofar as the human being wills, then human beings tend to will what is in agreement with their own desire: "True it is that every man willingly followeth his own bent and is the more inclined to those who agree with him."<sup>19</sup> To will is to follow your own bent (one wonders, whether there is something queer about will).<sup>20</sup> For Kempis willfulness and pride are the same mark: "To refuse to hearken to others when reason or occasion requireth it is a mark of pride or wilfulness" (*IC* 11). The task of the Christian is to give up the will by obedience to God's will: to will, in other words, *whatever* God wills.

The relationship between the particular will and the general will is framed here as a relationship between the individual and God. I want to think more how the relationship between the individual and community is also defined in terms of particular and general will. Let's take as an example the work of the seventeenth-century French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal.<sup>21</sup> In *Pensées*, Pascal also associates the particular will with self-will. The will is a kind of tendency to tend toward oneself. As he puts it: "Everything tends toward itself. This is contrary to all order. The tendency should be toward the general."<sup>22</sup> For Pascal the particular will is already willful, describing a tendency to turn away from the general. The particular will names a will of a part. Pascal attributes danger to the willing part in the following way: "Let us imagine a body full of thinking members. If the foot and the hands had a will of their own, they could only be in their order in submitting their particular will to the primary will which governs the whole body. Apart from that, they are in disorder and mischief; but in willing only the goal of the body, they accomplish their own goal" (*P* 132). If a part is to have will, then it must will what the whole of the body wills. The body part that does not submit its will to the primary will causes disorder and mischief.

One could learn so much from Pascal's mischievous foot. The willful part is that which threatens the reproduction of an order. As he goes on to suggest: "If the foot had always been ignorant that it belonged to the body, and that there was a body on which it depended, if it had only the knowledge and the love of self, what regret, what shame for its past life, for having been useless to the body that inspired its life . . . ! What prayers for its preservation in it! For every member must be worthy to perish for the body, for which alone the whole is" (*P* 132). To be a thinking member of a body thus requires *you remember you are part of a body*. Willfulness thus refers to the part that, in willing, has forgotten it is *just a part*. The consequences of such forgetting are shame: the part that is ignorant of its status as part would compromise the preservation of the body of which it is a part.

Pascal's mischievous foot belongs to the same history as "the arm" in the Grimm story. A rebellion is a rebellion of a part. The rebel is the one who compromises the whole, that is, the body of which she is a part. When we think of this whole we think of "the organic body," but we also think of how the social is imagined as being *like* a body, as a sum of its parts. The family, for instance, can be imagined as a body that must be preserved by submitting to its primary will. I suggested earlier that the arm that keeps coming up inherits the willfulness of the child. Perhaps it would be closer to the truth of the story to say that the willful child bends her will in the way of an arm. If the willful child is the one whose will is not directed in the right way, toward the preservation of the family, then she acquires life only from death, as if her life is a killing of the body of which she is a part.

It is significant that willfulness is deposited in the figure of the child. As I have already pointed out, the figure of the willful child appears everywhere in our literary and scholarly archives, also under the sign of the spoiled child (think of the brutish maxim: spare the rod and spoil the child). The location of the threat of willfulness relates to the promissory logic of the family. The child is the one who promises to extend the family line, which requires the externalization of will as inheritance. The reproduction of the family—for example, the passing of property down its lines through which the family is assembled as a form—thus involves the repetition of acts of willing in matters of life and death. The child's willfulness is that which threatens the continuation of the family line as a line of command: *the threat is required for an insistence on willing right*; it is, after all, what justifies turning the line into a rod.

The family is not the only social body at stake here. The child also signifies the not-yet-subject, or the subject-to-come, the one who comes after, such as the guest, or the stranger. The stranger is the one who is not yet a member of the body of a community, and for whom becoming a member would require that they be willing to will what has already been willed. The conditions of will are thus the conditions of hospitality. The will is distributed amongst parts, and thus it creates parts, as that which can be distributed. If the general will is a distributed will, then what is distributed is some people's will rather than others. Or we could say that the general will is a generalization from a particular will: the power of command is the power to command, which we can now describe as the power to determine *who or what is a part*.

