

FEELING TOO MUCH:
TRANSFORMATIONS OF EXCESSIVE EMOTIONALITY
IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH NOVEL

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INTRODUCTION

In his Preface to the first edition of *The Beauties of Sterne*, the editor—identified in the dedication as “W.H.”—explains the rationale behind his compilation of excerpts from Sterne’s work:

I have... extracted the most distinguished passages on which the sun of Genius shines so resplendent, that all his competitors, in his manner of writing, are lost in an eclipse of affectation and unnatural rhapsody. I intended to have them arranged alphabetically, till I found the stories of *Le Fever*, the *Monk*, and *Maria*, would be too closely connected for the *feeling reader*, and would wound the bosom of *sensibility* too deeply: I therefore placed them at a proper distance from each other. (Sterne, *The Beauties of Sterne* viii)

Here, W.H. reveals the core contradiction of the eighteenth century’s popular sentimental fiction: that it must be simultaneously productive of enormous feeling, allowing a subject to dilate upon a text, object, or detail that generates outsized or transcendent sentiments, while restraining that same feeling so that it does not become excessive and “wound... too deeply.”¹ As *The Beauties of Sterne*’s title page notes, the anthology is “selected for the Heart of Sensibility” or the “chaste lovers of literature” who possess the sensibility to appreciate the natural, unaffected depictions of intense feeling in Sterne’s work (vii), and who presumably agree with the apostrophe from *A Sentimental Journey* that also appears on the title page: “Dear SENSIBILITY! source inexhausted of all that’s precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows! thou chainest thy martyr down upon his bed of straw!—and ’tis thou who lifts him up to HEAVEN!—Eternal foundation of our feelings! ’tis here I trace thee.” The sentimental reader, then, is aligned with Yorick’s expressed belief in sensibility’s foundational value as the “source of all that’s precious”—

¹ As an indication of the continuing popularity of Sternean sentimentality almost 15 years after the 1768 publication of *A Sentimental Journey*, *The Beauties of Sterne* went through five editions in 1782 alone, and thirteen printings by the end of the century.

producing both joy and sorrow, and feelings that uplift and inspire while still enslaving and destroying.

But the anthologizing editor is careful to police this emotional intensity by keeping the passages separate, protecting readers from somehow being injured by their excessive feeling. While Yorick addresses sensibility as a deified creator worshipped by martyred devotees willing to die for its bliss, W.H. sees the pressure of sentiment on such acute sensibility as a threat: even placing passages in a certain order leads to feeling “too deeply,” threatening to “wound” the sensible, sentimental reader. Some kind of physical buffer, like the separation of the passages, is needed to put particularly moving episodes at a “proper” emotional distance from each other: even though W.H. fails to explain how he estimates when passages would be *too* closely connected, or sensibility wounded *too* deeply, there is clearly an unspoken etiquette at play that determines the difference between too much feeling and just enough. W.H. objects only to wounding “too deeply,” not wounding in the first place. His valuation of Sterne’s “most distinguished passages” reveals the unspoken sentimental hierarchy shared by many other critics and readers: the “good stuff” is that which prompts affect; the rest is little more than narrative filler.

Of course, too-much, too-deep feeling is not the only—or even the chief—objection levied against the eighteenth-century sentimental novel. In 1781, the *Monthly Review* declared itself “nauseated with the large quantities of that insipid trash, called *Sentimental Letters*, *Sentimental Effusions*, &c. &c. which ha[ve] been poured upon us, under the sanction of Yorick’s name, or by an affectation of his light and desultory manner of writing, without one grain of his wit and acuteness” (B..d..k 65). Self-declared Yoricks and Elizas find it “exceedingly easy to *assume* the *virtue* of sentiment, and... adopt its *cant*,” oppressing

themselves by their own “gentle feelings” and drooping and melting in their “own sensibility.” Sentimentality, the *Monthly Review* argues, all too frequently devolves into an inauthentic performance of superficial, elective victimhood; its danger lies chiefly in the quantity of literary trash and foppish behavior that it generates (not to mention the dilution of Sterne’s formidable literary legacy) at the expense of more productive, improving, and moral pursuits. A self-identified member of “a club of female *Literatae*” writing to the editor of the *Sentimental Magazine* in 1774 identifies a different array of problems with sentimental novels, not least the “dangerous tendency... modern novels, and other ludicrous publications, have on almost all ranks of people, but particularly on the weakest part of our sex” (“The SPECULATIST” 31). “Their influence,” the writer continues, “is incredible and astonishing. They are productive of intrigues, elopements, disobedience to parents, and the corruption of morals. They pervert the soberest education, instil loose and impure thoughts into the mind, and often direct the appetites and passions into the irremeable [*sic*] gulph of profligacy.” This is a succinct catalogue of common allegations against sentimental novels: that they present nothing less than a real “danger” to virtually everyone who comes into contact with them. Beneath their superficiality, or their artificiality, or their questionable morality, or their insipidity, or the threat that they pose to responsible education of the young, or their capacity to “wound” sympathetic readers, the undisciplined feeling at the heart of the sentimental novel forms the root of its problems.

This dissertation begins from the contradictions and complexities within late-eighteenth-century accounts of sentimentality: that it is innate, but vulnerable to feigning and affectation; that it is both absurdly delicate, and overwhelmingly powerful; that it can be encapsulated in minutia that explode into all-encompassing enormity, like the single tear embodying sorrows too great for words; that it must be restrained, yet felt wholeheartedly; that it celebrates affect and

receptivity, yet warns against the effects of that same passivity; that it is both instrumental and essential; and that it clings tightly to so many threadbare tropes, while nevertheless managing to reveal itself in surprising ways. Sentimentality is thus a massively overdetermined mode, a mixture of clashing and contradictory signs and symptoms which are but loosely connected to the excessive feelings that are variously seen as its outcome, or as its source. Here, I will uncover the underlying transformation of excessive sentimentality that takes place through the sentimental novels of the eighteenth century: initially seen as an affliction both spawned and fed by seductive sentimental fiction, sentimentality soon begins to soak up other, less distinctively sentimental forms of excess and add them into its bulk, transforming it into an accretion of whatever kinds of disturbing social and cultural excesses are lurking at the far fringes of the zeitgeist. In the process, I will seize upon one central sentimental question raised by W.H. and so many others: when abundant, free-flowing feeling is so desirable, what does it mean to feel *too much*, and why is that possibility so distressing? Why does the potential for feeling too much—the possibility that indulging in Sterne’s celebrated “source inexhausted” might, in fact, be opening an inexhaustible Pandora’s box of emotion—dominate the cultural conversation surrounding sentiment, sympathy, and sensibility, and what can that tell us about the dangerous consequences of such apparent virtues? How might too much feeling imperil the self, as well as society?

Critical Reactions, Renunciations, and Reimaginings

For both eighteenth-century and twentieth-century critics, excessive sentimentality was often understood to be little more than unliterary mawkishness not worth a second glance, let alone serious exploration. In her formative survey of critical reactions to the novels that populated circulating libraries of the 1770s and 1780s, J.M.S. Tompkins observes that “there

was, in the period that followed the masterpieces of the four great novelists”—Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, and Smollett—“a real conviction that the novel was played out. The works of Fielding and Richardson were seen as the culmination of a development, not the starting-point. Authors lamented that all types had been displayed and all themes used up” (Tompkins 4–5). Tompkins cites complaints about the creative exhaustion of the novel that date as early as the 1770s, and notes that “as late as 1790 the *Monthly Review*, splenetically blind to the signs of new life, grumbled: ‘The manufacture of novels has been so long established, that in general they have arrived at mediocrity.... We are indeed so sickened with this worn-out species of composition, that we have lost all relish for it’” (Tompkins 5).

Indeed, late-eighteenth-century reviews like the *Monthly* and the *Critical* are bursting at the seams with ready denunciations of novels’ imaginative and moral corruption and decline, which are even echoed in the titles and introductions of the novels themselves; as the *Monthly* observed, it seemed to many as if there were no untrodden novelistic paths left to travel.² Here, I cite Tompkins to represent just one of the many voices in mid-twentieth-century criticism who imply that the novels of the 1770s-1790s are a secondary, inferior generation to an original, pre-1770s Big Four. Despite writing what is still one of the most comprehensive surveys of British novels published in the last three decades of the eighteenth century, Tompkins seems to share the view that the novels she catalogues are a lesser breed.³

² Tompkins also notes the back-and-forth between reviewer-baiting novels and the Reviews’ high-handed responses: “As for poor Charlotte Palmer, who rashly christened her book *It is and it is not, a Novel* (1796), she can hardly have hoped to get off scot-free. ‘No, my dear,’ said the *Critical*, ‘it is *not* a novel; but be a good girl; do so no more; and we will say nothing about it this time’; and that is the whole review” (Tompkins 16).

³ M.H. Abrams’ canonical *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, for example, describes modern readers receiving the novel of sensibility as “ludicrously sentimental, and respond[ing] with jeers instead of tears to once celebrated episodes of pathos.... A useful distinction between sentimental and nonsentimental is one which does not depend on the intensity or type of the feeling expressed or evoked, but labels as sentimental a work or passage in which the feeling is rendered in commonplaces and *clichés*, instead of being freshly verbalized and sharply realized in the details of

Modern scholars are turning their attention back to the oft-maligned novels of the 1770s-1780s, but predominantly in theme-oriented studies where literary works are seen as reflections on and expressions of important social, economic, and political questions, thereby skipping over earlier debates about their literary merit. Mid- to late-twentieth-century studies by Janet Todd, R.F. Brissenden, G.J. Barker-Benfield, and Ann Jessie Van Sant offer basic historical and literary overviews to a long-neglected phenomenon and structure it in terms of a tradition in and of itself. John Mullan's *Sentiment and Sociability* and Barbara Benedict's *Framing Feeling* both describe sentimentality as a loosely-coalescing cultural genre that borrows from different types of literature and reflects different, changing modes of sociability, instead of as a consolidated format that has sprung up *sui generis* in the wake of Sterne and Mackenzie, while critics such as Markman Ellis, Claudia Johnson, and Lynn Festa have examined the intersections of sentimentality and politics. For Ellis, sentimental fiction's involvement in commerce and exchange allows novels to create economies of extravagant feeling and benevolence; for Johnson, the emotions of late-eighteenth-century fiction are "saturated in turbulent and disfiguring excess" marked by "political rather than purely psychological import" that renders

the representation" (Abrams 284). Ian Watt's (even more canonical) *The Rise of the Novel* dismisses the "quantitative increase" in novels' publication between 1770-1800 (double that of the previous three decades, according to his numbers) as "not in any way matched by an increase in quality" (Watt 290). "With only a few exceptions the fiction of the last half of the eighteenth century, though occasionally of some interest as evidence of the life of the time or of various fugitive literary tendencies such as sentimentalism or Gothic terror, had little intrinsic merit," he writes (290). "Much of it reveals only too plainly the pressures towards literary degradation which were exerted by the booksellers and circulating library operators in their efforts to meet the reading public's uncritical demand for easy vicarious indulgence in sentiment and romance." Watt singles out the "fugitive tendencies" of sentimentalism and the Gothic as interesting exceptions to his dismissal of late eighteenth-century fiction, but it is clear that what he sees as the predominant atmosphere of uncritical literary indulgence results in a morass of undistinguished novels which fall far short of their antecedents in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding.

sentimentality “politics made intimate” (C. L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 1–2); and for Festa, the emotional expenditures of sentimentality overflow messily into colonial encounters.⁴

My dissertation similarly argues that the sentimental novel serves as a kind of cultural sponge that absorbs a number of surrounding discourses into its particular literary currency of tears, tremors, and sighs. In fact, that very absorbency creates many of the novel’s problems, because it encompasses, channels, and redirects forms of excess that exist far beyond the admittedly limited reach of literary sentimentality: that is, the “excess” of the sentimental novel is not merely sentimental or literary in nature, but is also associated with forms of religious enthusiasm, challenges to the political and philosophical self-discipline represented by stoicism, physiological overload, and the aesthetic expansiveness of the sublime. One reason why eighteenth-century sentimental novels become such an object of popular contempt and condemnation is because existing concerns about cultural and societal excesses, such as the influence of enthusiastic Methodism and the recreational plucking at the heartstrings exercised by skilled actors, are easily superimposed onto them. In this way, sentimental novels are the victims of their own swift success: their visibility and appeal to vulnerable young readers led critics to focus on the lavish emotional displays that characterize them, and critiques of sentimental excess soon melded with critiques of the more generalized excess that could be neatly mapped on top of them. Excess, then, is perhaps less of an inherently sentimental quality than a burden which has been assumed by it.

⁴ In addition, studies by Simon Dickie (whose *Cruelty and Laughter* draws upon both canonical and non-canonical writers to paint the portrait of an eighteenth century that maneuvers around ideals of sympathy, sensibility, and sentimentality with very different results) and Deidre Shauna Lynch have further expanded the scope of critical considerations of eighteenth-century fiction beyond binary categories of “sentimental” and “not.” Thomas Pfau’s *Romantic Moods* begins, chronologically speaking, where I leave off, with British and German Romanticism; his argument about how “moods” evolve from an individual quality into the voices of their literary and historical moment has interesting ramifications when one looks back to eighteenth-century sentimentalism, which suffers similar difficulties as an inarticulable yet aesthetic ideal.

Here, I seek to dig beneath standard complaints and uncover how even the most boilerplate sentimental novels work their way through changeable models of excessive feeling that evolve throughout the final decades of the century, restricting, translating, counterbalancing, and extending excessive feeling into new and surprising forms. Whereas most studies of the sentimental have emphasized more canonical titles, I focus on long out-of-print-novels of the 1760s-1790s to investigate the peculiar connections that they forge between various forms of extreme affect and sentimentality, because these once-popular novels—regardless of how forgotten they are now—are one of the most prominent places where the kind of generalized tendency to excess that critics such as Adela Pinch have described as characteristic of eighteenth-century theories of sympathy has been filtered down through a literary, and highly specific, form. The many, obscure sentimental novels of the last three decades of the eighteenth century provide the sites for the iteration of various forms of excessive feeling, and demonstrate both its evolution and its evolving reception. The sentimental novel is growing beneath its unchanging veneer of familiar plot twists and character types: each decade from the 1760s to the 1790s sees new waves of sentimental novels which attempt to traverse, counteract, or circumvent the creative and moral difficulties of emotional excess by embracing a host of neighboring discourses. With each successive wave of sentimental fiction, the resilience of threadbare sentimental tropes masks significant evolutions in the kinds of social and cultural anxieties that have been exposed by the sentimental novel, as well as new strategies to deal with them.

Defining Sentimentality

The English roots of “excess” lie in the Latin *excēdēre*, “to exceed” (“Exceed, v.”). At the beginning of the eighteenth century the idea of “exceeding” centered around the idea of

transgressing limits, surpassing boundaries, or the “project[ion] beyond” a specified point.⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definitions of “excess” reach back to the 14th and 16th centuries with the Latin *excessus mentis*, or “ecstasy, trance, stupefaction,” which places excess in the realm of mysticism and the kind of rapturous ecstasy experienced by religious devotees (“Excess, N.”). Excess’s early linguistic connection with the kinds of passionate, mystical transcendence reached in prayer or contemplation is one whose resonances are still felt in sentimental novels (Hollywood and Beckman 187); Chapter Two will show how eighteenth-century readers of Henry Brooke’s *The Fool of Quality* vigorously objected not to the text’s boilerplate sentimentalism, but to the echoes of mysticism and Methodism which infuse its depictions of excessive feeling. (It is not the precise *kind* of excess that is so objectionable, in other words, but the presence of that excess in the first place.) Contemporary readers were wary of the ready parallels between the rapturous descriptions of ecstatic, overpowering sentimental feeling and traditional descriptions of the kinds of ecstatic unions with the divine that characterize Christian mysticism. Although this is only one of many eighteenth-century facets of “excess,” it sets the stage for the kind of cautious, wary approach that so many held towards an apparently benign genre of popular fiction whose main characteristic was exhorting its readers to shed so many tears.

⁵ This last meaning has interesting implications given how, as I will argue in Chapter Four, eighteenth-century sentimental excess propels eventual interest in the sublime. Even here, the OED distinguishes between the more common “to proceed beyond” and the rarer “to project beyond”; the idea of excess *forcing* the subject to extend himself hints at a more strenuous and thorough transformation than we normally think of as happening with typical sentimental overindulgence, and the “ex-” prefixes of “excess,” “exceed,” and other words in the family emphasize the extremity and outside nature of their ideas. Similarly, “ecstasy”—something inevitably experienced by novels’ characters during moments of unbearable feeling—derives from the Greek *ekstasis*, “the state of being ‘beside oneself’” or to be thrown into a frenzy of passion (“Ecstasy”). This kind of passionate transcendence particularly comes into play with the sublime landscapes of the late eighteenth century. *Ekstasis*’ definition additionally cites excess’s threat to individual subjectivity in its ability to remove or alienate the individual from the self—also a distinguishing characteristic of the sublime, and one dangerous potential result of overindulged sentimentality. Ultimately, excess has strong linguistic links to both transgression and transcendence.

Many of the OED's other definitions of "excess" circa the eighteenth century focus on its violation of normativity, and the departure from moderation: "extravagant violation of law, decency, or morality"; "overstepping the limits of moderation" (which even cites a line from Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, "All excess is vicious"); "being in greater amount or degree than is beneficial or right" ("Excess, N."). If we turn to contemporary dictionaries, Chambers' *Cyclopædia* (1728) divides excess into "*Natural* and *Moral*: The first, is a Part whereby one Quantity is greater than another.—Thus, we say, this Line is longer than that... the latter, is an Intemperance, or going beyond the just Bounds and Measures prescribed to any Thing: Thus, we say, *Excess* in Wine, Women, &c. is prejudicial to the Health" (1: 358). Chambers' examples echo existing definitions of "excess" as something that neutrally surpasses boundaries, but also associate it with intemperance and ill health; "excess" stands as a relative measure that contrasts with moderation, not as a determination that stands on its own. Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) emphasizes the role of passions, feelings, and individual temperament in determining excess; he particularly connects the word to descriptions of affect, using it to describe the passions and the expression of emotions. "Excess," in Johnson's *Dictionary*, is superfluity and abundance, but also "exuberance," "violence of passion," and the "transgression of due limits." Something that is "excessive" is similarly charged with being "vehement beyond measure in kindness or dislike," leading to a quotation citing those "*excessive* in pity." Even in Johnson, then, we see the germ of the idea that feelings can become too great, or be carried too far; furthermore, "excess" now encompasses emotional mismanagement and vehement force, stretching the ramifications of excess beyond the individual to affect the surrounding community.

By the 1790s, discussions of "excess" are typically accompanied with "in wine": excess has become strongly associated with intemperance, and it is against these material, bodily

indulgences that detractors aim their critiques. Constant drunkenness obviously presents a more tangible economic and social threat to society than the sentimental novels that have, at this point, been on the market for the past thirty years; “excess,” however, is popularly invoked almost as a personification of self-indulgence. A sermon published in 1795 preaches “the necessity and benefit of governing our animal appetites, which are too apt to lead those astray who are not under the influence of God’s grace... excess of *every kind* [is] hurtful to men’s own happiness, to the welfare of their friends, and the community in general; and above all... hateful in the sight of God” (Gordon 321).⁶ Here, the speaker stresses the role of self-governance in the moderation of excess, alongside of grace; excess harms both the individual and their community, but it is the individual’s responsibility to control it. “Extravagance” is identified as a “ruinous... tendency,” and an “evil quality of the mind” in which people are voluntarily “indulging” (321-2). Those who indulge in extravagance aren’t merely one drink or one purchase over the line of moderated acceptability; instead, they have thrown themselves headlong into a lifestyle of material, behavioral excess. Contemporary views of men and women of feeling echo these lines of thought: instead of merely crying a little too much, or being a little too ready to entertain a tale of woe, sentimentalists are seen as actively seeking or creating opportunities that allow them to exercise their ever-ready feelings. They are driven by their wholehearted pursuit of excess, which itself becomes a seductive force with the seemingly autonomous power to “lead” its followers astray. As we will find in the sentimental novels of the 1790s that are discussed in Chapter Three, this view of excess as an overpowering, independent agent is shared by contemporary fictions which emphasize the necessity of disciplining one’s own tendency to

⁶ Here, sentimental novels are not singled out from the pulpit, but this sermon goes on to preach against “the folly and the crime of indulging excess” in “our *dress*” (Gordon 322). Even seemingly small extravagances, the sermon argues, signal greater moral weaknesses.

excessive feeling before that excess proves hurtful, hateful, or ruinous. In late-century descriptions of excess like the sermon above, we find dueling descriptions of its agency: on one hand, excess is eminently controllable, and only harms those who insufficiently “govern” their appetites. On the other, excess which has acquired a degree of critical mass is able to “lead those astray” who have fallen victim to it, and still somehow presents a threat to the community at large.

As “excess” is increasingly consigned to the realm of erratic, individual failings, sentimentality rapidly assumed the mid-eighteenth-century cultural spotlight. But what, exactly, does “sentimental” mean, especially when the word is used to signal such an expansive host of problems associated with the novel? Lady Dorothy Bradshaigh’s oft-cited letter to Samuel Richardson illustrates the vagueness surrounding the term, both then and now. “What,” she wrote in a postscript, “is the meaning of the word *sentimental*, so much in vogue amongst the polite?” (Barbault 282). “Sentimental” has suffused town and country, and comprehends “every thing clever and agreeable”—but that must be a wrong interpretation, she quips, because “it is impossible every thing clever and agreeable can be so common as this word” (283). Bradshaigh has heard people, parties, walks, and letters are variously described as sentimental; so fashionably ubiquitous is sentimentality, that it has lost any meaning besides modish approval. Bradshaigh’s letter, however, dates from 1749: 19 years before the first appearance of Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey*, and predating Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling* by 22 years.⁷ Bradshaigh’s letter, in fact, is the *OED*’s earliest recorded appearance of “sentimental” (“Sentimental, Adj.”), an indication that some of the ire directed towards sentiment and sentimentality began well

⁷ The *OED*, among other sources, dates Lady Bradshaigh’s letter as being from 1749, though recent evaluations of Richardson’s correspondence cast doubt on the dates and edits assigned to Richardson’s letters. See, for example, McCarthy.

before the proliferation of derivative novels began to pick up steam in the 1770s, and that sentiment's ability to irritate readers—as well as enchant them—similarly predates the height of sentimental novels' popularity. But the main purpose of this dissertation is not to quibble over the semantics and etymology of popular eighteenth-century terms like “sentimental,” which were, as Lady Bradshaigh demonstrates, elusive seemingly from their inception. The following chapters will explore in greater detail how the intermingling domains of sentimentality, sympathy, and sensibility progressively absorb concepts like excess, enthusiasm, stoicism, and the sublime into the clamorous discourse surrounding sentimentality. Lady Bradshaigh's encapsulation of “every thing clever and agreeable” rapidly becomes an encapsulation of everything overwrought and excessive, even though—all the while—the plots and tropes of sentimental novels from the 1760s through 1800 seem to remain just the same.

In his self-proclaimed “Attempt” to define sentimentalism, R.F. Brissenden immediately identifies the chief problem with previous attempts: that earlier twentieth-century critics like Northrop Frye, in identifying an overarching eighteenth-century “Age of Sensibility,” say much about the age and little about the phenomenon that age supposedly encases (Brissenden 11). (Sentimentality is far less monolithic in its forms and intents than many would have it be, and encapsulating it within a titular “Age” of its own also ignores its diversity.) As Brissenden notes, the roots of the family of words surrounding sentimentalism—sentiment, sentimental, sense (especially moral sense), sentimentalism, sentimentalist, sensible, and sensitive—are unusually complex, deriving from the verb *sentire* and the noun *sensus* and incorporating a large range of meanings (14).⁸ *Sentire* refers to physical and sense awareness, as well as mental perception,

⁸ Both Brissenden and Janet Todd note an interesting divergence that occurs between the eighteenth-century British and French vocabularies of sentiment and sensibility: “in France where ‘sensibilité’ translated the English sensibility, a new term ‘sensiblerie’ developed to distinguish sensibility from the debased and self-indulgent quality”

imagination, and judgment (14-15). *Sensus*, in turn, may refer to either the physical or the mental power of perceiving or feeling (15). Both of these words encapsulate various forms of simple physical awareness ranging to more complex states of consciousness and feeling (15), which places terms like “sentiment” and “sensibility” on essentially ambiguous, unsteady ground: their roots may refer to reason or feelings, and their varied use is one reason why terms like “sentimental” gained the vaguely pejorative associations that they still carry today.

