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Chapter 1

Style in America and the King James Version

As I assemble these re ections on the presence of the King James Version in American writing, the fourth centennial of the 1611 translation stands on the horizon. A great deal has changed in American culture since the third centennial was celebrated in 1911. At that juncture, the King James Version was extolled by leading public gures such as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson as America s national book and as the text that more than any other had affected the life of English-speaking peoples. My guess is that the 2011 milestone will be marked more in academic circles than in the public domain. In the century since the previous centennial was celebrated, two major shifts have taken place: the practice of reading the Bible aloud, of reading the Bible at all, and of memorizing passages from the Bible has drastically diminished; and the King James Bible has ceased to be the almost universally used translation as readers have been encouraged to use more accessible

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versions, which also happen to be stylistically inferior in virtually all respects.

The decline of the role of the King James Version in American culture has taken place more or less simultaneously with a general erosion of a sense of literary language, although I am not suggesting a causal link. The reasons for this latter development have often been noted, and hence the briefest summary will suf ce for the purpose of the present argument: Americans read less, and read with less comprehension; hours once devoted to books from childhood on are more likely to be spent in front of a television set or a computer screen; epistolary English, once a proving ground for style, has been widely displaced by the high-speed short-cut language of e-mail and text-messaging. The disappearance of a sense of style even makes itself felt in popular book reviewing. Most contemporary reviewers clearly have no tools to discuss style, or much interest in doing so. One unsettling symptom of the general problem is that in the country s most in uential reviewing platform, the *New York Times Book Review*, when a critic singles out a writer for stylistic brilliance, it is far more often than not the case that the proffered illustrative quotation turns out to be either at and banal writing or prose of the most purple hue. Obviously, there are still people in the culture, including young people, who have a rich and subtle sense of language, but they are an embattled minority in a society where tone-deafness to style is increasingly prevalent. That tone-deafness has also affected the academic study of literature, but there are other issues involved in the university setting, and to those I shall turn in due course.

In sharp contrast to our current condition, American

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culture in the mid-nineteenth century, where my considerations of the biblical strand in the novel begin, cultivated the adept use of language in a variety of ways. The relish for language was by no means restricted to high culture: the vigor and wit of the American vernacular were prized qualities that were widely exercised, and one can see their literary transmutation in the prose of Mark Twain and the poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. The thorough familiarity in this period with the strong and eloquent language of the King James Bible provided an important resource, beyond the vital inventiveness of spoken American English, that nourished the general sense of style.

A case in point is the prose of one of the finest stylists of nineteenth-century America, Abraham Lincoln. He was, we recall, a man who had virtually no formal schooling. Just as he taught himself law through his own studious efforts, he developed a powerful and nuanced sense of English through his own reading. It is not easy to imagine comparable instances in our own time in which such mastery of language could be acquired through the sheer dedication of an autodidact. The force of Lincoln's speeches derives from a number of different sources, one of which was biblical. He had a wonderful native sense for the expressive use of cadence, repetition, antithesis, and for the cinching effectiveness of a periodic sentence. Especially in the formal architecture of his speeches, he also registered the influence of oratory inspired by the American Greek Revival.[1] At times the persuasive force

[1]On the background of the Greek Revival, see Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), pp. 41–62. A more elaborate and probing stylistic analysis of the Gettysburg Address is offered

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of his public rhetoric was altogether lawyerly, which is hardly surprising. His First Inaugural Address, for example, deploys lawyerly language from one end to the other because it is an argument to the nation on the question of whether there is a right of secession and whether the Union can continue without civil war. If the United States be not a government proper, but an association of States in the nature of contract only, can it, as a contract, be peaceably unmade by less than all the parties who made it? Here, as throughout the Address, one hears the voice of Lincoln the Illinois lawyer, sorting out in plain and precise language issues of contract and constitution and consent as the Republic faced a fateful juncture. This language, too, is a kind of rhetoric. The stylistic plainness, as Gary Wills, looking at Lincoln s revisions, has shown,[2] is a quality that Lincoln labored to perfect over time, especially against a background of American oratory that favored highly wrought ornamentation.

We more typically remember Lincoln s speeches for their eloquence. Much of this, as I have suggested, is achieved through his intuitive feel for appropriate diction and rhythmic emphasis, manifested, most famously, in every phrase of the Gettysburg Address, as in the grand concluding sweep of we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, moving on to the climactic anaphora, that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. Only a single phrase in the Address is explicitly

by Stephen Booth in *Precious Nonsense* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[2]Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, especially pp. 157 60.

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biblical, though one might argue that the very use of a language that is both plain and digni ed, resonant in its very ordinariness, is in part inspired by the diction of the King James Version. Many people, I suspect, assume that the opening phrase, Four score and seven years ago, is explicitly biblical, though in fact it is merely modeled on the three score and ten of the King James Version, a phrase that, given the sacred status of the formulaic number seventy, appears 111 times in the 1611 translation. The Hebrew actually has no equivalent expression and simply says seventy, as does Tyndale s translation, which was a principal source for the King James translators. Their decision to use this compound form would seem to re ect a desire to give their version a heightened and deliberately archaic ourish (it seems unlikely that this is the way ordinary Englishmen said seventy in the seventeenth century), and Lincoln clearly responded to this aim in adopting the form. The difference between eighty-seven and four score and seven is that the former is a mere numerical indication whereas the latter gives the passage of time since the founding of the Republic weight and solemnity. This effect in part is a consequence of breaking the number into two pieces, forcing us to slow down as we take it in and compute it. But it also has something to do with the archaic character of the phrase, and in this regard the background of the King James Version has a direct relevance. The 1611 translation, as has often been observed, was in general a little archaic even in its own time. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, much of its language was surely felt to be archaic (and even then, perhaps not always perfectly understood), and yet the text was,