Whilst we need to think of power as the power to make people do something against their will, we also need to think of power as the power to make people will a certain way, to identify their will with what is already willed. As I have already noted with reference to Rousseau,

when will becomes the object of governance, it is not enough to be obedient, you must be so under your own free will. Force thus shapes what is “with the will” rather than simply what is “against the will.” This is why some forms of force might not be experientiable as force, as they involve a sense of being willing. Force can even take the following form: the making unbearable of the consequences of not willing what someone wills you to will. A condition of bearability would then be to will “freely” what someone wills you to will.

Willfulness can be attributed to those who refuse a command, or who refuse to be commanded. Note that a command is not always explicitly given by someone to someone. A command can be given in the very sharing of a direction. We can think of social experience as an experience of flow. We all know the experience of “going the wrong way” in a crowd. Everyone seems to be going the opposite way than the way you are going. No one person has to push or shove for you to feel the collective momentum of the crowd as a pushing and shoving. To keep going you have to push harder than any of those individuals who are going the right way. The body who is “going the wrong way” is the one that is experienced as “in the way” of the will that is acquired as momentum. For some bodies mere persistence, “to continue steadfastly,” requires great effort, an effort that might appear to others as stubbornness or obstinacy, as insistence on going against the flow.

What is “already willed” can be thought of as an effect of the way things are going; a collective way can accumulate as force. We notice this force when it fails, which means that the one does not submit to this force, who does not agree with it, by going along with it, can often appear as more forceful. The willful character is the one who “stands out” in the force field of the social, which is to say the field of the familiar. Phenomenology teaches us that the familiar is that which we tend to pass over, where “the that” can also be thought of as a tendency: the familiar as a tendency to pass over. If when we are in the familiar, things appear more or less in the background, then we might inhabit that familiar by acquiring a tendency to allow certain things to stay in the background. We can rethink the familiar through the category of will. What has already been willed might not appear as will, providing the background of experience. The “already willed” might be that which recedes. When things are going the right way, the way of the will, we tend not to notice them. Willfulness might “come up” at the moment *when an act of willing does not agree with what has receded.*

Willfulness for women in particular or as particulars might describe the costs of *not becoming background*. In George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver, who might be described as a willful heroine, has

an epiphany after reading Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, a text I referred to earlier. The answer to her troubles is to give up her will, as an act of giving up desire and inclination: "It flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem, that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure as if that were the central necessity of the universe" (*MF* 306). From the point of view of the parents, their daughter has become good because she has submitted to their will: "Her mother felt the change in her with a sort of puzzled wonder that Maggie should be 'growing up so good'; it was amazing that this once 'contrairy' child was becoming so submissive, so backward to assert her own will" (*MF* 309). The mother can thus love the daughter, who can support the family by staying in the background: "The mother was getting fond of her tall, brown girl, the only bit of furniture now in which she could bestow her anxiety and pride" (*MF* 309). When you treat someone like furniture you put them into the background. To recede into the background requires giving up a will, or aligning your will with what is already willed.

It is widely reported that George Eliot admired the work of Thomas à Kempis. It is certainly the case that the novel does not present Maggie's emptying herself of will as a wrongful submission. If anything, giving up a will of one's own is presented as an ethical ideal that Maggie fails *because* she is willful, as Sally Shuttleworth has suggested.<sup>23</sup> We can hear this judgment of willfulness in the very description of Maggie's reading of Kempis: "That renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow born willingly. Maggie was still panting for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it" (*MF* 306).<sup>24</sup> Although Maggie thinks she has found the key in renunciation, her finding is represented as born out of inclination, and thus contradicts in form the content of what is found. The narrative, in giving us this description, also gives us a profile of Maggie's character as willful from which we conjure a behind: "From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity, even into her self-renunciation; her own life was still a drama for her in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity" (*MF* 308). Maggie: just too willful to give up her will, we might as readers conclude. Or we might hear the drama of her part quite differently.

