Volition's Face: Personification and the Will in Renaissance Literature

Andrew Escobedo

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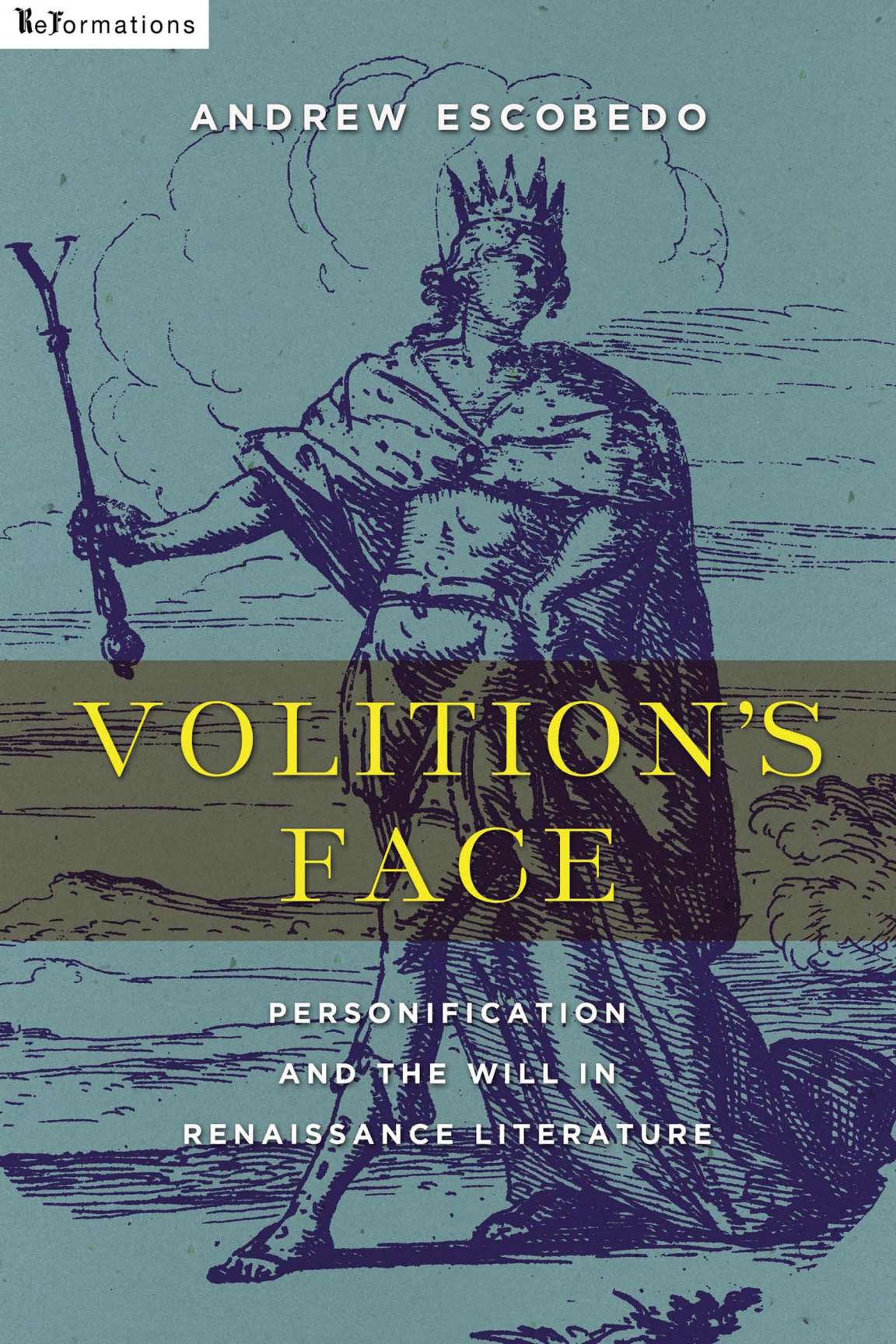
ANDREW ESCOBEDO



VOLITION'S FACE

PERSONIFICATION AND THE WILL IN RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

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ANDREW ESCOBEDO

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For Garey and Ford, whose faces are always before me

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PREFACE

I have modernized the poetry and prose quoted in this book except for the verse of Edmund Spenser, in accordance with the long-standing view that he seeks to produce the impression of archaic language.

A prefatory comment about terminology and usage is in order. I employ *prosopopoeia* as a close synonym for *personification*, despite the many centuries that separate the emergence of these two terms, and I do not italicize the former. Regarding the plural form of *prosopopoeia*: in an effort to avoid the pedantry of *prosopopoeiae* and the archaism of *prosopopoeias*, I use this single term both as a mass noun (like *advice* or *evidence*) and as an uninflected count noun (like *series* or *sheep*). Thus prosopopoeia always adds a face where there was none before, but some prosopopoeia add voices as well as faces.

As for the adjectival form, many historical options present themselves: *prosopopoeial*, *prosopopoeic*, and *prosopopoeical*, among others. I have opted for *prosopopoetic*, since we already have a modern analogue in the English word *onomatopoetic*. I briefly considered employing a separate adverbial form, but reason prevailed.

Brief sections of chapter 5 appeared in two previously published essays: "The Sincerity of Rapture," *Spenser Studies* 24 (2009): 185–208, and "Daemon Lovers: Will, Personification, and Character," *Spenser Studies* 22 (2007): 203–25. Likewise, portions of chapter 6 appeared previously in "Allegorical Agency and the Sins of Angels," *English Literary History* 75, no. 4 (2008): 787–818. My thanks to AMS Press and the Johns Hopkins University Press for permission to reproduce those sections in this book.

I DID MUCH of the early research for this book during a 2009–10 residency at the National Humanities Center, and I remain very

grateful to the staff who provided me with so much assistance, as well as to the fellows who provided intellectual comradeship. Friends and colleagues have supported this project the entire way through. I cannot name them all, but the following people commented on whole chapters: Neil Bernstein, Rüdiger Bittner, John Curran Jr., Jeff Dolven, Mary Floyd-Wilson, Genevieve Guenther, Theresa Krier, Jennifer Lewin, Susannah Brietz Monta, Melissa Sanchez, and Jennifer Waldron. This book is far better than it would be if these kind readers had not shown such generosity. My coeditors at *Spenser Studies*, Anne Lake Prescott and Bill Oram, have for years offered nourishing food for thought about Spenserian personification. I am also deeply grateful to the three series editors at the University of Notre Dame Press—David Aers, Sarah Beckwith, James Simpson—for their interest in this project and their criticisms of the initial typescript, as well as to the two anonymous outside readers who offered helpful suggestions for improvements. My wife, Beth Quitslund, has been a sympathetic and acute reader throughout the process, even as she worked to meet her own obligations and deadlines.

Our books are always in a sense like children, but this book sometimes robbed my sons, Garey and Ford, of time that could have been spent sword fighting, reading together, playing games, or practicing our sarcasm. I am thankful for their forbearance and dedicate this book to them.

INTRODUCTION

Personifications have become almost spooky in the modern literary imagination. Critics have compared them to zombies, freaks, sadists, automatons, death-dealers, fanatics, robots, and clinical compulsives. Personifications, it seems, travel on a trajectory toward fully realized characterhood but do not quite arrive. They are failed persons. When modern critics think of personification, they implicitly start with a notion of a psychologically deep, mimetically probable literary character and then subtract from this character until all that remains is a narrow strip of that character, a strip that cannot feel, think, or choose. For us, by and large, personification transforms subjectivity into objecthood.

This perception goes beyond the assessment of fictional character. Modern feminist philosophers, such as Jennifer Saul, explore the degree to which pornography personifies women, thereby reducing actual women to the single function of providing sexual satisfaction for men.[1] Modern ethicists, such as Ian Ashman and Diana Winstanley, explore the degree to which business corporations personify people, thereby compromising the moral responsibility of actual individuals.[2] For a deconstructionist critic such as Paul de Man, personifications signal the haunting potential of language to undo the category of the human: "They can dismember the texture of reality and reassemble it in the most capricious of ways, pairing man with woman or human being with beast in the most unnatural shapes.

Something monstrous lurks in the most innocent of catachreses: when one speaks of the legs of the table or the face of the mountain, catachresis is already turning into prosopopeia, and one begins to perceive a world of potential ghosts and monsters."[3]

Not all modern assessments of the dehumanizing effect of personification find it reductive or haunted, however. Some recent commentators see a productive dimension in the prosopopoetic confusion of people and things. The sociologist Bruno Latour has celebrated the degree to which prosopopoeia give agency to nonhuman objects under the rubric of the "Parliament of Things."[4] Heather Keenleyside suggests that the poetry of James Thomson, by imbuing the features of the landscape with personified agency, "works to conceive of a social order that would include everything under the sun, and to imagine an ethics that could serve such an expanded system."[5] Sheryl Hamilton has surveyed examples of modern personifications in legal discourse—corporations, computer bots, genetic clones, property—and she concludes that such instances help us see that personhood is "an always incomplete normative project" and that personification supplements the naturalized *person* with the socially constructed *persona*, toward which "we can productively refocus our gaze."[6]

The modern response to personification, then, is not univocal: it ranges from accusations of moral obfuscation and bad literary taste to praise for its beneficial decentering of the human. All these assessments, however, tend to share the assumption that personification is a derivation of or foil to the person. The person is the full, autonomous, and morally responsible agent, and personification—by dint of its refusal to respect the boundary between humans and things—produces a distortion within this agent.[7] This distortion may be decried as a corporate legal evasion or as a caricature of literary character, or it may be welcomed as a talisman against the illusion of autonomous human agency or unmediated consciousness. Yet either way, in the modern view, personification has the effect of leading us away from the realm of the person and toward the realm of nonhuman things.

This impression reflects a vast sea change in literary sensibilities. In the premodern world, personification works in the reverse direction: it starts with ostensibly inanimate things, such as passions, ideas, and rivers, and imbues them with animation and vitality. Nearly all the ancient and early modern commentators claim that prosopopoeia creates force, energy, and emotional intensification. Like de Man, these commentators understand personification to enact a commerce between living and the nonliving, but unlike him, as we will see in chapter 1, they emphasize the movement from death to life, from stasis to animation. And personifications maintain this energy in premodern literary narratives, racing across the landscape in pursuit of their single-minded projects, drawing affect and action out of otherwise insentient or motionless things. The fact that the term *personification* is an eighteenth-century coinage suggests the degree to which the dialectic between *person*ification and personhood is a peculiarly modern one. In premodern fictions, by contrast, personifications are not trying (and failing) to resemble real human beings or psychologically complex literary characters. Instead, they are channeling energy.

It is not the point of this book to argue that the premoderns got personification right and the moderns got it wrong. Literary art does what a given culture or era needs it to do. Rather, the point is to see what happens if we suspend the anachronistic imposition of the modern template onto premodern literary personification and try to get a clearer picture of what premodern writers and readers thought personification was doing.

Volition's Face argues that the energy characteristic of premodern literary personification is best understood, not as a derivation of personhood, but rather as an expression of will. Figures such as Joy, Fear, Rumor, and War emerge from the agent or from the landscape and take action in the world. They dramatize the transformation of affect or concept into volition: as a character exercises reason or feels fear, Reason and Fear extend from that character into the landscape, augmenting the scope of her agency. By the same token, however, by becoming partly independent of the agent, personifications

deny that agent complete control of her will. Personifications are trajectories of volitional energy that have taken on a life of their own.

Literary prosopopoeia thus captures a distinctly premodern intuition about the human will, namely, that the will is both mover and moved, the origin of our actions and the effect of prior determinisms. It will be the burden of chapter 2 to make this interpretation of premodern volition, but at the outset I can say that the medieval and Renaissance understanding of the will offered especially fertile ground for prosopopoetic representation. As the will emerges as an isolatable faculty in the Christian Middle Ages, commentators come to see it as the instrument of human agency but also as partly independent of other human capacities, such as intellect and moral character. Renaissance accounts of the will amplify this independence, conceiving of volition both as the means to self-creation and as the faculty by which people lose control of themselves. The will does not express the self in some fundamental way but rather is a faculty that sometimes undermines the self.