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paradoxically, part of everyday life, a familiar xture of hearth and home. In this way, the sheer dissemination of the King James Version created a stylistic precedent for the American ear in which a language that was elaborately old-fashioned, that stood at a distance from contemporary usage, was assumed to be the vehicle for expressing matters of high import and grand spiritual scope. Thus, four score and seven years ago, a biblicizing phrase that is not an actual quotation, sounds a strong note of biblical authority at the beginning of the Gettysburg Address.

The concluding ourish, by contrast, shall not perish from the earth, is a direct citation from the Bible. It appears three times, always without the not, and only in the Hebrew Bible: His remembrance shall perish from the earth (Job 18:17); The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth (Jeremiah 10:11); The good man is perished out of the earth (Micah 7:2). (Although the 1611 translation uses a different preposition for the verse from Micah, the original uses the same preposition, *min*, from, in all three cases.) The borrowing of the biblical phrase is not really an allusion to a particular scriptural intertext but rather the use, in the perorational nal gesture of the Address, of a familiar biblical idiom that gives the speaker s own language the breadth and moral gravity of the Bible. The Bible begins with God s creation of heaven and earth. It includes repeated grim intimations, both in this particular phrasing and related ones, of individuals, nations, humankind perishing from the earth, wiped out from the face of the earth. The idea of persisting in or desisting from existence is given, one

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could say, a cosmic perspective and a certain precariousness in the biblical language. Imagine the different effect if Lincoln had concluded his speech with a phrase like shall not come to an end or shall not cease to exist. The meaning would have been approximately the same, but the sense of magnitude, the idea of the nation realizing a new and hopeful destiny under God, as Lincoln wrote, would have been diminished. The sternly grand language of the King James Bible, as Melville had already demonstrated more than a decade earlier and as Faulkner and others would demonstrate in different ways later, was a way of giving American English a reach and resonance it would otherwise not have had.

Lincoln s greatest speech besides the Gettysburg Address is his Second Inaugural Address. It begins by af- rming that the historical moment the Union in still tense expectation on the verge of successfully concluding four years of bloody con ict invites brevity. It is in fact a fth the length of the First Inaugural Address (though still twice as long as the breathtakingly concise Gettysburg Address). The rst half of the speech, into the middle of the third of its four paragraphs, is a factual review of the course of the war and its origins in the dispute over slavery. There is nothing biblical in this rst section. Instead, Lincoln displays his ability to use plain and precise language for example, To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest [of slavery] was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war. His gift for emphatic antithesis in succinct parallel clauses is also in evidence here. The Bible is explicitly mentioned at the midpoint of the Address: Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each

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invokes His aid against the other. (One wonders whether in this wry awareness of the competing uses to which Scripture and deity are put Lincoln may have been remembering the passage from Voltaire s *Candide* in which both warring armies celebrate a Te Deum to thank God for permitting them to destroy their enemies.) Once the Bible has been introduced in this fashion, biblical quotations and weighted phrases drawn from the language of the Bible are predominant for the rest of the Address. It may seem strange, Lincoln now goes on to say, that any men should dare to ask a just God s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men s faces, but let us judge not, that we may not be judged. The rst clause, of course, gives a vigorous homiletic twist to God s curse of Adam in Genesis 3:19, pointedly and concisely suggesting that slavery is a fundamental perversion of the divine moral order. The second clause, a slightly modi ed quotation of Luke 6:37, strikes at least a rhetorical balance in a gesture of conciliation to the South (though it is hard to dismiss that telling image of wringing bread from the sweat of other men s faces). The verse from Luke occurs in the midst of the Beatitudes and immediately after the injunction to love your enemies, so we can see how Lincoln is making the utmost use of his scriptural sources with a kind of preacherly canniness. The only other explicit quotation from the Bible appears at the end of the extraordinary sentence that concludes this long paragraph:

> Yet if God wills that it [the war] continue until all the wealth piled up by the bondsman s two hundred and fty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until

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> every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous together.

As we shall have occasion to see, Faulkner, too, will use biblicizing language to represent the full historical gravity of the sin of slavery, linking the bloodshed of slavery to Cain s murder of his brother Abel. Lash is a very immediate synecdoche for the violence perpetrated through slavery, whereas sword one again observes the power of Lincoln s antitheses is a reiterated biblical synecdoche for warfare. The citation of Psalm 19:9 about the judgments of the Lord strongly af rms that the devastation of the slave states is an act of divine retribution. (Let us judge not, that we may not be judged is no longer much in evidence here.) Elsewhere, the second half of the Address is punctuated by biblical locutions that are not quite quotations. American slavery is said to have been permitted by God to continue through His appointed time. The appointed time is an often recurring biblical idiom, especially in Hebrew Scripture and particularly in the Prophets, where it indicates the unfolding of a divine plan in human events. A few lines later, Lincoln writes, Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. The rst two clauses vividly illustrate the effectiveness of parallelism in Lincoln s rhetoric. The scourge of war is a strongly expressive biblicism: it is a word that occurs in a variety of biblical contexts, almost never in its literal sense of whip, but, as here, in the metaphorical sense of devastating punishment. The