Eliot has a strong critique in her novels of what was called "egoism" in the literature of this period,<sup>25</sup> and it is very clear that her attribution of willfulness to certain characters offers its own value judgement. Willfulness is a negative evaluation of character. And yet characters are not contained by the value systems that organize the very form of their appearance. Nor is the representation of Maggie's willfulness without

its own ambivalence: the very care given *to* Maggie's character could be read as a form of care *for* her character. After all it is Maggie's sense of injustice that allows a narration of injustice within the novel. We can explore how willfulness—that apparently negative evaluation of character—becomes central to the recognition of injustice.

One of the extraordinary aspects of *The Mill on the Floss* is how it offers what we could call a phenomenology of childhood: showing how character can be experienced from without, as something given by others: character as the experience of an attribution. Over time Maggie is represented as becoming conscious of the injustice *of* attribution. The contrast between Tom and Maggie's experiences is partly achieved through the suggestion that, although they both act in ways that would ordinarily be designated as willful, Tom escapes the consequences of being judged in these terms: "Tom never did the same sort of foolish things as Maggie, having a wonderful instinctive discernment of what would turn to his advantage or disadvantage; and so it happened, that although he was much more wilful and inflexible than Maggie, his mother hardly ever called him naughty" (*MF* 73). Maggie is characterized as being trouble before she gets into trouble, and her actions are judged as evidence of her being the trouble she causes. The judgment of being trouble thus sticks to Maggie and not her brother Tom: "It was Mrs. Tulliver's way, if she blamed Tom, to refer his misdemeanour, somehow or other, to Maggie" (*MF* 114). The very attribution of willfulness *to* character participates in the gendering *of* character. Maggie has to live with the consequences of this attribution: anticipation can find its object, as if it is waiting for you, as a "tripping up," or a "catching out." There can be harshness in waiting.

To be caught by harshness can mean to become conscious of harshness. The process of becoming conscious of harshness—the affective consequence of injustice—is described as willfulness. When Maggie speaks out about the injustice of her extended family's lack of compassion in response to her father's loss of the Mill, she is heard as bold and thankless (*MF* 229). If rebellion is read as a consequence of willfulness (willfulness as behind an action), then willfulness might be required for a rebellion (willfulness as necessary to complete an action). In one rather extraordinary scene, Maggie cuts her hair in defiance of her mother. That her hair is the object of struggle matters: Maggie's hair, rather like Maggie herself, is represented as wayward, as if it has a will of its own.<sup>26</sup> Maggie is left looking rather like "a queer thing," to use Tom's description, and bitterly regrets her action: "Maggie felt an unexpected pang. She that thought beforehand chiefly of her own deliverance from her teasing hair and teasing remarks about it, and something also of

the triumph she could have over her mother and her aunts by this very decided course of action: she didn't want her hair to look pretty—that was out of question—she only wanted people to think her as a clever little girl and not to find fault with her. But now, when Tom began to laugh at her and say she was like the idiot, the affair had quite a new aspect" (*MF* 72).<sup>27</sup> The action is presented as impulsive and immature, but so too is Tom's teasing. It is the wider family that assign Maggie's action with meaning and value. Her Aunt comments that she looks "more like a gypsy" (*MF* 76)<sup>28</sup> than ever. A diagnosis of willfulness becomes a mode of stranger making. A willful part is treated as apart from the family: *a willful part becomes apart*.

It is not then surprising that Maggie's act of giving up her self-will returns us to the matter of hair: "Maggie in spite of her own ascetic wish to have not personal adornment, was obliged to give her way to her mother about her and submit to have the abundant black locks plaited into a coronet on the summit of her head after the pitiable fashion of those antiquated times" (*MF* 309). If Maggie cuts her hair in a rebellion against a command, then her submission of will becomes a submission to femininity and the cruelty of its fashion.