Of course, the vocabulary of eighteenth-century sentiment does not spring forth, fully-formed, from a Latinate vacuum: it is heavily shaped by philosophical and moral works on knowledge, benevolence, and sympathy by Locke, Hume, Hutcheson, Shaftesbury, and Smith, among many others.⁹ Barbara Benedict concisely outlines some of literary sentimentalism’s primary lines of ancestry: “Drawn from the epistemological theories of John Locke, themselves influenced by the philosophical skepticism of Descartes, and from the moral and aesthetic ideas of Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, philosophical sentimentalism maintains a belief in the natural sociability of humankind and the importance of impulsive, spontaneous sensibility” (Benedict 1). Critically, Locke places sense-experience and our reflections on that

(Todd 8). English saw no such linguistic distinction separating pejorative from celebrated sensibility, thereby providing ample fuel for the endless debates surrounding its desirability.

⁹ Perhaps the most influential argument connecting the figure of the sentimental man of feeling with Shaftesbury’s and Hutcheson’s moral doctrines of benevolence comes in R.S. Crane’s “Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the ‘Man of Feeling,’” which links the man of feeling to the even earlier pre-1700 Latitudinarian tradition—the first of many connections of sentimentalism to religious impulses and belief, which I will more fully explore in Chapter Two’s discussion of how Brooke’s sentimental *Fool of Quality* harbors an equal quantity of mysticism and Methodism (Crane 190–191). Crane links Latitudinarian clergy’s emphasis on universal benevolence and social charity to mid-eighteenth-century ideals of benevolent sentimentalism, but he suggests that these influences act in addition to the “very real and important influence” of Shaftesbury, “especially... when it was reinforced by that of his disciple Hutcheson” (213). Crane’s reading was, in turn, challenged by Donald Greene’s “Latitudinarianism and Sensibility: The Genealogy of the ‘Man of Feeling’ Reconsidered,” which contends that the strains of Latitudinarianism that Crane detects in fact stretch back far earlier than the seventeenth-century theology that Crane focuses on (Greene 160), but Greene is more interested in defending his definition of seventeenth-century Latitudinarianism than in suggesting a radically different sentimental ancestry.

experience at the center of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, thereby establishing a model of knowledge and exchange that is grounded in the body and its sensations. Shaftesbury and Hutcheson build from Locke's ideas of sensory and experiential knowledge to create something more social and communal in nature: Shaftesbury, Benedict argues, further attempts to socialize Locke by endowing humans with altruistic benevolence and moral judgment, whereas Hutcheson blends the idea of natural sympathy with his idea of mankind's instinctive sense of moral beauty (2).

Shaftesbury's stress on the natural sociability of humankind is a common strain throughout portrayals of sentimentality in the eighteenth century, and the shared, communal feelings that he portrays can also become excessive. John Mullan highlights what he calls Shaftesbury's suspicion of sympathy: in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, "sympathy can stand for either a pleasurable 'sharing' of 'sentiments' or a 'contagion' which is dangerous and disruptive" (Mullan 26). Shaftesbury writes that "one may with good reason call any passion 'panic' which is raised in a multitude and conveyed by aspect or, as it were, by contact or sympathy... especially where religion has had to do" (Third Earl of Shaftesbury 10). He describes sympathy as "infectious," and as something that puts people "beyond themselves"; it is a form of "enthusiasm" that affects society "in ill as well as in good passions, and so much stronger any affection is for being social and communicative." "Sympathy," Mullan writes, "can bring people together, but there is always the risk that it can do so in the wrong way. When it is merely a 'herding principle' it brings 'disorder... to the general society of mankind'" (27). Sympathy, when operating as a widespread social instrument, carries the potential to inflame societies with the wrong kinds of feeling, and the "wrong social spirit" can produce partisanship, damage political alliances, and lead to other forms of undesirable divisiveness and excess.

Shaftesbury's condemnation of infectious, enthusiastic sympathy also suggests that excess lies not in the type of feeling being experienced, but in how it moves and acts—the “infectious” nature of the wrong sorts of sympathy makes those feelings even “stronger... for being social,” causing sympathy to lead to disorder.

The fluid emotions outlined by David Hume in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740) are even more powerful and transitory than Shaftesbury's. Hume himself describes the passions as “so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce correspondent movements in all human breasts” (Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* 386).¹⁰ The force of sympathy is so strong, and the perceptions and operations of our minds are so similar, that they operate like “strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature” (368). Hume, like many other eighteenth-century philosophers, frames the operations of sympathy using the metaphor of sympathetic vibrations: his model is shared by contemporary theories of sensibility, which employ a similar vocabulary of sympathetically trembling nerves, fibers, and heartstrings (and further enmesh descriptions of sympathy and sensibility).

Hume's feelings lose nothing in vivacity from their transfer from person to person: “when I see the *effects* of passion in the voice and gesture of any person,” Hume continues, “my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself” (368). Likewise, viewing the causes of

¹⁰ Humean passions are largely associative by nature, and allow sympathy to play a role in their transferal: the “very remarkable resemblance” between humans, despite however their “parts may differ in shape or size,” “must very much contribute to make us enter into the sentiments of others, and embrace them with facility and pleasure” through use of the imagination (*Treatise* 207).

an emotion directs the mind to the effects, “and is actuated with a like emotion”—“and consequently *these* give rise to our sympathy.” This ricochet of emotional cause-and-effect has the potential to continue almost unchecked; in this respect, Adela Pinch views Humean feelings as remarkably fluid, “transsubjective entities that pass between persons... our feelings are always really someone else’s... it is passion that allows us to be persons, rather than the other way around” (Pinch 19). This formulation of communicable, sympathetic feelings contrasts, Pinch argues, with Hume’s other characterization of feeling in the *Treatise*: that feelings are individual, and that philosophy, society, and aesthetic experience all depend upon “individuals who can rely on the individual authenticity of their own emotional responsiveness” (19). The quality of feelings’ autonomy is muddled in Hume: they are at once the product of our own individual experience, and entities that fly about on their own, fueled by the power of sympathetic response.

Sympathetically-transferred feelings carry what Hume repeatedly identifies as a characteristic “force.” As Pinch notes in a review of recent critical readings of Hume’s account of the feelings, Hume becomes “progressively less systematic in his approach to the passions,” eventually rendering the cause of a passion “ambiguous and strangely irrelevant” (32-33). Instead, “what authorizes feelings, what gives them their authenticity,” Pinch argues, “is not their causes but their force or liveliness. Hume’s Newtonian framework allows his absolutism about feelings: they authorize themselves, refer only to themselves, and thus cannot be invalidated” (Pinch 33). Humean emotion answers only to itself, and is self-creating; when feelings are a force unto themselves whose causes have become moot (or at least secondary), there is little left to mediate them or hold them in check. His description of feelings that are autonomous and self-authorizing allows for a potentially anarchic, unstable form of sympathetic overflow—there is no room for moderation. Pinch describes the persistent feeling, in the second half of the eighteenth

century, “that feelings were getting out of hand,” leading to a multi-pronged attack on sentimentality and sensibility from such varied angles as conservatism, feminism, radicalism, and anti-Methodism (2, 1). Hume contributes to this fear by placing no restrictions on his transpersonal, autonomous emotions, which combine immediacy with transitory, mysterious origins.

Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) shares Hume’s mission of framing a moral philosophy around imaginative sympathy (among other things). Whereas Hume’s contagious, perambulating passions exceed the boundaries of the feeling individual, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is far less concerned with any potential for excessive mobility or acuity inherent in sentimental feelings. Indeed, Smith’s individual has trouble getting out of the self to feel for another: “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel,” Smith writes in the *Theory*’s second paragraph, “we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers... it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations” (A. Smith 11).¹¹ The combination of imagination and observation that lets us

¹¹ David Marshall couches his discussion of the exchange of feelings in Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in the language of theatricality, addressing it as one of a number of texts where “theatrical relations” are formed “between people who face each other from the positions of actor and spectator,” and individuals transform into “characters created by a view of the self as a persona, a role, or a representation that can display or conceal or counterfeit the signs of inner feeling” (Marshall 1). Marshall also notes the sympathetic imaginative echoing that must be performed by the engaged reader: as readers, “we must imagine that we are persons [in a fiction] who can be only representations to us; through imagination we transport ourselves to a distant place, trying to place ourselves in someone else’s situation. We take their part by trying to play their part” (171). Marshall’s construction goes far to explain the kinds of vicarious sympathetic pleasure and pain so sought after by readers of eighteenth-century sentimental novels, who engage with fictional characters by imaginatively inhabiting and performing their roles to the hilt. Novels, in other words, can act as the mirrors through which we model and interpret the communication and display of great feeling. One more important aspect of Smith’s emotional mirror, the process of flattening and muting feelings for more effective emotional transport, will be more fully discussed in Chapter One, as will the question of how completely those spectators can actually engage in the secondhand woes of the sufferer.

sympathize with others also, as Knud Haakonssen notes, raises our awareness of how we, ourselves, are perceived by others (xv). By raising our consciousness of how we are observed by a sympathetic but ultimately separate other, we internalize what Smith terms the figure of the internal or impartial spectator, which allows us to alter and audit our behavior for maximum intelligibility. That is, despite the fact that we feel so little even for a man being tortured before our very eyes, Smith feels a need to integrate an element of moderation and self-regulation into the movement of sympathetic feelings in the form of the impartial spectator.

Smith famously compares society to a mirror which “is placed in the countenance and behaviour of those he lives with, which always mark when they enter into, and when they disapprove of his sentiments; and it is here that he first views the propriety and impropriety of his own passions, the beauty and deformity of his own mind” (129).¹² Here again, it is in relation to *others*’ perceptions of our feelings that we know how to judge and to moderate what we feel; the mirror of society “first” shows the individual how his sentiments are perceived, and society’s reactions are the guiding instrument that determines the line demarcating appropriateness and acceptability. To determine where feelings cross that line, however, requires enough self-awareness and sensibility to stand back and imagine oneself from another’s perspective in the first place, demanding a degree of self-possession that sentimental heroes and heroines caught in the vicissitudes of passion cannot always muster, and a degree of self-reflection which Hume’s feeling individuals, buffeted by self-authorized feelings, also cannot

¹² Hume, too, uses a mirror analogy in his *Treatise*, remarking that “the minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each other’s emotions, but also because those rays of passions, sentiments and opinions may be often reverberated, and may decay away by insensible degrees” (Hume 236). This illustrates a key divergence between Smith and Hume: for Hume, the mirror’s reflections “may decay away” as they reverberate, and become blurred in the presence of the mirroring other. Hume’s emotions may not have the long life of Smith’s, but their mobility allows for a different kind of excessiveness.

necessarily exert. Smith's mirror and internal spectator highlight the self-reflexivity of his model of sympathy and sentimental transfer: the object of Smith's focus is not the events or objects that inspire a passionate response, but the resultant passions themselves.¹³

Whereas Hume and Smith emphasize the movement of feeling between individuals—a spontaneous and almost automatic process for Hume, a laborious one for Smith—eighteenth-century discussions of sensibility draw attention to the body as itself an additional source of feeling, and as an instrument that governs degrees of susceptibility.¹⁴ Philosophers often attempt to make sense of sentiments' unpredictable movements and patterns of transit by locating them within the physical mechanics of the body, thereby assigning feelings a physiological—though perhaps equally obscure—root. Concerns about the nature of excessive feeling, then, take up not only how it affects the mind and behavior on both an individual and a collective level, but also how it is connected to the body. Unsurprisingly, sensibility—like sentimentality—is a “culturally important, but worryingly vague” concept during the eighteenth century (M. Ellis 5), which plays a key role in the domains of physiology, epistemology, and psychology, particularly the overlap between psychology and physiology (Van Sant 1–2). The problem with leaning so heavily upon sensibility, Ann Jessie Van Sant argues, is that its vagueness and breadth means that it comes to be assigned as the default motivator of many purportedly undefinable

¹³ Pfau argues that Smith's attempts to regulate the strength and movement of sympathy are linguistic in nature, writing that sympathy is “the master trope through which every discrete feeling and passion must be filtered so as to evaluate its utility and propriety” (3–4). He sees Smith as ultimately stymied by the same thing that stumps Hume, namely that “something so ostensibly private and inward as a feeling should be imbued with so much social energy” (4). Again, the regulation and moderation of feelings is key, and neither Smith nor Hume is able to fully posit how this regulation can take place.

¹⁴ Because of its historical and scientific breadth, a detailed exploration of sensibility's history and operations falls beyond the scope of this dissertation. For more representative contemporary works on the links between sensibility and the passions, see Robert Whytt, Philomathes, and Aikin. For more recent work on physiology and feeling, see Barker-Benfield and G.S. Rousseau.

phenomena.¹⁵ The grounding of feeling within a complex network of sources in the body further complicates portrayals of nomadic, restless sentiments, as well as the possibility of learning to exercise moderation and control over them; as I will go on to explore in Chapter One, the language of vibrations, fibers, and heartstrings is wrapped up in the discourse of sensation. Ultimately, eighteenth-century fears of excessive feeling go hand-in-hand with concerns about the ability of the individual body to weather those same feelings, and how much—mentally, emotionally, and physiologically—it can withstand.

Chapter Organization

In this dissertation, I agree that the growth of the sentimental novel from the individualistic works of Sterne and Mackenzie in the late 1760s and early 1770s to the boilerplate sentimental novels of the 1780s and 1790s is not an inevitable march towards a creative dead end, but a series of waves or gradual revisions of the sentimental that document and reply to the flaws of previous versions. One of the methodological goals of this dissertation is simply to engage with once-popular but now rarely-studied texts, whose titles—like *The Curse of Sentiment* and *The Errors of Sensibility*—are often name-checked in modern criticism without further examination; such novels, regardless of their literary merit, influenced contemporary readers and society in general, and reveal to us today how the seemingly indiscriminate mass of

¹⁵ Contributing to the instability of sensibility is the kind of microsensations experienced by sentimental characters like Sterne's Yorick, allowing chance encounters to cause "reverberations in the nervous and circulatory systems of participants and readers," giving "near-epic force to a sentimental exchange" (Van Sant 101): feelings grow explosively and unpredictably, and there is no consistent logic or proportionality between the size of the original, pathetic object, and the excessive feelings that it inspires. Van Sant likens this phenomenon to a "miniaturization of experience," wherein common objects are invested with "momentary momentousness" (101)—precisely the kind of inflation of an everyday detail into an excessive totem. The impulse to endow otherwise innocuous objects like snuffboxes, coins, and miniatures with associative sentimental feeling emphasizes the fineness of the sentimentalist's sensibility, and displays sentimentality's constant obsession with explosive scale: emotionally maximizing the minimal.

semi-anonymous eighteenth-century fiction is actually marked by responses and reactions to the works that have come before.

I start in Chapter One by considering how sentimental novels perform highly theatrical exchanges of sentiment and sympathy through tears: both the single, pathetic drop, and the seemingly hyperbolic flood. Tears, I contend, are an instrument that defines the limitations of sentimentality and illustrates the mechanics of sympathy by demonstrating the ways that sentimental excess is expressed and absorbed by the body. As a bodily production, tears are often described as tracing the pathways of emotions from their perception through the eye, across the sensible nerves, and into the heart; they fall onto trembling hands, and comeingle with others' tears to create shared demonstrations of feeling. The tear acts as a symbol of excessive sentiment, but is also presented as a spontaneous production of the nervous body that itself appears in excessive tears, floods, and fountains; by unpacking the meanings imposed upon the tear, we can better understand the contradictory ways that the eighteenth century constructs ideas of excess and excessive feeling, and how it can—or should—be managed.

I begin with late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth-century writings on the mechanics of the eye. This might seem like a digression into medical history, but the physiological explanations of the eye's operations offered by Newton and others are tightly interwoven with explanations of how we, as sensible observers, react instinctively (and tearfully) to stimuli, and how the production of tears can be an almost automatic response to any scene or emotion that works on our highly sympathetic nerves. These texts begin with the assumption that tears are reflexive and involuntary, the uncontrollable production and release of acute nervous stimulation, but my next section contrasts these tears with the groomed, constructed appearance of emotional response: how sympathetic tears are explained and described by contemporary

rhetorical and acting manuals. Actors' tears, artificial as they may be, must nevertheless attempt to communicate deep, nonverbalized feelings between the actor and his audience, and the sentimental novel—ever fond of prolific descriptions of profound emotions “too deep for words”—shares rhetorical and theatrical assumptions about the performative transfer of feeling through tears and gestures.

The questions that these manuals raise about the proportionality of spectatorial affect—sometimes allowing audiences to be more deeply affected than the actor, but still requiring the actor to feel the full brunt of the emotions he conveys—also get at the quandary perpetually lurking in the background of Smith's and Hume's writings about sympathy: that we may never be able to feel as strongly as the person that we feel for, but may still be capable of feeling too much. Excess, in other words, may have less to do with the amount of feeling experienced by an individual, and more to do with the location of that emotion: how it is triangulated between the actor and the spectator. Theatricality, as even the earliest sentimental novels reveal, isn't just a discourse peripherally linked to sentimentality: it is a rich technique consciously plumbed by sentimental novels to facilitate and expedite the transfer of immense emotions between characters, and between the novel and the reader.

Chapter Two is a case study of the extremes of sentiment and its political, economic, and religious ramifications, as detected by contemporary reviewers, readers, and would-be editors of Henry Brooke's sprawling *The Fool of Quality* (1766-1769). Brooke's novel has been all but forgotten today but was one of the most popular and most praised novels of its time, chock-full of all the kind of maudlin sentiment and rambling moralizing that one might expect. Less expected, however, is the vehemence of contemporary response to a work that the *Monthly Review* identified as “genius, enlivened by fancy, bewildered with enthusiasm, and over-run with

the visionary jargon of fanaticism” (“*Fool*” 330). Instead of objecting to the customary, tired tropes of sentimentalism that abound throughout the novel, Brooke’s eighteenth-century audience consistently identified the echoes of mystical Christianity and Wesleyan Methodism in the text as most dangerously excessive—echoes of religious “fanaticism” which, to most modern readers, might be passed over in favor of focusing on its showier displays of emotionality.

Eighteenth-century critics attributed Brooke’s characteristic “too-muchness” to the interplay of two related types of enthusiasm: religious and sentimental, both of which underlie the novel at a foundational level. In this chapter, I argue that the vigor of the contemporary response condemning Brooke’s overheated enthusiasm is not predominantly a reaction against its excessive sentimentality, but a response to the novel’s juxtaposition of sentiment with other, equally unsettling forms of religious, political, and economic excess. Yet the sprawling enthusiasms of *The Fool of Quality* aren’t enough to override the worthiness of the sentiments contained within: both Mary Hays and John Wesley admired the novel enough to attempt to abridge it, and the last section of this chapter examines those abridgements to see how they attempt to pare less desirable forms of excess away from those that are nevertheless still deemed worthy. Given how praiseworthy the bulk of *The Fool of Quality*’s episodes and values were to contemporary readers, the inclusion of dangerous enthusiasm alongside of sentimentality reveals how powerful, and unpredictable, the excessive feeling can become.

The often indistinguishable (and often undistinguished) sentimental fictions published in the 1780s and early 1790s veer sharply away from the kinds of religious and political excess that characterize Brooke’s *Fool of Quality*, but individual titles signal an ostensible ambivalence towards the kind of lavish emotionality that is their stock in trade: *Excessive Sensibility*, *The Curse of Sentiment*, and others of their ilk place qualifications and restraints upon their own

emotionality that aren't found in their predecessors. In Chapter Three, I survey a number of representative texts from the many largely anonymous sentimental novels published in the 1780s and 1790s in order to understand their changing attitudes towards excessive individual feeling. Even though the same sentimental tropes and overheated language characterize such works, these novels encourage their readers to close ranks against the kinds of unconstrained excess that abounds in earlier sentimental novels, thereby attempting to prevent the kind of erratic sentimental radicalism that many saw as the natural, terrifying product of Brooke's *Fool*. Feeling, characters and narrators incessantly remind the reader, is something that must be responsibly monitored and moderated by the individual. Uncontrollable sentimentality is portrayed as a self-involved, self-invoked failing; its excesses may be checked by social isolation, self-discipline, or the objectification of one's own feelings, a process which lets the feeling individual to control and assess their own feelings with an accurate sense of their size and seriousness.

To revisit this central question of whether sentimental excess is innate or somehow brought on from outside forces, I examine the discussion of Stoicism in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which praises the classical virtues of self-command; as the century progresses, we find the pendulum swinging away from the idea of feeling excess as an instinctive sympathetic reflex and back towards the portrayal of it as an avoidable cautionary tale. Here, I treat sentimental novels of the 1780s and 1790s not as constituting a backlash to their predecessors, but as a progression in the waves of gradually harsher sentimental critiques that seek to discipline and seal off the extremes of individual feeling. Once that emotional self-mastery has been achieved, we can see how so many sweeping critiques of excessive sentimentality are really veiled criticisms of female education, morality, fashion, and manners.

Even though the 1790s sees the popularity of Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novels eclipsing that of their sentimental forebears, I argue that Radcliffe's work represents the last significant evolution of the sentimental novel's encounters with excess, not an epochal departure from it. Her enormously popular *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) carefully distinguishes itself from the kinds of sentimentality detailed by the novels in Chapter Three, with its heroine's father issuing a deathbed warning against the very real dangers of excessive sensibility. In Chapter Four, however, I argue that Radcliffe does *not* seek to denounce sentimentality and excessive feeling by partnering with the Gothic and the sublime. In this chapter, I progress through Radcliffe's five major works to show how Radcliffe's introduction of the Gothic and the sublime into boilerplate literary sentimentality revivifies the sentimental tradition that her novels take their cues from, instead of disowning it entirely.

Here, I regard the Gothic as a mode that uses a somewhat different set of tropological tools from the sentimental, while striving equally hard for emotional affect; a number of 1790s-era novelists switch between the sentimental and the Gothic between works, and the Gothic's distinctive generic malleability (as David Morris and Michael Gamer argue) lends it the structural freedom to cling to the conventions of the sentimental while interrogating it with elements of the sublime. As Radcliffe's novels evolve from slight historical romances with the barest elements of the supernatural into the full-blown sublime intensity of *The Italian*, Radcliffe increasingly invokes the sublime to interrupt her heroines' sentimental absorption—engaging in one form of emotional excess, in other words, to forestall another. Characters who shrink before the sublime change their relationship to their own feelings without altering their essential nature: sentimental feelings remain, but are scaled down to their proper proportion. By expanding the kinds of forms, figures, and settings that may potentially trigger the sublime (even embodying it

within the person of the monk Schedoni), Radcliffe gives overwhelming feeling an aesthetically distinct escape valve that avoids the self-absorbed entropy of the sentimental, which instead empowers her heroines and draws them back onto the emotional middle path. Radcliffe thus leaves us at the brink of another sea change to the arsenal of ways that literature can extract emotional affect, as well as the ways that it can express emotional outflow.