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concluding phrase may speedily pass away does not occur as a collocation in the Bible, but both speedily and pass away are biblicisms that, coupled with this mighty scourge of war, give the whole clause its strength. (Again, had Lincoln written rapidly instead of speedily, much of the effect would have been lost.) Finally, the brief one-sentence paragraph that ends the Address begins with another of Lincoln s splendid parallelisms, With malice towards none, with charity for all, and then moves into two additional biblical locutions, to bind up the nation s wounds and to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphans. The addition of up to bind gives the verb a biblical coloration, evoking, without speci c allusion, a variety of prophetic promises of healing and restoration. And though it may seem perfectly logical to mention the widow and orphans of the man fallen in battle, this, too, is a collocation that occurs again and again in the Hebrew Bible as exemplary instances of those who are helpless and in need of support.

Lincoln s prose powerfully illustrates the semantic depth and stylistic gravity that American novelists as well would often tap in drawing on the language of the King James Bible. His writing, as we have seen, is by no means pervasively biblical, but at the appropriate junctures it mobilizes biblical diction both to effect a stylistic heightening and to bring into play an element of moral or explicitly theological vision. The grand concluding movement of the Second Inaugural Address aims to engage the audience in a vision of justice and healing and peace after four years of devastating warfare, and the vehicle that makes this possible is the language of the

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Bible. At a cultural moment when the biblical text, verse and chapter, was a constant presence in American life, the idioms and diction and syntax incised in collective memory through the King James translation became a wellspring of eloquence.

Eloquence, of course, is an attribute we readily associate with oratory, but not with the novel. The prominence of biblical motifs or allusions in certain major American novelists has often been observed, but what I should like to consider is whether the language of the English Bible made a difference in the texture of the prose, enabling crucial shifts or heightenings of perspective, as it did in Lincoln s speeches. The general insistence of this inquiry on the importance of style may itself seem anachronistic to some, a mere indulgence in an aesthetic aspect of prose ction that is of dubious relevance to what novels are really about, and so a few comments are in order about the role of style in ction.

Does style in the novel in fact count for much? The evidence of the novelists themselves is somewhat mixed. A few prominent novelists, such as Dreiser, have been wretched stylists. Trollope s prose was no more than serviceable, yet with it he produced an abundance of genuinely engaging novels, a good many of which are ne representations of class and character in Victorian England. Balzac was not at all a brilliant stylist, and on occasion he could be bombastic, especially in his handling of gurative language, but *The Human Comedy* is among the most grand and enduring achievements of the genre. Stendhal famously announced that he wanted to fashion a factual, understated prose that would compete with the language of the civil registry, but style makes a

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difference in his novels, and anyone who has read him in French is likely to sense a sad diminution of his lightness of touch and his worldly tone in the English translations. At the other end of the spectrum, many great novelists have been exquisite, and in some cases, painstaking, stylists: Fielding (whom Stendhal greatly admired); Flaubert, the inaugurator of the modern idea of the novelist as fastidious arti cer; Joyce, Kafka, and Nabokov, all of them in varying ways emulating the model of Flaubert; and, among many possible American instances, Melville, a wildly energetic improviser whose prose we shall consider in detail, and Henry James, whose stylistic disposition is in its idiosyncratic way Flaubertian rather than biblical.

The question of style in the novel that animates the present study urgently needs to be addressed because it has been so widely neglected, especially in academic circles, since the 1970s. More recently, there have been some encouraging signs of a renewed interest in close reading and the formal aspects of literature, but the legacy of the neglect of style is still with us. The principal reason for this neglect is quite evident: in departments of literary studies, the very term and concept of style even of language itself have been frequently displaced by what is usually referred to as discourse, a notion that chie y derives from Michel Foucault. Discourse in the sense that has generally been adopted is a manifestation, or perhaps rather a tool, of ideology. It ows through the circuits of society, manipulating individuals and groups in the interests of the powers that be, manifesting itself equally, or at least in related ways, in ction and in poetry, in political speeches, government directives, manu-

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als of mental and physical hygiene, advertising, and much else. This orientation toward discourse was at the heart of the New Historicism (now a fading phenomenon), and it is instructive that one of its founders, Stephen Greenblatt, in the preface to his admirable *Hamlet in Purgatory*, should have felt constrained to say that there is no point in talking about Shakespeare if you do not respond to the magic of the language, thus implicitly repudiating many of his followers and perhaps some of his own earlier inclinations.

After the New Historicism, though sometimes drawing on it, at least indirectly, literary scholars have been busy pursuing a variety of purportedly political agendas with sometimes no more than illustrative reference to literary texts race, class, gender identity, sexual practices, the critique of colonialism, the excoriation of consumerism and of the evils of late capitalism and globalization. There has scarcely been room in such considerations for any attention to style, for the recognition that it is literary style that might make available to us certain precious perceptions of reality and certain distinctive pleasures not to be found elsewhere. When one encounters intelligent appreciations of style these days, they tend to come from practicing novelists, or from a few critics who have no more than one foot in academic life.