The judgment of willfulness is made when girls do not willingly occupy the place assigned to them by the gender order. Eliot does not give us an account of female liberation from this order, and in many ways her novels associate this order with a moral order that must be protected. In another George Eliot novel, *Romola*, about a character of the same name, we learn just this. Alas, poor Romola. She attempts to flee from a marriage based on deception, a marriage in which she loses both heart and inheritance. She is stopped by a monk who says: "You wish your true name and your true place in life to be hidden, that you may choose for yourself a new name and a new place, and have no rule but your own will. And I have a command to call you back. My daughter you must return to your place."<sup>29</sup> To leave her place, to leave her place of subordination, according to the monk, is to have no rule but the will. The monk describes Romola as a "willful wanderer, following [her] own blind choice"; as the one who is "seeking [her] own will" or "seeking some good other than the law [she is] bound to obey" (*R* 341). To break free from duty is narrated as willfulness, a wandering away from the right path. Romola is not allowed by the text to wander away, and indeed returns to Florence, following the line of the monk to a life of duty to others.

But even if willfulness leads only—in narrative terms—to renewed acts of submission, we can as feminist readers follow the attribution of willfulness in and out of the fictional worlds created by writers such as

George Eliot. We can read in willfulness the very potential to deviate from well-trodden paths, to wander, to err, to stray. Willfulness might be required to speak out about the injustice of what recedes; willfulness might be required to keep going “the wrong way.” The recognition of willfulness can become part of a shared feminist inheritance that is between texts and between characters, as well as a point of connection between fictional feminists and feminists who read fiction.

The fictional character can thus reach out of fiction, almost like a hand that comes up and comes out of the grave. The hand coming up and coming out can signify not only persistence and protest, or persistence *as* protest, but also a connection to others. Martha Nussbaum, reflecting on literature and philosophy, describes how for her ethical questions became real through the portrayal of literary characters: “The form of the questions,” she suggests, takes the form of “reflecting and feeling about a particular literary character.”<sup>30</sup> In a related way, the portrayal of female characters who are too big for their plots can be how feminist questions take form. The character of Maggie Tulliver has, after all, been the object of feminist identification over time. Simone de Beauvoir was reported to have been “crying for hours at the death of Maggie” and wrote how “like Eliot, who had become identified in my mind with Maggie Tulliver, I would myself become an imaginary character, endowed with necessity, beauty, and a sort of shimmering loveliness.”<sup>31</sup> In Lyndie Brimstone’s personal reflections on literature and Women’s Studies, she relates her own experience to Maggie’s: “Maggie with her willful hair” who “made one dash for passion then went back to rue it for the rest of her truncated life.”<sup>32</sup> A willful character in fiction can acquire a life out of fiction. And in becoming feminists, we might create imaginary characters for ourselves with reference to those whose familiarity we inherit from our immersion in fictional worlds.

If we share characters, we might share their traits. We might as feminists share not only the attribute of willfulness, but share a willingness to reclaim that attribute and give it new meaning (we could even say to reclaim willfully the attribute of willfulness). The attribution of willfulness has indeed historically been claimed by feminists in exactly this way. Queer feminist histories are full of self-declared willful subjects. Take as an example the Heterodoxy Club that operated in Greenwich Village in the early twentieth century, a club for unorthodox women. They described themselves as “this little band of willful women,” as Judith Schwarz reveals in her wonderful history of this club.<sup>33</sup> A heterodoxy is what is not in agreement with accepted beliefs, or holding unorthodox opinions. To be willful can mean to be willing to announce your disagreement, and to put yourself behind it. To be willful can mean being willing to be judged as disagreeable.

If feminist histories of struggle are histories of those who are willing to be willful, then we can turn back: we can listen to what and to who is behind us. In listening to this behind, we can hear voices, willful voices, that keep coming up by speaking up. Alice Walker describes a "womanist" in the following way: "A black feminist or feminist of color . . . Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one . . . Responsible. In charge."<sup>34</sup> Julia Penelope describes lesbianism as willfulness: "The Lesbian stands against the world created by the male imagination. What *willfulness* we posses when we claim our lives!"<sup>35</sup> Marilyn Frye's radical feminism uses the adjective willful: "The willful creation of new meaning, new loci of meaning, and new ways of being, together, in the world, seems to me in these mortally dangerous times the best hope we have."<sup>36</sup> Willfulness as audacity, willfulness as standing against, willfulness as creativity. The willful part who does not will the reproduction of the whole, who wills waywardly, or who wills wrongly, plays a crucial part in the history of feminist rebellion.