Personification is the literary device that uniquely expresses the activity of this executive yet potentially wayward will. Prosopopoeia give life to the capacities and faculties within us, transforming passions into action, but as a consequence, they also assert their independence, sometimes even doing things to us without our consent. Yet it is not quite right to say in such cases that these faculties are "alienated" from us. When characters in a personification fiction are surrounding by figures named Conscience, Despair, Love, or Sin, such scenarios do not imply pathological or alienated states of self but instead anatomize the typical protocols of premodern agency—protocols that assume a gap between self and volition. Wayward independence remains an ordinary and ongoing potential of literary prosopopoeia, much as the premodern faculty of will remained partially out of the control of the cognitive machinery of judgment and affect. As we will see, this is partly what premodern people meant when they called the will "free."

Interpreting literary personifications as an expression of will also involves noting their striking resemblance to the classical dae-

mon, that semidivine figure that populated the landscape and mindscape of the ancient Greco-Roman world. Daemons, bearing names such as Health, Ambition, and Madness, seem to anticipate medieval and Renaissance personifications in manifold ways. Modern critics have tended to read this association as a sign of personification's fixation: just as an ancient daemon might force a human agent to behave in a certain way, so a personification obsessively performs a narrow set of actions. Perhaps most famously, Angus Fletcher associated the daemonic dimension of personification with clinical compulsion, and this view has been highly influential in scholarly accounts. Yet, as this book argues, such a view mistakes the primary function of daemonism, namely, to indicate the interior capacities of the human agent in constant interaction with the energies of the external landscape, a complex mixture of activity and passivity. Daemonism, although predating the historical formulation of an isolatable faculty of will, nonetheless underwrites the unpredictable independence of premodern volition: my will is mine, but not identical with me.

Once modernity makes this identity a standard feature of volition—once my will's autonomy becomes synonymous with my autonomy—personification no longer adequately represents human agency. It ends up threatening the human agent (or realistic literary character) as an uncanny double, or, on the flip side of the same coin, it secures human agency by offering a contrasting image of imperfect personhood. Steven Knapp has remarked how often in post-Renaissance personification literature one encounters the scenario of a fictional character coolly observing a personification as it fanatically abandons itself to extreme or pathological behavior—the observer's contrasting impassivity is the assurance of his agency and autonomy.[8] This is *not* the typical scenario of premodern personification, since there was practically no expectation that premodern agents exerted their volition in isolation from the forces of the external landscape. Until the faculty model of the human psyche passes away, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, prosopopoeia offers a rich and powerful expression of the

human will's fitful energy. This book explores the link between personification and volition in a range of English Renaissance literature, arguing that Spenser, Marlowe, Milton, and many of their literary contemporaries understand acts of will as a discharge of prosopopoetic energy.

These writers personify certain human affects or concepts—such as despair, erotic passion, and sin—in ways that reflect both the executive and the wayward dimensions of premodern volition. Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, placing the protagonist in a vaguely predestinarian world, makes it impossible to be sure if the prosopopoetic good and bad angels *express* Faustus's will or *control* it. Spenser's Britomart, seeking a means to free Amoret from Busirane's torture, has an encounter with a daemonic statue of Cupid that either co-opts her will to the service of Petrarchan desire or inspires her to boldly rewrite Busirane's version of that desire. Milton's Satan, conspiring with his fellows in heaven, gives cephalic birth to the allegorical figure of Sin, rendering his choice to rebel either one of absolute autonomy or one of involuntary reflex. In all these cases, personification is not merely a figure of stasis or constraint; rather, it signals immensely powerful exertions of the will. Yet personification does not represent undiluted self-mastery either: its independence implies that an act of will imposes itself on the agent as much as it channels that agent's power.

In selecting literary examples that best showcase the book's thesis, I have chosen texts in which critics have found personification to constrain the agency and vitality of the characters involved. Hence, it has been suggested that the Tudor interlude plays, often written by Calvinist ministers, employ prosopopoeia to depict the powerless human will in the grip of external forces. Likewise, the scarcity of traditional personification in *Doctor Faustus* is often understood as Marlowe's effort to imbue his protagonist with tragic agency. This kind of view has Spenser offering personification as a cautionary tale about the risk of fixated literalism and has Milton using Satan's birthing of a personification to show the diminished ontological status of the rebel angel.

Once we relinquish the assumption that personification amounts to flat character, psychological compulsion, or tropological stasis, however, fresh possibilities for interpretation emerge. We are able to see that the Protestant Tudor interludes use personification to provide a figurative framework that coordinates the sinner's will to repent with God's grace. Likewise, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* minimizes personification to demonstrate the impoverishment of Faustus's will, indicating how thoroughly isolated from the landscape he is as he despairs. Spenser's heroes generally assert their wills and achieve their goals by more closely resembling personification, identifying with the virtue that they represent. And the birth of the personification Sin, in *Paradise Lost*, suggests that a radically free will would become *too* free, behaving randomly and no longer under the agent's control. Repeatedly, these texts turn to personification in order to express the struggles, conundrums, and exertions of the premodern will.

Although I understand my interpretation of personification as a corrective to the received view—or, at least, to a number of received views—I have also gratefully relied on the labor and insights of previous studies. One of these, James Paxson's *The Poetics of Personification*, deserves mention up front, since it is among the few books in English devoted entirely to literary personification rather than more broadly to a topic such as allegory or rhetorical figure. I admire this book a great deal but confess that I engage it only lightly in the pages that follow, since our views of what constitutes the study of personification diverge rather widely. Paxson approaches personification primarily as a rhetorical and textual discourse, one that tends to undo itself in a deconstructionist fashion.[9] By contrast, I take literary personification to distinguish itself from rhetorical device through the performance of action in a narrative, including the act of speech. For Paxson, personification represents the uncanny juncture at which words appear to resemble people; for me, personification undertakes a literary translation of a premodern philosophy of action.

Chapter 1 will offer some preliminary arguments and evidence in support of the view of personification maintained in this book.

Before that, however, I need to say something about the literary-historical scope of this study, along with its implications for literary periodization. It has been argued—probably rightly—that the impulse to personify is part of the psycholinguistic structure of the mind or brain. This study takes as a main departure point the suggestion of George Lakoff and Mark Turner that personification relies on a core metaphor: events are actions.[10] Personification transforms occurrences, states of mind, and moral qualities into actions willed by agents. As a psycholinguistic phenomenon, personification has been around for as long as human beings have been around, and from this view it would be difficult to demonstrate that the figure has changed in any fundamental way. My study, by contrast, has a more specific target: literary personifications that appear as characters in fictional narratives. (Lakoff and Turner are silent about such cases.) The assessment of personifications in this regard has manifestly changed since the Renaissance: modern fiction rarely allows prosopopoeia to appear as characters in its plots. Since this study's interests are primarily literary, it relies on a view of personification that spans the rise and fall of its literary popularity—roughly, between the fifth and seventeenth centuries.

This view does not, of course, deny that literary personification both pre- and postdates this period. Literary prosopopoeia frequently occur in the ancient world, characters with names such as Health, Rumor, Pleasure, Virtue, and Peace. Yet, as chapter 1 discusses, many classicists argue that such characters are in fact daemons, not personifications in the postclassical sense of the figure. Even if one holds (as I do) that the distinction between daemon and personification often blurs and even collapses in narrative, one cannot reasonably deny that characters with names such as Health, Rumor, and Peace appear in Christian literature far more than they do in ancient literature. The Christian Middle Ages sponsors a full-scale tradition of personification literature to a degree that the ancient world did not. One reason for this development, as this book argues, involves the medieval formation of an isolatable faculty of will.

If the long view of personification underwrites this study, then why focus on the Renaissance? One reason is that scholars have, rightly or wrongly, long seen in this era the emergence of modern notions of self and agency and so have been pressed to explain what role conspicuously artificial figures such as personifications played in this emergence. It may be significant that Renaissance scholars, unlike medievalists, need to account for personification under the shadow of Hamlet, Cleopatra, Quixote, Satan, and Eve. If a new style of literary character is emerging in such figures, then the Renaissance period poses important questions for literary prosopopoeia. Why does personification continue to flourish in imaginative literature of the period? And what kind of relationship did Renaissance writers and readers understand personified figures to have with other types of literary character?

Furthermore, as I demonstrate in the pages that follow, the Renaissance inherits its notion of will from a set of intellectual debates that grew in complexity over the centuries. In the final era of its existence as a piece of faculty psychology—before it turns into the expression of an ego or "true self"—the will runs into various kinds of trouble. For one, Reformation theology takes the long-standing view of the will's bondage to sin—which medieval writers treated as important but negotiable—and makes this idea the centerpiece of its moral psychology. For another, seventeenth-century writers begin to deny the legitimacy of the faculty psychology model of human agents, making it more difficult to specify the nature of the will's freedom from other cognitive machinery. Finally, in the literary sphere, a newly robust discourse about ancient daemons, cultivated especially by Renaissance Platonism, creates an ambiguity about the literal/figurative status of the personifications that seek to impose themselves on the wills of the other fictional characters.

The literary personifications examined in this book all respond to these problems in various ways. Conscience and Despair take action within a theological and devotional scenario in which the faculty of conscience is no longer understood to prompt the will directly and in which the state of despair cannot be managed by

the sinner's volition. Milton's Sin references a seventeenth-century debate about whether evil human choices result from the semi-independent faculty of will or from the cause and effect of natural determinism. Spenser's Love responds to an ambiguity within Renaissance Platonism about whether the personage of Cupid was to be understood entirely figuratively, as a metaphor for erotic love, or partly literally, as a daemonic spirit that assaults agents from without and co-opts their will.

This book focuses on Renaissance literature, then, not because the nature of personifications changed at that time but because the medieval faculty of the will faced new pressures that some writers engaged by means of literary prosopopoeia. That these writers found it natural to do so underscores the fact that personification had long served as a figure of agency. As a result of these various developments, the authors that this book studies tend to be self-conscious about the link between personification and the will. But this self-consciousness differs from medieval literary practice in degree rather in kind. The problems of the will that these authors confront are Renaissance ones, but their primary tool—personification—remains thoroughly medieval. This book thus draws generously from earlier literary examples.

Indeed, an important implication of this book is that the Renaissance invented new templates for neither the human will nor literary personification. These templates had already been drawn up by medieval writers. Renaissance writers, although putting them to new uses, did not fundamentally change them. Given that scholarly studies have long entertained a notion of the "Renaissance will," it seems worth emphasizing the extent to which this study argues for a strong continuity between medieval and Renaissance conceptions. Despite the efforts of philosophers such as Descartes and Hobbes, the faculty model of the will persists through the seventeenth century and arguably beyond. Despite the presence of seemingly novelistic literary characters such as Faustus, the Duchess of Malfi, and Satan, personifications continue to flourish in literary fictions. To study these phenomena, then, a scholar must give attention to the medieval formulations from which they derive. That is one reason

this book employs the term *Renaissance* rather than *early modern*. Early modern people are necessarily looking forward, inviting the inclination to treat them through a deliberately modern lens. Renaissance people, although dubiously imagined as "reborn," nonetheless are looking back to where they came from.

Personification remains the dominant literary figure of agency through the seventeenth century. Even the late Renaissance tendency toward literary verisimilitude, prompted by neoclassicism and by the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics*, did not diminish the widespread popularity of prosopopoeia.[11] This suggests that changes in literary taste cannot alone explain the gradual decline of personification's fortunes in the centuries following the Renaissance. In any case, it is not until the eighteenth century that commentators such as Jean-Baptiste Dubos, Samuel Johnson, and Lord Kames begin to complain about the artificiality and improbability of personified figures, particularly when they appear as agents.[12] These complaints only grow louder in the nineteenth century.[13] As the North Atlantic world sheds earlier assumptions about faculty psychology and the nonidentity of self and will, personification increasingly seems to freeze human agency rather than mobilizing it.

None of this is to imply, I hasten to add, that literary personification simply vanishes after the Renaissance or that it ceases to be interesting. Prosopopoeia continue to populate eighteenth-century poetry, and full-scale personification allegories can be found into the twentieth century.[14] Furthermore, literary character of the eighteenth century remains sufficiently various to resist any clear teleology toward the novelistic self. Dramatic characters in this period, for example, show less concern for verisimilitude than do their cousins in novels.[15] Writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries experiment with innovative prosopopoetic forms, such as "it-narratives" that tell a story from the point of view of inanimate domestic items like overcoats and pens.[16] These examples of post-Renaissance character and personification certainly broach rich questions of agency, animation, and objectification. Yet they all occur alongside a chorus of complaints that personification fails to reach the lived experience of human action. Thus, without denying

the variety of the figure, we should note how often in modern literature personification is a *foil* for human agency.[17] By contrast, premodern personification was first and foremost an *expression* of agency, human or nonhuman, albeit a complex one.