There is, let me hasten to say, no logical contradiction between attention to style and attention to ideology. At least in the more extreme instances of ideologically motivated writing, virtually the opposite is true. Ideology may impel a writer to certain stylistic choices or, since this is a chicken-and-egg phenomenon, the fondness for certain stylistic gestures may conceivably predispose a

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writer to embrace a particular ideology. There are certainly cases in which stylistic analysis could illuminate the role of ideology in a literary work in fresh and instructive ways. Thus, the fascinating Hebrew modernist poet Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896 1981), who became a militant Zionist extremist and a kind of Jewish racist, deploys a wild and disruptively aggressive language in his strongest poems from the 1920s onward that is intimately connected with his politics, and a just account of such a writer would have to consider style and ideology together. Greenberg has clear af nities with German Expressionism (born in the Hapsburg Empire, he absorbed German as his rst European language after his native Yiddish), and if one recalls that the eminent Expressionist poet, Gottfried Benn, was at least until 1936 an ardent supporter of Nazism, some correspondence between the Expressionist aesthetic and fascist values may be worth investigating. Most writers have views on political questions, even if such views are no more than obliquely implicit in their work, and I am not suggesting that either the implied or the explicit politics of a writer should be ignored. What has happened too often, however, in American literary studies is that the focus on ideological considerations has tended to reduce the literary work to its inferable propositional content, the analysis, bent on unmasking the text, looking past the articulations of style that are compellingly interesting in their own right and that might in fact complicate the understanding of the propositional content. The claim I make in this study for the importance of style is not an attempt to cut off literature from its moorings in history and politics but rather an argument that we will be bet-

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ter served by looking with a ner focus at the very linguistic medium writers use to engage with history and politics and perhaps in some instances to transform our vision of both those realms.

A recent book that does concentrate on style in the novel is Adam Thirlwell s *The Delighted States*.[3] Thirlwell, a young British novelist who has read widely and enthusiastically in several languages, lays out a playful tour through the history of the novel that has considerable charm and poses some important questions about style in the novel, even if it is not altogether conceptually satisfying in the answers it provides. Although the descriptive ourish of Thirlwell s lengthy comic subtitle mentions four continents as the setting for this story about the novel, his attention is mainly devoted to European writers, with the United States represented only by Saul Bellow (unless one wants to allow Nabokov as an American writer). One reason for the particular engagement in European and to a lesser extent, Latin American novelists is that they exhibit more to-and-fro movement from culture to culture, usually through the agency of translation, than one nds among North American writers, and the question of novels in translation is at the heart of Thirlwell s book. Its most valuable contribution to the discussion of style in the novel is to have put forth the phenomenon of translation as a kind of test case about the role of style in ction.

[3]Adam Thirlwell, *The Delighted States: A Book of Novels, Romances, and Their Unknown Translators, Containing Ten Languages, Set on Four Continents, and Accompanied by Maps, Portraits, Squiggles, Illustrations, and a Variety of Helpful Indexes* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

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Novels are famously, or perhaps notoriously, translatable. That very translatability poses a challenge to anyone who thinks, as I do, that lexical nuances and patterns of sound and subtleties of syntax are crucial to the sense of reality articulated in novels. There is something scandalous, Thirlwell suggests, though he does not use that term, about the manifest translatability of the novel. Let me mention two rather different examples that he also invokes, *Don Quixote* and *Madame Bovary.* I would assume that what linguistically informed readers characterize as the pungency and energy of Cervantes Spanish is not fully conveyed by any of his translators, and yet *Don Quixote* has had an immensely fructifying effect on many different English, French, German, Russian, and Yiddish novelists whose only access to it was through translation. Perhaps this is not altogether surprising. The arresting archetypes of the endearingly daft emaciated Don and his pragmatic roly-poly sidekick grab the imagination, even when the language of the translation may be a somewhat anemic approximation of the original. But the other novel in question that has had a widespread effect on later writers is *Madame Bovary* (which of course itself displays Cervantes paradigm of a delusional sense of reality imbibed through reading). Flaubert, unlike Cervantes, is a novelist fanatically devoted to stylistic re nements, aspiring to a prose, as he says in one of his letters, that will perform the high function in literary culture that was once the domain of poetry. Nevertheless, even with many of these re nements scarcely visible in the sundry translations, this story of the frustrated wife of a provincial doctor, her two disastrous love affairs, and her suicide has been compelling

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for countless readers and has given many writers a strong precedent for their own ction.

There is a tricky balance between the sheer weight of the represented world of a novel and the force of the language in which it is conveyed. Novels, one must concede, are urgently about a whole variety of things that are not made up of words: events, individual character, relationships, institutions, social forces, historical movements, material culture, and much more. If the translator inevitably substitutes other words, and usually less adequate ones, than the novelist s to point to all these disparate elements of the represented ctional world, the mere act of pointing often proves to be ef cacious enough. There are no doubt all sorts of effects in the Russian of *Anna Karenina* that are lost on those of us who read it in English, yet when we follow Kitty, in the company of her mother, on her way up the grand staircase to her rst ball, we get a perfectly vivid sense of her delighted self-consciousness in her own appearance, the sound of the orchestra ltering down from the ballroom, the parade of people in formal dress on the stairs, and the general excitement of the moment. Tolstoy s subtle handling of the narrative point of view, his wonderfully strategic choice of descriptive detail, and his ability to enter so convincingly into Kitty s thoughts and feelings, all make this possible, and none of it is strictly dependent on language.