CHAPTER ONE

FOUNTAINS, FLOODS, AND THE SINGLE TEAR: PERFORMING AND EMBODYING
EXCESSIVE FEELING

Tears are the stock-in-trade of the sentimental novels that proliferated throughout Britain as the eighteenth century drew to a close. They quickly came to embody, for critics and readers alike, these novels' potential to evoke poignant feelings even to the point of excess.¹⁶ More than a century after *The Man of Feeling*'s original publication in 1771, Henry Morley's 1886 edition printed an "INDEX TO TEARS (*Choking, &c, not counted.*)," which differentiates the multiple tears that can occur even on one page with indices such as "Tears, mingled, *i.e.*, his with hers," "Tears, press-gang could scarce keep from," and "Beamy moisture." Morley's index for Victorian readers—as well as, perhaps, its reprinting in the 2001 Oxford edition of the novel—maintains an ironic editorial remove from the text's overwhelmingly heartfelt sentimentality. It treats tears as a harmless source of amusement for the modern reader who views such constant emotional displays as a typical example of the overwrought, mannered, and supremely outdated feeling that haunts the sentimental novel. However, Morley's index also marks the appearance of each tear as a key to the novel, regardless of whether its reader finds it amusing (like Morley) or genuinely pathetic (like a great many eighteenth-century readers). Instead of indexing the actual events or plot points of the text, Morley has chosen to catalogue the tears that accompany them, implying that the tears themselves somehow become the agents of sentimental plot. *The Man of Feeling*'s readers, he indicates, see the book's tears as the book's point: either because

¹⁶ For a sampling of some of the diverse eighteenth-century works that address the meaning of tears, see "A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education," 14; Donoghue 132–3; Kames 1:296–310; Pratt iii–vi; and Upton 99–101. For more recent criticism that addresses tears, see Engstrom; Keymer 578–88; Todd 64, 77; Lutz; and Vincent-Buffault.

they mark incidents productive of sympathy and immense feeling in those who witness them, or because the tears alone are worth savoring. Tears, after all, don't merely flow in sentimental novels: they gush, burst, bathe, mingle, shower, wet, moisten, drop, wander, glisten, steal, roll, plead, tremble, stray, and speak. These loquacious tears are imbued with an almost human eloquence that not only facilitates their ability to portray infinite variations of finely-hued feeling within a text, but also to provoke copious—even excessive—answering tears from witnesses and friends within the text, and readers outside of it. At the same time, however, this proliferation of sentimental tears is paradoxical. Morley indexes each tear as an individual and unique experience, but the ensemble—viewed at even a slight distance—is an undifferentiated and overwhelming mass of interchangeable droplets. Tears' ability to embody complex feelings enables them to act as the agents of profound sentiment, but also leaves them vulnerable to overuse and misuse at the hands of lazy novelists. Some tears come to be hailed not merely as shortcuts to deep emotion but as empty substitutes for feelings that don't exist. This signifying power positions the tear as a primary, but volatile, instrument of sympathy in the eighteenth century.

The *Man of Feeling*'s many tears may each carry a different, subtle meaning, but collectively they can become too much. The quantity and quality of tears indexed for such a brief book are but a visible form of the novel's abundant, or overabundant, feeling. Morley's overflowing catalogue demonstrates how easily sentiment can come to be seen, or even correctly identified, as excessive, not only in *The Man of Feeling* but in the massively popular genre of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel in general. As a cultural form, sentimentality seeks to explore powerful, if not overpowering, emotions, celebrating and tracing feeling's transit among sympathetic individuals. But as a literary mode, sentimentality is particularly conducive to the

kinds of florid and overwrought excess satirized by many contemporaries. Thus the 1785 “Catalogue of the Materials or Utensils Necessary in the Manufacture of a NOVEL” in the *Edinburgh Magazine* devotes a segment of its satirical catalog to the profusion of tears in sentimental texts like *The Man of Feeling*. “Formerly the dull dogs of Novelists used to have their catastrophes on common couches,” the author notes, “but of late it has been contrived that they should be *steeped* in sorrow” (55). Sorrow, “it appears from this... is a *fluid*, although its precise composition may be still involved in obscurity,” since it variously steeps couches, drowns ladies, melts lovers (“by which it appears to have some properties not pertaining to fluids”), and depresses others (“which seems to imply that sorrow is a *solid* body”) (56). Here, tears seem to possess an inherent agency—their fluidity enables them to flow relentlessly between subjects and objects—as well as a materializing function, or an ability to somehow make emotions solid and real. The critic decides that it is the vague nature, origin, and quantity of tears within the sentimental novel that so confuses and dilutes their meaning. “If heroines be to be described with such a quantity of tears as to *steep* a couch, which is a very large piece of furniture, we cannot wonder if we are next told that the tea-table was afloat, and the cannister on a voyage to the tea-pot,” notes the reviewer. The question of proportionality is a difficult one for the sentimental novel: single tears are capable of encapsulating great feeling, but they’re often followed by floods. And, if a steeped couch is par for the sentimental course, how do we know that floating a small table would somehow be out of line? Even the most basic, well-intentioned signposts—such as the single tear—can become superfluous affectations, and their clarity is lost in a crowd.¹⁷ For many critics of sentimentality, excess destroys not only the efficacy of tears, but the integrity of the emotions they represent.

¹⁷ The significance of the single tear was not lost on earlier novelists, either. Henry Fielding’s decidedly

As I suggest in this chapter, the boundaries separating acceptable feeling from excessive feeling are difficult to establish for both eighteenth-century authors and fictional characters alike: there is no consistent or universal reference point to distinguish between the two. The sentimental novel must address the unanswered, or unanswerable, question: how do we determine when feelings, or their representatives, become excessive? And, in a world of rapidly-changing literary and cultural fashions, what does “excessive” even mean? Here, I identify several different forms of emotional excess that come to be intermingled within sentimental fictions: feelings that are disproportionately large when compared to their object; feelings that escape the boundaries of the self, as in contemporary theories of sympathy; and feelings that overcome the subject with their power, preventing the individual from sharing or diffusing them. In this chapter, I will use the tear as a gateway into the larger problems instigated by the presence of unregulated, excessive feeling in the sentimental novel as well as within society at large. At first glance, the wantonly proliferating torrents and floods of novelistic emotion may only appear to test our tolerance for literary hyperbole. However, as I will argue, the presence of excessive sentiment exposes the limited capacity of sympathy to relieve and productively channel individual feeling. Sentimentality encourages overwhelming feelings to be rendered into the language of easily-translated external signs like tears and sobs, but despite the importance of presenting oneself—and one’s emotion—as a legible text for the spectator or reader, an

unsentimental *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749) plays with characters’ displays of grief as Squire Allworthy is allegedly on his deathbed. The housekeeper lets loose a “briny Stream which so plentifully rose above the two mountainous Cheek-Bones,” which is soon revealed to be caused less by “Grief for her Master” than by her sense of having been slighted in his will: “Sure Master might have made some Difference, methinks, between me and the other servants” (Fielding 160). As the family assembles around Allworthy’s bed, Blifil “fell to blubbering; and began to express very loud and bitter Lamentations” even before Allworthy opens his mouth to speak (158). In contrast to Blifil’s theatrically trumped-up grief, Jones waits until Allworthy compliments him to fling himself “at his Benefactor’s feet” and express his gratitude, after which he “turned away to hide a Tear which was starting from his Eyes” (159). Even without the affected veneer of sentimental convention, Tom’s single tear indicates an authenticity and profundity of his feelings that the others lack.

unavoidable gap remains: between the pathetic object and responsive teary-eyed sentimentalist, between what Smith frames as the sentimental subject and even the most sympathetic, bleeding-hearted observer. Sensibility, Yorick apostrophizes, is the “source inexhausted of all that’s precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows” (*Sentimental Journey* 162). While self-styled sentimental devotees—and, following the publication of books like the *Sentimental Journey*, there were many—similarly sought to position sensibility at the very center of all things good and worthy, they downplayed the potential problems posed by sensibility in excess. Unbridled feeling runs the risk of becoming disproportionate and of flowing, unreciprocated, into the world; more importantly, while it can unite sympathetic individuals through the power of feeling, it can also strand them by encouraging and cultivating increasingly powerful emotions that leave their host even more isolated and alone. It is, therefore, a particularly dangerous cultural ideal, and as the century progresses we can see how out-of-control sentimentality is simultaneously seen as cultivated and desirable, as well as destructive and incapacitating. Emotional superfluity poses a grave threat to the integrity of the individual, and threatens the religious, moral, and political standards supporting society itself. Ultimately, as I will suggest later, sentimentality’s inadequate management of grandiose feeling is part of what contributes to the end-of-the-century interest in the Burkean sublime as a conduit allowing characters to instantly, but safely, access powerful emotions.

To show this, I will introduce the complex and often slippery idea of emotional excess in the eighteenth century by examining how contemporary sources locate it within the individual body, portraying emotions that dodge between the bodies, the hearts, and the minds of subjects who are often unprepared for the onslaught. In this way, sentimentality might be seen as taking a parallel path to that of nostalgia, as Kevis Goodman traces it: migrating “from medicine into

aesthetics” through the eighteenth-century fondness for medical and physiological systemization (202). Feelings’ elaborate and often surprisingly powerful operations within the body and soul are interpreted by the multiple intersecting physiological systems that arose to accommodate and explain these complex interchanges. Furthermore, the movements of feelings between and about the body are not only explained within their eighteenth-century depictions, but performed. At about the time that medical and philosophical treatises were reconceptualizing ideas about the capacity of the individual to contain feelings, instructional texts on rhetoric and on acting were putting them in motion, striving to perfect the communication of nonverbal and inarticulable feelings between performers and audiences. The sentimental novel does not develop in a vacuum, and the conventions that the novel develops about appropriate ways of embodying and conveying sympathy between individuals reflect the influence of contemporary publications on performance. Novels are of course much more than the scripts of plays written out in prose form, but both genres are charged with the similar task of transferring a central figure’s powerful feelings to his or her audience. On the stage, emotions must be embodied by expressive actors, and then conveyed to the waiting audience; on the page, emotions must be embodied by expressive fictional characters, and then conveyed to readers who share them.

Bodily Excess

Sentimental fictions, as well as the medical studies that undergird them, posit that physical expressions of powerful emotion are not merely a symptom or byproduct of that feeling, but possess a certain agency in and of themselves. Both modern and contemporary works on sentimentality point out that tears are literally and metaphorically linked to the heart, expressing feelings and instigating the transfer of that same feeling to the observer. Much like the sentimental is a mode that connects the actions of feeling back to the mind and body, traces of

feeling like the tear serve a similar purpose of mediation within and between subjects. Tears vacillate between the domains of the emotional and the physiological; eighteenth-century thinkers explore their origins in physical sensibility, but find that a significant part of their power is inexplicable.

The publication of Newton's *Opticks* in 1704 saw the prominent assertion of an inherent physiological connection between the organs of sense perception and the brain and nerves, giving rise to the language of nerves, fibers, and animal spirits that pervades the language of sensibility throughout the eighteenth century. Newton, like many writers who follow, presents a body that palpably responds to external stimuli, building upon Locke's earlier claims that knowledge is built upon sense perception: light excites vibrations in the eye which travel along the nerves, "conveying into the Brain the impressions made upon all the Organs of sense" (Newton 135).¹⁸ More specifically, the eye's ability to powerfully and effectively transmit sights, information, and feelings is unique for Newton and others. "Let it suffice to affirm," we are told in *Tristram Shandy*, "that of all the senses, the eye... has the quickest commerce with the soul,—gives a smarter stroke, and leaves something more inexpressible upon the fancy, than words can either convey—or sometimes get rid of" (273). Indeed, the eye is crucial in the central sympathetic act of witnessing or beholding another's suffering; for all of the remarkable technical abilities explored by Newton, the eye's capacity for sight is not as celebrated in fiction as its connection to the soul, and its ability to let in and to let loose feelings.¹⁹

¹⁸ For a discussion of the role that specular observation plays on the understanding in Locke, see Van Sant 87-92. For more on Locke and the influence of Newton, see Barker-Benfield 3-6.

¹⁹ We can look to Addison's essay on the pleasures of the imagination in *The Spectator* No. 411 for an early-eighteenth-century example of the primacy of sight in the production of pleasurable feeling, if not of sentiment. "Our Sight," it begins, "is the most perfect and most delightful of all our Senses.... It is this Sense which furnishes

The eye is not merely the organ for mechanically observing feelings—its expressive qualities allow it to share them, show them, and perform them. In the passage above, the eye is represented as sometimes more truthful than words, while also being able to surpass them. Because of the eye's prominence and eloquence, philosophers, physiologists, and novelists alike seize upon its production of the tear as the symptom and the vehicle for such revelations. For Hume, "tears naturally start in our eyes" in perceiving a tender sentiment just as irresistibly as we indulge "the same tenderness towards the person who exerts it" (*Treatise* 385); here, feelings incite tears, at the same time as they incite sympathy, upon the witnessing individual. More precise theories about the bodily underpinnings of tears differ, particularly about whether tears are purely a mechanical production of the nervous system, or whether their power comes from something that goes beyond a simple system of physical cause-and-effect. Regardless, tears can appear as the manifestation of excessive feeling within an individual's body, or can relieve a dangerous buildup of it. In my Introduction, I discussed how definitions of excess are variously rooted in the indulgence of feeling and natural physiological tendencies; tears are also seen as having complicated physical and emotional origins by virtually everybody who studies them. Paradigms of how feelings and sentiments are located within the body change to accommodate sentimentality's cultivation of potentially excessive amounts of unsought or uncontrollable feeling, which are inevitably rooted somehow within the body's operations, but at no consistent, fixed address.

Written and published well before the heyday of the sentimental, William Salmon's *Ars Anatomica: or, the Anatomy of Humane Bodies* (1714) is a clinical text that nevertheless displays

the Imagination with its Ideas; so that by the Pleasures of the Imagination or Fancy (which I shall use promiscuously) I here mean such as arise from visible Objects" ("Spectator No. 411" 83–84).

honest astonishment at the sheer quantity of tears that the body can produce. It's a sentimental commonplace that tears never manifest themselves in moderate quantities; novels seldom settle for anything less than a streaming fountain, river, or flood. Salmon, however, uses strikingly similar language of hyperbole for his *Observations*, despite its publication a full fifty years before the first appearance of most sentimental texts. Tears, he writes, often "issue forth in a vast Quantity; so that there seems to be a Fountain of them, otherwise they could not flow forth (as upon the spot) in so great Abundance, as we often times see they do, even to Wonder and Admiration." Furthermore, "one could scarcely believe that the hundredth part of such a Quantity of brinish Water could flow forth in one Hour, (even in extream Sadness or Joys,) as has been seen to be wept out in one quarter of an Hour" (352). Salmon associates the appearance of excessive tears with extreme emotion, happiness and sorrow alike. He accepts reports of tears' incredible abundance as a wonderful, if surprising, truth, describing them in the same terms that will so often be used by the sentimental novel—they are vast, form fountains, are abundant, inspire wonder and admiration, appear scarcely believable, and escape all expected orders of magnitude (even 1/100th of their quantity in four times the amount of time would be incredible). Salmon posits that tears can result from the agitation of "Phlegmatick Serious Humours collected in the Brain," and can be inspired by everything ranging from physical causes, like an obstruction in the eye, to "Grief arising from the Vehemency of Affection, Love, Anger, Ingratitude" (353). The mechanics of the brain's squeezing and pressing on the membranes that control the eyes are unclear, but tears nevertheless present a sudden overflow of feeling that defies logical or purely biological expectations. Salmon is content to leave the precise nature of tears' origins unclear, and this deliberate vagueness, combined with his exaggerated descriptions of tears flowing forth, anticipates the rhapsodic reverence they're given

in novels to come. It describes tears as excessive in their disproportionate flowing forth, and it is this kind of irrational abundance that continues to be associated with tears of sentiment.

Almost 50 years later, Robert Whytt's *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cure of those Disorders Which Have Been Commonly Called Nervous* (1765) grounds its discussion in bodily sympathy, linking sympathy—here used in a general sense of physical receptivity and responsiveness—to pathology. He credits this remarkable sympathy for allowing feeling to spread, despite dismissing “the minute structure of the nerves, the nature of their fluid, and those conditions on which depend their powers of feeling and communicating motion to the body” as lying “much beyond our reach” (v). Despite this mystery, “we know certainly” that the nerves transmit feeling through a “particular and very remarkable” sympathetic body (v–vi). Whytt describes the body as surprisingly communicative and wholly cooperative; he asserts that tears are occasioned by the passions of the mind, not the physical workings of the tear ducts. We don't know how this chain of events works, but that makes it no less real: “altho' we cannot explain why grief or joy should, by means of the nerves, excite a greater motion than usual, in the vessels of the lachrymal glands,” he writes, the increased secretion of tears is nevertheless “occasioned by those passions of the mind, proceeds from this cause, and not from any compression of the lachrymal glands or their ducts, by the neighbouring muscles, as has been commonly imagined” (vi–vii). Whytt's elaboration of bodily sympathy intersects in unexpected ways with the philosophies of sympathy espoused by Kames, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith: there is no sharp line in the eighteenth century and strictly delineating the separation between philosophy and science, and Whytt's attempts to uncover the ways that the body's systems conform with external stimuli address the same essential question of how external sights work

upon the body.²⁰ He questions the precise relationship between “the flux of tears occasioned by grief or joy” and the lachrymal glands that other doctors propose, arguing that instead “the changes in the motion of the heart occasioned by external objects, acting either on the organs of sight, or hearing, are not owing to any communication of their nerves with those of the heart, but to the impressions made on the *sensorium commune*, and the affections of the mind excited thereby” (48–9). In a way, the body’s nervous systems are only of interest for Whytt insofar as they enable surprising and mysterious displays of feeling; sympathy and the *sensorium commune* are deliberately vague causes, surpassed in interest and importance by their effects. Whytt’s formulation of sensibility is easily accommodated within many of the evolving schools of thought on sentimentality, and his refusal to reduce the workings of feeling on the body to a rigid system of stimulus and response easily leaves room for the apparently disproportionate workings of feeling.

No clearer consensus had been reached about the links between tears and sentiments, the mind and the body, by the end of the century. Alexander Crichton’s *Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Mental Derangement* (1798) claims that tears—even happy ones—are linked in with the body’s circulatory system; literally and physically, they are produced by the actions of the heart, as opposed to the mind or sensorium, as are other typical signs of feeling like blushes and

²⁰ The language of physiological sympathy is also freely adopted by the sentimental novel. Newton’s *Opticks* frames its discussion of the eye’s technical capabilities in terms of its ability to transmit information and impressions to the sensorium; Whytt also, for example, refers somewhat interchangeably to the mind and the *sensorium commune* (describing the *sensorium commune* as the place where impressions or vibrations made by external objects provoke a nervous response (16, 219)), thus adopting a Newtonian language of sensibility which Sterne will evoke in *A Sentimental Journey*: “... all comes from thee, great—great SENSORIUM of the world! which vibrates, if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground, in the remotest desert of thy creation” (163). Addison’s *Spectator* No. 565 also cites Newton’s definition, referring to the “*Sensorium* of the Godhead. Brutes and Men have their *Sensoriola*, or little *Sensoriums*, by which they apprehend the Presence, and perceive the Actions of a few Objects that lie contiguous to them” (“*Spectator* No. 565” 1122). As G.J. Barker-Benfield has noted, Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748) both borrow the discourse of nerves and fibers explored in the work of George Cheyne (6–36).

sparkling eyes. It is “the heat of the body,” Crichton writes, and “the various secretions and excretions,” that correspond with the arterial system, and joyful emotions considerably increase the production of both (2: 158). Excess tears—“a flood”—are rare, though, and their production is essentially mysterious. “Whether this uncommon flow of tears be owing to an increase of secretion, in consequence of a peculiar determination of blood to the lachrymal gland, or whether it arises from the mere compression of the muscles of the eye on that body, or if both circumstances conspire to its production, I do not pretend to decide” he concludes (2: 159). Unlike Whytt, Crichton isn’t content to let the origins of tears’ production remain unknown; he sees their appearance as linked to the circulation of blood and muscular activity. Sobs, sighs, and other traditional signs of sentiment are also part of this system, and are caused by congestion near the heart. This congestion can become the cause of “an obscure pain,” thus showing how signs of feeling caused by emotion lead to actual physical discomfort (2: 179). The action of the circulatory system causes the heart, the aorta, the blood vessels, and indeed the entire system to “become loaded and distended with blood. The painful sense of fullness which this occasions, gives rise to a common expression, which is, in some degree, descriptive of what really exists; in sorrow the heart is said to be *full*, and in deep sorrow it is often said to be *like to burst*” (2: 178). Thus, the body literally cannot handle the production of so much strong emotion. The commonest of sentimental hyperboles—“my eyes running over and my heart ready to burst with sighs,” as Clarissa writes (Richardson 388)—is rooted in contemporary medical fact. It is unclear whether this medicalized knowledge informs the foundation of Crichton’s theories, or whether preexisting notions about feelings and fibers have shaped his construction of the body.

The end of the century also saw the republication of a brief excerpt from an essay on the benefits of tears, originally published in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society in

1749, in several popular periodical miscellanies.²¹ This passage, attributed to James Parsons, again links tears to the circulatory system that surrounds the heart: like Crichton, he sees tears as nature's way of expressing "an overflowing joy" (2: 1181). Unlike Crichton, Parsons is willing to posit the ramifications of such an influx of too much feeling on the body: too much feeling—feeling that comes on too suddenly—poses not only an emotional shock, but a physical one. "When the joy is received too suddenly," he writes, it leads to a shock "whereby the blood is driven at the first onset with greater violence to the extremities, and in a greater quantity than can be time enough brought back to the heart." The result overloads the vena cava, auricles, and ventricles, "whilst, in the mean time, the head is loaded with too great a quantity, and the person in danger of an apoplexy, or sudden death." This is a very real, very physical danger presented by extreme emotion; the uncomfortable fullness that Crichton identifies yields to a recognized medical threat: apoplexy, or death from a sudden effusion of blood or similar bodily fluids, brought on by shock ("Apoplexy"). That said, in such situations, "tears have another noble use, for by flowing plentifully, the lives of many have been saved, for they lessen the bulk of humours, and gain time for the more happy return of mass to its natural circulation." Tears can *save* the feeler from this sudden, certain death through their plentiful excess, thereby venting the buildup of the humors. "Thus, in vehement grief too," Parsons adds, "shedding of tears in plenty is known to ease the anxiety usually attending it." Tears, in studies such as Parsons', move far beyond being feeble gestures of affected sentiment. They are not merely ineffectual or superfluous, in fact the opposite—their superfluity and their great abundance give them the power to act in the life-and-death situations Parsons describes. At their most severe, emotions

²¹ See "Mischief of Laughter, and Benefit of Tears" in the May 1779 issue of *Hibernian Magazine* and the 1 October 1794 issue of the *New Wonderful Magazine and Marvelous Chronicle*.

such as grief or joy carry potentially lethal consequences; a deluge of tears is not merely an indulgence, but essential.

Performing Excess

Eighteenth-century physiological texts seek to locate the grand and unexpected movements of feeling within the body, but all of the authors I have discussed nevertheless conclude that effusive tears are somehow more powerful than the sum of their anatomical parts. Medically-minded scholars were not the only students of the phenomenon of the power of expressed feeling: eighteenth-century texts on rhetoric and acting link its physiological to its psychological aspects, but instead of striving for innate explanations of such phenomena, they seek to cultivate and perfect its performance.²² The medical texts above begin with the reasonable assumption that tears are a reflexive gesture, performed involuntarily by the body at the intersection of its networks of nerves and fibers. This kind of bodily response does not need to be groomed or translated: it works flawlessly and naturally, albeit to some degree mysteriously. The theater, on the other hand, is an entirely man-made construct, even if it is built upon the familiar model of a subject performing for an audience; it must seek to mimic the evidence of authentic emotional response, and artificially produce it on command.