Such, in brief, is the view of personification that this study proposes. Before we move to the arguments for this view in chapter 1, it is worth saying a few words about what this study does not do. It does not focus on nonliterary examples of personifications, such as illustrations in emblem books and statues on the facade of the Amiens Cathedral. These phenomena are important, and I consult them in relation to literary examples, but this study assumes that prosopopoeia most resemble agents when they do things in a fiction. It is also important to note that this investigation does not single out texts that personify the faculty of will, such as the wifely Will in the thirteenth-century personification allegory "Sawles Warde," or Will the dreamer in *Piers Plowman*, or Free Will the sinner in the Tudor interlude *Hick Scorner*. Rather, the argument is that all premodern literary personification—be it Reason, Rage, Winter, or Rome—expresses volition, whether of a human agent or of the natural landscape.

Furthermore, this study does not undertake a survey of personification literature, tracing (for example) the development of the figure from Prudentius to Blake. My interests are theoretically broader and textually narrower than such a survey could accommodate. This book tries, as it were, to decipher literary personification's genetic code, explaining why it works as it does and describing its relationship to its ancestors and descendants.

The book begins with a chapter makes a case for the basic thesis, engaging the modern scholarly consensus that literary prosopopoeia signals constraint or lifelessness by arguing that such a view relies on mistaken assumptions about daemonism and premodern literary character. Chapter 1 also offers an account of personification's dual identity as sign and character in relation to allegorical narrative. Chapter 2 then undertakes a sketch of the history of the will, from antiquity to the Renaissance, in order to suggest why a full-scale tradition of personification literature did not flourish until

the Christian era. It describes the distinctive aspects of the Renaissance will—particularly through the lens of Reformation theology and seventeenth-century philosophy—while still maintaining that this view of volition comes largely from the Middle Ages. In other words, the continuity of a certain model of will roughly matches the duration of the flourishing of literary prosopopoeia.

Chapters 3 through 6 each focus on a single passion or quality personified in English Renaissance literature. Each chapter generally begins with a brief précis of the history of its passion or quality in personification literature and then grounds its discussion in a particular text or set of texts: Conscience in the Tudor interludes (chapter 3), Despair in *Doctor Faustus* and book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* (chapter 4), Love in books 3 and 4 of *The Faerie Queene* (chapter 5), and Sin in *Paradise Lost* (chapter 6).

The selection of these four personified qualities, beyond their popularity in Renaissance literature, allows me to show the range of modes by which personification expresses volition. Conscience, for example, highlights the degree to which personification makes internal faculties external to the agent, thereby capturing the sense of conscience as a censuring voice that both belongs to us and comes from someone else. The personification of Despair alternately enjoys a full command of will—he deliberately inflicts despair on others—and suffers a lapse of self-control by falling into despair himself. Love, as mythical Cupid or Platonic Eros, carries out a daemonic possession of his victims that skirts the line between voluntary self-surrender and involuntary self-dispossession. Finally, the personification of Sin raises fundamental questions about the origin of our will: Does the appearance of Sin cause the agent to sin, or does Sin signal that act of evil already willed by the agent? These various cases all develop this study's basic insight: to account for the difference between premodern personification and modern literary character, we must attend to the difference between premodern and modern notions of will.

Without appreciating prosopopoeia's link to volitional energy, and the notion of self that this link assumes, it is hard for us to resist

treating personifications as diminished versions of literary characters. We find ourselves sorely tempted to read the fate of Spenser's Malbecco—who metamorphoses from jealous husband to a personification named Gelosy—as an allegory of what really happens with all personification. This comic cuckold, who "forgot he was a man," transforms from person to monster, confined to a dark cave and feeding on toads, his humanity lost to cold abstraction.[18] Yet even here personification animates the state of jealousy into a set of actions in the world. Malbecco, both coveting and loathing his miserable condition, illustrates the way jealousy works in human beings: it mocks the meat it feeds on. Malbecco does not lose his humanity by becoming a personification. He loses his humanity by becoming a personification of *jealousy*. This book seeks to recover a distinction that Spenser's readers found intuitive.

Chapter One

PERSONIFICATION, ENERGY, AND ALLEGORY

Literary personification nearly always produces a transition from the order of being to the order of doing. Now, it does this in a way that potentially produces a reverse movement, whereby doing lapses into states of being. This is the movement on which modern criticism about personification most often dwells, but for the moment let us stay with the transition into action. Literary personification marshals inanimate things, such as passions, abstract ideas, and rivers, and makes them perform actions in the landscape of the narrative. Conscience chides the sinner, Resistance repels the lover, and Rome reproaches Caesar as he crosses the Rubicon. In such cases, states of being and feeling—the aversion of the beloved or the outrage of Roman citizens—metamorphose into active agency. These personifications indicate, not simply desires, but desires tending toward action. Personification is an expression of will.

Prosopopoeia and Energy

Premodern writers offer scant theorizing about personification, and most of that pertains to the rhetorical function of prosopopoeia in oration.[1] But the orators and rhetoricians, almost without exception, characterize the trope as a kind of energy. The third-century

BC treatise *On Style*, usually attributed to Demetrius of Phaleron, introduces *prosōpopoiia* as a figure "which may be used to produce force," and it offers as an example Plato's invocation of the future offspring of Athenian citizens in the *Manexenus*. "The *prosōpon* makes the passage much more lively and forceful, or rather it really turns into a drama," the author of *On Style* concludes.[2]

Quintilian's first-century *Institutio oratoria* distinguishes prosopopoeia from the general category of figures that intensify emotion, such as *exclamatio*, by indicating that the former is "bolder" and needs "stronger lungs."[3] By means of personification, a lawyer can make a judge think that he is directly hearing "the voice of the afflicted," thereby enhancing the power of the case, "just as the same voice and delivery of the stage actor produces a greater emotional impact because he speaks behind a mask."[4] Like all classical commentators, Quintilian understands prosopopoeia as a tool a speaker might use in a speech, but he also associates it with personified abstractions in poetry, such as Rumor, Pleasure, Virtue, Death, and Life. He further indicates that prosopopoeia can appear in narratives, as when Livy describes cities maturing and doing things as if they were human agents.[5]

The idea of personification as a kind of emotional intensification persists into Renaissance rhetorical theory. But an important development occurs, since Renaissance commentators now often explicitly see prosopopoeia as one of the building blocks of literary fiction. Abraham Fraunce, for example, calls it "an excellent figure, much used of Poets."[6] There is thus a merging of poetic and rhetorical theory, although an incomplete one, since commentators "are still not sure if they are writing treatises on oratory with literary examples or treatises about how to read and write literature," as Gavin Alexander has suggested.[7] Nonetheless, in these Renaissance accounts any given discussion about the rhetorical value of prosopopoeia potentially implies the figure's literary value. The energy that ancient theory mostly confined to rhetorical address begins to seep into an implicit theory of fictional character.

Erasmus, in his influential *De copia* (1512–34), locates prosopopoeia under the scheme of *enargeia*, a visualizing device used for

"the sake of amplifying, adorning, or pleasing," although he prefers to place personified figures such as Rumor, Mischief, and Malice under the heading of *prosopographia*.[8] English writers likewise emphasize the act of animation, the vitalization of nonliving or nonreasoning things with living attributes and personhood. George Puttenham writes in the *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) that poets use prosopopoeia when they "attribute any human quality, as reason or speech, to dumb creatures or insensible things, and do study (as one may say) to give them a human person."[9] Henry Peacham in *The Garden of Eloquence* (1593) likewise describes the trope as "when to a thing senseless and dumb we fain a fit person," attributing to it "speech, reason, and affection." By means of prosopopoeia, Peacham explains, the poet temporarily reverses the effects of mortality: "Sometime[s] he raiseth again as it were the dead to life, and bringeth them forth complaining or witnessing what they knew."[10] Indeed, he insists prosopopoeia is the last, best defense of a besieged orator, "not unlike to a champion, having broken his weapons in the force of his conflict, calleth for new of his friends . . . or to an army having their number diminished, or their strength enfeebled, do crave and call for new supply."[11] John Hoskyns concurs, distinguishing apostrophe, which adds "life and luster" to a speech, from prosopopoeia proper, which he credits with the capacity to "animate and give life."[12]

Renaissance writers also affirm the intensifying power of personification outside of formal discussions about rhetorical taxonomy. Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians uses the term to explain Paul's opposition between Christ and the law: "And to make the matter more delectable and more apparent, he is wont to set forth the law by a figure called prosopopoeia, as a certain mighty person which had condemned and killed Christ."[13] Commenting on the rousing effect of Paul's questions, "O Death, where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory?" in 1 Corinthians, Anthony Tuckney instructs his readers, "As to the strength and elegancy of the expression, take notice of . . . his rhetorical prosopopoeia."[14] Philip Sidney confirms the force of personification when he argues for the poetic

dimension of the Bible by adducing David's "notable prosopopoeias," which "maketh you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty."[15]

When premodern commentators talk about personification, then, their talk nearly always has to do with amplification, intensification, and energy. Literary personification—that is, personified figures who perform actions as characters in a narrative—partakes of this rhetorical dynamism. In leaping into the landscape as agents who do things, seeking to influence the other characters of the fiction, personifications resemble the ancient figure of the daemon. The connection between personification and daemons has been well documented, but I would like to review this material in the hope of isolating distinctive elements that have not been prominent in previous critical discussions.

Premodern Daemonism

Daemons, as Plato's Diotima explains in the *Symposium*, are spirits intermediate between gods and men, immortal though susceptible to passions, "the envoys and interpreters that ply between heaven and earth, flying upward with our worship and our prayers, and descending with the heavenly answers and commandments."[16] The Greek concept of the daemon was often confused with and sometimes merged into the Roman figure of Genius, which substantially expanded its range of significance beginning in late antiquity.[17] The discourse about daemons, who often have names such as Health, Love, and Discord, stretches from Hesiod to Renaissance Platonism, and it conceives of them in a variety of ways. Some writers, such as Plutarch, Bernardus Silvestris, and Ficino, emphasize the mediatory function that Diotima described; they imagine daemons linking together the various levels of the cosmos and, sometimes, the levels of the self.[18] Other writers, such as Plato (in his story of Er), Apuleius, and Plotinus, describe guardian daemons or genii allotted to us by fate, guiding our actions but also expressing our character.[19] (This is probably what Heraclitus means when he says

that a man's character [*ēthos*] is his fate [*daimōn*].) Still others, such as Euripides, Porphyry, and Leone Hebreo, imagine daemons as the conduit whereby the energies of the landscape transact with the energies of the self.[20] Daemons invade your soul from the outside, but you don't simply absorb them: they always retain a degree of externality.

In all these characterizations, two themes stand out. First, daemons channel energy: they prompt, possess, attack, protect, and intercede. Second, daemons provide the means by which our interior lives communicate with the outside world. In a daemonic dispensation, the self is not sealed off from the environment but instead maintains a transaction with the elements of the external landscape. We are not the helpless playthings of these inhabiting spirits—our agency partly comes from them—but neither can we make ourselves invulnerable to them. Daemonism involves a mixture of passivity and activity. (In the *Iliad*, Achilles is certainly susceptible to the influence of Ate, but think how curious it would be to claim that Achilles is the passive victim of Ate.) Daemonism, then, posits a fundamental way in which human beings exert their will in the world.