Yet something happens in novels through the elaborately wrought medium of style that resists translation, even as the large represented world of the novel is conveyed well enough in another language. How that something manifests itself in the American novel through a

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biblical inflection will be the subject of the chapters that follow. A second issue of translation is involved in this question of American prose style. The King James Version is itself a translation, one in which some of the contours of English were reshaped mainly in accordance with a Hebrew original. Though I can attest that reading Genesis or Job in the 1611 translation is by no means the same as reading it in the Hebrew, much from the themes and imagery and characterization of the Hebrew is nevertheless preserved, and has deeply affected untold numbers of English readers, among them major writers. A language stretched and bent for the purposes of translation thus became a primary model of English style that American writers in particular have been drawn to embrace. But if translation can be the engine of stylistic creativity, merely competent (or less than competent) translation as a vehicle for conveying the represented world of the fiction has the effect of diluting or obscuring many of the most deeply engaging aspects of the original.

Let me propose a partial list of attributes of style that make a difference in our experience of the work of fiction, that generally resist translation, and that are neglected in literary studies to the peril of our understanding of literature. These are: sound (rhythm, alliteration, assonance, and so forth), syntax, idiomatic usage and divergences from it, linguistic register (that is, level of diction), and the cultural and literary associations of language. I would like to consider some instances of how these attributes of style make themselves felt in fiction, keeping in mind the instructive test of translatability. My initial examples are from Melville, to whom I shall direct more sustained attention in the next chapter.

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If you try to imagine *Moby-Dick* in French or Chinese or Hindi, you can readily conceive that the tale of Ahab s monstrous monomania and of the exotic crew of the *Pequod*, the tremendous evocations of the great white whale as a virtually mythological presence, would all come across to far- ung readers in different languages. All this constitutes what I have referred to as the represented world of the novel, the powerfully imagined material of ctional mimesis. This represented world, as I noted in connection with Tolstoy, is not entirely dependent on the language in which it is conveyed, and one may grant the contention of many theorists of the novel that it is the represented world that is primary. But if style is in some sense secondary, it nevertheless has electrifying importance, as I shall try to illustrate. Consider even a brief sentence from Melville s novel: The sea was as a crucible of molten gold, that bubblingly leaps with light and heat. [4] A translation could easily reproduce the simile of molten gold and the vigor of the verb leaps, but the deliberate oddness of the adverbial bubblingly that focuses, by a small swerve from established English usage, the movement of the water, and the alliteration and assonance of leaps with light and heat that lock the clause together these are another matter. All these small stylistic effects help create the lyric intensity of this moment of the sea perceived from the moving ship, and they would necessarily be diminished in translation. They constitute what Stephen Greenblatt calls the magic of the language, and that to a large degree is what makes the experience of reading this book so mesmerizing.

[4]Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), p. 423.

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A different operation of the force of style may be seen in these words from a dramatic monologue by the black cabin-boy Pip. Here, as so often in Melville, characteristics of the canonical English Bible come into play together with other elements of style: Oh, thou big white God aloft there somewhere in yon darkness, have mercy on this small black boy down here; preserve him from all men that have no bowels to fear! (p. 155). The artful shaping of the language may be less spectacular in this sentence than in the previous one quoted, but it is no less decisive. The dense cluster of monosyllabic words generates a clenched power. Instead of any gesture toward African-American dialect, Pip is made to speak a high-register poetic language that in its pronounced iambic cadences is reminiscent, like much else in this novel, of Shakespeare. (In the lines just before the words I have quoted, Pip utters disjointed syllables that sound rather like the Fool in *Lear*.) The archaic yon is ancillary to this Shakespearian impulse, though at the same time it may be nautical language, like aloft. The use of bowels in the sense of deep feelings or compassion is drawn directly from the King James Version, where the word appears as a literal rendering of a Hebrew idiom, and like the hints of Shakespeare, it points back to the early seventeenth century. The high solemnity of Pip s address to God could presumably be conveyed in a language other than English, but it is the speci c biblical resonances (perhaps especially of Psalms) and also those of Shakespeare (as usual in this novel, especially pointing to *Lear*) that give these words their peculiar metaphysical dignity.

Let us look at a more elaborate example from *Moby-*

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Dick in which repetition of sound, poetic rhythm, and interplay of dictions with reminiscences of the Bible are beautifully orchestrated. Here are the last three paragraphs of Ahab s apostrophe rst to savage nature and then to a dying whale that occurs late in the novel (chapter 116).

> Oh, thou dark Hindoo half of nature, who of drowned bones has builded thy separate throne somewhere in the heart of these unverdured seas; thou art an in del, thou queen, and too truly speakest to me in the wide-slaughtering Typhoon, and the hushed burial of its after calm. Nor has this thy whale sunwards turned his head without a lesson to me.
>
> Oh, trebly hooped and welded hip of power! Oh, high aspiring rainbow jet! that one striveth, this one jetteth all in vain! In vain, oh whale, dost thou seek intercedings with yon all-quickening sun, that only calls forth life, but gives it not again. Yet dost thou, darker half, rock me with a prouder, if a darker faith. All thy unnamable imminglings oat beneath me here; I am buoyed by breaths of once living things, exhaled as ash, but water now.
>
> Then hail, for ever hail, O sea, in whose eternal tossings the wild fowl nds his only rest. Born of earth, yet suckled by the sea, though hill and valley mothered me, ye billows are my foster-brothers. (pp. 409 10)

The language of Ahab s elevated speech is all at once, or alternately, Shakespearian, Miltonic, and biblical. Some of the turns of formal apostrophe sound more like the epic invocations of the muse in *Paradise Lost* than like anything in Shakespeare (Then hail, for ever hail).