Books on acting and oratory emphasize the potential for physical, expressive display to effectively transfer the actor's feeling to receptive onlookers, and prize—above all—a performance that truly embodies all the nuanced complexities of feeling, instead of roughly sketching them. Sentimental novels of the period inevitably dwell upon the same unutterable and

²² For more on the use of gesture to convey emotions in a theatrical or oratorical situation, see Barnett; Benedict; De Bolla 146–182; Fairer 132–151; Goring; Howell; Madoff; Markley; Marshall; Roach; Smitten; and Anne Patricia Williams.

nonverbal aspects of feeling: silent communions marked by sighs, clasps, sobs, and pathetic scenes wherein tears are called into service to testify to feelings too profound for words.

Contemporary scholars of performance and gesture do not emphasize tears above all other forms of physical expression, but they do see tears and other sentimental signs as part of the same crucial, underlying representative system. Even sentimental novels that dwell upon the most finely-hued sentiments of their characters' emotional lives rely more upon florid depictions of shared sympathy and exhibitions of sensibility to add emotional punch to their work. Ultimately, the sentimental novel and the theater must know how to depict externalized signs of emotion to reach the same ends, relying upon tears to produce emotional effects in the viewer, regardless of the means used to summon them. These tears are not merely well-mannered condensations of polite feeling: they are called into service to mark emotions of overpowering force, and to share them, as directly and brutally as possible, with the onlooker.

Most early eighteenth-century publications on acting and oratory strain to situate heartfelt tears into developing and preexisting theories of performance, placing them within the context of an established system of gesture, as strange or incomprehensible as they might seem when removed from their context. Although the tear's unique ability to display and enact feeling goes unquestioned, these texts situate it within more rigorous and stylized systems of mannered display. Thus, the tear—purportedly the body's untutored production of overwhelming emotion—is integrated and conventionalized into traditional practices of physical and sentimental discourse. This disciplining and domestication of the tear reverses the direction of the concurrent physiological studies addressed in the previous section: the nature of teary effusions from the lachrymal ducts is essentially mysterious to medical and anatomical scholars, and impossible to harness or control. But for the actor, tears—even those authentically and

undeniably felt by the performer on stage—*must* be controlled for rhetorical efficacy to be maintained. (In other words, an actor who can only bawl at the pathos of the tragedy that he performs is of very limited dramatic range.) Physiological studies seek to understand the mechanics of emotions on tears within the body; treatises on acting seek to understand how the indicators of feeling can be most effectively used without, manipulating tears and other gestures to maximize the audience's sympathy with the figure on stage. The actor must be sensitive to the inner workings of the passions, but any emotional turmoil remains secondary to the controlled and nuanced display of the feelings described in the script. The causes of feeling become increasingly detached from their effects, and the theatrical creation of affect becomes a craft that strives to become scientifically precise, freed from constraints and worries about the reciprocity of fellow-feeling.

Michel Le Faucheur's *Traitté de l'action de l'orateur* [sic] was originally published in France in 1657. English translations appeared in England in 1680 as *An Essay upon the Action of an Orator*, in 1727 as *The Art of Speaking in Publick: or an Essay on the Action of an Orator*, and in 1750 as *An Essay upon Pronunciation and Gesture*.²³ In 1750's *An Essay Upon*

²³ I begin here with Le Faucheur, but as Howell, Roach, and Goring have explored, the British elocutionary movement that gathered steam at the start of the eighteenth century has many of its roots in classical systems of rhetoric. Interest in physical eloquence manifested itself in a growing number of publications on pronunciation and elocution, both for public delivery and for the pulpit, drawing from works by Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian. Seventeenth-century essays like Thomas Wright's *The Passions of the Minde* and John Bulwer's *Chirologia: or the Naturall Language of the Hand* stress the links between bodily motion and the transfer of meaning to an audience, identifying subtle details of gesture which can greatly change its effect. Howell notes that, following systematic revisions of Ciceronian rhetoric during the seventeenth century, "the eighteenth century was left with the task of either keeping the old rhetoric alive in some sort of relation to the changes proposed [to rhetorical disposition and rhetorical elocution], or of creating a new rhetoric for a new time." Howell, however, goes on to criticize nearly all of these revisionary efforts by eighteenth-century elocutionists, particularly Sheridan, for their "chronic ignorance of ancient rhetoric and their exaggerated enthusiasm for rhetorical delivery as a completely independent art" from classical learning (152, 251). Perhaps inevitably, eighteenth-century rhetoricians responded to the weight of the ancient tradition that Howells sees as backing their work by selectively picking and choosing elements from classical sources to inform their more modern incarnations. This revitalized interest in rhetoric and elocution splintered to inform numerous disciplines; classically-informed ideas about the proper use of the body to convey feeling went on to mesh with those of the more modern sentimental tear. For both of these facets, managing the

Pronunciation and Gesture, Le Faucheur seeks to standardize the physical rhetoric surrounding the expression of inner feeling, thereby rendering it more consistently moving. He emphasizes the eyes' ability to transfer feeling: as many novelists will go on to show, tears are contagious. So potent is eye contact, according to Le Faucheur, that the "*Fire of your Eyes easily strikes those of your Auditors, who have theirs constantly fixed upon your's; and it must needs set them a-blaze too upon the same Resentment and Passion*" (148). All kinds of fiery feelings—anger, passion, sorrow—are equally transferrable through the eyes. According to Le Faucheur, sympathy has the same incendiary potential as "*Indignation and Fury*": "There is the same *Power in all other Passions*: For if you are afflicted with a *violent Grief* for your own *Misfortunes*, or touch'd with a great *Compassion of another Man's Misery*, it will draw Tears from your *Eyes*" (148). Feelings are catching, and can draw tears regardless of whether they are for your own or others' misery. Given this mobility, tears enable the transfer of all kinds of passionate and compassionate feelings; much as Whytt later insists on the existence of an underlying system of bodily sympathy that links emotions to their physical responses, Le Faucheur's tears enable compassion, and are the engines of reciprocal feeling between actor and spectator.

According to Le Faucheur, sorrow possesses the ability to supersede the divide separating actor from spectator. "*Passions*," he confirms, "are wonderfully convey'd from *one Person's Eyes to anothers*; the *Tears* of the *one* melting the *Heart* of the *other*, and making a *visible Sympathy* between their *Imaginations and Aspects*" (152). Tears are the signs used to create visible sympathy between individuals, in spite of the inevitable physical and emotional

distance between actor and audience is crucial. In addition to the primary texts discussed here, see Burgh, Aaron Hill, and Quintilian.

separations that divide them. Sorrow, as the *Edinburgh Magazine* sardonically noted in its “Catalogue,” often acts as a liquid; in this instance, passions travel fluidly not only from eye to eye, but between the sufferer’s eye and the witness’s heart, linking the physiognomy with the imagination through sympathy. The passions’ fluidity allows them not only to join the heart with the body, and the sufferer’s feelings with the onlooker’s, but also to transform people and passions that get in the way: they are able to melt hearts, and alter those whom they encounter. At the same time, these potent and mutable tears surpass the boundaries of the individual and move from person to person, linking the physical (viewers’ “*Aspects*”) with their imaginations. Such transitory tears function as a literal example of how the self can overflow with feeling that surpasses the power of language, forging the “more effectual *Sympathy*” between orator and audience that Le Faucheur values so highly (78).

Le Faucheur’s text is not merely about the influence of actors’ tears upon an audience—the generation of these tears also raises questions of how these plentiful tears affect the actor himself. The power of performance to inspire tears also leads Le Faucheur to draw explicit connections back to “*ancient Actors*,” who “apply themselves with so much Care and Concern to the acquiring a Faculty of moving their imagination to a *Power of weeping and shedding Tears* in abundance upon occasion: And they succeeded so admirably well in it, wrought the *Counterfeit* up to such a Degree, that their *Faces* used to be all over blurr’d with *Crying* after they came off the *Stage*” (148). In this particular example, the act of weeping is enough to make the actor himself cross the boundary from merely acting to genuinely feeling, thanks to the power of an active imagination. The origins of these performed emotions may be counterfeit and externalized, but they are sufficiently worked up to render the actors’ tears no mere stage device designed to tug pathetically on the audience’s heartstrings, but an expression of genuine grief,

albeit for a sorrow that doesn't exist. These tears, motivated by real feeling, are no more inauthentic than the tears of a reader weeping over the heroine of a sentimental novel, whom she knows despite authorial prefaces avowing the contrary to be a fictional creation. As Le Faucheur demonstrates, the origin of sentimental tears—in fiction, or in real life; in another's sorrows, or one's own—becomes moot after a certain point; there is no consistent economy of scale dictating that a distressed bird receives more pitying tears than a young beggar, and excess feeling therefore becomes even more difficult to determine. But the tears shed by the “*ancient Actors*,” and the disproportionate tears of the literary sentimentalist, demonstrate how tears can still work on an individual from the outside-in despite the absence of a real-life referent. Le Faucheur recognizes, regardless of sentiment's genesis, that it is rooted in true feeling. He recommends that the orator first “form in himself a *strong Idea* of the *Subject* of his *Passion*; and the *Passion* itself will then certainly follow in course, ferment immediately into the *Eyes*, and affect both the *Sense* and the *Understanding* of his *Spectators* with the *same Tenderness*” (151–2). Ultimately, however, forced and genuine tears look the same, and even counterfeit tears are enough to fill theaters with “*Affliction, Lamentation, and Weeping*” (149). Physical signs of feeling, like tears, can accurately transfer emotions to an audience with startling force, but these same signs can also propagate to the point of meaninglessness: an actor's emotional performance can quickly build to an orgy of endless, undifferentiated tears. Feeling can become deracinated, feeding circularly upon itself and growing beyond control. The separation of visible sentiment from its real source is what makes it so powerful, but also what leaves it particularly vulnerable to manipulation. Fiction shares the problems of theatrical feeling.

John Hill's *The Actor: or, a Treatise on the Art of Playing* (originally published in 1750, but substantially revised for its 1755 edition) sets forth an idea of the “perfect player” who

possesses understanding and moderation, in order to effectively control his feelings and enable sympathy. An actor with sensibility, but no understanding or control over it, “will be affected more than he ought” on stage by the author’s intent, “and instead of moving us, will render himself contemptible,” whereas an actor with sensibility and understanding comprehends the proper portions of “the passion marked in the place, and intended to be raised by the author... and, feeling just as much as he ought, he makes us feel just as much as we wish” (52).

Proportion is key for effectively expressing feeling—too much sensibility, and the subject is overwhelmed and unable to connect sympathetically with his audience; too little sensibility, and the spectator is unmoved and detached. But when proportion is used with understanding and control, the properly sensible actor correctly interprets the piece as well as the author’s intention, and skillfully moves the audience as a consequence. Moderation, for Hill, is the closest thing to a safeguard against excessive sentiment that misses its mark, and tears that fail to connect with their audience. Hill uses the example of two “nearly equal” actors to demonstrate the ways that the “perfect player” should navigate between the extremes of remaining “unmoved” and being affected “so strongly, that he feels so much, that he shall be unable to give utterance to the words. Tears shall interrupt the delivery, and his whole frame shall be so disturbed, that he shall not be able to pronounce the words accurately” (54). In the context of the theater, some degree of composure and articulateness is obviously necessary for an effective performance, but the physical disturbance felt by the overly-affected player threatens the accuracy—not merely the style of delivery—of his dialogue; when overcome by tears, he won’t be able to communicate verbally, or even perhaps bodily, at all. Tears, as an indication of excess, literally interrupt language, but they also upset the player more deeply: he is “disturbed,” unable to police his own feelings and unable to control how they are released to the audience. The perfect player, on the

other hand, should have “all the sensibility of this last, and yet all the command of himself that is necessary to regulate its emotions.” He mustn’t “feel in such a manner as to lose the use of his voice,” and “conveys to us distinctly the words of his author... [and] also by his manner, that he is affected by them” (54).

Hill installs boundaries around the tear by lending it manners and situating it within a regulatory system of physical rhetoric.²⁴ Here, the perfect player must obey a different model from that of the stereotypical hero or heroine of sensibility located within sentimental novels: fictive characters all too often feel “so much” and are “so disturbed” by the bodily pain of acute emotion that they “cannot give utterance” to words expressing their sentiments. Hill’s actors may feign similar degrees of being choked up by feelings too strong to be expressed verbally, but they must also retain their underlying fidelity to a text and an author. Players have access to the text that their audience does not; their emotions are, to some extent, foreign, and they must, above all else, moderate their sensibility with understanding:

Here is the great perfection of the science: we would have him, while he feels all this, yet command his passions, so that they do not disturb his experience; and yet we would not have that expression he keeps for himself take away the pain of it from us; we would have his manner of pronouncing the words take all that effect upon us, which the passage has on the most sensible reader; but we would not have it take that effect on himself (54–5)

Sensibility’s operations are so elaborate as to require a “science” to govern them, and the player must pull off a nearly impossible feat: to affect the spectator *more* than he himself is really affected, not letting his internal restraint “take away the pain” given to the receptive onlookers, while nevertheless understanding the full intensity of “all this”—the author’s words, the proper

²⁴ For more on the physical eloquence surrounding the expression of sentimentality, see Goring. Goring argues that the human body is an eloquent object, and positions its actions as particularly important within the domain of politeness.

affect, and the ability to feel the full range of the emotions he conveys. The player must somehow comprehend, while rising above, acutely painful sentiments, using his innate sense of moderation and balance to both embrace and control affect. The actor, in other words, fully comprehends the cause of emotions, but must privately mitigate their effects; the audience hasn't experienced the cause of the actor's emotions, but receives the full effect. Hill's concern here is not so much whether feeling is manifested on the body after originating in the feelings, or whether feelings can be caught from observing or experiencing their physical signs; instead, it is with the modulation of strong passions so that they can be transferred in the first place.

Hill's work establishes an economy of feeling centered around the strategic deployment of tears. "It has been observed," he remarks early on, "that as a single word will sometimes do more than a whole sentence, so one tear will affect an audience, where they would have despised a flood of them" (27). Hill's perfect player possesses a solid grasp of proportionality, and thus realizes how the stoic, single tear can win over an audience immune to the excess of hyperbole. Similar displays of deliberate restraint are seen in sentimental novels—upon his reunion with the title character, *The Man of Feeling*'s old Edwards "dropped one tear and no more" while recounting his tale of sorrow (Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* 67). More tears do not equal more feeling, yet few novelists have the rhetorical restraint necessary to resist the flood. The single tear is certainly acknowledged as being an affecting form with which to display emotion, but even old Edwards, with all his judicious resistance to excessive sentiment, goes on to "now blubber... like a boy" at Harley's sympathy only several pages after shedding his original tear (*The Man of Feeling* 71). Mackenzie thus attempts to exploit both ends of the sentimental spectrum: single, profound tears, and showers of them. But the efficacy of Hill's performative rhetoric demands discrimination, and governing what purports to be ungovernable. "The single

drop of sorrow, the involuntary tribute of humanity, may be great and graceful, while the profusion of tears would be unworthy and contemptible” he writes (J. Hill 27–28).²⁵ More broadly, Hill’s stance on tears reflects his emphasis on duly regulated sensibility, and warning against the dangers of extravagance (79). His perfect player must navigate between the Scylla of accusations of insensibility, and avoid “the Charybdis of extravagant emotion” (80). An actor may “judge wrong with respect to the propriety of his giving way to his sensibility; and he may also err as egregiously as to the manner of expressing it” (86).

Many hidden perils lurk for the actor expressing sensibility: the error of misreading the original text, and expressing a disproportionate amount of passion in relation to its content; the error of feeling too intensely, and “giving way” to natural sensibility; the error of communicating this feeling too intensely, and alienating the audience with inarticulacy and a lack of verbal command; and the error of holding back sensibility too strictly, and appearing unmoved. An 1810 account of the death of a seventeenth-century French actor while playing in Racine’s *Andromaque* provides an example of such an actor who went too far: “Montfleury, who had probably not sufficiently planned his resources, put so much exertion into it that he died of it; actors will not be sorry to find the nuances and the pauses which will save them from a similar accident” (Barnett 218). Montfleury anticipated James Parsons’ medical warnings about the sudden influx of excessive feeling causing an apoplexy; the actor’s “nuances and pauses” allow him to pace himself and his emotions, preventing such accidents of overexertion. Both Hill and

²⁵ Paul Goring also notes that Hill’s careful delineations of appropriateness can be regarded as a response to the “same fear of excessive gesture which inspired the reactions against Methodist enthusiasm and Orator Henley’s more manic performances” (139). Of course, objections to Methodist enthusiasm were based on much more fundamental principles than protests against Henley’s particularly flamboyant style of public address. Hill, however, focuses on how an effective style of delivery can mute or enhance the content of a presentation, remarking that overpowering gestures may be effective as an occasional punctuation mark “but to be eternally introducing them, robs them of all their merit and force” (J. Hill 57).

Le Faucheur discuss excessive feeling primarily as something that disrupts, and disables control: excess is neither inherently good nor inherently bad, but revealing it ultimately disturbs even the most heartfelt sympathy. Indulgence in immoderate passion is a threat to the actor's communication with his audience, but, as I will later show, these extremes are also problematic for an audience whose devotion to sympathy puts it through similarly vigorous sentimental calisthenics.

Drawn directly from the work of contemporary British actors and publications like Hill's *The Actor*, Denis Diderot's 1773 *Paradoxe sur le comédien* argues that "c'est l'extrême sensibilité qui fait les acteurs médiocres; c'est la sensibilité médiocre qui fait la multitude des mauvais acteurs; et c'est le manque absolu de sensibilité qui prépare les acteurs sublimes" (*Paradoxe* 16). Sensibility, Diderot insists, only interferes with the effective conveyance of emotions, and the best acting results from careful rehearsal and emotional detachment. Moreover, Diderot has none of the reverence for actors' moderation and balance that marks Hill's work—detachment is paramount, since it allows for the most precise mimicry. Talented actors' skill depends "non pas à sentir, comme vous le supposez, mais à rendre si scrupuleusement les signes extérieurs du sentiment, que vous vous y trompiez" (15). This actor has rehearsed and memorized every element of the passion he shows:

Les cris de sa douleur sont notés dans son oreille. Les gestes de son désespoir sont de mémoire, et ont été préparés devant une glace. Il sait le moment précis où il tirera son mouchoir et où les larmes couleront; attendez-les à ce mot, à cette syllabe, ni plus tôt ni plus tard. Ce tremblement de la voix, ces mots suspendus, ces sons étouffés ou traînés, ce frémissement des membres, ce vacillement des genoux, ces évanouissements [*sic*], ces fureurs, pure imitation, leçon recordée d'avance, grimace pathétique, singerie sublime dont l'acteur garde le souvenir long-temps après l'avoir étudiée, dont il avait la conscience présente au moment où il l'exécutait, qui lui laisse, heureusement pour le poète, pour le spectateur et pour lui, toute la liberté de son esprit, et qui ne lui ôte, ainsi que les autres exercices, que la force du corps. (14)

Diderot's actor is so scrupulously exact in his gestures in order to trick, or deceive, his observers. Flowing tears—or alternatively, a strategically raised handkerchief, which functionally amounts to the same thing for Diderot—are wielded as a device, as are all the physical and vocal indicators of sensibility: shivers, trembling, cries, fainting, and grimaces. Diderot specified that the actor's precision benefits the poet, the spectator, and the actor, because it reduces all of the signs that generate sympathy to mere physical activity, leaving the actor “toute la liberté de son esprit.” The actor strives not only to be completely detached from feeling, but to have rehearsed and repeated his gestures endlessly, “devant une glace” if possible, in order to know the exact moment when to release gestures, syllables, and motions; he is even more emotionally distant from the image of himself in the mirror than the audience. He doesn't perform, but plays and replays a “leçon recordée d'avance.” For Hill, sensitivity and sensibility were important components of the engaged and ever-moderate perfect player, but for Diderot, only the actor's understanding and capacity for imitation matter. “Celui donc qui connaît le mieux et qui rend le plus parfaitement ces signes extérieurs d'après le modèle idéal le mieux conçu est le plus grand comédien” (71). Diderot, then, also has a kind of perfect player in mind, but in his case it is the most perfect mimic of signs who comes closest to “le modèle idéal.” This actor's true talent lies in appearances:

Qu'est-ce donc que le vrai talent? Celui de bien connaître les symptômes extérieurs de l'âme d'emprunt, de s'adresser à la sensation de ceux qui nous entendent, qui nous voient, et de les tromper par l'imitation de ces symptômes, par une imitation qui agrandisse tout dans leurs têtes et qui devienne la règle de leur jugement; car il est impossible d'apprécier autrement ce qui se passe au-dedans de nous. Et que nous importe en effet qu'ils sentent ou qu'ils ne sentent pas, pourvu que nous l'ignorions? (71)

This actor's job is to show emotion in a way that will be aggrandized and exaggerated in the mind of the spectators, inflating to engage their imaginations and coming to dominate their

judgment. Here again, the feelings being conveyed are something of an afterthought—it's only the accurate portrayal of the signs and symptoms which matter, and even those are temporarily borrowed. Diderot suggests that we, as audiences, rely upon this kind of all-encompassing imitation of "les symptômes extérieurs" because we have no other means of evaluating "ce qui se passe au-dedans de nous." Others' effective performances of affect, then, become an essential means of getting to understand ourselves, and the actors' actual feelings are irrelevant.²⁶

This mastery of sentimental affect may seem far removed from the genuine communion of fellow-feeling celebrated by men and women of feeling, but Diderot's acceptance of the disproportions inherent in the theater recalls Adam Smith's insistence upon the essentially imaginative foundation of sympathy. Both authors, for example, concentrate on the disconnection between the actor's mental state and the audience's, and the manner in which the actor's studied gestures grow in the spectator's estimation—key ways of negotiating the distance separating spectators from sufferers. The description of sympathy issued by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is, as David Marshall has pointed out, intimately linked to the figure of theater. Although Smith's *Theory* is normally studied alongside eighteenth-century fiction and philosophy, his work on sympathy enacts many key aspects of the theatrical relationships elaborated upon by Le Faucheur, Hill, Diderot, *et al.* Among other things, it touches upon the relationships between a spectator and his or her audience, the transfer of feeling between individuals, the situations in which such exchanges of feeling may take place, and the interactions between the causes of feeling and their effects. Smith particularly sees the

²⁶ A contemporary account of Diderot's work on *La Religieuse*, however, underscores how Diderot nevertheless operates in more traditional affective terms while working on his novel. "Un jour que Diderot travaillait à sa *Religieuse*, M. Delainville, son ami, lui rend visite, le trouve plongé dans la douleur, et le visage baigné de larmes.—Qu'avez-vous donc? lui dit M. Delainville; comme vous voilà!—Ce que j'ai? lui répondit Diderot; je me désole d'un conte que je me fais" (Diderot, *La Religieuse* 72).

imagination as instrumental for connecting ourselves to the world, and as the foundation for his ideas of fellow-feeling. It is imagination, after all, that allows us to use our own experiences and observations to form a conception of what others feel, and enables the existence of the impartial spectator that Smith's theory is built upon. Without it, feelings would have no force or mobility.²⁷ "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel," Smith begins, "we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by convincing what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (11). Not only are the senses useless at informing us about what others feel, but the faculty of the imagination enables us to envision our own feelings if we were placed in the context of the other. "It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy," he continues (11–12). Feelings, for Smith, are inherently personal; we see others' feelings only through the filter of our own experience, so our own personal frame of reference can greatly modify our conceptions. For Smith, then, imagination doesn't even allow us to truly understand what another subject is feeling—instead, we merely know how *we* would feel, and our sympathy firmly revolves around ourselves. As a result, the feeling subject is fundamentally isolated; a man of feeling being agitated by the acuity of his own extreme emotions may welcome the arrival of a kindly spectator to share in them, but that spectator, while lessening the subject's isolation, will never be able to fully comprehend all of the pain and acuity of the original emotion. Because of the essential disjunction between emotional actor and emotional audience, the mechanics of the spectator's sympathy can operate in unpredictable ways, particularly when taken to their extremes: feeling can never be

²⁷ This—in terms of my analysis of the sentimental novel, at least—is one of the most crucial differences between Smith's work and Hume's. Hume's *Treatise* depicts a world where feelings' imminent force is something barely governable, and easily transferrable. For Smith, on the other hand, neither the similitude nor the easy spread of feelings between individuals is guaranteed.

chaperoned across that gap closely enough. Imagination's ability to bridge the gap between speaker and audience is thereby limited, but such sympathetic exercises are nevertheless vital: "nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast," and sharing tears in mutual grief is nothing but pleasurable (17; 18–19).