Certainly, there were skeptics in the premodern period. Cicero's Cotta ridicules the tendency of the Stoics to ascribe daemonic agency to every little movement of the environment. If the sun is a daemon, what about the rainbow? And the clouds? And the seasons and storms? "Either this process will go on indefinitely, or we shall admit none of these," Cotta concludes.[21] Likewise, Christian theologians could not accept the daemon as the ancients conceived of it. Augustine reserves his sharpest vitriol for Apuleius's popular description of these guardian spirits, which he takes to be devils in disguise.[22] Renaissance writers were also perfectly willing to make fun of pagan superstition. Sir John Harington wonders mischievously—If a daemon is assigned to every human function, then which daemon has charge over using the privy?[23]

There is no denying the presence of these philosophical and theological doubts; indeed, the volitional energy of literary personification partly depends, as we will see, on an ambiguity between real

and fictional, or (to put it in slightly different terms) between literal and figurative. For the moment, however, let us note that the transactional relationship between self and cosmos posited by the Greco-Roman daemon is the relationship that obtains generally throughout the pre- and early modern Christian world. The advent of Christianity did not lead to the modern, freestanding ego any more than Paul's demotic claim that we are all one in Christ led to modern democracy. A strong continuity persists between the ancient and the premodern Christian notion of the self, which exerts its agency in constant interaction with the external energies of the world. This claim about premodern selfhood does, without a doubt, take so broad a view that it lets slip many fine differences and distinctions. But for my purposes there is no getting away from the broad view: literary personification flourished for over a millennium.

In any case, a range of studies over the last several decades from classicists, philosophers, intellectual and cultural historians, and literary critics has been approaching a rough consensus on certain aspects of premodern selfhood. Ruth Padel has discussed Athenian tragedy as a paradigmatic Greek view of a self constantly susceptible to daemonic forces, a view that fundamentally blurs the distinction between inside and outside.[24] Charles Taylor has recently distinguished between the modern ego, isolated from its environment, and the premodern "porous self" that both was vulnerable to and drew energy from nonhuman forces in the external landscape.[25] Timothy Reiss describes this porousness with the concept of "passibility," whereby the agency of the entangled self does not rely on a firm line between active and passive; instead, the agent takes action in the midst of "concentric circles" of social, sacred, and natural forces surrounding the self.[26] Similarly, Gail Kern Paster and others have used a Galenic model of self and body to describe human interaction with, and management of, the surrounding environment.[27]

Some of these accounts tend to underestimate the executive role of the will in the early modern world (bear in mind that the "executive" does not imply isolation from the deliberative or affective), and chapter 2 will take up this issue in more detail. Nonetheless, all of these accounts imply a relation between self and landscape that

I am calling *transactional*. Why *transactional* rather than another term? For one thing, this term has the word *action* in it, and my study is anxious to analyze the relation between a certain sense of selfhood and expressions of will. I am interested in the self in action. Furthermore, *transactional* connotes at least a minimal degree of assent between the agent and the forces impinging on the agent: transactions are more willed than compulsive. The term's implication of activeness, in fact, suits the purposes of this study more than Taylor's nomenclature of "porousness," suggestive though that nomenclature is. Finally, the term's prefix underscores the extent to which acts of will, in the premodern imagination, take place across the boundary (a comparatively fuzzy one) between self and nonself.

Daemonic Personification

Medieval and Renaissance personification is the literary translation of the conception of action implied by daemonism. Like the daemon, personification signals our intuition of the primitive energies inside us by which we exert our wills over against the external landscape and by which we remain susceptible to that landscape's influences. As a character in its own right, a personification has been possessed by a daemon, whose power it now channels. As an influencer of other characters, a personification is the daemon who possesses other agents and imbues them with intensified purpose. For the premodern era, one could scarcely imagine a more apt trope for figuring the self's agentive relation to the world. Personification offers a concentrated, even exaggerated image of transactional selfhood. A literary character can sometimes own its choices to the degree that these choices appear to come from the inside and not only the outside; yet a personification's inside already seems as if it came from the outside. A personification has an agency, but one that does not quite appear fully to belong to it.[28]

Personification's extreme transactionalism, its internal commitment to external forces, constitutes the figure's most fundamental energy. It showcases personification's close relation to the dynamic

agency of the daemon, which in Greek and Roman literature often magically possessed human beings, foisting upon them a driving sense of purpose, either good or bad. Having an inside so clearly impelled by the outside, manifesting the interior passions of the mind on the external landscape, personifications enjoy a peculiar independence from the constraining effects of the narrative in which they appear. Famously, personifications refuse to function according to scale or probability: they do not modulate their behavior in response to surrounding narrative circumstance, acting out their being in an untrammeled manner.

This is not to deny that narrative circumstances can influence the reader's understanding of a personification's significance, or that a writer using prosopopoeia may be "concerned with context and shades of meaning," as David Aers has suggested.[29] Indeed, the daemonic basis of literary personification complicates the figure's general momentum from stasis to animation. Personification crosses a figurative threshold whereby an inanimate thing becomes, as it were, a living agent, but in a daemonic dispensation nothing is purely inanimate. *Animae* of all sorts literally circulate through the natural landscape and the human psyche. Prosopopoetic energy thus works on a sliding scale from daemon to figure: it poetically imbues a lifeless thing with liveliness, but that thing itself is already potentially inhabited by a daemonic spark.

This means that the metaphorical scenario that personification features can also be understood as magic or enchantment. For example, when Spenser's Sir Guyon sets out to attack Furor with his sword, the Palmer tells him, "He is not, ah, he is not such a foe, /As steele can wound, or strength can overthroe."[30] Furor defies the ordinary protocols of the story, according to which knights fight villains with weapons. Sword blows can't stop Furor. Why not? We might understand Furor to enjoy magical protection from mortal weapons—that is, understand him as daemonic. Or, we might understand Furor as the *idea* of rage cast figuratively into agentive form: he performs as a character in the fiction but retains a dimension of idea-ness that remains at a remove from the fiction. This dis-

tance does not simply drag the story into abstraction: it energizes the story by making it temporarily rearrange its usual rules.

As daemon or personification—or, in the terms I argue for, as daemonic personification—Furor enjoys a freedom from narrative rules and circumstances that operate elsewhere in the poem. He is rage untrammeled, the absolute distillation of a passion into an act of will. But Furor doesn't appear to possess "free will" as we understand this concept in modern debates about freedom. Furor doesn't, for example, deliberate about what to do out of a range of equally possible actions. This limitation is a consequence of the kind of agency that Furor enjoys. Personifications are so radically free to do what they are that, viewed from another angle, they appear gripped by a narrow fixation.

We might put the matter in this way: Furor has "no choice" but to act out his wrath—his inner daemon drives him to it—but, by the same token, nothing can stop Furor from raging—not soothing music, not pleading, not even adverse narrative circumstances. Temperance might bind Furor in chains but cannot change Furor's nature. To employ two concepts from modern political theory, an allegorical agent enjoys both negative and positive liberty: it is "free from" the constraining pressures of narrative circumstance, and it is "free to" realize its nature through volitional action, to "be his own master," as Isaiah Berlin put it.[31]

Again, this is certainly a strange kind of freedom, and a number of critics have associated personification's single-mindedness with psychological compulsion. This impression is mistaken, insofar as compulsion forces people to do what they, in some sense, do not want to do. Personifications, by contrast, *want* to do what they do; they are wholehearted about their actions and attitudes. They gravitate toward what Philip Fisher has described as the "vehement passions," those affections such as wrath, fear, and grief that for their duration possess the whole person.[32] Nonetheless, although prosopopoeia are free to do what they want, they can want only one kind of thing. We therefore have to be cautious in associating personifications with agency, especially if we think that agency amounts to

autonomy. The modern notion of autonomy implies the capacity of a freestanding ego to privilege certain inclinations, dispositions, and feelings over others while itself remaining mostly independent of said inclinations, dispositions, and feelings—thereby strictly controlling which mental phenomena are expressed in action and which are not.

Clearly, personifications do not have or represent autonomy in this sense. It is better to associate them with the will, the faculty by which an agent acts upon the world, including actions that we would call *willful*. When people behave willfully, they have adopted an attitude such that it is difficult for them to alter their present course of action. Willful people are, in a sense, temporarily *stuck* with their will. The notions of will and willfulness were closer in the Renaissance than they are now. (It is probably not a complete coincidence that the early modern word *will* meant both appetite and intention.) In any case, it is with this understanding that we may say that personifications represent agency: they are trajectories of volitional energy. This is why they often seem to burst onto the stage when they first enter a fiction and why they sometimes resemble numinous deities. They are like daemonic agents who channel energy from afar, interrupting the rules of the literal narrative.

But if literary personifications function as daemonic agents, to what degree is this agency defined by their visual and ornamental dimension? Prosopopoeia is closely tied to a tradition of iconography such as we find in manuscript illustration, emblem books, church statuary, and so on.[33] Guillaume de Lorris's garden of Love features plenty of prosopopoetic agents, but the poet finds it natural to begin his story by describing the personifications painted on the wall surrounding the garden.[34] This visual dimension does potentially limit personifications' scope as agents, since images signify through appearance and ekphrasis, not through actions. This effect is heightened in cases where personified figures appear only briefly in a fictional scene, where their function begins to seem more ornamental (in the strong sense of interpretive elaboration) and less agentive. When Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* comes upon Simple, Sloth, and Presumption and exchanges less than a sentence with

each of them before departing, these personifications do not so much perform actions as they provide a visual tableau of the spiritual dangers facing the protagonist as he proceeds on his journey.[35]

The question of the point at which personification becomes commentary begins to broach the relation between prosopopoeia and allegory, and I will have more to say about this shortly. For the moment, it will suffice to note that agency requires a narrative appearance of some extension and that what counts as momentary versus extended is hard to schematize definitively. Morton Bloomfield distinguishes between what he calls pseudopersonification, such as the animate metaphor in the sentence "The storm is howling outside," and genuine personification, to which multiple animate verbs are attached over some duration in a narrative. James J. Paxson describes simple animate metaphor as "secondary personification," which he ascribes to the level of discourse, whereas "primary personification" is found at the level of story. Barbara Newman distinguishes the epiphanic vividness of what she calls Platonic personification, which emanates from transcendental reality, from the analytical dullness of what she calls Aristotelian personification, which briefly gives a proper name to an abstraction.[36] Personifications, then, do not always function as agents: sometimes they are visual emblems, ornamental commentary, brief animate metaphors, or momentary nominalizations. The point to emphasize here, however, is that when these phenomena occur in literary narrative (the topic of this study) they are potential cases of prosopopoeia waiting to spring into action. When personifications are allowed to take action in a fiction, they truly distinguish themselves, becoming characters who translate the order of being into the order of doing.

Within recent scholarship, the critic who has most clearly seen this quality of prosopopoetic agency is Theresa Krier, whose account of daemonic allegory posits that personification has the potential to express vital energy. Drawing on the concept of elemental motion in Luce Irigaray, Krier suggests that the daemonism of late antiquity functioned as a kind of allegorical cosmology, whereby the will of the gods was translated into a physics imbued with divine energy.[37] This daemonic physics, she suggests, provides the elemental

basis of medieval and Renaissance personification. As fluid movement and energy, personification can produce conceptual linking and demonstrate the divine animation of the physical landscape.[38] I understand my view of personification as an expression of transactional agency to run a roughly parallel course to her view of personification as a model of thinking and physical mobility.

Personification and the Modern Person

The notion of a transactional self no longer predominates in the modern world (at least, in the North Atlantic world), and this is one of the reasons that personification now seems to us artificial, archaic, or inhuman. It is instructive to notice that the figure of the daemon suffered a similar fate in the post-Renaissance period. Over the course of the Enlightenment, writers increasingly found the daemon incredible or incomprehensible. John Quincy Adams wondered in a letter to Thomas Jefferson if the Greeks understood daemons as more than metaphors. Jefferson responded that, although men are always susceptible to superstition, someone as intelligent as Socrates could not actually have believed in a guardian spirit: by *daemon* Socrates must have meant his conscience or reason.[39]

No doubt, traces of the daemon remain in the modern world. The common phrase "Something got into me" bears witness to our intuition that acts of will sometimes seem to come upon us from the external landscape. But this intuition has long been pushed to the margin by the conviction that human passions and inspirations occur only as mental, interior phenomena. Perhaps the most thorough transformation of the external daemon into internal mental space comes from Immanuel Kant, when he defines artistic genius as "the innate mental predisposition through which nature gives the rule to art." Kant finds it noteworthy that the word for this mental facility "is derived from [the Latin] *genius*, the guardian and guiding spirit that each person is given as his own at birth."[40] Yet what once came from outside the self is now placed entirely inside. Mod-

ern genius is a structure of human consciousness, not an invasion by the spirit of inspiration.