If we are charged with willfulness, then we can accept and mobilize this charge. To accept a charge does not necessarily mean to agree with it. To accept can mean being "willing to receive." We might be willing to receive the charge of willfulness, but in receiving it, we transform it. When willfulness becomes an act of self-description, it is no longer a character diagnosis. Character cannot provide a container. Willfulness might even become what is required to survive a character diagnosis. If we are judged as willful when we disagree with a judgment, then we might need to become willful to stand up for our disagreement. To stand up, to stand against the world, to create something that does not agree with what is given, requires willfulness. Sometimes you can only stand up by standing firm. Sometimes you can only hold on by becoming stubborn. When it requires willfulness to keep standing, to keep going the way things are not flowing, you become what they have insisted you have always been. An act of becoming willful thus performs a disagreement with the very judgment of being willful, as a disagreement that will not be visible to the one who judges. Becoming willful fulfills an expectation of character precisely in rebellion from its expectation. Willfulness thus resists the system of characterization even when it appears to fulfill its dreams.

## NOTES

- 1 Michael FitzGerald, "Character Evidence and the Literature of the Theophrastan Character" in *An Aesthetics of Law and Culture: Text, Images, Screens*, ed. Andrew T. Kenyon and Peter Rush (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2004), 144.
- 2 Tzvetan Todorov, "Reading as Construction," trans. Marilyn A. August, in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), 68 (hereafter cited as RC).
- 3 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), 130.
- 4 Helene Cixous, "The Character of Character," *New Literary History* 5, no. 2 (1974): 387.
- 5 For a good analysis of George Eliot's approach to the category of "the will" in relation to the scientific and psychological work on will of the period, see Michael Davis, *George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), especially chap. 4.
- 6 Alex Woloch, *The One Versus the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003).
- 7 Cited in John Stuart Mill, *The Logic of the Moral Sciences* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1999), 29. This quote from Novalis has not only been widely cited, it has also been misattributed: William James, for example, attributes the quote to John Stuart Mill in *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1918), 125 (hereafter cited as *PP*). Novalis's descriptions of character circulate widely in our scholarly and literary archives. *The Mill on the Floss* draws on another character quote from Novalis: "The tragedy of our lives is not created entirely from within. 'Character,' says Novalis in one of his questionable aphorisms 'character is destiny.' But not the whole of destiny. . . . Maggie's destiny, then, is at present hidden, and we must wait for it to reveal itself like the course of an unmapped river; we only know that the river is full and rapid, and that for all rivers there is the same final home." George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (New York: Signet Classics, 1965), 420 (hereafter cited as *MF*). There is perhaps a revival of interest in the work of Novalis in part, I suspect, because of an increasing recognition of the affinities between early German Romanticism and poststructuralism. See Clare Kennedy, *Paradox, Aphorism and Desire in Novalis and Derrida* (London: Maney, 2008).
- 8 Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 78.
- 9 John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 20 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979), 466 (hereafter cited as *CW*).
- 10 Gail Weiss, *Refiguring the Ordinary* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2008), 81.
- 11 John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (New York: Dover, 2007), 25 (hereafter cited as *ST*).
- 12 See, for example, Mary Whiton Calkins, *A Good Man and the Good: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 82. The significance of virtue to moral character is, of course, central to Aristotelian ethics. For Aristotle "the virtue of man also will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well." Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 37. For a good introduction to character from an Aristotelian perspective, see Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989). I should note here that whilst Aristotle makes habit central to virtue, this would not be defined in relation to the category of the will. It is widely argued that the idea of the will as "an independent power" comes into existence with Augustine and the Christian ethics of interiority. See

Alfredo Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 339. For an excellent genealogy of the idea of the will as a faculty, see Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (Orlando: Harcourt, Brace, 1978).

13 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Everyman, 1993), 62 (hereafter cited as *É*).