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The formal poetic character of the passage is strongly reinforced by the iambic cadences it repeatedly uses and then gone round again, Oh, trebly hooped and welded hip of power, that only calls forth life, but gives it not again. Syntactic inversion is another marker of poetic formality this thy whale sunwards turned his dying head, Yet dost thou. Alliteration underscores the emphatic force of the language Hindoo half, bones . . . builded, buoyed by breath, hooped hip. (The use of Hindoo as an adjective illustrates Melville s disposition to turn references to the exotic into rhetorical terms here, the word referring to what is alien, unknown, inscrutable perhaps, as some have suggested, with Kali, the goddess of destruction, in mind.) The invented adjective unverdured is probably a conscious emulation of Shakespeare, who, for example, coined the verb incarnadine in *Macbeth.* The archaic verbal form builded, on the other hand, is a borrowing from the King James Version, as, most memorably, in Proverbs 9:1, Wisdom has builded her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars. Equally biblical is the fondness for semantically parallel clauses a stylistic trait that we will explore in greater detail in the next chapter as in that one striveth, this one jetteth all in vain. (Strive in particular is a recurrent term in the biblical lexicon.) Hip, because it is linked to power, probably recalls the biblical he smote them, hip and thigh with a giant slaughter (Judges 15:8). Counterpointed to the taut, intermittently biblical diction are two polysyllabic and abstract word choices intercedings and the wonderfully alliterative coinage, unnamable imminglings. The concluding sweep of Ahab s apostrophe

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signi cantly invokes reminiscences of the Bible without actual allusion. The wild fowl shows a trace of the fowl of the air of the Creation story in Genesis 1. Born of the earth yet suckled by the sea is a neat replication of antithetical parallelism in biblical poetry (with the rst phrase also pointing to the making of the rst human in Genesis 2), while nds his only rest recalls a variety of biblical locutions involving rest and resting place. Finally, the billows are King James language for waves, as in Jonah s psalm (Jonah 2:3), all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. In all this, one palpably feels that the *texture* of Melville s language is decisive in shaping what he wants to say about the whale, the sea, the natural world, and the nally anti-biblical nature of reality as he conceives it.

To apply the test of translatability one last time, it is instructive to compare Melville s prose here with a recent French version. The French is elegant, idiomatically smooth, and in most respects relatively accurate. It does a good job in catching the formal side of Ahab s apostrophe. Thus, Then hail for ever hail, O sea works quite well as Salut, donc salut ˆ jamais, mer [5] (even if more than a little is lost rhythmically) because French has its own tradition of elevated literary language and lofty forms of address. Not surprisingly, Melville s explosive alliterations have entirely vanished in the French rendering along with all the iambic cadences. What is robustly odd in the English is regularized in the French:

[5]*Moby-Dick et Pierre ou les Ambiguïtés*, under the editorial supervision of Philippe Jaworski, with the collaboration of Marc Amfreville, Dominique Mar ais, Mark Niemeyer, and Hershel Parker (Paris: Gallimard, 2006) p. 539.

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Hindoo becomes *l'Indienne*; wide-slaughtering is simply *destructeur*; and unverdured is interpretively translated and sadly attened as *infertile*. Melville s prose is improvisatory, exuberantly unruly in its inventiveness, and in this regard inaugurates a tradition in American style; the French smoothes all this out. Perhaps most strikingly, because there is no canonical French translation of the Bible that can be tapped as Melville taps the King James Version, the strong sense of grand biblical language used to shape a vision of the world counter to that of the Bible is entirely absent. The terri c force of who of drowned bones has builded thy separate throne in the heart of these unverdured seas is diluted in the unbiblical qui t es construit, quelque part au coeur de ces mers infertiles, un tr ne fait des os des noy s. A reader of this perfectly competent French version will no doubt pick up a good deal of the grandeur in Ahab s address to destructive nature and to the whale, but it is bound to be a paler experience than is offered by the original s constellation of stylistic effects, including the potent biblical background they incorporate.

There is no real contradiction in my underscoring the failure of translation to convey the stylistic complexity of the original and my expressed admiration for the 1611 English rendering of the Hebrew Bible. There are surely moments in literary history when a translation, whatever its closeness to or distance from the original it represents, becomes an achievement in its own right. For reasons that we cannot entirely explain three that come to mind are the mining of William Tyndale s brilliant version of the Bible, the richness of English literary culture at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the peculiar and pro-

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ductive decision to follow the contours of the Hebrew in idiom and often in syntax the translators convened by King James shaped an English version that introduced a new model of stylistic power to the language. What usually happens, however, in translation, as in the instance of the French rendering of *Moby-Dick*, is that a dutiful, more or less semantically faithful version of the original, employing a rather conventional set of stylistic procedures, erases a good deal of what is most compelling in the original text.