Another way to put this is to say that daemonism no longer underwrites the human agent once modernity defines human beings according to the rubric of the "person." Modern personhood tends to distinguish the contingent parts of the self from the real or essential self: whatever else I am, I am first and foremost a person. Whatever its virtues, then, personhood tends to remove the human being from the landscape of nonhuman things surrounding her. As Kant famously explains in the *Groundwork*, "Beings the existence of which rests not on our will but on nature, if they are beings without reason, still have only a relative worth, as means, and are therefore called *things*, whereas rational beings are called *persons* because their nature already marks them out as an end in itself."[41] This description implicitly limits the interaction an agent has with her environment because such transactions might threaten the fundamental distinction between things and persons. Yet blurring that distinction is precisely how literary personification works.

In claiming that modern personhood ends up making literary personifications seem like obstacles to rather than vehicles of human agency, however, I do not wish to deny premodern prosopopoeia any connection whatsoever to a notion of person or whole agent. For one thing, personifications represent the parts of a psyche or landscape in action, and as parts they thus imply the presence of a whole. The degree to which a given narrative realizes this whole varies from case to case. Fictions such as the *Psychomachia* or *The Faerie Queene* feature personifications that illustrate a set of faculties, passions, institutions, vices, and virtues that do not seem to belong to any particular whole. Other fictions, such as *Confessio amantis* and *Piers Plowman*, appear to be "person-shaped," as James Simpson has put it, insofar as the progress of their personification narratives appears to correlate with the integration of a human psyche.[42] In such cases, however, premodern personifications do not compete with or usurp the place of whole agents, as they will come to do in modernity; rather, they anatomize and constitute the energy of whole agents.

Furthermore, my isolation of premodern prosopopoeia from modern personhood is not meant to imply that only modernity has ownership of the concept of the person. The premodern world also possessed concepts of agency and identity such that we might call premodern agents "persons." Alain de Lille's twelfth-century definition of a person as "a *hypostasis* [individual] distinct by reason of dignity" has surprisingly modern overtones.[43] Indeed, Thomas Pfau has recently argued, in a study of human agency and changing conceptions of reason in the West, that it was premodernity, and not modernity, that developed a coherent notion of personhood, namely, "as endowed with the potential for self-awareness and with the ontological fact of its ethical responsibility."[44] Premodern psychology, according to Pfau, understood humans as persons insofar as they enjoyed a teleological stance toward the natural world and toward themselves. In this respect, his book builds on the work of the German philosopher Robert Spaemann, who mines accounts of *persona* and *hypostasis* in early medieval Christian theology to argue that the special status of persons lies in their capacity to take various stances toward their nature, unlike other living creatures, which are simply identical to their nature.[45] Pfau's and Spaemann's accounts thus potentially reverse the story I am telling: for them, personhood flourished in the premodern world and was subsequently lost when modernity relinquished the assumption of natural teleology.

To some degree, we are dealing with a difference of terminology. Pfau's notion of the premodern "person" has substantial overlap with my account of the premodern transactional self. For example, Pfau observes that whereas the modern agent potentially understands his environment "as a neutral inventory of medium-sized dry goods," for the premodern agent "the world has to be understood as a dynamic and profoundly interconnected grid of phenomena toward which we relate in prima facie evaluative form, viz., as focal points of interpretive curiosity and, potentially, as sources of means for our continued flourishing."[46] For Pfau, this teleological orientation of the person to the natural world is imperiled in modern thought, when writers such as Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and Adam

Smith come to treat nature as an inert background to human action and treat human reason as instrumental rather than normative, the tool of the will to power rather than the basis for the virtuous use of power. Although my emphasis is not on teleology, like Pfau I see the premodern agent, who is partly constituted by her surroundings, as eventually superseded by "the modern idea of a disengaged and hermetic self."[47] The difference is that I am calling this modern self a "person."

The reason I do so is that it is important, for the purposes of my study of personification, to emphasize the degree to which modernity has understood itself to have discovered the person by stripping away the inessential or contingent parts of the self in order to reveal the real "I," the first-person marker that is somehow both unique to me and shared by all human beings. Descartes's ego, Locke's self-conscious self, Kant's transcendental self, Henri Bergson's fundamental self, Harry Frankfurt's wholehearted self, Linda Zagzebsky's irreplaceable first-person—these philosophical formulations have all variously contributed to the modern notion of the person, whose consciousness observes but remains buffered from the external landscape. Once human agents are persons, in this sense, then *person*ifications come to seem like pale imitations, either threatening the integrity of the agent or indirectly confirming her autonomy as a contrasting foil.

Nonetheless, Pfau's account of premodern personhood prompts me to underscore that my term *transactional* does not imply that agents lack individuality, intentionality, or self-control. Premodern writers assumed, as we do, that human actors perceive, deliberate, and decide. Yet they understood them to do these things not just in their minds by also by drawing upon the energies and presences that surrounded them in the environment. This is not to say that premodern agents *never* suspended this transactionality. Stoic sagehood implied impassibility, as did certain profound states of Christian despair, as we will discuss in chapter 4. But such instances were exceedingly rare and were usually understood as exceptions that proved the rule that human action involved interaction with

the external landscape. Premodern daemonism was an outstanding example of this interaction, and personification was its literary translation.

Personification and Allegory

Thinking of personifications as daemonic agents helps to specify what kind of characters they are. They are *willful* characters, committed to a narrow set of actions and seemingly inspired or impelled by external energies. But we have also noted that personifications, unlike daemons, have a pronounced figurative quality. They are metaphors, or perhaps catachreses, that enact a transference between the order of things and the order of persons.[48] Matthew Sutcliffe, anxious to deny the Jesuit Robert Parsons an early church tradition of saint worship, appeals to the figurative dimension of personification: "There is an infinite difference between the words of the Fathers and the blasphemous forms of popish prayers. They [the Fathers] by a figure called Prosopopoeia did speak to saints, as orators do to heaven, or earth, or cities, or other things that hear nothing. These [Catholics] pray to them as if they heard them, saw them, and could help them."[49] Whatever their daemonic power, personifications maintain a distance from literal presence, qualified by the notion of "as it were," as Philip Sidney puts it in the case of psalmic images of God's approach.

In literary fiction, personifications are continued metaphors that persist through a narrative. As a result, readers have often understood them as allegorical. If this is correct, then a further basic description of prosopopoetic agency is required. Allegorical signs do not necessarily behave as agents. The building called the Castle of Perseverance and the market called Vanity Fair signify something in relation to other signs in their allegory, and events may take place in them, but they do not perform actions. If personifications are likewise signs, perhaps it makes sense to group them more closely with signifying objects such as castles, spears, and forests, and less closely with characters who behave as literal agents.

In short, we need an account of the relation between personification's characterhood and its signhood. Critics have sometimes gestured at such an account under the rubrics of "concrete versus abstract" and "realistic versus allegorical." Yet the first binary does not make much sense of personifications of things such as rivers or cities, and the second commits us to a psychological mimeticism that is probably alien (as I will argue shortly) to the premodern experience of literary character. Instead, in this section and the next I propose to examine personification's allegorical dimension under the rubric of "example and sign." Doing so will allow us to specify the range of ways in which personified figures, as signs and characters, interact with the narrative that contains them.

The first thing to ask is whether literary personifications are indeed allegorical or not. There is no general agreement about this question. Some scholars claim that allegory emerges from a tradition of latent or hidden meaning (*allos*, *hypnoia*, *mysterium*), whereas personification offers patently obvious meaning.[50] Furthermore, allegories (unlike individual tropes) require narratives that develop in time in order to unfold their meaning.[51] These scholars also point out that medieval and Renaissance theorists of allegory never mention a relation to personification. Hence, that personification sometimes occurs in allegorical narratives is a mere coincidence. Other scholars have argued, to the contrary, that no device partakes more thoroughly of allegory than personification. The trope forces us to attend to ideas signified by the characters in the story, implying multiple levels of meaning. Personifications wear a mask or face (*prosopōn*) linked to an idea or feeling, and so involve an inside/outside structure analogous to the surface/depth structure of allegorical narrative.[52]

My own view is rather ecumenical on this question. The object of study in this book is personification, not necessarily personification allegory. Personifications do not, in themselves, yield allegory, which I assume to involve a narrative that announces, with greater or lesser degrees of explicitness, its secondariness to an order of nonfictional ideas. *Secondary* here doesn't mean boring or useless;

instead, it means instrumental. In allegory, the story reveals itself, at least at times, as an instrument for pointing at these nonfictional ideas.

This definition remains deliberately silent about a number of hot-button issues surrounding allegory. It says nothing about whether allegory must involve abstract ideas or whether these ideas are hidden by or transparent within the narrative. The definition offers no rules for how allegorical narratives signal their secondariness. The rubric of "greater or lesser degrees of explicitness" is pitched broadly enough to all but ensure that borderline cases—is it allegorical or not?—will occur. My silence about these issues constitutes an attempt to avoid entanglement in long-standing debates about allegory that, although interesting, have little relevance to the manner in which personifications operate. It is the issue of secondariness, as we will see, that most impinges on prosopopoetic function.

Yet even in this regard I must make an important qualification. For the sake of convenience, the pages that follow will assume a ready distinction between allegorical and nonallegorical fiction, but that distinction was far cloudier in the Renaissance. According to some modern scholars, the early modern category of allegory is very wide indeed. Kenneth Borris's important study of allegorical epic, for example, at times seems to include any text "stressing moral significance and profundity of content."[53] Judith Anderson casts allegory in similarly broad terms, ranging from "realistic improbability and disjunction to conspicuous mythic characterization, sustained structural significance, radical puns and thematic words, insistent reiteration of meaning, allegorical projection, interiorized landscapes, persistent allusion to the forms, images, and words of earlier literary texts, and in short, to a concern with meaning that is not naively abstracted from earth but is radically discontinuous with it."[54] Allegory in these descriptions sounds almost coextensive with the possibility of meaning itself, and it is hard to imagine a nonallegorical work of fiction under these rubrics. Yet I confess that I can find no Renaissance definition of allegory that would exclude these conceptions. The lesson I take from Borris and Anderson is

this: we should not expect to find a category of "nonallegorical fiction" explicitly informing the sensibilities of premodern readers and writers. In the terms I am using, *any* fiction can potentially be considered secondary to an order of nonfictional ideas. Nonetheless, not all fictions equally call attention to a secondariness that marks them as allegorical.

If allegorical narrative features this quality of secondariness, then to what degree does this formulation help us say whether a given character is allegorical or literal? The nature of literal character is immensely complicated, but I will suggest three conditions: (1) it openly represents a historical person; (2) it does not announce (via name or behavior) its secondariness to an order of nonfictional ideas—that is, it can be understood *primarily* in terms of its relation to other elements in the same narrative plane; (3) it displays emotions, dispositions, or intentions of sufficient range to make it difficult to identify the character with a single trait. Renaissance writers and readers would affirm (1) explicitly and (2) implicitly and would probably regard (3) as rather oblique. (For the modern sense of literal character, simply reverse this order of priority.) In any case, these criteria allow for plenty of ambiguity but are at least minimally relevant to the Renaissance recognition of literal character, allowing us, for example, to include Shakespeare's Lord Bardolph, who spreads rumors in *2 Henry IV*, but to exclude Shakespeare's Rumor. Shakespeare's contemporaries would probably see this distinction, even if they had no interest in theorizing or formalizing it.

Signs and Examples

The second condition of the above definition of literal character—that a character not announce its secondariness to an order of nonfictional ideas—promises to give the most insight into the relation that personifications have with the fiction that contains them. Within a fiction, what counts as announcing or not announcing one's secondariness? The distinction between sign and example offers a way to think about this question. In the play *The World and*

the Child (1522), for instance, Folly urges Mankind to abandon virtue, and Conscience urges him to return to it. If we say that Folly and Conscience *signify* the operation of certain mental inclinations in the human soul, and therefore understand the characters as secondary to ideas about these mental inclinations, then we are close to allegory. But we don't have to say this: perhaps Folly and Conscience *exemplify* foolish and conscientious moral advisers, in which case there is no particular urgency to call the story allegorical. One can have examples without allegory. Goethe defined allegory as a mode "where the particular serves only as an example of the general," but this is probably not quite right.[55] Examples don't signify another order of meaning: an apple is an example of fruit, but it does not necessarily signify fruit. But an apple might signify, in an allegorical interpretation of Genesis 3, the sinful desire to transgress divine law. Allegory, in this respect, seems to treat its elements as signs more than as examples.