14 Simon Dentith, "George Eliot, Rousseau and the Discipline of Natural Consequences," *The Victorians and the Eighteenth Century: Reassessing the Tradition*, ed. Francis O'Gorman and Katherine Turner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 55.

15 James Mill, *Political Writings*, ed. Terence Ball. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 181 (hereafter cited as *PW*).

16 Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "The Wilful Child," in *The Complete Grimm's Fairytales*, trans. Margaret Hunt (Digireads.Com Publishing, 2009), 258. [http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=KA\\_Pt9jflAwC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Grimm+Margaret+Hunt+The+Complete+Fairy+tales&hl=en&ei=WWgETr22DYqnhAfkif2zDQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=KA_Pt9jflAwC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Grimm+Margaret+Hunt+The+Complete+Fairy+tales&hl=en&ei=WWgETr22DYqnhAfkif2zDQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false). This Grimm story forms part of what Alice Miller has called "the poisonous pedagogy" in *For Your Own Good: The Roots of Violence in Child-Rearing* (London: Virago, 1987). As Joseph L. Zornado describes, this pedagogy rests on willfulness: "Because the child is willful, stained by original sin and destructive, the adult must enact decisive and punitive measures so that the child will not grow up 'full of weeds,'" in *Inventing the Child: Culture, Ideology and the Story of Childhood* (New York: Garland, 2001), 79.

17 *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), 3778.

18 George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Terence Cave (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 96 (hereafter cited as *DD*).

19 Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ* (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2008), 11 (hereafter cited as *IC*).

20 The history of will could indeed be described as a rather queer history: associated for example with swerving atoms (Lucretius), sin (Augustine), and error (René Descartes). An Old English meaning of "will" (now only in Shetland Dialectic) is: "To go astray; to lose one's way; to stray." *OED* 3781.

21 Pascal is using general will in a theological sense, and is a key antecedent to Rousseau. For an interesting reflection on the secularization of the general will, see Patrick Riley, *The General Will Before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine into the Civic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988).

22 Blaise Pascal *Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter (New York: Dover, 2003), 132–33 (hereafter cited as *P*).

23 Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 104.

24 For a good discussion of the idea of renunciation in relation to this passage, see David Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations: A Reading of the Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 123–39.

25 See John Halperin, *Egoism and Self-Discovery in the Victorian Novel* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1974). As Halperin notes for Eliot "moral education" is narrated as "movement from egoism to a more objective moral vision" (125). I would suggest that feminists have historically been charged with egoism, with putting self before others. This charge helps explain the tension in Eliot's novels between moral and feminist vocabularies.

26 There is much longer story to be told of hair and willfulness. For a useful discussion of hair in the Victorian novel see Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009).

27 Note here that the desire to be thought of as clever might be treated as self-willed (wanting an agreeable idea of oneself reflected back to oneself) but self-willed in a distinctly feminist way (an attribute of cleverness for girls might be an agreeable feminist idea that is disagreeable to others). There are many points in the novel of sympathetic identification with Maggie's cleverness.

28 For a good discussion of the significance of the gypsy narrative see Susan Meyer, *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996).

29 George Eliot, *Romola* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 338 (hereafter cited as *R*). I wonder whether the voice of the monk is the voice of Thomas à Kempis.

30 Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 11.

31 Cited in Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 247.

32 Lyndie Brimstone, "Refusing to Close the Curtains Before Putting on the Light: Literature and Women's Studies," in *Transforming the Disciplines: A Women's Studies Primer*, ed. Elisabeth L. MacNabb, Mary Jane Cherry, Susan L. Popham, René Perri Prys (Binghamton, NY: Hawarth, 2001), 73.

33 Judith Schwarz, *Radical Feminists of Heterodoxy* (Norwich, VT: New Victoria, 1986), 103.

34 Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (London: Phoenix, 2005), xi, emphasis in original.

35 Julia Penelope, *Call Me Lesbian: Lesbian Lives, Lesbian Theory* (Freedom, CA: Crossing, 1992), 42, emphasis in original.

36 Marilyn Frye, *Willful Virgin: Essays in Feminism, 1976–1972* (Freedom, CA: Crossing, 1992), 9.