Marshall describes this detachment between subject and observer in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in terms of a theatrical metaphor, wherein impartial spectators witness the feeling exhibited by actors or spectacles. The essential division between subject and observer is duplicated and echoed between the theater and the novel: actors, orators, and novelistic men or women of feeling stand opposite to the spectators, audiences, and readers who witness their emotional turmoil. But in order for feelings to be transferred between actors and spectators, the actor must "flatten... the sharpness" of his or her feelings, "in order to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him" (A. Smith 27). The function of this emotional muting is twofold. Firstly, flattening feelings can be seen as a way of packaging them or rendering them legible for quick and accurate transfer. Le Faucheur, Hill, and Diderot discuss the stylization of the actor's presentation of feelings for the best possible reception by a theatrical audience, and in contrast Smith alters the appearance and acuity of genuinely-felt feeling to render it more palatable to the viewer; the viewer cannot experience anything other than his or her own sensations, and such transfer is as close as she or he can come to experiencing another's feelings. Secondly, such theatrical emotional leveling mitigates the threat of excessive emotion. In this case, the ability to bridge the gap between sufferer and spectator is what delineates the boundary between manageable and disproportionate; it is only by lowering the pitch of his passion, Smith writes, that the sufferer finds "that relief which nothing can afford him but the entire concord of the affections of the spectators with his own" (27). Strong feeling, for both

Smith and the theater, is in some way isolating, and only valuable when it is able to be communicated and understood; it is only by lowering the pitch of his feelings that the actor is able to raise the audience's, and thereby reach a satisfying form of emotional equilibrium.

For Smith as well as for David Hume, feelings are mirrored between individuals, but for Smith this process of mirroring promotes a form of self-division that comes about when one attempts to judge one's own conduct. "I divide myself," Smith writes, "into two persons; and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whom I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavouring to form some opinion" (131). Thus we become both judge, and the person judged, and the two will never entirely agree; Smith's divided self is literally self-policing in its detachment. As one becomes progressively more skilled at understanding and refining the appearance of one's own feeling as a spectator—at not just letting others see these feelings, but drawing an outward-facing self-portrait with them—one identifies oneself even more strongly with "the ideal man within the breast," adopting the view of the impartial spectator as something "perfectly habitual" (172). Diderot's "le plus grand comédién" is not just the best mimic, but the actor who has best mastered Smith's split between self and self-presentation, twisting it to detach the two completely. This process, of self-consciousness removed from the self, guards against overwhelming sentiment while enabling its transmission; for Diderot, there is no danger of such a dispassionate actor being overcome, whereas for Smith, the presence of the impartial spectator encourages the sufferer to break down immense feelings into smaller and more easily-digestible pieces. Though self-division may protect the subject against the dangers of overwhelming sentiment, such increasingly strict dissections of sympathy may only deepen the chasm sympathy seeks to overcome, leaving individuals—in control of their feelings though they might be—

isolated and alone. As I suggested earlier, the causes of feeling become increasingly detached from their effects, and this reduction of causality makes the operations of feeling even more unpredictable.

The increasingly sophisticated modulation of sympathy is also something thematized within the sentimental novel, which seeks both to cram its pages full of affecting scenes and sights, and maximize the number of tears extracted from its readers in the process. However, even the most tear-jerking sentimental novels adapt ideas about the theatrical modulation of feeling by occasionally reducing the pitch of their emotionality in order to make a more striking impression upon the reader. The single tear never entirely loses its signifying efficacy, however hackneyed it may be. Ildiko Csengei's discussion of tears in *The Man of Feeling* does not focus on the single tear, but argues that the presentation of tears in sentimental novels acts as a tool to teach readers sympathetic reading practices, showing "how literature can realize its social and political agenda on the level of the individual's emotions"(Csengei 954). In my next two chapters, I will show how sentimental novels' excessive emotionality soon gains associations with ideological extremism and irrational, dangerous degrees of personal weakness that make many readers and critics uneasy, enacting an unexpected "social and political agenda" through the most apparently conventional demonstrations of feeling. Through the 1780s and 1790s, the ground beneath discussions of excessive sentimentality begins to shift: the question becomes not how powerful feeling can be most effectively incited, but how it can be most responsibly regulated.

CHAPTER TWO

“BEWILDERED WITH ENTHUSIASM”: RESPONDING TO SENTIMENTALIZED
RELIGION IN HENRY BROOKE’S *THE FOOL OF QUALITY*

Henry Brooke’s *The Fool of Quality* (1766-1769) contains the extravagant quantity of flowing tears that one might expect from the sodden pages of one of the eighteenth century’s most popular sentimental novels, but its sprawling five volumes encompass other moral and ideological extremes that both intrigued and alarmed eighteenth-century readers. Contemporary reviewers praised Brooke’s portrayal of benevolence and fine feeling, but these readers also looked askance at the idiosyncratic religious, political, and spiritual beliefs set alongside of these assets. When we read *The Fool of Quality*, the *Monthly Review* remarked, “our feeling, to use his own expression... ‘bear unison and accord to every word he utters,’” but an unfortunate strain of “enthusiastic rapture, and... visionary jargon of fanaticism” characterizes the novel (G[riffiths], “Juliet Grenville” 15–16).²⁸ At the time of its publication, *The Fool of Quality* was particularly excoriated for what the *Monthly* identified as its “sanctimonious rubbish,” calling it a performance simultaneously “enriched by genius, enlivened by fancy, bewildered with enthusiasm, and over-run with”—using the phrase for a second time—“the visionary jargon of fanaticism” (“Fool” 330). However, such critical censure is not just a response to the mere presence of religious thought contained within the novel, but the obscurity of the enthusiastic and mystical paths that it encourages the reader to walk. The novel’s “*religious sentiments* and *pious*

²⁸ While many of the following reviews come from the *Monthly Review*, the initials attached to each piece indicate that they were written by a number of different individuals.

expressions,” according to yet another reviewer, “may be thought to savour too much the spirit of William Law, or the methodists” (V. 411), but more bothersome still is the wildness that such a proclivity implies.

Coleridge, an engaged and largely sympathetic reader, identified Brooke’s “characteristic fault” in his marginalia as “a *too-muchness*—an over-heated hyperbolism in his phrases” (Coleridge 725). But Brooke’s occasionally hyperbolic language draws no more censure from critics than that of the legions of other sentimental novels which were beginning to overtake the marketplace during the latter third of the eighteenth century. Instead, contemporary readers most strongly associate the novel’s “too-muchness” with its “unfortunate,” “enthusiastic” and “visionary” religious content, and, in turn, the effects that such excessive and unconventional religiosity might squeeze from its readers. The vigor of the contemporary response condemning Brooke’s overheated enthusiasm can be seen as symptomatic of a more wide-ranging anxiety over the operations and limitations of extreme affect, as well as the apparent ease with which it can be translated or transmuted into religious, economic, and political views that border on the transgressive—or, at least, the inappropriate. In and of themselves, emotions like compassion, adoration, and intense love are seen as benign; once they become the product of unconventional strains of belief, or are directed into action, they become troublesome. John Wesley, for example, used “the most infallible of proofs, inward feeling” to assess his own religious beliefs, but as Isabel Rivers points out, casting feeling as a source of certain knowledge ensures that it appears as simple enthusiasm to outsiders; Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) particularly condemns those who generate evidence from their own inner impulses, and his view was not unusual (Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment* 239–240). Consequently, *The Fool of Quality*’s talent for using one’s inner sympathetic impulses as the basis for equally impassioned

religious beliefs encourages strains of mystical Christianity and Methodism that, for many readers, linger too closely to what they see as the novel's more unobjectionably secular sentimentalism. Considering the volume of protests against Brooke's subversive tendencies, such an intimate association between sentimentality and allegedly fanatical extremes signals the broader cultural and ethical significance of a genre often dismissed as nothing more than waterlogged, purple prose.

Recent Brooke scholarship focuses on the politics of economics and exchange in the novel, but I suggest that its emphasis upon benevolence is also rooted in the mystical Christianity and Wesleyan Methodism so often cited by contemporary reviewers. John J. Richetti, for example, calls *The Fool of Quality* "an amazing fantasy of fabulous mercantile accomplishment and heroic philanthropy" (Richetti 259). While Richetti recognizes that many philanthropic episodes are motivated by imitating "the selfless wisdom of the deity," he concentrates on the ramifications of this choice, not the religious or scriptural impulses at its origin (Richetti 260).²⁹ Markman Ellis also treats "the act of benevolence" within the context of the sentimental economy that trades coins for tears, here seen as "genuinely reformist, humanist and innovative" (Ellis 134-159). Neither Richetti nor Ellis deny the importance of the religious context of sentimental novels like *The Fool of Quality*—they merely focus their attention elsewhere—but placing this ameliorative impulse and these scenes of ostentatious benevolence within an overarching spiritual framework helps us see how belief collaborates with economic interest to

²⁹ Along similar lines as Richetti, Thomas Keymer focuses on the politics of the text's surprisingly powerful economic actions. He cites the novel's presentation of a "Whiggish alternative," which aligns "virtuous sensibility with... the new entrepreneurial energies of industry and commerce." He also sees the immense amounts of funds at young Harry's disposal as "fabulous profits of emergent capitalism." G.J. Barker-Benfield also only cites the text in passing, referring to it in terms of commercial enterprise and as "a typically pious work advocating the reformation of manners." Curiously, while Barker-Benfield acknowledges John Wesley's interest in the novel, his reference to its piety as "typical" seems to disavow the very atypical enthusiasm and fanaticism that concerned contemporary readers (Keymer 592; Barker-Benfield 149, 65).

motivate the novel's sometimes-fervent generosity. As J.M.S. Tompkins, writing in 1932, noted, "Brooke was a man of great natural sensibility, at a time when sensibility was fashionable; he was also a religious enthusiast, using the language of enthusiasm; and these things do not make for restraint, especially in a fluid medium like the novel" (Tompkins 31). Following Tompkins, however, no critics have emphasized the intimacy of the novel's enthusiastic sentimentality with its enthusiastic pursuit of controversial religious beliefs—or, in fact, the iconoclasm of those religious beliefs in the first place. Most recently, in *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Misty G. Anderson has not focused on the sentimental novel as a genre, but highlights the similitude between the popular eighteenth-century rhetoric of feeling and Wesleyan Methodism's descriptions of moving the hearts of its believers. Anderson describes Methodism's "warming of the heart" as something "sensuously immediate," but—in addition to, as she argues, juxtaposing primitive or mystical strains of Christianity with a "modern mode of religious expression"—such an intimate ability to warm and touch the hearts of one's peers, not to mention the potential to carry them away upon a tide of enthusiasm, is heavily reliant upon sympathy for its operation (Anderson 3, 10). The ability of such strong emotions to be evoked and to fundamentally alter the construction of the self is one reason why sentimentalism, as well as Methodism, can be seen as such a high-stakes mode.

Here, I claim that eighteenth-century misgivings about *The Fool of Quality's* excessiveness derive from broader fears about the connections that it forges between Brooke's own enthusiastic religious beliefs and sentimentality, as well as the destructive threat that these connections pose to the social order. Broadly speaking, *The Fool of Quality* can be seen as a product of the cultural changes taking place in eighteenth-century Britain, typifying what Isabel Rivers identifies as the its rejection of Reformation orthodoxy and its attempt to separate ethics

from religion (Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment* 1). Brooke's sometimes erratic embrace of mystical, dissenting, and Wesleyan theology forces readers attracted to its comfortable sentimentality and admirable displays of feeling to confront the unorthodox religious ideas like spiritual revelation and sanctification linked to them within the text. Lastly, to examine how deeply intertwined faith and feeling are, I examine two contemporary abridgements of *The Fool of Quality* by John Wesley and Mary Hays which try to alter the dynamics between the two: Wesley attempts to regularize the novel's often scattered religious doctrines, whereas Hays attempts to de-emphasize their more obviously partisan qualities. By reading Brooke's novel as a text rooted in its author's own religious beliefs, I reveal the strains of unconventional belief that resonate in its pages and test its audience's patience. In the process, we can reconsider modern critical assumptions about the sentimental novel's existence as a largely secular genre: despite its general disinterest in politics, it nevertheless remains a product of the later eighteenth century's political and social environment, bewildering enthusiasm and visionary jargon included.

Feeling and Fellowship in *The Fool of Quality*

Brooke leaves no doubt that the forms of enthusiastic sentimentality portrayed in his novel are rooted in systems of physiological and performative feeling; the tear reveals the invisible actions of profound feeling inside the body. Much like his contemporary Sterne, Brooke seeks to precisely render the systems of sympathy that dictate how these feelings are staged and transferred. For Brooke, the body and the feelings are intimately linked: "Every affection of the human soul has its distinct and respective interpreter in the countenance," Brooke's narrator comments, and not only is there a clear correspondence between feeling and sign, but an underlying chain of events producing one from the other. He continues:

I am further to take notice, that each, of those many Interpreters, hath its respective Set of Tubes and Fibres leading thereto, through which the Blood and Spirits flow on their respective Emotion. Thus, whatever the general Tenour of a Person's Temper may be, such as joyous, or melancholy, irascible, or placid, and so forth; the Vessels, relative to these Affections, are kept open and full, by an almost constant Flow of the Blood and animal Spirits, and impress such evident Characters of that Person's Disposition, as are not to be suppressed, except for a Time, and that too by some powerful and opposite Passion. (Brooke, *The Fool of Quality; or, the History of Henry Earl of Moreland. In Four Volumes* 2: 124–5)

This “comprehensive economy of feeling,” as Markman Ellis terms it, links tears and blushes to the system of fibers and nerves that joins them to their origins in the affections (20).

Sympathetic response, however, can be refined through exercise: feeling, Brooke claims, is like a muscle, which can grow “stronger and more conspicuous by Exercise; as we see the Legs of a Chairman, and the Shoulders of a Porter, derive Bulk and Distinction from the Peculiarity of their Occupation” (2: 125). Brooke firmly places the mechanics of sentimental feeling upon the physiological structures underpinning sensibility: the muscular workmen exercising for the benefit of those of higher classes, or the softer feelings that result. The quantity of physical residue left by emotions thus points back at the hardness of the body that produces them. What's more, these feelings are maintained through constant emotional and physiological exercise, exposing the individual to constant buffets of “powerful” passions “not to be suppressed.” For Brooke, feeling is rooted in the body, and fundamentally manageable; unlike Hill and Diderot, however, Brooke includes no cautions about exercising the passions in excess.

For *The Fool of Quality*'s main character, emotional impulses prompt immediate action. Harry knows no moderation or restraint, and so he becomes an ideal representation of someone driven by excessive feeling. He is also particularly well-suited to act as a vessel for the display of emotions: Harry is not only a fit channel for his own passions, but also the sentiments of others that he sympathetically adopts. Harry's vessels, to employ Brooke's physiological

system, get impressive exercise throughout the text, and he is thus the model of someone for whom the sentimental chairmen and porters of feeling in the body are regularly employed. In fact, his willingness to experience strong feeling is extended to virtually anyone who can sentimentally partake in the experience. Early on, we're shown how contagious others' sentiments are for Harry:

Harry drew near with his usual Intrepidity, till he observed that the Man had a reverend Beard that spread over his Breast, that he held something in his Hand on which he gazed with a fixed Attention, and that the Tears rolled down his Cheeks, without ceasing, and in Silence, except the half suppress'd Sobs that often broke from his Bosom. *Harry* stood, awhile, immoveable, his little Heart was affected, he approached the old Man with a gentle Reverence, and looking up in his Face, and seating himself by his Side, the Muscles of his Infant Aspect began to relax, and he wept and sob'd as fast as his Companion. (1: 42)

Brooke draws, and completes, a kind of sympathetic circuit in this vignette. We begin with the figure of the old man, who is absorbed in his own solitary grief and clearly not performing for any audience. His gaze is fixed upon the token in his hand, the object that prompts the feelings that extract his tears and half-sobs. Harry, the witness of this scene, is first affected in his heart; Brooke leaves no question that Harry enters the scene as a youthful blank slate, his naïve sympathy aroused by the sight of the old man. Then, by “looking up in his face,” Harry’s countenance changes to reflect that of his model—the old man’s visible feelings now prompt changes in the muscles of his “infant aspect,” and the system of nerves and fibers connecting his heart and his body prompt him to weep.

For even a young sentimentalist like Harry, the body and the feelings are intimately, even irresistibly, linked. Brooke’s system of bodily sympathy assimilates all the signs and symptoms of sentiment, outlining the bodily journeys that sympathy takes in order to lend them a clear logic and assigning even their most outlandish effects to distinct causes. Brooke’s system attempts to integrate and explain strong feeling by combining physiological theory with ideas

about the movements of the passions put forth by Smith and Hume. Hume, in particular, describes the passions as possessing an almost viral contagiousness, passing “with the greatest facility from one person to another,” producing “correspondent movements in all human breasts” (*Treatise* 386). These feelings are fundamentally transpersonal, agreeably “caught” by those who witness another’s passion, and felt more “from communication” than from one’s own “natural temper and disposition” (386, 206). One of these passions can be communicated, Hume writes, “only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it” (206). The sentimental transfer of the old man’s feelings to Harry through his rolling tears and sobs, then, is not too far-fetched: in Hume’s formulation, the communication of external signifiers of affect, particularly those manifesting themselves on the face and in the voice, is what initiates the transfer of emotions between individuals. Tears and facial expressions are so powerful, in fact, that these effects plant the germ of an idea, which is converted into an impression, which “acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection.” It is no wonder that Harry so quickly absorbs the old man’s tears, and so completely reduplicates them: the old man’s sorrow produces a correspondent movement in Harry, having been transferred by the old man’s “external signs in the countenance and conversation.”

For Hume, the externalization and transfer of strong feelings does not necessarily rob them of their force, and Harry weeps, after all, just as fast as his companion, despite not even knowing what the old man holds in his hand. Moreover, this exchange could never have taken place without tears.³⁰ Harry, while imbued by Brooke with an impressive ability to intuit others’

³⁰ Hume’s *Treatise* also emphasizes feelings’ ability to work from the outside in. “When I see the *effects* of passion in the voice and gesture of any person,” Hume writes, “my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself” (368). Viewing

feelings, needs the old man's rolling tears to expose the profundity of his emotion. The extreme communicability of Hume's sentiments is predicated upon the essential likeness of human minds, and the chain of events that leads a spectator to experience another's feelings seems to take place without the spectator's permission ("my mind is convey'd," Hume writes in the passive voice). No one is inherently immune from sympathy: "the minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations, nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, affected" (368). It is due to this fundamental "remarkable resemblance, which preserves itself amidst all [the] variety" of humanity that sympathy can form, and feelings be so fluently shared. "As in strings equally wound up," he explains, "the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature." Harry and the old man impersonate these tightly-wound strings, sharing and communicating emotions between themselves. "How comes it, Dada," Harry asks his guardian later in the novel, "that crying should be so catching?" (3: 277). Adela Pinch has argued that what she terms eighteenth-century emotional extravagance contains two aspects: the extravagance of feelings that, like Hume's, wander extravagantly from person to person without boundaries, and the unrestrained, lavish emotionalism that characterizes so many sentimental fictions (3–4). She posits that these two meanings are linked in the contemporary imagination because feelings appear the most excessive when their origins and movements are uncertain. Both of these forms of excess are apparent in *The Fool of Quality*, which may be one reason why the text seems so particularly open to critical condemnation: the

symptoms of feeling, like tears, can sympathetically provoke a witness to experience the same passion; the signs of affect are the vehicle for its transport. Concurrently, "when I perceive the *causes* of any emotion, my mind is convey'd to the effects, and is actuated with a like emotion." These intermingled causes and effects—loosely conjoined, to use Hume's terminology, more than they are precisely connected—are what give rise to sympathy, enabling one person's inner feelings to be shared and transferred through their physiological expressions.

communicability is something that Brooke uses to his advantage, lessening sorrow's sharpest solitary pangs through the intermingling of tears, but the exact mechanics of sympathy remain intangible no matter how carefully he draws out his maps of interconnected nerves and fibers.

Echoes of Mysticism

Eighteenth-century critics initially received Brooke's novel with approbation, but soon shied away from what they saw as Brooke's literary, personal, and moral extremism. In 1766, the *Monthly Review*'s Ralph Griffiths accepted the peculiarities of the second volume, arguing that its defects and irregularities were more than overcome by its "excellent sentiments, affecting scenes, and interesting events" (Griffiths, "Fool" 286–7). By the time that the final volume had been released, the *Monthly*'s anonymous reviewer's "perfect" reconciliation to Brooke's superficial defects and his admiration of its events and sentiments had given way to serious, short-tempered critique. In April 1770, the reviewer wrote that the final volume of Brooke's "extraordinary religious romance" had been read "with the same mixture of delight and disgust with which we perused some of the former volumes" ("Fool" 330). By now, however, what were initially seen as surface irregularities had grown to spoil it entirely. While the characters were still ably drawn, "it is with real concern that we see them debased by the ascetic reveries of Madam Guyon, William Law, and the rest of the rapturous tribe.—What can we say more of a performance which is at once enriched by genius, enlivened by fancy, bewildered with enthusiasm, and over-run with the visionary jargon of fanaticism?" These seventeenth-century European mystics, like Madame Guyon and Jakob Böhme, form an important—and, today, unrecognized—portion of the novel's context. *The Fool of Quality* specifically cites "the great Teutonic Theosopher, *Jacob Behmen*," as a source of authority, and touches upon many of the theological topics taken on by Böhme (2: 158). A number of translations of Böhme's work

appeared in London throughout the seventeenth century, which attracted interest from both Anglicans and Dissenters; a copy was even given to, and read by, King Charles I (Hutin 41; M. L. Bailey 60).³¹ The seventeenth century subsequently saw Böhme's work adapted by various groups of so-called Behmenists, who spanned the globe between Europe, Britain, and North America, although such factions' beliefs had little besides iconoclasm, in common. His writings attracted some notable admirers in Britain, including John Milton, and Henry Brooke and William Blake. The absence of published correspondence left by Brooke means that we must infer such influences by the many contemporaries who drew them out for particular comment and censure (Hutin 151–2).

Böhme, born in 1575 in Upper Lusatia and trained as a shoemaker, had a metaphorical and literal “illumination” in 1600 when he witnessed a gleam of sunlight strike a vessel (Weeks 1). Fancying that this sunlight allowed him to see into “the secret heart of nature, into a concealed divine world,” Böhme claimed this illumination enabled him to see into the “center of nature” at the heart of the countryside surrounding him, as though he were surrounded by divine love (Weeks 1–2). He sees a unity and cohesion between the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the individual; they influence each other via repulsion, sympathy, and antipathy (Martensen 33). His works emphasize the ultimate unity of nature and God in all things, and the inherent oppositions at play within even the Trinity: antagonistic forces that, together with God's love, work to continually unite and separate, allowing the ultimately constructive coexistence of light and darkness, love and wrath, good and evil (M. L. Bailey 27–8; Fremantle 43–4). This holistic vision particularly ruffled the feathers of eighteenth-century British critics: the 1757

³¹ For more on the life and works of Böhme, see Martensen, Bailey, and Weeks.

edition of *The History of Modern Enthusiasm* condemned Böhme's "high Pretense to the Knowledge of the *Language of Nature*, and to interpret, the very Essence and Nature of all things, animate and inanimate" (Evans 123). In *The Fool of Quality*, young Harry Clinton—the titular sentimental fool whose education is loosely placed at the center of the narrative—is assured that evil is a necessary quality of human nature (4:91). While the assumption that evil is an inescapable component of human nature was common currency during the eighteenth century, Böhme frames its existence in a particularly constructive manner: "Good and Evil are mix'd," he writes, and are necessary and oppositional elements whose give-and-take allows for the unity of God in all things (Böhme 96). In the text, Harry is taught to think of the presence of evil as an opportunity for good; it would be an "Error" to conceive of "Emptiness, Darkness, and Desire" in a creature as evil (4:92). Instead, these characteristics are "exceedingly far from being an Evil, in themselves.... It is extremely good for the Creature to be *poor* and *weak*, and *empty*, and *dark*, and *desiring*; for, hereby, he becomes a Capacity, for being supplied with all the *Riches*, *Powers*, *Glories*, and *Blessedness* of his God"—every individual as a sort of spiritual *tabula rasa*, waiting to be filled by God. Harry's tutor, Mr. Fenton, continues, explaining that "God is, every where (in and of himself)," and describing God's power very much in Böhme's terms as an "Illumination" (4:92-3).