The difference between signs and examples very quickly raises problems, however. For one thing, all the words and characters and events in a fiction might be understood as signs—say, in a Peircean sense—but this doesn't help us distinguish allegorical from literal character or agent from nonagent. For another thing, examples appear to refer in ways that are different from signs, but what is the difference? Do examples have a natural or logical relation with their categories rather than a conventional relation? In a fiction, does the character named Youth exemplify or signify the concept of youth?

We can get some clarification on these matters from the work of the art philosopher Nelson Goodman, who postulates a distinction between *denotation* and *exemplification* that corresponds, roughly, to the distinction between sign and example obtaining in allegory. Goodman suggests that denotation involves the relationship of a label, such as the title of a painting, and the thing it labels, such as the painting. Denotation includes all sorts of labels, linguistic, gestural, and pictorial: a painting of the Eiffel Tower may function as a label of the Eiffel Tower. Importantly, the "realism" of such a painting, its resemblance to the actual Eiffel Tower, is merely incidental to its denotational function. After all, as Goodman points out, such

a painting far more closely resembles other paintings of the Eiffel Tower than it does the actual building, yet we do not claim that the painting represents other paintings.[56] The relation between labels and the things they label is purely arbitrary and conventional, not natural or based on shared properties (34–39). In short, denotational labels do referential work, pointing us to things other than themselves.

By contrast, exemplification requires that the symbol under consideration possess the property that it exemplifies. Goodman offers the example of tailor swatches: a plaid swatch not only refers to plaidness but also possesses the quality of being plaid. In Goodman's formulation, "Exemplification is possession plus reference. To have without symbolizing is merely to possess, while to symbolize without having is to refer in some way other than by exemplifying" (53). In denotation, the arrow of reference travels only in one direction, from the word *plaid* to the property of plaidness, for instance. But exemplification involves a bidirectional relation between symbol and the thing symbolized. The word *plaid* denotes the tailor's swatch, but the swatch likewise refers to plaidness. The relation between example and the properties exemplified is not arbitrary as in the case of labels: the example must partake of the nature of the property it exemplifies.

It is worth emphasizing that Goodman's definition of example does not necessarily imply a Platonic notion of Forms. As Goodman notes, we can say equally that what is exemplified is a property (plaidness) and a predicate ("is plaid") (54–57). This leaves open the question—which I think ought to be left open—of whether to understand literary personification as philosophical realism or nominalism.[57] After all, we can find both views expressed within a single personification fiction. The speaker of Dante's *Vita nuova*, for example, assures us on the one hand that personifying Love "as if it were a human being" is, strictly speaking, "patently false, for Love does not exist in itself as a substance, but is an accident in a substance." On the other hand, he also speaks of this personification in terms that resemble the metaphysical realism of Socrates in the *Cratylus*: "The name of Love is so sweet to hear that it seems

impossible to me that the effect itself should be in most things other than sweet, since, as has often been said, names are the consequences of the things they name."[58] As with Dante's figure of Love, we can think of literary personification either as giving a name to that which does not really exist as a substance or as embodying independently existing abstract properties.

In any case, Goodman's distinction between denotation (which I am calling a "sign") and exemplification offers a valuable means for thinking about the intersection between prosopopoeia's agentive and figurative dimensions.[59] In particular, it supplies a template for the range within which personifications act out their concepts. In some cases, personifications signify their concept by performing actions that share no characteristics with that concept. Take, for instance, the character of Chastity (Pudicitia) in Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, who defeats her opponent Lust by thrusting a sword into the vice's throat.[60] Now, if Lust had sexually propositioned Chastity, and Chastity had said no, then we might have an example of chastity. But that is not the case here. Even if the scene of combat plays on traditional language about fighting against temptation, slicing open your opponent's windpipe is not literally a chaste thing to do. The link between violence and chastity is merely conventional. Like a denotational label, Chastity signifies her allegorical meaning by pointing toward an idea to which she herself has no necessary relation. The idea of chastity does not point back to her.

Personifications like Prudentius's Chastity bear a considerable resemblance to allegorical signs such as the Castle of Perseverance or the Apple of Temptation. What they signify has little to do with what kind of thing they are or what actions they perform. We could just as readily have a Castle of Temptation and an Apple of Perseverance. The Wandering Woods might deny its victims a clear path, but it equally might offer them a clear path to the wrong destination. Of course, some limits exist: the Armor of Vulnerability would be a strange allegorical sign, and a Chastity that eagerly coupled with Lust might confuse us.[61] George Puttenham rightly observes that in allegory a figure cannot be "altogether contrary" to its meaning but has "much convenience with it."[62] But aside from cases of

direct self-contradiction, anything goes. Allegory signifies so supplely because its signs are arbitrary and almost anything can stand for anything else. This quality of allegory sometimes inclined religious opponents during the Reformation to accuse each other of capricious biblical interpretation under the charge of "allegorical" reading.

Since Chastity's denotational function does not depend on the particular actions she performs—in the sense that she could signify chastity by means of an arbitrary range of actions—her allegorical significance has nothing to do with what kind of character she is. Certainly, she has a character in the fiction: a warrior princess who exalts over the fall of her enemy. But she could equally be a humble peasant who looks with pity at the victims of desire, or the master of a household who keeps his bedroom neat and uncluttered. None of these actions are literally chaste things to do, so such characters denote chastity by pointing away from themselves toward an order of nonfictional ideas outside the frame of the fiction. They do not signify as characters; rather, they signify and also happen to be characters.

Contrast Chastity, however, with Prudentius's figure of Patience, who stands "with staid countenance, unmoved amid the battle and its confused uproar."[63] Patience endures her opponent's attacks patiently. Wrath throws a spear, and Patience stands unmoving as the spear bounces off her breast armor. Wrath smites her in the head with her sword, but the sword breaks upon the virtue's bronze helm. Wrath finally becomes so frustrated that she kills herself.[64] Throughout the encounter the poet describes Patience as unmoved, calm, and waiting. In Goodman's terms, Patience the character exemplifies her concept in a way that Chastity the character does not. The things that Patience does are literally patient. Like Chastity, she points to a nonfictional idea, but unlike Chastity this idea also points back at Patience.

Notice that the difference between sign and example does not involve verisimilitude: Patience's impassivity as her opponent attacks her is surely less "realistic" than Chastity's victory over Lust.[65] Instead, the difference involves the nature of the relation between

an example and its meaning. Unlike Chastity, what Patience signifies depends on what she does and on what kind of character she is, because she exemplifies what she signifies. Her character does not perhaps have a *necessary* relation to her allegorical meaning (she could perform patient actions different from the ones she does), but this relation is not arbitrary. As Goodman observes, "Labeling seems to be free in a way that sampling is not. I can let anything denote red things, but I cannot let anything that is not red be a sample of redness" (58–59). To the degree that Patience offers a sample—an example—of patience, her range of action and character is limited. She signifies her meaning by means of her character, not in spite of it.

Over a long enough narrative, of course, a single personification can alternate between signification and exemplification. This imposes a programmatic ambiguity on the question of whether personifications are literal or allegorical agents. The condition of literal character that I posed a few pages ago—that a character not announce its secondariness to an order of nonfictional ideas—seems to apply to Patience but not to Chastity. Chastity's actions and character serve as instruments for signifying an idea of chastity that plays no role in the literal fiction. We need to go outside the literal narrative plane if we wish to access the concept of chastity that this character references. By contrast, Patience's character and actions offer examples of patient behavior that interact with the literal narrative. This does not make Patience antiallegorical, to be sure, but it does provide grounds for interpreting her as nonallegorical. As I observed before, one can have examples without allegory: Mr. Darcy's behavior toward Elizabeth Bennet's family exemplifies the character flaw of pride, but we do not therefore conclude that he is a sign in an allegorical narrative. Likewise, Folly and Conscience offer foolish and conscientious advice in *The World and the Child*, so we can understand the ideas they reference in terms of the literal plot of the drama.

So sometimes personifications signify by exemplifying, and sometimes they just signify. One can find plenty of cases like Pru-

dentius's Chastity, where the property referred to has no literal presence within the fictional character. Spenser's Error does not literally make any mistakes, and Bunyan's Flatterer does not literally offer any blandishments to Christian and Hopeful.[66] The nonexemplifying aspect of literary prosopopoeia, incidentally, sheds light on the oft-disputed relationship between personifications and "character types" such as we find in the drama of Ben Jonson and others. Lady Saviolina, Fastidious, Morose, and their ilk will never exactly coincide with literary personification because a character type that does not exemplify fails its essential duty, and this is not true of prosopopoeia. On the other hand, character types and personification will always have some overlap because more often than not personifications possess an exemplifying dimension: their actions and character are samples, within the literal narrative, of what they signify. Fear behaves fearfully, Pride behaves pridefully, and likewise for Hope, Ignorance, Strength, Charity, and so on. Even personifications of the natural landscape, such as cities and rivers, might be understood as examples, at least to the degree that we can specify what it means to behave in a city-like or river-like fashion.

This means that, as examples, personifications do not have access to an arbitrary set of actions by which to reference their concepts. They signify with their actions and dispositions, which is to say that they signify as characters, not only as signs. Like most characters, they engage the narrative and therefore find themselves limited and manipulated by that narrative. Indeed, in narrative (and perhaps in real life, though that is not the question here), circumstantial constraint is one of the conditions of agency: the fact that the features of a landscape resist a character indicates that the character is trying to push these features around in the first place. In rare cases, the narrative manipulates personifications in such a way that they appear to behave contrary to their concept. Guillaume de Lorris's Resistance promises to stop resisting; the Seven Deadly Sins in Langland "confess" their sinfulness and promise to reform; in the interlude *Hick Scorner*, a repentant Free Will gives his companion Imagination the new name of "Good Remembrance."[67] Narrative

circumstances appear temporarily to cause these personifications to lose focus and to drift or fall into behavior that contradicts their putative allegorical significance.

Personifications, then, have at least two ways of interacting with a fictional narrative. They can float above it, as signs, violating or reorganizing or ignoring its typical causal rules, or they can engage its causal landscape, as examples, manipulating and being manipulated by its literal features. And they can do both at the same time. Spenser's Furor, as a sign of rage, is partly exempted from the rules of combat operating elsewhere in the poem, but he is also an angry man, exemplifying rage and transmitting it to others. When personifications are more sign than example, we are inclined to think of them as metaphors; when they are more example than sign, we sometimes describe them as extreme character types.

Personifications are thus agents who have one foot in character and one foot in signhood. They resemble allegorical signs, signifying their concept through action that sometimes has only an arbitrary and conventional relation to this concept. Yet as examples they also differ from allegorical signs in that their relation to their concept is not arbitrary; they need a certain kind of character to achieve their signifying work. Whether as daemonic characters or as signs free from narrative causality, personifications extend passion into activity and concept into volition.

Personifications animate things; they draw action out of otherwise inactive objects or states. This is what I meant by my opening claim that personification produces a transition from the order of being to the order of doing. I also admitted in that opening that the reverse movement can occur: narrative action may seem to lapse into abstract states of being. In some fictions, when personifications multiply and enter into regularized, repetitious interaction (pageants, ritualized battles, genealogies, etc.), they do not appear to daemonically interrupt the rules of a narrative but instead seem to translate these rules into signs. It is probably fair to say that the paired combats in Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, exciting though they are, become less exciting as the narrative continues. And when in *Piers Plowman* Anima (as she is named in the B-text) tells Will at

some length that in her other modes of being she is called Animus, Mens, Memoria, Racio, Sensus, Conscience, Amor, and Spiritus, we may conclude that Langland does not here ramp up the action but rather temporarily suspends it to demonstrate a set of psychological affiliations.[68]

This enervating effect, although certainly present in literary personification, remains secondary to the main daemonic force of prosopopoeia as it operates in premodern literary texts. A few critics, such as Theresa Krier, see personification as essentially energetic. Yet the contrary conclusion that personification first and foremost depletes the fiction—and that personification is a kind of frozen or hollow version of literal characters—has become an unstated scholarly consensus. It is time to explore this consensus.

Volition or Compulsion? Modern Views of Personification

Nearly everyone recognizes that personification is linked to agency in some way. One commentator has even referred to it, in passing, as "the pre-eminent rhetorical figure of agency."[69] Yet most critics have come to understand the link as an ironic or negative one. Personification implies agency by foreclosing or objectifying it.