There is one aspect of style in the novel that deserves special highlighting, which is the interplay of different levels and provenances of diction, because it is particularly relevant to the effect of insets of biblical language that will be examined in the remainder of this study. Language in the novel is quite often an intricate game of high and low, for reasons that are probably best explained by the Russian theorist M. M. Bakhtin, who de nes the generic distinctiveness of the novel as a collision of and dialogue among different languages in the same culture, each embodying its own values and outlook. In Lincoln s oratory, there are different elements of diction, including biblical turns of speech, but one gets the sense that they have all been integrated into a single oratorical style. In the novel, on the other hand, as Bakhtin suggests, the disparateness of the different languages is preserved as they are played against each other builded thy separate throne and unnamable imminglings belong to different linguistic realms, and each even has its own music and its own associations.

Not much critical attention these days is devoted to levels of diction, and perhaps many critics do not even

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hear the nuances of difference. This inattention may in part re ect broad social changes, though one also suspects a consequence of the decline of reading. The literary deployment and recognition of levels of diction are rooted in social hierarchy: what is perceived as low or even vulgar, as educated speech, or as lofty literary language, depends, at least in origin, on class distinctions. Contemporary American society exhibits a notorious and increasing economic gap between the rich and the poor, but class differentiation is less formally marked here than it has been earlier and elsewhere. The lack of such differentiation surely helps foster some insensitivity to levels of diction among American readers. Yet a neglect of the game of high and low that has been going on in the novel for three centuries dulls the perception of style and deprives readers of one of the keen pleasures in the reading experience. Thus Fielding in *Tom Jones*, in a characteristic ploy, describes Tom s dive into the bushes with the accommodating Molly Seagrim in the most highfalutin Latinate language while, with professed reluctance, introducing the term rutting to identify the activity in question. The contrast between the two dictions not only is amusing but also makes a moral point: a young man s acting on an impulse of lust may be hypocritically disguised by euphemistic language, but it belongs, perhaps quite appropriately and healthily, to the realm of animal behavior.

In English, the great source of stylistic counterpoint is the two dictions deriving respectively from the Greco-Latin and the Anglo-Saxon components of the language: the former, polysyllabic, learned and sometimes even recondite, often tending to abstraction; the latter, phonet-

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ically compact, often monosyllabic, broadly associated with everyday speech, and usually concrete. The language of the King James Version falls by and large on the Anglo-Saxon side of this divide, though there are abundant elements of the Anglo-Saxon stratum of the language that have nothing to do with the King James Version. The counterpointing of the two strata has been a feature of English prose since the seventeenth century, and we have already seen one striking instance of it in one of the excerpts quoted from Melville. But it is Faulkner, clearly a kind of neo-Baroque stylist, who is the great master of this strategy of contrapuntal dictions. A spectacular example is evident in the two paragraphs that begin the Dilsey chapter in *The Sound and the Fury.* There is nothing obviously biblical in the language of the passage, though it contains one freighted, paradoxical image that has a thematically important biblical background. In any case, as I shall argue in relation to *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner s writing is not biblical in texture or syntax but rather in its marshalling of keywords from the biblical lexicon, and I think three such words occur here. As readers will recall, this concluding section of *The Sound and the Fury* switches from the use of the characters points of view employed in the three previous sections to a resplendently omniscient narrator deploying high Faulknerian language:

> The day dawned bleak and chill, a moving wall of gray light out of the northeast which, instead of dissolving into moisture, seemed to disintegrate into minute and venomous particles, like dust, that when Dilsey opened the door of the cabin and emerged, needled laterally

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> into her esh, precipitating not so much a moisture as a substance partaking of the quality of thin, not quite congealed oil. She wore a stiff black straw hat perched upon her turban, and a maroon velvet cape with a border of mangy and anonymous fur above a dress of purple silk, and she stood in the door for a while with her myriad and sunken face lifted to the weather, and one gaunt hand ac-soled as the belly of a sh, then she moved the cape aside and examined the bosom of her gown.
>
> . . . She had been a big woman once but now her skeleton rose, draped loosely in unpadded skin that tightened again upon a paunch almost dropsical, as though muscle and tissue had been courage and fortitude which the days or the years consumed until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the somnolent and impervious guts, and above that the collapsed face that gave the impression of the bones being outside the esh, lifted into the driving day with an expression at once fatalistic and of a child s astonished disappointment, until she turned and entered the house again and closed the door.[6]

The passage begins with a chain of monosyllabic words of Anglo-Saxon provenance which, in accordance with the natural rhythms of English, also constitute an iambic cadence. The counterpoint to this pattern is rst asserted in the initial subordinate clause, where there is an array of Latinate terms dissolving, moisture, disintegrate, minute and venomous particles. Faulkner,

[6] William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Vintage, 1990), pp. 265 66.

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with a kind of stylistic relish, delights in emphatically bracketing terms that re ect the contrasting dictions: mangy and anonymous fur, myriad and sunken face, a paunch almost dropsical, somnolent and impervious guts. The strong effect of these double-barreled formulations is simultaneously to give Dilsey s presence a gritty physical concreteness an aging black woman with a sagging face and a protuberant belly wearing a moth-eaten cape and to imbue her gure with metaphysical complication, representing her under the aspect of eternity the wrinkles on her face are myriad, as much a manifestation of the multiplicity and variety of life experience as of decay; the shabbiness of the fur trim becomes, wonderfully, anonymous just as the guts are mysteriously impervious ; and, most evidently, Dilsey emerges through all this energetic activity of style as an image of courage and fortitude, stubbornly continuing with the chores and trials of caring for those around her despite the body s decay and the most maddening circumstances.