Language like this, as vague and nonspecific as it seems to us today, is most frequently identified by contemporaries as proof of the mystics' strong influence on Brooke. "There are whole chapters of [*The Fool of Quality*]," historian Charles Abbey wrote in 1887, "in which every page, and almost every line, prove the hold which [Böhme's] theology had gained over him" (Abbey 301). We aren't told what these chapters, pages, and lines are, but Abbey repeatedly notes their existence. Coleridge's marginalia also identify Brooke's admiration of

mystics like Böhme within certain passages, and he registers his discontent with what he saw as Brooke's sometimes erroneous doctrinal interpretations. In response to Harry's instruction about evil, Coleridge protests: "No!... the Author had not penetrated to the depth of the Mystery: tho' his Master, Jacob Behmen, had a glimmering & confused view" (Coleridge 732). While Coleridge's commentary also takes Brooke to task for Brooke's sometimes unorthodox theological views, Coleridge objects primarily not to mysticism itself, but to instances where he thinks that Brooke erroneously or incompletely applies those ideas. While arguing against Brooke's assumption that "anger *always* supposes *fear*," he concludes "that Brooke was a Behmenist—but in this respect, he has only skimmed the Cream and Sweetmeats of Behmen's System—Jacob himself entertained far other and profounder views on this point" (Coleridge 730–1). The lack of systematic exploration of a singular viewpoint most disturbs Coleridge, and not Brooke's distance from the religious mainstream. If Brooke's ideas are doctrinally incorrect, their becoming so closely intertwined with sentimentality renders them less palatable.

Readily mixed in with Böhme's visionary mysticism is the work of eighteenth-century devotional writer William Law, whose "spirit" and "reveries" were also easily discernable within the novel to eighteenth-century readers (V 411; "Fool"). "A great deal" of Brooke's theology, we are told in an 1887 history of *The English Church and its Bishops*, is Böhme filtered through the "clearer and more thoughtful mysticism" of Law:

The nature of the fall and its universality, the corresponding greatness of redemption, the deep and measureless love of God, the inward birth in man of Christ the Redeemer and purifier of all nations, reclamation to the utmost bound of possibility, the beneficent work of suffering, all nature groaning for its final restitution—these are the special topics upon which Henry Brooke, no less than William Law, dwelt upon with eagerness and enthusiasm. (Abbey 301)

Law serves as a sort of theological bridge between the seventeenth-century European mysticism and the contemporary Wesleyan Methodism that can also be traced within *The Fool of Quality*.

Law was profoundly influenced by Böhme, and corresponded frequently with John Wesley until a later disagreement; in fact, Law's popularity later in the century was augmented by Wesley's abridgements of Law's writings (Rivers, "Law, William").³² Law (1686-1761) was licensed as an Anglican curate in 1711 near Cambridge but lost his fellowship in 1716 after refusing to swear the abjuration oath and aligning himself with the nonjuring church (Rivers). He published his two most influential works, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* (1726) and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729) just before the time when he became intensely interested in Böhme's work in the early 1730s (A. K. Walker 98). Law's reading of Böhme helped him to reconcile the apparent opposition between a good and all-powerful God, and the real existence of sin; how, both Law and Böhme ask, can evil and sin exist in a world governed by a God who is love (Hutin 157)? Law, inspired by Böhme, comes to frame the fall of man not as the product of an inescapable original sin, but as a voluntary choice, and the result of free will (Hutin 159). Brooke's adoption of these ideas for exploration in *The Fool of Quality*, however, leaves him open to accusations by critics that he shares Law's proclivity for rapturous enthusiasm (V 410; "Fool"). 1757's *The History of Modern Enthusiasm* characterized Law's works as favoring "very much of the Enthusiastick Spirit, so it is most certain, that some high Flights of Piety (intermixed indeed with Bombast and Tinsel) have worked a wrong Biass on weak and crazy Intellectuals" (Evans 122). Even Law's piety has the potential to contort the beliefs of the weak and unsuspecting, and his Enthusiastic and extravagant views are furthermore influenced by his admiration of "that mystick Expression of JACOB BEHMEN" (Evans 123). In fact, the increasing vehemence of eighteenth-century attacks on Law explains why even mere

³² For a detailed discussion of Law's borrowings from and disagreements with Böhme, see Hoyles.

echoes of his presence rendered *The Fool of Quality* so distasteful. Law was, John Hoyles writes, “from the beginning branded as an enthusiast; and for the 18th century, from Dr Johnson to Wesley, enthusiasm was nature’s archetypal aberration, to be resisted at all costs. Law was in fact considered to be outside the pale of 18th century culture,” and liberally—if posthumously—excoriated in publications like William Warburton’s anti-Methodist *The Doctrine of Grace* (1762) (Hoyles 129).

Law’s later writings particularly emphasize the doctrine of universal salvation, in which man, having taken the “*express, open, voluntary Act and Deed*” to sin, can be “*born again from above*” in a “*new regain’d Birth*” (Law, *Christian Regeneration* 21, 26–7). The process of regeneration occurs progressively, through a Christ who “is *in us*” and acts as “an *inward Saviour*” (Law 44, 46). Law’s work on Christian regeneration repeatedly distinguishes between the “inward and *spiritual Man*” who is the subject of salvation and the “old,” worldly exterior that must be overcome. Brooke’s characters often use similar concepts, as with universal salvation and inner recovery (Law 70-1). ‘The World is, in itself,’ Harry is instructed, “no other than a History of the two capital and eternally important Truths, THE GREATNESS OF THE FALL in *Lucifer and Adam*, and THE GREATNESS OF THE REDEMPTION in *Jesus Christ*” (4:294). Christ, one of Brooke’s characters explains, “is not an *outward* but an *inward Redeemer*, working out our Salvation *by the Change of our depraved Nature*” (5:238-9). (It is through “his *external* as well as *internal Revelation*,” the novel continues, that even non-Christians can be redeemed (5: 239).) One of Law’s most distinctive beliefs is his location of both the Fall and the Atonement within human nature, and his Böhme-influenced insistence that neither good nor evil are external forces, but located within each being. Law writes that the presence of God “must, of the utmost

Necessity, first make itself *creaturely* in you; it must *be* and *arise* in you, as it does without you, before you can possibly enter into any Communion with it” (Law, *An Appeal* 43).

The Fool of Quality not only recalls Law’s ideas about inner rebirth and revelation, but it also models his teachings: so powerful are these Law-reminiscent lessons about individual salvation and new birth, in fact, that characters in the novel are instantaneously convinced and call for “instant Baptism,” which completes their happiness (5:326). Brooke’s characters also espouse the idea that Christ’s “blessed Body” was crucified “for the Redemption of commiserated Sinners” (5:240). For eighteenth-century readers, a casual mixture of religion with sentiment would have been familiar terrain—the idea of sentimentality as a God-given blessing had already entered the realm of literary cliché. Such specific and heterogeneous doctrinal views, expounded upon at such great length within a fictional context, however, were thought inappropriate and offensive.

Signs of Methodism

Perhaps even more than mysticism, Methodism, if we are to judge by the sheer volume of critical complaints put to print, is the dominant religious strain in *The Fool of Quality*.³³ Henry Brooke, following an early, embarrassing spat with the Irish Catholics after which his zeal mellowed substantially, remained staunchly Protestant throughout his life.³⁴ Trained as a lawyer in London and eventually settling back in his birthplace of Ireland, Brooke’s alliances with the church were mostly informal.³⁵ Nevertheless, his interest in the enthusiastic Methodism

³³ For more on the role of religious enthusiasm during the eighteenth century, see Pocock.

³⁴ See Brooke’s *The Farmer’s Letter to the Protestants of Ireland*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1745), which warns Irish Protestants against an imminent Catholic-Jacobite uprising.

associated with John Wesley is repeatedly cited as the largest obstacle blocking the text's otherwise noble sentiments. Wesley himself had a long and complicated relationship with William Law; Wesley initially admired and praised the contents and ardor of *Christian Perfection* and *A Serious Call*, and Methodism of this period ("in all its manifestations," notes Rivers, pointing out a unity of belief among the increasingly divided early Methodists of the 1730s) shares Law's belief in the doctrines of new birth and justification by faith (Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment* 120; Collins 41; Rivers, "William Law and Religious Revival" 637). Later on, under the influence of the Moravians, Wesley energetically criticized Law for not fully understanding the doctrine of justification and for couching his ideas in improperly mystical cant, writing reproachfully to Law that his two years of study of Law's *Christian Perfection* left him only with the conclusion that it was "a law by which a man cannot live" (Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment* 210–1; Baker 106; Watts 433). Nevertheless, despite the later squabbles between the two figures, Law's mysticism and Wesley's Methodism continued to be mutually influential throughout the century.

Brooke's characters earnestly and passionately dwell on the crucial role of love—something that plays an equally critical role in Wesley's writings, as well as in those of Law and Böhme. "The end of the commandment is love," Wesley wrote in a 1746 letter (Wesley, *Letters* 75). "Let this love be attained, by whatever means, and I am content." Wesley's sermons similarly emphasize love as "not only the first and great command, but all the commandments in

³⁵ Brooke's daughter Charlotte tells an anecdote about her father's talent for enthusiastically inducing fervent emotions through belief—a talent which will later be exercised through the sentiments evoked within the novel. On this occasion, Henry Brooke was asked to perform the service at their rural parish in the absence of the usual clergyman. "He consented, and the previous prayers being over, he opened the Bible, and preached extempore on the first text that struck his eye. In the midst of his discourse, the clergyman entered, and found the whole congregation in tears. He entreated Mr. Brooke to proceed; but this he modestly refused; and the other as modestly declared, that after the testimony of superior abilities, which he perceived in the moist eyes of all present, he would think it presumption and folly to hazard any thing of his own." Charlotte Brooke goes on to regret that her father was not formally trained for the church (Seymour xxx).

one. Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, they are all comprised in this one word, love. In this is perfection, and glory, and happiness” (Wesley, *Christian Perfection* 4–5). William Law, too, placed love at the core of his teachings, albeit in even more grand and mystical terms: his *The Spirit of Love* repeatedly emphasizes how “the *Spirit of Love* is the Breath of every thing that lives, and moves in the Heart... which is God himself living and working in you” (Law, *Spirit of Love* 63). In turn, prominent among the doctrinal opinions expressed by *The Fool of Quality*’s Mr. Fenton is that “God, alone is LOVE, and nothing but Love” (4:89). In a lengthy discourse on religion in Brooke’s Volume 5, we are asked by the elder Mr. Clinton, “What, indeed, should hinder our God from being wholly a God of Love?” (5:115). Clinton goes on to reconcile the existence of sin and evil with that of a God who is entirely love, and quotes Romans 7:11-25 to distinguish, in familiarly Böhmean terms, between “the *Outward* and *Inward*” man (5:116, 126-7). Another Wesleyan image that can be traced in *The Fool of Quality* is the metaphor of “a golden chain (to use the expression of *Plato*) let down from the throne of God” to link all life with its creator (Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions* 53). While the concept of the Great Chain of Being was common currency within secular philosophy as well, Wesley’s construct particularly emphasizes the interconnectedness of all humanity.³⁶ *The Fool of Quality* similarly stresses the “thousand social Charities, Relations, and Endearments that, with Links of golden Love, connect the Brotherhood of Man” (4:95-6). This belief, in particular, is easily transferred to the key acts of charity, benevolence, and compassion that characterize the sentimental novel: to love, or feel for, one’s neighbours as much as one’s self demonstrates great depths of sensibility and sensitivity,

³⁶ See Lovejoy.

as well as adhering to important Christian values.³⁷ Wesley's own language mingles faith with what he calls "feeling": "you will know you are under the guidance of God's Spirit," he writes, "by *feeling it in your own soul*; by the present peace and joy and love which you feel within, as well as by its outward and more distant effects" (Wesley, *Journal* 88). Religious enthusiasm, it seems, can be easily translated into sentimental enthusiasm, and—given the suspicion with which enthusiasts were treated—such an easy transition did not inspire confidence.

One of the more controversial aspects of mid-eighteenth-century Wesleyan Methodism was its emphasis on benevolence. In contrast to earlier Calvinist accounts which subordinated good works as a consequence, not the cause, of justification, Wesley foregrounds material generosity as a real way of enacting God's will on earth (Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment* 10). Wesley's sermons stress the importance of using money for good purposes: gaining all you can, saving all you can, and most importantly giving all you can. After taking care of household necessities, he says, "do good to them, that are of the household of faith," then "as you have opportunity, do good unto all men" (Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions* 141). "Render unto God," he encourages, "not a tenth, not a third, not half; but *all that is* God's, be it more or less: by employing all, on yourself, your household, the household of faith and all mankind, in such a manner... that whatever ye do may be *a sacrifice of a sweet smelling favour to God*" (Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions* 143). The act of giving money to an object of pity is a central event for the sentimental novel as a genre, and modern criticism of *The Fool of Quality* has focused on Brooke's portrayal of benevolence and stylized sentimental generosity.³⁸ In this way,

³⁷ See, for example, R.S. Crane's influential "Suggestions toward a Genealogy of 'The Man of Feeling.'"

³⁸ As Robert Markley has argued with respect to Sterne, the complex relationship between money and virtue is often treated in misleadingly reductive ways within the sentimental novel: questions of poverty and social inequality are

The Fool of Quality fits with the subgenre of eighteenth-century sentimental novels with characters who attempt to exchange feelings for coins, but Brooke's ideas on benevolence directly reflect the Wesleyan teachings identified as atypical by contemporary critics. God "has ordained," Brooke writes in the third volume, "the relative Differences of *Rich* and *Poor*, *Strong* and *Weak*, *Sound* and *Sickly*, &c. to exercise us in the Offices of that Charity, and those Affections, which, reflecting and reflected like mutual Light and Warmth, can alone make our Good to all Eternity" (3:246). "GOD has appointed human *Power* and human *Wealth*," he continues, "as a ready and sufficient Fund for human *Want* and *Weakness*; to which Fund, therefore, they have as good a Right to resort, as any other Creditors have to respective Trust or Deposits; for, though Poverty and Weakness are not Creditors, by the Laws of Man, they are Creditors by the eternal Laws of Nature and Equity; and must, here, or hereafter, bring their Debtors to account" (3:247). In other words, it is not just the privilege, but the right, of the poor to embrace charity offered to them. Material wealth is specifically identified as the resource that God intends to be used to balance the effects of poverty, and though Brooke here portrays wealth and poverty as held together by a complex system of debts and credits, such plenitude is clearly a resource intended to—or *required* to—balance out others' deficiencies. Brooke, then, goes beyond Wesley in his ideas about benevolence. Wesley is careful to maintain a hierarchy of needs that wise stewards should attend to: first, your own needs; then, your wife's, your children's, and your servants'; then, those who "are of the household of faith"; then, lastly, "all

smoothed over when authors employ cash to suggest a one-to-one correspondence between monetary and sentimental values, and morality coexists uneasily with philanthropy (Markley). Novels like Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, Markley argues, attempt to enact virtue and draw attention to social injustice, all while working within the boundaries of a hierarchically structured society. In his reading of Shaftesbury, Markley claims that writers as diverse as Steele, Sterne, and Mackenzie "do not subvert, radically undermine, or fundamentally realign the hereditary bases of wealth and power but seek to expand them" (218).

men” (Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions* 141). Brooke, however, advocates an almost unbridled philanthropy: benevolence, like feeling, need not be unnecessarily restrained.

The Fool of Quality contains one particular vignette that depicts money at the center of a personal economy of benevolent sentiment, which has also attracted much recent critical attention. In it, young Harry’s patron has given him and his tutor a sum of £1500, telling him to lodge near the Fleet prison and to seek out prisoners in distress. Mr. Fenton continues his instructions:

Let five hundred Pounds of this Money be appropriated to the Enlargement of such Prisoners as are under Duress for Sums not amounting to ten Pounds. You will thereby free the Captive; give means of Bread to the Hungry; and restore to your Country many Members that are worse than useless, that are also a dead Weight and Incumbrance upon her.

Let the remaining thousand Pounds be applied to the Enfranchisement or Relief of those Prisoners of Note, whose Cases and Calamities call for singular Compassion. And be sure to keep an Account, where your Money may fall short of such valuable Purposes; and, as far as five hundred Pounds more will reach, we will supply the Defect. (2:238-239)

Coleridge’s marginalia noted the scenes’ excessiveness: “And this, it appears, was only 700£.— One instance among scores of Brooke’s hyperbolic infirmity” (Coleridge 730). Brooke’s attempt to regulate sentimental impulses by assigning them to financial equivalents backfires on a pragmatic level: not only is it obviously unrealistic, but it posits a monetary solution for alleviating poverty as well as suffering in general. The Fleet was a prison for debtors, so cash could easily pay the bills and creditors of its inmates, efficiently freeing its captives. However, expanding this benevolent exercise to prisoners in other jails, or to the poor of London in general, would be even more unrealistic and far less effective. “The misfortunes of the wretched are indeed relieved; but they are relieved by means which seldom occur in real life,” a reviewer reflected in 1804 (“Harry Clinton” 151). “Many seem brought into a distress from which an effort of industry might have extricated them, merely to afford opportunities for exercising the

beneficence of Mr. Fenton and his adopted son. Resources to supply such beneficence are in the power of few,” he writes, and so the dispirited reader is only left mournfully regretting that he does not share Harry’s resources.

Brooke, however, imparts Harry’s sentimentalized generosity with the potential to instigate political change. Harry’s aid is not restricted and individual in its scope: he has the ability to aid England by restoring formerly “useless” members back to his country. It is unclear whether money or sentiment plays the part of the liberator who “free[s] the captive” in these instances, but sentiment is the motivator and the money—initially limited to £1500, but possibly supplemented by another £500—is the enabler. John Richetti describes the novel’s various systems of philanthropy as founded firmly upon class privilege—a privilege that is “random and opportunistic, meant chiefly as part of young Harry’s sentimental education” (Richetti 260). He sees this educational plan as a form of “benign exploitation” and “selfish appropriation,” philanthropy founded upon superiority. Indeed, Brooke’s novel does not recognize the existence of the various charitable institutions that were growing dramatically in scope and scale at the time of the novel’s publication; Brooke’s charity, as demonstrated by his characters’ feeling responses to others’ distress, remains unstructured, private, individual, and irregular, and less than practical for any scenario more complicated than simply relieving the debts of debtors.

Similarly, Markman Ellis’s critique of *The Fool of Quality* revolves around the falsity of this model of economy, which transforms benevolence into a selfish act which serves the giver’s interests above all else (M. Ellis 134). But in the text, Harry’s actions are treated seriously; he may shock and amuse other characters (and, by proxy, the reader) with his naïveté, yet Brooke nevertheless presents him as a model of innocent, uncompromising feeling to be admired and imitated. Mr. Fenton’s pet philanthropic project is just as unrealistic as Coleridge, Ellis, and

Richetti claim, but no more so than the idealized systems of benevolence undertaken in other contemporary sentimental novels. Harry's sentimental generosity performs the importance of "social Charities, Relations, and Endearments that, with Links of golden Love, connect the Brotherhood of Man" in even more radical of a fashion than Wesley recommended. In such a disbursal of money, Harry acts as a good steward for himself, his household, and all the household of faith and mankind. The seemingly unlimited sum that he has at his disposal represents the Wesleyan importance of rendering "*all that is God's*" to those who need it. The ridiculous efficacy of Harry's generosity—having such a large sum of money to help those imprisoned by the want of just a little—can be seen as the "ready and sufficient Fund for human *Want and Weakness*," except that Harry gladly distributes this money to anybody willing to bring him to account. Harry does not follow the discriminating hierarchy of needs that Wesley establishes, accounting first for his own wants; he eagerly searches for those in distress. Brooke sees religiously-ordained charity as possessing the ability to achieve great, almost revolutionary change, as opposed to merely providing or cultivating opportunities for showy beneficence: by freeing those imprisoned for small debts, Harry effectively spreads his generosity to as many unfortunates as possible. In doing so, he strains the traditional limits of the sentimental novel.

Ethics and Politics

The Fool of Quality includes further echoes of fundamental doctrinal questions that interested both Wesley and mystics like William Law. Brooke presents one memorable scene where an individual's capacity to sympathize with terrible feeling is stretched to the limit, but the suffering object is not noble or pitiable in any way, and the acuity of his pain makes the spectator even more disinclined to share it. In it, David—one of the many characters who momentarily assumes the novel's narrative spotlight—sees a violent traitor who has wronged him in the past

sentenced to death. “Never was Joy like mine, on hearing this Sentence pronounced against *Barbar*,” David recollects, “and I rose early the next Morning in order to have the Pleasure of being at his Execution” (3:202). At the execution, Barbar panics, and “all the muscling of his Countenance had all the Impressions of Death, Despair and Hell represented upon it.” This, however, does not affect David, other than to fill him with “that Delight which is naturally felt on the Gratification of Revenge.” But as Barbar is violently and painfully executed, “when I saw him writhing in Agony, and heard his horrible Roars and Groanings, all my Revenge was quickly turned into Terror and Compassion; his Pangs and Sufferings, as it seemed, were transferred to my own Person, and, had I not turned away, I should have fainted on the Spot.” In this scene, David transforms—almost against his will—from spectator to sympathizer. David does not forgive Barbar’s transgressions, but after hearing Barbar’s pain, he quickly sympathizes almost as though these sufferings were his own. Here, revenge and sympathy reciprocally mirror each other. David is actually the one who initiated Barbar’s punishment: his loyalty to the Dey, or regent, earned him a reward, and he requests “none of your Treasures or Possessions, O *Ali*! I only ask the Head of that Traitor, the Head of *Barbar*; I ask but Blood for Blood” (3:197). But David’s desire for vengeance quickly transmutes into “Terror and Compassion,” meaning that David’s retributive wish to inflict pain on Barbar is immediately changed into David’s taking Barbar’s pain upon himself. In other words, David’s initial need to refuse and return Barbar’s pain is completely overpowered by the opposing sympathetic urge to share it.

In this case, Brooke explicitly engages with Smith’s infamous claim that “Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers” (11). Smith’s spectatorial model of sympathy dictates that someone exposed on a pillory is placed in an inherently theatrical situation, denying him the sympathy of

spectators with his pain. If there is pity, “it is with his shame, not with his sorrow” (71). David Marshall argues that, in this situation, spectators have two choices (192). They can withhold sympathy, and remain spectators. Or, they can grant sympathy, and if they “enter into the sentiments of the person they are beholding, if they become in some measure the same person as him, identify themselves with him through a transfer of persons and characters—then they stop being spectators.”