The most familiar and naive version of this view involves the claim that personifications are missing something as characters: they have only two dimensions rather than three, they are flat rather than round, they sound only one note rather than a complete melody, and so on. Now, once one has the modern novel, these kinds of claims begin to make sense. Steven Knapp may be right that eighteenth- and early nineteenth century writers associated personification with a troubling confusion between people and things, thereby using personification as both an embodiment of and a contrast to a notion of sublime agency.[70] And it may be true, as William Jewett has suggested, that Coleridge and Southey's *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794) ironizes an ideal of political agency by making its lead characters "congeal into abstract personifications of their leading traits."[71]

As long as we limit these kinds of claims to the modern era, they offer plausible insights about the perceived difference between real people and flat personifications. But such claims are not valid—or, at least, not generally valid—for the premodern period, whose readers and writers didn't have the modern novel and would have found such ideas puzzling. The standard template of literary character for these readers was not Emma Bovary, compared to whom the character Ennui appears flat, undeveloped, or obsessed.[72] Medieval and Renaissance readers would probably understand Ennui, if this character appeared in Flaubert's story, as a piece of Emma, but a piece that illustrated how Emma worked and that showed Emma taking action in the world. They would not assume that Ennui risked congealing flesh-and-blood Emma into a cold abstraction.

This does not mean that premodern readers thought that all literary characters were simplistic. As Elizabeth Fowler has shown us, one may have a highly complex experience of a literary character without bothering with modern notions of psychological depth.[73] Nor would I deny that premodern literature sometimes features characterological effects that resemble modern fiction.[74] But the dichotomy between real person and artificial trope did not dominate the sensibilities of premodern readers.

Many critics would readily grant what I've been arguing here, and most would eschew the naive version of the complaint that personifications are flat and lifeless. Nonetheless, some of the most sophisticated scholarly accounts of personification betray a whiff of this complaint, albeit at a highly amplified conceptual level. One form this line of thinking has taken involves associating prosopopoeia with death and with the inhuman. Paul de Man, for example, as we have already briefly discussed in the Introduction, influentially argued that prosopopoeia invites a commerce between life and death, so that as the trope imbues nonliving things with animation it simultaneously inflicts speechlessness and death upon the living who behold it.[75] J. Hillis Miller and Margery Garber have extended these ideas in discussions about the petrifying and epitaphic effects of personification on readers and writers.[76]

To be sure, these accounts of personification turn on a special theory about the relation between language and human experience, namely, the idea of the priority of the former over the latter. De Man offers a version of this argument in rich, if somewhat elliptical, terms: "If there is to be consciousness (or experience, mind, subject, discourse, or face), it has to be susceptible to phenomenalization. But since the phenomenality of experience cannot be established *a priori*, it can only occur by a process of signification. . . . Once the phenomenal intuition has been put in motion, all other substitutions follow as in a chain. But the starting, catachretic decree of signification is arbitrary."[77] That catachretic decree, that abusive juxtaposition of the person and nonperson, is prosopopoeia, which gives a human face to things that properly have none. For de Man, personification is the ur-figure reminding us that concepts such as time or mind require sensuous, phenomenal correlatives and, further, that such correlatives become intelligible through language. Time enters the human order, for example, through the "face" of the clock. Yet, in de Man's reading, this kind of prosopopoetic reminder troubles human experience—"Prosopopeia is hallucinatory. To make the invisible visible is uncanny"—and personification imposes a programmatic uncertainty about the mediated nature of our consciousness: "It is impossible to say whether prosopopoeia is plausible because of the empirical existence of dreams and hallucinations or whether one believes such a thing as dreams and hallucinations exists because language permits the existence of prosopopoeia."[78]

This is not the place to query the understanding of language that underwrites de Man's account of prosopopoeia. Instead, let us ask about the extent to which this account might pertain to literary personifications that behave as characters in narrative. De Man is silent on this issue, confining his examples to brief, prosopopoetic moments occurring in lyric. In this respect, Michael Riffaterre has complained that de Man does not sufficiently distinguish between full-scale personification, which requires some degree of "descriptive realism," and prosopopoeia, a simple figure of speech that involves "no mimesis, no restriction justified by referentiality."[79] Riffaterre

thinks that prosopopoeia is a function of linguistic or poetic convention, not a protraction of language into the sphere of sensuous experience or real life: "Figural meaning does not depend on sensory perception, referentiality or a descriptive grammar" (113). The implication here, *contra* de Man, is that prosopopoeia is not the trope that enacts an uncanny or petrifying double of the person.

But if prosopopoeia as trope does not produce this uncanny effect, what about personification as character? Unfortunately, Riffaterre does not pursue this question, merely noting that the conspicuous artifice of prosopopoeia can be only comic in narrative "because the basic rule of fiction is verisimilitude."[80] (It would be interesting to know how this dictum might account for personification fictions such as *The Romance of the Rose*, *The Faerie Queene*, or *Pilgrim's Progress*.) In any case, it is hard to deny that at the level of narrative personification does indeed mix trope with personhood. From this perspective, James J. Paxson is probably right to say that "personification involves a kind of epistemological error—a sort of forgetting of the textual status belonging to animate metaphors."[81] Personifications are words strutting around as if they were people.

But to conclude from this that in literary narrative personification functions to deaden or paralyze imposes a curious burden upon personification as a figure among figures. Why not conclude that prosopopoeia enlivens rather than enervates? The assumption in operation here, I suspect, is that personification attempts to approximate the person and that therefore its conspicuous failure to do so leaves the person distorted, uncanny, or troublingly mediated. But, as this book has been arguing, this is not how premodern rhetoricians talk about the trope. When Henry Peacham notes that via prosopopoeia the poet "raiseth again as it were the dead to life, and bringeth them forth complaining or witnessing what they knew," the emphasis of direction here is from lifelessness to animation, not the other way around.[82] In any case, if we associate language with death or the inhuman, then all tropes are liable to pull the living into the nonliving. Personification does not deserve a special distinction in this regard.

Other critics have understood the textual and iconographic status of personification to link it to constraint and immobility. One of the finest accounts of this kind comes from Susanne Wofford's *The Choice of Achilles*, which devotes several chapters to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. In her reading, the poem imagines "an apparently inevitable link between prosopopoeia and imprisonment, bondage, enclosure, or death."[83] Personification does indeed rely on "daemonic possession," yet for Wofford this possession never yields inspiration, only dispossession: "Sin itself comes to be defined as the moment when a human being allows a daemon to overtake him or her, becoming as it were completely 'obsessed' by the one devouring trait" (303). Agency resides in *resisting* personification allegory: Britomart is a "non-allegorical heroine" (310) in her victory over Busirane, and in general we should read the success of virtuous characters in the poem "not as an allegory, but as a fiction of release" (320).

In a somewhat similar vein, Jeff Dolven has offered an elegant description of personification allegory as a form of poetic justice, one that emblematically includes the consequences of crime with the crime itself. Via a consideration of the activities of Arthegall in book 5 of *The Faerie Queene*, he suggests "how close to the conceptual root of personification allegory the idea of punishment lies."[84] Rather like Wofford, Dolven equates moments of relief from the poem's punitive zeal with moments of release from allegorical meaning. As the wicked Munera suffers destruction at the hands of Talus, the poet mentions that she has "a sclendar wast," preventing us from fully relishing her deserved punishment: "Now we know that she has this *unallegorical* middle, a surprising and touching detail, almost felt in the crook of an arm before she is gone from the poem for good."[85]

Both these readings provide rich insight into how a poem like *The Faerie Queene* manages its allegory. Yet they are, after all, interpretations of particularly sadistic-seeming moments in the poem: Busirane's torture of Amoret and Talus's execution of violence on a defeated opponent. My concern is that if we extrapolate from scenes such as these to personification generally, we will get a skewed view

of how readers before the novel experienced it. That is, we might find ourselves pursuing interpretations that seek out moments when the characters *escape* from the tyranny of personification and allegory and then taking these moments as the genuine nodes of interest and energy within the fiction. Personifications, in this view, will not be the trajectories of volitional energy I described earlier but rather the sinkholes the narrative must negotiate if it wishes to remain alive.

This kind of interpretation, at any rate, appears to inform even some of the best recent discussions of personification allegory. Masha Raskolnikov, for example, has written a wonderful survey of medieval literary texts that use personification to ruminate about the relationship between body and soul. She argues persuasively that personification allegory produces an "immanent psychological theory," one that involves "the division of the parts of the self into forces capable of action."[86] Yet in a number of her actual readings, personification becomes most notable insofar it appears to resist being personification, as when in the *Psychomachia* Chastity contradicts her meek nature by exercising extreme violence, or when Boethius's Lady Philosophy argues for a freedom of the will that she, as a personification, can never enjoy.[87] Another paradigmatic example for Raskolnikov is Guillaume de Lorris's Resistance (*Dangier*), who, by allowing Openness and Pity to soften his aversion to the lover, "offers an example of an allegorical character who stretches the limits of his named nature until *forced to snap back into its confines*: Insofar as he is a person, and subject to persuasion and charm, he can be nice to the Lover, but insofar as he is an allegorical figure for the Rose's reluctance to yield to the lover, he must not. Dangier's will is not entirely free because he is an allegorical character."[88]

I admire the ingenuity of Raskolnikov's arguments here, but I worry, as I did above, that they channel a modern notion of literary character that premodern readers would not have brought to the table. Resistance does indeed obsessively resist the Lover's courtship of the rose, and to do otherwise compromises his nature. But he isn't "forced" to resist the lover; instead, he is doing what he wants. And it is unlikely that Guillaume's readers imagined that

Resistance possesses volition "insofar as he is a person": it is not Resistance's job to be like or unlike a person, but rather to put into action the beloved's aversion to the Lover. His will does not become free as he begins to succumb to the persuasions of Openness and Pity. Rather, he suffers a loss of energy: the inertia of narrative obstacles slows down his momentum, and he loses his volitional focus. (Let us recall that the first thing Resistance does upon relenting is fall asleep.) We will do better if we call Resistance's violation of his nature at this point something like "semantic drift" instead of "free will." Even personifications, as they interact with other characters and events, sometimes find their energy diffused by the entropy of the narrative. But such diffusion does not represent an entrée to personhood or freedom.

Two Touchstone Studies

The implicit critical consensus about personification that I am trying to contest here perhaps finds its most important articulations in two highly influential studies, Angus Fletcher's *Allegory: Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (1964) and Gordon Teskey's *Allegory and Violence* (1996). Although the official topic of both books is allegory, they assume, to a degree other critics do not, that personification is the paradigmatic figure of the allegorical mode. These two books have offered crucial resources for my work on personification, although I have important disagreements with some of their arguments. Engaging those arguments, even if briefly, will help clarify my own view of personification as an expression of will.

More than any other modern critic, Angus Fletcher anticipates my claim that personification indicates a kind of energy. For Fletcher, allegory is concerned above all with quantities of power: "His [the allegorical hero's] essentially energetic character will delight the reader with an appearance of unadulterated power. Like a Machiavellian prince, the allegorical hero can act free of the usual moral restraints, even when he is acting morally, since he is moral only in the interests of his power over other men."[89] Fletcher's

account is perhaps best known for the way it describes this energy as resulting in an obsessed, fixated persona: "If we were to meet an allegorical character in real life, we would say of him that he was obsessed with only one idea, or that he had an absolutely one-track mind" (40). In a fascinating intuition, Fletcher associates this obsessed persona with psychological compulsion (279–303). What we now describe as a clinical condition that compels repetitive action, the premoderns described with the literary figure of personification.

This is a justly celebrated interpretation of personification allegory. Yet critics who rely on Fletcher's account have tended not to inquire into the literary basis on which he makes this interpretation. That is, compared to what notion of character are we to understand personifications as compulsive? Fletcher bases his account on what we might call the felt distance between a personification and a psychologically mimetic character. For example, as Spenser's Malbecco begins to transform into the personification Gelosy, the character moves "away from realism and mimesis" toward allegory, which denies Malbecco his previous role as a jealous husband, a role that Fletcher calls "eminently real and natural and comic" (49). Likewise, in splitting Arthegall into prosopopoetic parts, such as Talus, the poet "denies true human character to that hero" (38).