It must be said that this metaphysical complication of the physical description becomes, in the second paragraph, a little disorienting, though this may well be the intended effect: one does not readily visualize the image of the bones being outside the esh. What drives that paradoxical image is Ezekiel s vision of the dry bones revived: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring esh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live (Ezekiel 37:6). Although Ezekiel s original prophecy is actually an allegory of national rebirth after the metaphorical death of exile, in its later reception it became the source text for the idea of

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the resurrection of the dead, and its dissemination in the popular Negro spiritual is surely relevant to Faulkner s representation of Dilsey. Her chapter is set on Easter Sunday, 1928, and at the church service she will be granted a vision of the true resurrection (I ve seed de rst en de last [p. 297]). Faulkner, of course, is transposing Christian theology into a moral and un-theological perspective on human nature: Dilsey, unlike the members of the Compson family, each dead-ended in a different way, is the one gure in the novel capable of regeneration, of bearing up under life s burdens and enduring.

The word skeleton does not occur in Ezekiel or in any other biblical text, but after it is put forth twice here, we get bones, which is at the center of the passage in Ezekiel and also part of a more general idiomatic pattern in the Bible. Three monosyllabic terms that gure signi cantly in the Bible form a constellation here: dust, esh, and bones. (In chapter 3, we will have occasion to trace the importance of these very terms in the thematic lexicon of *Absalom, Absalom!*) It may at rst seem something of a stretch to link dust in the rst sentence of this passage with any biblical usage. It occurs here, after all, as a simile meant to convey the concrete look and feel of the gray light and moist air of dawn on this early April morning. In the Bible, dust is sometimes a metonymy for human mortality, for man who was made from dust and is fated to return to dust. But as the metaphysical complications of the representation of Dilsey accumulate in these two paragraphs, with the theme of resurrection emerging, and as esh and bones make an appearance, which in biblical idiom are a collocation that indicates kinship and the sheer

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physicality of mortal human life, dust at the beginning seems not only a rendering of the weirdly particulate quality of the morning light and driving mist but also an intimation of the ephemeral material substance of human existence. Dilsey, like all of us, is from dust, and to dust she will return; the integument of esh manifested in her physical appearance begins to fall away, as it must; but the bones rising from the slack esh invoke Ezekiel s promise that new esh will be laid on the dry bones and they will live again.

Faulkner s prose is a limit case for the decisive presence of the King James Version in a long line of American writers. His rhythms and syntax and the spectacularly recondite vocabulary he often favors are not in the least biblical. He is far removed from the biblical rhetorical sweep of Lincoln s oratory and from the ourishes of biblical poetic style that mark some of the grander moments of Melville s narrative prose. Yet, he was a writer steeped in the 1611 rendering of Scripture, and he found in it a thematic vocabulary that met the large measure he sought in his novels for the representation of the human condition. Stylistically, these compact key-terms that he drew from the Bible were, in their very concreteness, as I shall try to show later, a ballast, like the rest of his Anglo-Saxon vocabulary, against the soaring abstractions that were also vitally important for him: dust and esh and bone over against myriad and indomitable and fortitude.

This study is an attempt to throw light on the abiding role of the King James Version in the shaping of style in the American novel and at the same time an effort to reanimate, through this particular instance of the biblical

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component, the sense of the importance of style in the novel. Especially because borrowings from the King James Version are always one element among many in American prose, it is worth stressing that language itself comprises highly heterogeneous elements, and hence the constituents of style in general are themselves heterogeneous and their combinations and permutations intrinsically unpredictable. The sound and length of the words (as we have just seen in Faulkner), their syntactic ordering, the cadences in which they are arranged, the levels of diction they manifest, the antecedent texts (biblical and others) they evoke explicitly or obliquely, their deployment of gurative language all combine in shifting patterns to put an indelible stamp on one moment after another and on the entire ctional world constituted from those moments. To revert to the question of what is lost in most translation, I would say that reading the untranslatable text is ultimately what departments of literary studies ought to be about, but in the peculiar atmosphere that has dominated the academy for several decades, the reverse has often taken place: the original has been read almost as though it might as well have been a translation. Too often, though surely not invariably, teachers of literature and their hapless students have tended to look right through style to the purported grounding of the text in one ideology or another.

As I have already noted, I am by no means proposing that the context of ideology is irrelevant to the study of literature. Literary works are made of words, but they emerge from and address issues in the real world, and so politics, social history, biography, material culture, technology, and intellectual history are all worthy of atten-

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tion in the effort to attain a fuller understanding of literature. What I would like to argue is that none of these considerations of context should entail an averted gaze from the artful, inventive, and often startlingly original use of language that is the primary stuff of literature, the very medium through which it takes in history, politics, society, and everything else. The play of style in fiction is not only a source of deep pleasure, sometimes even rapture, but also a process that enables thought, inviting the perception of complex associative links, compelling fine discriminations and qualifications, leading us to see one frame of meaning in connection with another, or with several others. The King James Version of the Bible, once justifiably thought of as the national book of the American people, helped foster, at least for two centuries, a general responsiveness to the expressive, dignified use of language, to the ways in which the rhythms and diction of a certain kind of English could move readers. Against this general background, I would now like to explore some eminent instances in which novelists drew on the resources of the King James Version to fashion different versions of a distinctive American style for prose fiction.