David, obviously, has no first-hand understanding of having a sharp stake run through his spine, so he can neither rely upon his own first-hand experience of a similar situation, nor claim that his near-fainting represents an equivalent amount of bodily stress. Nevertheless, David’s experience embodies Smith’s representation of imaginative, theatrical sympathy: he cannot feel as much as Barbar, or use his senses to understand it, but David can use Barbar’s “horrible Roars and Groanings,” as well as the expressions he reads on the traitor’s countenance, to imagine what he would feel like in Barbar’s place. So keen is David’s imaginative identification that he must still turn away, or avert his eyes, to avoid feeling them too wholly. Such a transfer would be overpowering, even though, according to Smith, not all of Barbar’s feelings could be fully communicated. Moreover, David’s sympathy with Barbar is not merely noteworthy because of its unexpected appearance and surprisingly profound effects: it is also controversial in the eyes of readers and critics who see larger institutional problems posed by Brooke’s model of sentimentality. David’s uninvited pity presents a perfect example of an instance where excessive feeling could, in fact, upset existing models of law and justice in dangerous ways. The “eye for an eye” model of justice advanced by both David and the Dey may be far removed from the more charitable principles espoused by typical British sentimentalists, but it is nevertheless clear from this example that the impulses of the heart can be easily detached from the rule of law.

Consequently, there is no assurance that sympathy might not run counter to the essential rules of law and equity that found the basis of British civil society.

But Barbar's execution also parallels the popular Wesleyan doctrine of penal substitution, wherein Christ's death serves as a full sacrifice and substitute for human sin. Wesley's *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law* (1756) specifically takes on Law's assertion that "There is *no Wrath* in GOD, no *fictitious Atonement*, no *Folly of Debtor and Creditor*," countering that "As man owed his Creator the perfect Obedience of his whole Life, or a Punishment proportioned to his Transgression, it was impossible he could satisfy Him, by a partial and imperfect Obedience. Neither could he *merit* any thing from Him, to whom he owed all things" (Wesley, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law* 56, 59). A sinner's relationship to God, Wesley argues, surpasses simple analogies of debt and credit and defies the notions of proportion and repayment. Christ, therefore, acts as "a Mediator, who could... satisfy the Supreme Judge, who had pronounced the Sentence of Death against the Transgressors of his Law, suffer in the Place of his people, and *merit* for them Pardon, Holiness, and Glory" (59-60). Wesley's rhetoric of penal substitution is explicitly legalistic in tone, and one can see the parallels that Brooke has crafted between it and the trial and execution of Barbar. David begins the episode believing that he is owed, in the language of equivalence and exchange, Barbar's suffering: "I ask," he says in highly Wesleyan style, "but Blood for Blood."³⁹ Barbar, too, is sentenced to death, in a public execution reminiscent of both Wesley's description of Christ's suffering and Smith's description of another on the rack. (Wesley even speaks of Christ as suffering "in the Place of his people," much like we enter into the sentiments of someone with whom we sympathize.) Brooke hardly establishes

³⁹ For more on the language of blood and its relationship to contemporary ideas about debt and penal exchange, see John R. Tyson's Introduction to the works of Charles Wesley in *Charles Wesley: A Reader* 3.

Barbar as a Christ-like figure—for instance, Barbar’s death sentence is immediately issued after he guiltily attempts to commit suicide as he is brought to trial—but Barbar’s visible, visceral sufferings are enough to reverse David’s feelings into immediate sympathy, transforming him into the figure of a sinner struggling with repentance (Brooke 3:222, 3:227). When viewed through the lens of the sentimental novel, Barbar dies for David’s sins, enabling his redemption through sympathy and helping to satisfy David before “the Supreme Judge.” Another instance of what might seem to be an exaggeratedly sentimental instance of spectatorial sympathy is driven, in *The Fool of Quality*, by Methodistical religious beliefs.

Abridgements and Abridgers

Because of *The Fool of Quality*’s dubious teachings, the consensus among eighteenth-century critics is that it badly needs editing. The *Monthly Review*’s only response to the question of how to temper such extraordinary and objectionable excess is a “hearty wish that the ingenious writer (if he *can* divest himself of his monastic robes) would give us an abridgment of this work, cleared from the sanctimonious rubbish by which its beauties are so much obscured; and then, we are persuaded, it would be perused with pleasure by readers of every rank and age” (“The Fool of Quality” 330). The *Monthly Review*, then, sees the unexpurgated text as unsuitable for public consumption; its potential for religious indoctrination threatens the beauties and sentimental genius of the text as a whole. Nevertheless, the critic insinuates that Brooke *should* be able to rid himself of his “monastic” posture, and that the “sanctimonious rubbish” obscuring the text’s beauties can be excised. The reviewer suggests that the text could be successfully amended and abridged, removing the excessive supplementary religious content and rendering it newly useful to the public at large. The novel’s excess is not in its feeling, but in the quality and fervency of religious enthusiasm clogging its pages.

Other contemporary reviewers echo the suggestion for some kind of abbreviation of its many extremes. “If there is not much order preserved in the composition of this work,” the *London Magazine* writes, “it at least contains much benevolence, and though it may offend the rigid rules of criticism by the continual episodes into which it is branching, it cannot but be serviceable to the interests of morality” (“An Impartial Review” 275–276). The novel’s episodical nature drew particular, repeated critique for distracting readers from the narrative’s otherwise worthy and interesting morals. “Every page teems with the marvelous, and numberless incidents no less unnecessary than unnatural, are contrived for the mere purpose of exalting the hero’s character,” the *London Magazine* complains (“The Fool of Quality” 39). The narrative becomes lost, the reviewer explains, beneath all of the characters, stories, and events that Brooke crams into the text; its worthy messages, too-frequent “methodistical divinity” notwithstanding, are subordinated by its loose organization and narrative improbability. “The history of the Fool of Quality is not merely the narrative of a single life, but is crowded with episodic relations of the adventures of many characters, which are merely introduced that their stories may be recited,” protested the *Critical Review* (“XIII. The Fool of Quality” 459). Nevertheless, the *London Magazine* concluded, “it is impossible to read the work without profit and pleasure... the heart is forcibly affected even where the judgment most sensibly laments the evident impossibility of the narrative” (“The Fool of Quality” 39). At the time of the novel’s publication, its forcible emotional affect was seen as occurring in *spite* of its Methodism and disjointed narrative; small wonder, then, that readers repeatedly, if rhetorically, urged the author to self-edit and anthologize his own work.

Such abridgments—albeit often created strictly for reasons of length and marketability, as much as for morality—were popular contemporary forms among readers. Leah Price

distinguishes between the two most common kinds of abridgements performed to the sentimental novel: the collection or anthology, and the abridgment. For example, Richardson's *Collection of Sentiments* from his own works "fragment[s] the novels by substituting alphabetical for chronological order; the abridgments unify them by stripping discontinuous digressions away from linear plot" (17). Anthologies "excise ephemeral local detail in favor of timeless maxims," but abridgments "keep narrative particulars but cut abstractions, sprinkling gaps through the text like negative anthology-pieces" (17). Brooke, the consensus seems to be, desperately needs abridgement, but opinions about what that abridgement should keep and what it should excise differ. Brooke's work inspired no *Beauties of...* volume that collected its most precious sentiments, unlike other eighteenth-century novelists; *The Beauties of Sterne*, by contrast, tore through thirteen editions by the end of the century, and it was necessary (according to the editor) to reveal passages "lost in an eclipse of affectation and unnatural rhapsody" (Sterne, *The Beauties of Sterne* viii). By contrast, an abridgement of Brooke would not perform general moral and narrative streamlining, but remove whatever religious content the editor found most objectionable. For some readers, an abridgement would strip away the distracting and potentially dangerous religious and moral ideology clouding the novel's otherwise beautiful sentiments. For others, an abridgement would pare down the narrative and mystical clutter that dilute its morality, allowing its religious views to stand forth unsullied. Paradoxically, each camp sees itself as peeling away one form of excess in order to better reveal the novel's center, but what's identified as the unnecessary excess, and what's identified as the core, switch depending upon the reader. For this reason, a look at two very different late-eighteenth-century abridgements of *The Fool of Quality* reveals how its sentiments are variously promoted or curtailed, and what ideas are seen as needing to be quieted.

Accusations of *The Fool of Quality*'s insidious Methodism were only corroborated by John Wesley's fondness for it. In 1774 Wesley asked Brooke's nephew about the possibility of abridging the novel himself, writing that he "could not but observe the design of it, to promote the religion of the heart, and that it was well calculated to answer that design" (Qtd. in Tyerman 173). At the same time, "there seemed to me to be a few passages... which might be altered for the better; I do not mean, so much with regard to the sentiments, which are generally very just, as with regard to the structure of the story, which seemed here and there to be not quite clear." To borrow Price's terms, Wesley is interested in retaining and improving the novel's story, not just its religious maxims. By all accounts, Wesley admired the novel; he recommended it as educational and instructive, and his unusual decision to spend so much time altering it is framed as a choice to draw out and emphasize the good, not to neuter and nullify the bad. (Wesley was over 70 when he sent out his enquiry, and the decision to spend the time necessary to reduce Brooke's five volumes to two raised not a few eyebrows.⁴⁰) Permission by the ailing Brooke being granted, Wesley's adaptation was published in 1781 as the two-volume *The History of Henry, Earl of Moreland* (without Wesley's name affixed, but with the title page of the second edition noting that it is "sold... at all the Methodist Preaching-Houses in Town and Country") (Brooke, *The History of Henry Earl of Moreland*).

Wesley's preface to the text explains his reasons for the new edition. After noticing its virtues, "I was indeed a little disgusted," he says of his first reading, "with the spinning out of the story, so as to fill five volumes: and wished, some of the digressions had been pared off, that it might have come within a reasonable compass" (Brooke, *The History of Henry Earl of Moreland*

⁴⁰ Wesley, writes one nineteenth-century biographer of Brooke, was "not unfrequently... called upon to defend his course in this respect," and recalls Wesley's impassioned defense of the novel to "several of his preachers." (Strickland ix-x)

iii). But Wesley is careful to avoid accusing Brooke of including filler; instead, he removes “at least one-third of what was published in those five volumes, more to the satisfaction of the Bookseller, than of the judicious Reader” (*The History of Henry Earl of Moreland* iii–iv). To render the book more commercially viable, he trims “uninteresting Dialogues,” “trifling and ludicrous incidents,” and “remarks upon the feudal government,” as well as “a great part of the Mystic Divinity, as it is more philosophical than scriptural.” Wesley’s prioritizing is revealing: he detects the influence of mystics like Böhme and Law upon the text, with whom he had by now quarreled, and regards them—as well as Brooke’s lengthy political discussions and episodic organization—as detracting from its emotional and devotional efficacy. He seeks to pare the excess by rendering the novel more doctrinally—thus Methodistically—consistent, and what is left is a “Treatise... most excellent in its kind, of any that I have seen, either in English, or any other language.”

Wesley goes on to identify, in ascending order of importance, what he sees as the unique strength of Brooke’s novel: its “*pure... clear and proper...* frequently beautiful and elegant” style, and the “admirable sense” it contains, setting forth “the important Truths, which are revealed in the Oracles of God,” naturally providing “the most essential Doctrines of Religion” to the “thinking Reader.” Most important, according to Wesley, it is a “Treatise” that “continually strikes at the heart,” aiming at “inspiring and increasing every right affection: at the instilling gratitude to God, and benevolence to man. And it does this not by dry, dull, tedious precepts, but by the liveliest examples that can be conceived” (*The History of Henry Earl of Moreland* v). Wesley praises this depiction as being drawn “so delicately fine, the touches so easy, natural, and affecting, that I know not who can survey it with tearless eyes, unless he has a heart of stone.” Most critics objected to Brooke’s religious enthusiasm, but it makes perfect

sense that Wesley would find this same fervency attractive. Wesley treats the novel not as a fiction, but as a “Treatise” advancing “essential Doctrines”—a text whose primary purpose is religious instruction, needing him to chisel away all of the narrative distractions for it to become an irresistibly effective vehicle in which to convey God-given truths. Moreover, Wesley handily exploits its tear-jerking powers of feeling for instructional purposes. Its sentiment—its ability to provoke feeling in all who read it, save those with a “heart of stone”—gives the text its power, and Wesley reworks the text to touch both the “thinking” and the feeling reader through its lively narrative examples. An exchange about the book between Wesley and one of his preachers underlines how Wesley sees feeling and belief as interlinked:

“Did you read *Vindex*, John?” said Wesley, referring to an exceedingly humorous passage in the book.

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you *laugh*, John?”

“No, sir.”

“Did you read *Damon and Pythias*, John?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you *cry*, John?”

“No, sir.”

Lifting up his eyes, as in utter astonishment, and clasping his hands, Wesley exclaimed: “O, earth—earth—earth!” (Strickland x)

Wesley’s implication is that, without feeling deeply along with the novel, the preacher consequently lacks spiritual depth; powerful sentiment, and powerful religious beliefs, inform and transform into each other.

Wesley’s abridgement attempts to restore some linearity to the narrative. Characters’ histories are retained, but the interspersed quasi-Socratic dialogues between “Author” and “Friend” are cut. Wesley is not opposed to all of Brooke’s digressions—a sixteen-page disquisition on the British constitution is kept, for example—but he is selective about what elements of Brooke’s more extreme theology are left in (Strickland x). Although some dialogues

are excluded because they occur in irrelevant portions of the narrative, Wesley also eliminates Brooke's reference to "the great Teutonic Theosopher, *Jacob Behmen*," as well as Brooke's Böhme-influenced vision of a natural world "secretly pregnant" with a God present in every speck and minim. Wesley's *The History of Henry, Earl of Moreland* is still a book with a heavy theological bent, but it eliminates Brooke's explanation of how evil in the world balances and promotes good, leaving in passages emphasizing Harry's inherently selfish and "evil spirit" (*The History of Henry Earl of Moreland* 1:259). Similarly, while Wesley keeps Brooke's Law-like description of Christ as an "inward redeemer" and the trinity as enabling redemption, he eliminates Brooke's more sweeping and wild-eyed portrait of the history of the world as encapsulating two "eternally important Truths," the Fall and the Redemption. Unsurprisingly, however, Wesley maintains most of the original text's more Methodist tendencies: he retains repeated references to God as a God of love, and many passages extolling the virtues of great charity and benevolence, including Harry's £1500 experiment in benevolence. Wesley's introduction claims that his abridgement is stylistically motivated, but—while he does tidy up some of the narrative's looser ends—he also lends it substantially more doctrinal clarity. In the process, he subtly shifts *The Fool of Quality* from a simple, secular sentimental novel into a text which uses sentiment to reinforce its didacticism by means of Methodist doctrine.

The Fool of Quality received another of its desired abridgements in 1804 as *Harry Clinton: A Tale for Youth*, edited by Mary Hays. Hays—a compatriot of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, whose own *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) displays an intimate knowledge of what it means to suffer excessively from sensibility—nevertheless mitigates the more dangerously extreme and excessive tendencies found in the full novel in favor of presenting it as a didactic story for children. Born in 1759 to a family of Dissenters, Hays would not necessarily have

balked at Brooke's more iconoclastic beliefs: as a young woman, she corresponded with Baptist preacher Robert Robinson, became involved with a number of politically-active Dissenting thinkers, and eventually became a Unitarian as well as an identifiable figure within the circle of English Jacobins (G. L. Walker 13–17). Hays's edits are motivated by the belief "that writers whose irregular genius has not permitted them to polish all the riches they possess, may be happily explored by others" (Brooke, *Harry Clinton* v). *The Fool of Quality*, she argues, abounds with this "real genius and genuine feeling," but is "so obscured by fanaticism and extravagance, that it has sunk into neglect." But Brooke's text can be not only useful through its genius and feeling, but in presenting to youth "a history of the practical education and culture of the *heart*," to fill in the gaps left by increasingly pragmatic works like Maria Edgeworth's *Practical Education* (*Harry Clinton* v–vi). In more modern times, Barbara Benedict has referred to *The Fool of Quality* as a text "designed to educate children and self-consciously pedagogical," but Brooke's original text—while certainly pedagogical in inclination, and deliberately naïve in style—is meant to attract and educate readers of all ages, not merely children (Benedict 60). We can infer from Hays's comments that the original's pointed zeal, presumably in both form and content, was enough to cloud its potential as a tool for the sentimental education of youth, but she adds that the amended version she proposes need not "be disdained by persons of maturer age, who may extract from it both profit and delight" (*Harry Clinton* vi). Here again, by looking at Hays's own description of what her version retained and what it omitted, we can see what elements she identifies as excessive, inappropriate, or somehow inhibiting the inculcation of feeling.

Hays has attempted to preserve the "air of romantic wildness" in the original tale, which she finds pleasing, and the dialogue, "particularly in the first part of the story, seldom required

alteration” (*Harry Clinton* vi–vii). At the same time, “with the sentiment I have sometimes taken liberties: the style is throughout compressed and rendered less obsolete” (*Harry Clinton* vii).

The religious or ideological edge of Brooke’s language, then, does not seem to be as troubling as his sheer long-windedness or occasionally baroque style, but we must remember that the first half of *The Fool of Quality* which she saw as needing less alteration also struck contemporary reviewers as considerably less extreme than the second. Gary Kelly interprets Hays’ interest in adapting the novel as a way of participating in a new movement of moral and rational children’s literature, lending it a post-Revolutionary perspective in its excision of “narrowness”: “In the general principles of morality,” Hays concludes, “care has been taken to avoid the narrowness of system, or the language of a party” (Kelly 247; *Harry Clinton* vii). This comment sheds more light on the generalized “fanaticism and extravagance” that she mentions earlier: Methodism and mysticism are both fair game for exclusion, as is Brooke’s critique of governmental corruption. Both have been neutralized as much as possible, not eliminated altogether.

Care has also been taken “in selecting those incidents which may touch the heart, and awaken its purest affections,” and “still more solicitude has been employed not to inflame the senses, or rouse prematurely the passions of youth.” While narrow ideas have been more or less easily excised from the text, the potential of Brooke’s feelings to “inflame”—as opposed to the safer mission of “culturing” the heart—is problematic, and the most specific threat posed by the original text that Hays cites. The novel’s “purest” affections are admirable, but the intensity and decorum of the whole is suspect.

Indeed, virtually all the reviewers of Hays’s abridgement agree that the unexpurgated novel was in dire need of editing. Once “its length, its intricate story, or its licentious descriptions” have been safely removed, *The Literary Journal* wondered, “what could be put into

the hands of the inexperienced with more advantage, than such well-drawn pictures of life?”⁴¹

The *Monthly Review*, which so objected to Brooke’s enthusiasm and fanaticism in its reviews of the novel’s last three volumes, thinks that overall the compression “certainly contains various and important lessons of virtue and benevolence” (Mans). Nevertheless, it wonders “whether some traits in the character of Mr. Fenton and his pupil Harry will not still be considered as bordering on excess in point of generosity, we shall leave others to determine; as there appears little danger of stimulating youth to transgress the bounds of moderation in the active duties of charity.” Excess, it seems, cannot be as cleanly excised as other reviewers assume, although not all remaining instances of it are bad. Excess of generosity is much less of a threat to vulnerable youth than excess religiosity, and the “bounds of moderation” are more firm in some cases than in others. The enormous difference in background and beliefs between Brooke’s two self-appointed editors also demonstrates the breadth of the novel’s qualified appeal: on one hand, the founder of Methodism; on the other, a dissenting feminist novelist. Wesley chose to revise the novel in order to better channel the sentiment into the evocation of Methodist sentiments, whereas Hays’s abridgement seeks to rid it of its political slants, rendering it an appropriate, didactic story for children. While neither camp agrees about which components of the book, besides perhaps its sheer bulk, make it so objectionable, there also are no critics or readers willing to give the text a pass; its fervency of religious belief makes it too much.

⁴¹ The reviewer continues to note that Mr. Brookes [*sic*] was overtaken by a “deprivation of reason” at the end of the second volume, which “caused him frequently to waver in his plan; and the last three volumes, which were written during lucid intervals, frequently betray the wanderings of a distempered imagination” which prompts his “long religious discussions.” (“Harry Clinton. A Tale for Youth”)

In the *Lounger* No. 20, penned by *The Man of Feeling* author Henry Mackenzie in 1785, popular novels—“particularly... that species called the *Sentimental*”—are critiqued for their “perversion from a moral or instructive purpose.” In particular, Mackenzie’s chief complaint against the sentimental novel revolves around its questionable morality: “In the enthusiasm of sentiment there is much the same danger as in the enthusiasm of religion,” he writes, “of substituting certain impulses and feelings of what may be called a visionary kind, in the place of real practical duties, which in morals, as in theology, we might not improperly denominate *good works*” (Mackenzie, “*Lounger* No. 20” 78–9). Even though Mackenzie writes in general terms about an entire genre, he parallels the dangers of enthusiastic sentiment with those of enthusiastic religion, alleging that both serve to distract the reader from “real practical duties” or “*good works*,” with “visionary” urges acting as a distraction. *The Fool of Quality* does not suffer from a lack of good works or practical action—its hero is nothing if not active and vigorous—but the novel’s critics detected the same associations between enthusiastic sentiment and religious enthusiasm that Mackenzie does. The *Critical Review* frames the novel’s religious qualities as too closely intermingled with its ability to stimulate emotion for the reader’s safety. “Many parts of [the last three volumes] are such as to provoke tears which cannot be restrained, and inspire horror which is not easy to be shaken off,” the critic writes. “The effects, however, of this magic are not of long duration.... At one time the author appears religious even to madness, and we are almost ready to adore the splendid errors of his mind; at others, he becomes superstitious even beneath contempt, and we turn from his page at once with pity and disgust” (“XIII. The Fool of Quality” 459). The text’s ability to move the reader is unquestioned: it provokes unrestrained, uncontrollable tears, and even horror. At the same time, Brooke’s extreme religiosity—here cited as something almost admirable, and certainly tempting, in its profound error—is juxtaposed

against his unorthodox, irrational devotion. Given how effective and vigorous the feelings portrayed within *The Fool of Quality* are, their cozy proximity to what many saw as erroneous beliefs worthy only of contempt, pity, and disgust shows how unpleasant the workings of powerful emotion can become when turned to particular, peculiar ends.

CHAPTER THREE

SENTIMENTAL MARTYRS AND SENTIMENTAL VOLUNTEERS: DETACHING
FEELING FROM EXCESSIVE SENTIMENTALITY IN NOVELS OF THE 1770S-1790S

Following in the wake of wildly successful books like Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768), Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1766-1769), and Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), the 1770s and 1780s saw the publication of a growing number of increasingly derivative, increasingly pulpy, and increasingly lachrymose novels that all declared themselves to be "sentimental." Writers like Sterne, Brooke, and Mackenzie embraced the messy excesses of sentimentality and all-encompassing feeling without significant critical or cultural backlash aimed at this particular aspect of their novels, but—as more and more of what the *Monthly Review* impatiently dismissed in 1781 as Yorick-inspired "insipid trash, called *Sentimental Letters, Sentimental Effusions, &c. &c*" flooded the literary market—commentators raised objections to the quantity of sentimental prose being published, its dubious quality, and, perhaps most of all, the questionable values and morality that such texts encouraged in their eager and impressionable readers (B..d..k 65). "We should," Catherine Talbot cautions in a posthumously-published 1772 essay, "most strictly guard against all Excess of [sentimental] Delicacy; and though we cannot help feeling Things, in the quickest Manner, for the Moment, we should arm our Reason against our Feeling, and not permit Imagination to indulge it, and nurse it up into a Misery: for Misery, if indulged, it will certainly occasion" (37). Talbot's model of excessive sentimentality as an inclination requiring constant monitoring to avoid coalescing into a source of outright misery is one that will be increasingly echoed by critics through the end of the century. Talbot does not argue against the native impulses of sentiment itself; feelings, she

clarifies, are natural and unavoidable. Excess is the enemy to be guarded against, and it is “we”—ourselves, the feelers—who must take responsibility for internally monitoring the motions and the intensity of our own feelings, as well as determining the benchmark of excess itself. Talbot paints excessive feeling as a self-cultivated phenomenon that remains firmly within the realm of individual control. This same notion of sentimentality as a mode to be individually mastered or controlled, avoiding the kind of “insipid trash” that helps stimulate too much of it, slowly rises to dominance throughout the late 1770s, 1780s, and 1790s over the previous idea of sentimentality as a mode anchored by communal, social sympathy.