For Fletcher, allegory in general lacks "the feeling one gets of common humanity binding together the characters of a mimetic drama" (30). This is because, in part, personifications cannot grow organically in the way literal characters do, in the sense of "maturation" (66). And personifications cannot achieve maturation because, significantly, they lack free will: "Realism of character is related to freedom of choice in action. The truly 'real' character, the Pierre of *War and Peace*, does not necessarily change radically, but he does have the power to change radically, if need be, and we are made to feel this potentiality. He can act according to probability, not solely according to fixed necessity, nor is he a victim of random chance" (66–67). A personification, by contrast, is best described as a "caricature" (34) or "a robot, a Talus," or the monster in *Frankenstein*, or a cyborg in modern science fiction (55).

I have no interest in faulting Fletcher for appealing to notions of "natural" literary character, "true human character," or "common humanity." He is talking about the experience of character that we often find in novels. We don't have to deny that all literary characters are tropes in order to acknowledge that novelistic characters affect us differently than do caricatures. Pierre Bezukhov and Emma Bovary and Charles Swann appear designed to encourage us to identify with them; an appeal to common humanity is partly how they work.[90] Compared to them, personifications like Folly or Furor do perhaps appear like robots or reanimated corpses.

My concern, rather, is that comparing Folly and Furor to such characters puts us on the wrong track. There is no evidence in the vast archive of premodern literary characters, or in premodern literary theory, that readers and writers *typically* had an expectation of psychological depth or mimetic realism. The contrast between Pierre and Folly that seems so obvious to us would probably not have seemed obvious to them, or at least not obvious in the same terms. Yet I believe that the perceived affinity between mimetic, novelistic characters and real human beings continues to underwrite the critical inclination to describe personifications as constrained or enervated. What Fletcher does openly we still do implicitly: we *start* with the notion of psychologically deep, mimetically probable literary character and then peel away its complexity and nuance until all that remains is a single, simplistic kernel.[91] This is the modern view of personification. But to apply this modern view as the default template for prosopopoeia would seem to require that we produce a premodern model of novelistic character *avant la lettre*.

Does Fletcher produce such a model to contrast to personification? He implies that he finds it in mimetic drama, especially as described by Aristotle. The *Poetics* repeatedly recommends that tragic drama maintain a probability of plot because the effect of wonder (*thaumasia*) is most intense when events occur unexpectedly but in a recognizable causal sequence.[92] It seems fair to say that Aristotle would find the narrative improbability of a personification to make it unsuitable as the protagonist of a tragedy. But Fletcher pushes this

idea to a broader range of application, concluding that "mimetic drama . . . questions whatever will prevent human character from gradually modifying itself. . . . Above all, natural growth and natural decay seem to be the prime concern of the mimetic artist" (150).

This smacks of bootstrapping. Aristotle has no interest in the natural growth of human character in tragedy: he cares about character only insofar as it helps to produces certain plot effects.[93] For him, what matters is choosing the right *type* of character—elevated or base, virtuous, wicked, or in between—that fits the kind of fiction the dramatist or poet is creating.[94] Character leads to certain *kinds* of action rather than enabling the free selection of multiple possibilities.[95] So although Fletcher suggests that Aristotle would prefer to see a "free agent" on the stage rather than an obsessed one (67), and refers to the "Aristotelian notion that art must deal with the variable and with matters of 'choice'" (306n4), we will search in vain for such ideas in the *Poetics* itself.

Fletcher, I suggest, can find the stark contrast to personification that he seeks in modern novels but not in Aristotle. Nor would he find it in ancient drama if he looked. Athenian tragedy features, not the natural growth of its characters, but rather the shocking effects of the morning after: Herakles waking up after killing his family while possessed by madness; Ajax realizing to his horror that he has slaughtered cows, not warriors; Oedipus learning that he is the cause of Thebes's plague. The actions of these characters result from a combination of their mostly fixed nature and external daemonic forces.

I don't intend these comments as a wholesale rejection of the account of personification in Fletcher's *Allegory*. My view in many ways is Fletcherian: personifications are trajectories of energy driven by daemonic force. Such figures do indeed appear fixated on a single objective and mode of behavior. But fixation is only part of the story: daemonic possession also inspires and enables personifications to do what they are in an untrammeled manner.

Along with Fletcher, the other account of personification I must address is Gordon Teskey's undeniably brilliant *Allegory and Violence*. Teskey rejects Fletcher's view that personifications express

compulsive, daemonic energy, and he has no interest in contrasting them with mimetic literary characters. Instead, he argues that personification offers the definitive instance of allegorical violence. In his view, allegory expresses, and seeks to accomplish, the desire of the realm of ideas to impose itself on the realm of material things. Allegory aggressively foists meaning onto the world. Teskey associates this imposition both with the notion of "participation" in Platonic metaphysics, whereby an object has a quality only by merit of its connection to an Idea of that quality, and with Aristotelian hylomorphism, in which form actively imposes itself on passive material.[96] In Teskey's account, the medieval Scholastic doctrine that feminine Matter secretly desires masculine Form to ravish it aptly signals the gender dimension of the struggle between ideas and things (20). The violence of allegory is above all a sexual violence.

Teskey's view of allegorical violence crucially influences his description of personification, which, he suggests, ought to be understood as only one side of a coin. On the other side is "capture": "What the act of capture exhibits is the truth over which allegory is always drawing its veil: the fundamental disorder out of which the illusion of order is raised" (19). The material world resists the effort of Ideas to organize or process it. This resistance occasionally erupts in an allegory as disturbances or discontinuities on the otherwise smooth conceptual surface. In the case of personification, the poet sometimes allows us to glimpse matter resisting the violent procedure by which Ideas translate the world into signification. For Teskey, paradigmatic examples of capture include Dante's Francesca da Rimini—trapped for eternity in hell—who refuses to behave as a simple personification of lust, and Spenser's Amoret—bound, heart ripped from her chest—who refuses to transform into an obliging object of male desire (19, 25–29). Capture is the aggressive process leading up to a finished product, personification, but the product then conceals this process.

Teskey's account offers a profound sense of the metaphysics in operation in allegory generally and in personification specifically. Yet an implication of this account, as in several of the critical views I have discussed, is that personification becomes most interesting

when it stops behaving like ordinary personification. The *prosōpon* of personification is a deceptive one: Charissa nursing her babes in the House of Holiness may seem sweet, but just below the surface is a bloody Amoret struggling to escape from bondage. Indeed, for Teskey it is primarily insofar as we can still perceive repressed matter resisting its prosopopoetic mask that personification attracts our interest.[97] When personification effectively erases the process of capture, it threatens to drain vital energy from literary narrative. As Teskey puts it in an essay about the idea of death in allegory, "The very liveliness of the allegorical figures, their frenetic, jerky, galvanic life, makes us think of dead bodies through which an electric current is passed."[98]

Teskey's account of personification as an undead figure, one that seems energetic only when the remnant of suppressed materiality twitches within it, relies in no small part on his strict separation between the Greco-Roman daemon and Christian personification. In this he follows Coleridge's distinction between ancient mythic figures such as Love and Psyche, on the one hand, and Christian allegory, on the other, which features the "known unreality," as Coleridge put it, of personified characters.[99] Along these lines, Teskey argues that in ancient literature the landscape is numinous and local: gods, daemons, and spirits coexist with the natural order of things. Christian thought, by contrast, reconceives of this local numinousness as God or the One or absolute meaning and situates it outside the natural order, leaving in its place a system of signs that point back to it.[100]

According to Teskey, this means we cannot understand ancient literary figures such as Hesiod's Eros or Homer's Eris or Euripides's Philotimia as personifications, but only as supernatural beings whose agency is real, not merely a sign of an abstract idea (40–41). Prudentius's Ira, by contrast, is an abstraction to which the poet has retroactively given agency: Ira's power to act does not belong to her but comes from her relation to a system of signs. This system animates her otherwise empty shell, an electric current, as it were, passing through a dead body.

I am dubious that the distinction between daemon and personification can be made as sharply as Teskey would have it. Most scholars agree that the two figures differ from one another, but most also concede that it is often hard to be sure of the difference.[101] Classicists such as Emma Stafford have suggested that the ancient Greek world implicitly made use of a sliding scale, at one end of which stood the fully individualized deity, while on the other stood a figure of speech with no personality: in between were more and less figurative versions of personification.[102] Likewise, medievalists such as Barbara Newman have demonstrated the persistence of numinous deity in Christian literary figures such as Natura, Amor, and Sapientia.[103]

Premodern Christians did not build altars of worship to Chastity and Health, it is true, but many of them did believe that the world was inhabited by invisible spirits and energies, good, bad, helpful, and mischievous.[104] For example, in Lewis Wager's moral interlude, *The Life and Repentance of Mary Magdalene* (1566), Christ brings Mary to repentance by banishing her longtime companion Infidelity from her presence, along with "the seven devils which have her possessed."[105] It is nearly impossible to understand Infidelity here as purely a figurative sign of an abstract vice. After all, Christ is *literally* performing exorcisms when he speaks of the seven wicked spirits in scripture (Luke 11:26), which Wager references in the above line. Infidelity is a walking metaphor personifying faithlessness, but he also operates as the daemonic agent that has led Mary along the primrose path to sin.

And a regard for daemonic agents was not limited to popular belief. A Renaissance intellectual like Leone Hebreo is happy to nod to both numinous presence and Platonic metaphysics:

> [The ancients] called human virtues, vices, and passions "gods or goddesses," principally because, apart from the fact that *the nobility of the first and the might of the others has in it some godlike element*, each of the virtues, vices, and passions of men in general has its own Idea, and manifests itself in them with more or less intensity in proportion as it partakes of the Idea.

> Therefore it is that among the gods are numbered Fame, Love, Grace, Cupidity, Pleasure, Discord, Labour, Envy, Deceit, Perseverance, Sorrow and many other of the same kind, forasmuch as each has its own Idea or incorporeal principle, (as I told you), on account of which it is declared a god or goddess.[106]

Human passions, virtues, and vices in themselves possess daemonic intensity. Leone's personified figures participate in the primacy of the Forms without quite sliding completely from deity to sign.

Part of the difficulty here involves Coleridge's distinction between real and unreal characters. In an anthropological sense it is perfectly clear what this means: Ovid's Envy links an abstraction to the name of a personality believed to be real (a daemon), whereas Langland's or Spenser's Envy links an abstraction to the name of an openly fictional personality (a personification). But in a narrative sense it is less clear what this difference means. All three of these figures take action in narratives, imposing themselves on other characters, seeking to achieve their envious projects. For Ovid, Langland, and Spenser alike, I suggest, envy is in us and also out there in the world. We express envy through acts of will, and Envy pricks us into feeling envious.[107]

In arguing for the daemonic basis of personification, I suppose I am claiming, as in the case of Fletcher, that Teskey gives us only part of the story. The part he provides is fascinating: personification foists an idea onto a human figure in a kind of aggressive hylomorphism, whereby form tries to ravish and impregnate matter. As a consequence, a personification has an agency that does not quite belong to it. This accounts for its curious heterogeneity to the narrative in which it acts. But at the same time personifications channel daemonic agency. They represent the energies passing back and forth between us and the landscape. Chastity and Envy figure the nobility and might, as Leone puts it, of our will to virtue or to vice.

Thus far I have argued for a continuity between daemonic and prosopopoetic representations of agency. What Envy did for Ovid, she does similarly for Langland and Spenser. Nonetheless, there is no denying that characters with names such as Envy occur in me-

dieval and Renaissance literature far more than they do in classical literature. Premodern Christianity sponsored the great age of literary personification. Why was this so? Scholars have long identified an answer: monotheism requires that the gods transform into metaphors. "The twilight of the gods is the mid-morning of the personifications," as C. S. Lewis once put it.[108] Yet as rich and important as this explanation is, medieval readers and writers understood personifications as more than pagan deities translated into figures. The next chapter thus explores a different kind of explanation for the rise of literary personifications in the early Middle Ages and after, one that involves examining several developments in the concept of the will in this period. In doing so, I will suggest that ancient daemons and Christian personifications, despite their broad overlap, also imply disparate notions of agency.

"Free Will." Detail from Caesar Ripa, *Iconologia, or Moral Emblems* (1603; repr., London, 1709), 49. Reproduced with permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.