As I’ll go on to explore in this chapter, novels, essays, and periodicals of the 1780s and 1790s shift the burden of managing excessive feeling—whether seen as originating from genuine temperamental sensibility, or self-indulgent self-generation—onto the shoulders of the individual, who is no longer automatically assumed to be experiencing such feeling in the midst of a social, sympathetic community. Sentimentality, in other words, comes to be seen as something that one should learn to dominate, not be dominated *by*. Novels increasingly present incapacitating emotionality (introduced via sentiment) as a matter of choice, not inevitability: the Advertisement to Helen Maria Williams’ *Julia, a Novel* (1790) asserts that its purpose is “to trace the danger arising from the uncontroled indulgence of strong affections” which occurs “when, disapproved by reason, and uncircumscribed by prudence, they involve even the virtuous in calamity; since, under the dominion of passion, if the horror of remorse may be avoided, misery at least is inevitable; and, though we do not become the slaves of vice, we must yield ourselves the victims of sorrow” (iii). Here, dangerous sentimentality is construed as the direct result of unchecked indulgence, capable of engulfing even the uncorrupted and the virtuous when reason and prudence are ignored. While reason and passion are familiar polarities within

eighteenth-century thought (and at least as old as the winged horses of reason and passion pulled by Plato's charioteer), Williams specifically evokes them as if the readers she seeks to warn have a choice: they can remain in control of their affections, reason, and prudence, thereby guarding against calamity, or allow passion to dominate and become the passive, unfortunate "victims of sorrow." Furthermore, it is again "we" who are responsible for acting against uncontrolled passions; both Williams and Talbot invoke the collective when urging readers to protect themselves from unrestrained feeling, whereas less than a decade earlier, "we" were the ones who writers urged to maximally indulge in the sympathetic communion of feeling. Passionate feeling has become something that must be moderated and regulated by the individual subject, even though the joys of sensibility and fellow-feeling nevertheless continue to be celebrated throughout society at large. Unlike earlier sentimentalists—think, for example, of Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*, who feels as much as possible for as many people as possible, and whose exalted delicacy is celebrated despite his inevitable early death—late-century novelists like Williams use characters like Julia to expose the unpleasant consequences of their excessive feelings, which range from the undesirable (manipulation, abuse, and social isolation) to the fatal. Authors no longer celebrate a sentimental life because of its ephemerality, but warn against it as an irresponsible indulgence and dangerous lapse of self-control.

In this chapter, I will examine how, as the eighteenth century enters its last quarter, the most humble, anonymous sentimental novels become a staging ground for the battles over emotional self-absorption and self-regulation that so preoccupy the zeitgeist. Sentimental titles like *Excessive Sensibility*, *The Curse of Sentiment*, and *Plain Sense* announce their own participation in the debate over excessive feeling, and their self-referential gestures toward their status as contemporary novels of feeling allow them to build from the lessons of their recent

predecessors. Here, I model the transition that is unevenly taking place between extreme sentimentality's portrayal as sought-after and desirable in Chapters 1 and 2 and as something to be cautioned against and condemned in the novels of this chapter as a series of waves that irregularly overlap and overtake each other. The accelerating vigor of fictional and cultural responses to sentimental novels creates an unfolding series of reactions to reactions, all building from the immediate, immense popularity of sentimental novels of the 1760s and early 1770s. Whatever their titles might seem to indicate, this wave of novels does not renounce all of the tender values and mawkish tropes that characterize their sentimental forebears; movements in popular fiction are not dictated by some unseen literary authority omnipotently analyzing market trends, so while some authors choose to avoid excessive sentimentality by removing any whiff of religious or political zealotry, others denounce the precise political and social systems that they see as fueling the fire. Each new micro-generation attempts to improve upon the previous one not by a process of exclusion, but by incorporating new elements—here, a focus on emotional self-discipline and objectifying one's own feelings—alongside of the old ones. In this way, the sentimental novel remains recognizably sentimental throughout the eighteenth century, despite all of the different directions, discourses, and forms that it pursues; as it reacts to reactions to reactions, however, it gets progressively shaggier and shaggier, accreting even seemingly far-fetched elements like *The Fool of Quality*'s notorious religious enthusiasm onto its already considerable bulk. In its most recent iteration, the sentimental novel reacts to critiques of sentimental excess by arguing that sentimentality is a virtue that should not be allowed to flourish unchecked: its excesses may be curbed by social isolation; self-discipline and reason; or the objectification of one's own feelings, allowing them to be controlled and regarded with a proper sense of proportion. When excess is no longer framed as the inevitable outcome of

communal sympathy, and sentimental characters are transformed into figures of emotional self-management, mainstream critiques of sentimentality often mask broader critiques of female education, morality, fashion, and manners.

Smith, Stoicism, and Critical Background

The influential groundwork established by philosophers like Adam Smith and David Hume in the middle of the eighteenth century laid out popular models of sympathy that fueled the widely-held idea of sentimentality as a mode that encouraged the collective communion of feeling, with that spirit of collectivity sometimes expanding to provoke threatening or dangerous actions. But Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* also clearly articulates and advocates for self-control, encouraging feeling individuals to reign in and moderate their own sympathetic impulses. Much as popular perceptions about sentimentality itself shift dramatically from the 1770s through the 1790s, allowing progressively harsher waves of criticism to emerge from the continuing reassessment of sentiment's once-touted virtues, contemporary readers of Smith shifted their interpretations of his work to stress the role of self-command and self-control. Both Adam Smith and David Hume base their discussions of sympathy on the figure of the fundamentally isolated individual. The union of actor and spectator is ultimately what's sought, but the medium for obtaining this enviable connection is purely imaginary: for Smith, it is "imagination alone" that allows us to place ourselves in the position of another, and we remain fundamentally isolated with, and within, our own feelings (11). The gap between even the most skilled actor and the feelings of even the most sympathetic audience is one that can never be completely closed, and it increasingly seems as though late-eighteenth-century literature acknowledges its inevitability: novels represent the idealized union of men and women of feeling with a like-minded community of sympathizers less and less frequently, and the gap between

them is underscored instead. Smith speaks of the necessity of flattening his emotions in order to communicate them, noting that relief can only be found in the “entire concord of the affections of the spectators,” but even that comfort is withheld from many of the subjects of later sentimental fictions: narrators and other characters no longer offer sympathy to characters suffering stoically beneath the oppressive weight of their own keen feelings, arguing instead that self-control, not recourse to sympathy, is what’s needed (27).

In fact, Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is full of praise for the virtues of self-command. As Julie Ellison argues throughout *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion*, stoicism presents an attractive counterpoint to the indulgences of sentimentality. Though Ellison focuses on the origins of this dichotomy in seventeenth-century British politics in Restoration drama, she argues that Adam Smith stages moral sentiment by evoking “the neoclassical scenario of the Roman Stoic surrounded by his sympathetic friends,” as Smith somewhat impatiently condemns the proclivity of overeager sentimentalists to anxiously trouble themselves “about the world in the moon” (Ellison 10–11). Ellison goes on to focus on the political, cultural, and economic resonances of various forms of sympathy, but her work highlights a key aspect of Smith’s work that I emphasize in this chapter: that the exchange of sentiments in Smithian sympathy is predicated upon a high degree of self-control and self-governance. Smith contrasts the “perfect apathy” of Stoicism, which endeavors “not merely to moderate, but to eradicate all our private, partial, and selfish affections... even the sympathetic and reduced passions of the impartial spectator,” with the demands of Nature, which has provided “the real or even the imaginary presence of the impartial spectator, the authority of the man within the breast,” to “overawe” and moderate the “too vehement” passions that tend to arise from hope, fear, joy, and sorrow (Smith 344–5). These powerful sentiments,

“notwithstanding all the reasonings of Stoicism, produce upon each individual, according to the degree of his actual sensibility, their proper and necessary effects,” but the “judgments of the man within the breast... might be a good deal affected by those reasonings, and that great inmate might be taught by them to attempt to overawe all our private, partial, and selfish affections into a more or less perfect tranquillity” (345). Smith’s description emphasizes that the “man within the breast” may be “taught,” and is receptive to “reasonings”; some properly stoical self-control, in other words, may be just the defense that the feeling subject needs to maintain balance and avoid excess, but it is a quality that can be learned as well as inborn. “What noble propriety and grace,” Smith writes, “do we feel in the conduct of those who... exert that recollection and self-command which constitute the dignity of every passion, and which bring it down to what others can enter into!” (29). Self-command is necessary to modulate the frequency of emotions down to a communicable volume, as well as to quash more aesthetically unpleasant demonstrations of indelicate, “clamorous” grief. Smith also praises “that reserved, that silent and majestic sorrow, which discovers itself only in the swelling of the eyes, in the quivering of the lips and cheeks”; the physiognomy of restrained emotion, then, is more pleasing than excessive display, and reinforces the pathos of dramatic sentimental gestures such as the single tear (29).

Notwithstanding Smith’s celebration of this moderation, it plays less of a role in pre-1770s sentimental texts. While novels rarely, if ever, cite the philosophical sources for their ideas about sentimentality and sympathy, the opposing strains that Smith distinguishes enter and reenter late-century sentimental fictions as two polarities that keep each other in check: self-control may be employed to restrain excessive passions, and consequently restore the socially-sanctioned exchange of feeling; and to feel sentiment in the first place, one must relax enough to be swayed by the emotional force of another’s vicissitudes. But as the century progresses, we

see the balance between these two sides of the equation shift: emphasis falls more heavily on the necessary role of self-control, and less on the virtues of socialized feeling. In the novels that I will discuss in this chapter, authors aren't attempting to completely disavow the social power of feeling itself, or to denounce the pleasures of fellow-feeling, but to moderate its power when taken to the extremes of either crippling the sentimental subject or having potentially incendiary feelings catch and spread among spectators. To avoid this solitary sentimental implosion or creeping sentimental contagion, many of these texts choose not to reject the sentimentality advertised in their titles and subtitles, but to instill within their narratives either a veneer of moral didacticism with the disclaimers of a cautionary tale, or characters with a spirit of self-regulation that follows Smith's internal, impartial spectator.

The profusion of "insipid trash" that the *Monthly Review* found so nauseating began in the 1770s to fill the void in the market left in the wake of immensely popular sentimental novels like Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768) and Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771), and continued unabated through the 1790s.⁴² The publication dates of the texts that I will be examining in this chapter range across this thirty-year span, but I will not be arguing that they trace a chronologically-ordered, clearly-delineated transformation in thoughts and approaches towards excess. Indeed, it is difficult to distinguish an earlier sentimental novel from a later sentimental novel based purely upon the qualities of its prose; the most significant difference is usually found in the level of moralizing didacticism detectable in the voice of the narrator describing the particular errors and troubles caused by sentimental excess, as well as the degree of cautionary or condemnatory criticism detectable in the responses to it modeled by characters within the text.

⁴² *A Sentimental Journey* went through three printings during its first year alone, and the first unlicensed sequels appeared in 1769; *The Man of Feeling* went through two printings during its first year, and was published in a French translation in 1773; Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* spanned 1766-1769.

Instead, the wave-like progression of sentimentality during this period, where we see the initial reactions to Sterne, Mackenzie *et al.* yield to once- and twice-removed reactions to *those* reactions, means that each new novel reacts to the ones that have come immediately before, making novels like 1789's anonymous *The Man of Feeling* many generations removed from Mackenzie's 1771 *Man of Feeling*. This process of progressive revision and steady evolution is shared by the multiple generic branchings that we find taking place in prose fiction at the beginning of the nineteenth century: the domestic novel, moral and educational tales like *Sandford and Merton*, and the supposedly staunchly sentimental texts discussed below. (In the next chapter, I will explore the intersection of the sentimental tradition with the Gothic in Ann Radcliffe's novels. As I will argue, the Gothic does not arise to replace or overwrite the tired clichés of the sentimental, but provides a literary playground where the tropes and values of the sentimental can be revived and refreshed by those of the sublime, prompting yet another gentle progression of the sentimental.) While this kind of generic diversification certainly begins to take place before the 1770s, and occurs independently of the developments in the sentimental that I discuss in this chapter, the separations and jointures that we find in and around the sentimental novel at this time—its absorption of some of the didacticism of domestic fiction targeted towards women, for example, and slight touches of the Gothic that predate the full revitalization triggered by Ann Radcliffe—can be seen as part of a similar developmental process, where popular genres and modes build from and respond to each other in a common quest to channel affect.

Given this increasing diversity within the sentimental, I'll use the self-reflexive nature of excessive sentimentality to guide my selection of texts, and examine those whose titles either advertise or purport to disavow the sentimentality that lies within; what could be more exemplary

than novels whose very titles advertise their positions on feeling? As modern scholars like G.J. Barker-Benfield are fond of pointing out, one of the sure signposts of sentimentality's exhaustion was the cluster of novels published with "titles that anticipated Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*: *Excessive Sensibility* (1787), *The Illusions of Sentiment* (1788), *Arubia: The Victim of Sensibility* (1790), *Errors of Sensibility* (1793)" (360–1).⁴³ But as often as this series of titles is quoted nearly verbatim by critics, the critiques that the text themselves offer of sentimentality and sensibility, and the correctives they recommend, are more subtle and vary more dramatically than their titles indicate or most critics acknowledge. Barker-Benfield reads the appearance of titles like *Excessive Sensibility* largely in terms of Wollstonecraft's arguments in *Rights of Woman* while citing Marilyn Butler's interpretation of these texts as novels of education.⁴⁴ In this chapter I also intend to show the elisions made by literary histories like Janet Todd's, who in *Sensibility: An Introduction* claims that, by the end of the century, a consensus upon sensibility has been reached: "By the 1790s almost all serious novelists noted the selfishness, irrationality and amorality of the cult of sensibility," she writes (144). "It became almost obligatory to rail

⁴³ Barker-Benfield, of course, is not the first to connect these novels with Austen's later response; R.F. Brissenden, for example, cites her earlier parody in *Love and Friendship* (131). According to the *British Critic*: "the object of [*Sense and Sensibility*] is to represent the effects on the conduct of life of discreet, quiet good sense on one hand, and an over-refined and excessive sensibility on the other." (360–1). But while Austen's novel unquestionably finds thematic fuel in these novels, the assumption that sentimental novels published 20 or 30 years prior function as precise moral and ideological precursors offering exactly the same line of critique is one that I wish for this chapter to challenge. As I will go on to show, conceptions of "excessive" feeling vary as much as their prescribed antidotes.

⁴⁴ The sentimental novel's increasing emphasis on self-control and discipline is often identified as particularly feminine, and correlated with the increasing critique of women's sentimental education as inculcating dangerous weakness. While the work of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays is one powerful and important response to the kinds of novels examined in this chapter, the rise of domestic fiction during this time period is certainly linked to the same concerns about self-discipline: if crippling sentimentality is nothing more than an affectation taught to young girls, modes of education should be carefully considered. As will be clear in the examples that follow, the sentimental novel has a heavy predisposition toward overt moralizing; while eighteenth-century critics of the novel's morality allege that the books exploit sentimentality, using it to produce and train unmanageable emotions in naïve, uncritical readers, a great many novels contain explicit moral admonitions about the dangers of sentimental indulgence, using it to advocate more general principles about the value of reason, education, and self-control.

against that ‘most fatal poison,’ whatever the author actually constructed in the novel... Clear sentimentalists degrade sentiment, and sentimental novelists claim not to be writing sentimental novels.” Markman Ellis dismisses the neatness of this reading, pointing towards James Gillray’s “New Morality” as evidence of sentimentality’s ongoing political charge. Ellis also convincingly reads Harriet Thomson’s *Excessive Sensibility* as depicting the subversive social dangers seen as attendant upon sensibility near the turn of the century (213), but he neglects to note the even more obvious peculiarities about the novel: that *Excessive Sensibility* has few tears, and even fewer demonstrations of sentimental excess, contained within its pages. By paying attention to what these relevant, once-popular texts actually argue and represent—as opposed to merely what their titles seem to claim—we can draw a more complex picture of changing end-of-the-century attitudes towards enthusiastic sentimentality, and recommended correctives for it, than if we merely stick to the well-trodden paths of Richardson, Sterne, *et al.*

The influence of growing pre-Revolutionary turmoil in France can also be detected in many novels’ increasing interest in minimizing feelings that could potentially reach a revolutionary level of fervor. As a result, contemporary writers increasingly link the dubious effects of sentimentality to questions of national pride. Critics often frame their objections to crippling sentimentality in terms of preserving the strength of the nation’s character: too much feeling is framed as an explicit threat to the constitutional strength and robustness of countless British individuals, requiring reason and discipline to counteract amoral European literary—and presumably, social—excessiveness. British critics are particularly sensitive to literary echoes of Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), which serves as an emblem for excessive-to-the-point-of-suicide emotionality that is frequently replicated in sentimental novels of the 1780s and 1790s. (“Dangerous indulgence! poisonous sensibility! How many victims to sin and folly

has that one publication produced?” interjects the narrator of Agnes Bennett’s *Juvenile Indiscretions*, before an “infatuated youth” plunges, “with Werter in his bosom,” into the sea (Bennett 4: 192–4.) By and large, British critics and authors want their readers to defend themselves against the Wertherian model of indomitable feeling, and refer to the wan fragility affected by men and women of feeling as an enervating problem that threatens the strength of the nation.⁴⁵ This generation of the sentimental novel does intersect, chronologically speaking, with the Jacobin novel; one of the authors discussed below is Helen Maria Williams, whose sentimental novel *Julia* precedes what Gary Kelly identifies as the sentimental radicalism of her *Letters from France*; another, who stridently argues for rationality and education as counterbalances to sentimentality, is Jane West, singled out by Kevin Gilmartin as a prominent author of a number of counterrevolutionary, anti-Jacobin romances (Gilmartin 179). Both Kelly’s studies on women writers and the Jacobin novel, however, pass over the kinds of boilerplate prose that I focus on in this chapter in favor of those that are far more overtly “revolutionary” in their demands for and embrace of political and cultural change, and Gilmartin’s book on counterrevolutionary writing similarly skips over the sentimental novel in favor of anti-Jacobin works. The texts in this chapter are still recognizably consistent members of the sentimental tradition that straggles outward from Sterne and Mackenzie, not incendiary tracts of a feminized or in any way explicitly political cultural revolution led by a professional middle class; they can be read as the ripples, as it were, that precede the sea change of the heavily politicized sentiment explored by Wollstonecraft, Hays, and so many others. This late-century background of social and political uncertainty may also have contributed to the portrayal

⁴⁵ For more on the reception of *Werther* in Britain, see Schiffman and Conger, “The Sorrows of Young Charlotte.”

of sentiments, like their feelers, as having the status and volition of individual subjects; given the increasing sense of political instability in France, it's not surprising that British authors choose to focus on subduing the passions by assigning them to the individual and sternly lecturing readers on the individual's responsibility for their care and grooming, instead of imagining them as roaming about freely and collectively.

Thomson's *Excessive Sensibility*

Harriet Thomson's *Excessive Sensibility* received mixed reviews after its release in 1787. Thomson, the second wife of periodical writer William Thomson and described only by an 1816 biographical dictionary as "very highly esteemed among her friends for her virtues and talents," was also the author of 1788's *Fatal Follies*, 1791's *The Labyrinths of Life*, and 1804's *The Pride of Ancestry; or, Who Is She?*, none of which made as large of a splash as her first novel (Bayne; Watkins, Shoberl, and Upcott 346). *The Critical Review* saw *Excessive Sensibility* as entirely unremarkable: "not so excellent as to deserve great commendation, or so trifling as to excite contempt" ("Excessive Sensibility" 389). Other critics specifically seized upon the disclaimer appearing in the dedication at the beginning of the novel, wherein the author claims that the book is intended "to exhibit a true picture of the depravity of modern manners" (Thomson 1: iii). "We are sorry to say," the *General Magazine and Impartial Review* wrote of the novel, "we believe the exhibition too just not to excite contempt for those numerous characters in the higher ranks of life whose portraits are here meant to be displayed," and the *Monthly Review* wrote that some characters "are delineated with a bold and glowing pencil, and in a manner that sufficiently indicates [the author's] acquaintance with the human heart" ("Excessive Sensibility"; AB 529). The accuracy of (depending upon which review you read) Thomson's portrayal of manners, practices, and character renders the novel engaging, but the avowed morality of its sentimentality

draws more attention. The *Monthly* praises the novel's morality, particularly when "so few [novels] have any moral at all, and when even some not only idly and unprofitably waste the time, but also leave bad impressions on the heart, of the young, unwary, and inexperienced reader" (530). The *European Magazine, and London Review* also agrees that the novel is not "*unimportant in its moral*" and accurately depicts the "dissipated and dissolute manners of modern high life" ("Excessive Sensibility" 254). Furthermore, it observes:

the title of the piece is so palpable a *misnomer*, that the author repeatedly affects to despise *sentiment*, and *sentimental novels*; nor do we perceive throughout his own work any mark of "*sensibility*" that can possibly be called "*excessive*," unless it be that of the heroine of the piece, an amicable and unjustly-suspected wife, on being renounced by a beloved but deluded husband, flies, in a state of temporary phrenzy, to the arms of her father for protection; or that the villainous author of this calamity challenges his quondam best friend for having been instrumental in bringing his infamy to light; meets him, and *instead of pistoling him*—stung with remorse—*pistols himself*. (254)

Here, the reviewer articulates something consistently overlooked by other reviewers and modern critics: that *Excessive Sensibility*, despite its title and trappings, is neither particularly excessive nor particularly sentimental, nor is it—unlike the last few novels I will discuss in this chapter—overtly didactic. The novel's tone is so unexpected not only because it defies the expectations established by its title and apparent genre, but also the traditional paradox exploited by its peers: most sentimental novels of its ilk claim to reject the sentimentality that they exploit in order to retain their most feeling-fixated readers (like Williams' *Julia*, whose introduction is cited above), but *Excessive Sensibility* sees no pressing need to languish in its own tears. In its characters, it *does* produce a model or two of excessive feeling (which are shown to have their own negative consequences), but its divergence from the boilerplate trappings of sentimental novels—something which readers at the time of its publication, as now, expect to find—highlights the increasingly loose relationship between content and form that we find in novels purporting to

condemn their own feeling. In other words, *Excessive Sensibility* is an unusually unsentimental sentimental novel.

Although it departs from its sentimental forebears in its relative lack of excess, *Excessive Sensibility* is far from the first novel to advertise its moral as a justification for its portrayal of sentimentality. Its purpose, the dedication claims, is only to exhibit and warn against modern depravity—it is, according to that introduction, entirely instructional and educational, teaching its readers to avoid the extreme sensations touted in its title. *The Man of Feeling*'s author Henry Mackenzie lamented in the *Lounger* No. 20 (1785) that popular novels are frequently perverted from a moral or instructive purpose to one “directly the reverse” (Mackenzie, “*Lounger* No. 20” 78). “I am not,” he explains, “disposed to carry the idea of the dangerous tendency of all Novels quite so far as some rigid moralists have done. As promoting a certain refinement of mind, they operate like all other works of genius and feeling,” and novels’ realism allows them to speak directly to the reader through their representation of familiar situations. Instead, the “principal danger of Novels, as forming a mistaken and pernicious system of morality, seems to me to arise from that contrast between one virtue or excellence and another, that war of duties which is to be found in many of them, particularly in that species called the *Sentimental*.” Duties are set in opposition to each other, and virtues subdivided then put in conflict; ultimately, the “over-strained delicacy of the persons represented, always leads them to act from the motive least obvious, and therefore generally the least reasonable” (“*Lounger* No. 20” 79). As Margaret Cohen notes in her discussion of the nineteenth-century French novel, the paradigmatic sentimental novel “catches its protagonists between two moral imperatives, each valid in its own right, but which meet in a situation of mutual contradiction” (34). Unlike the French novels that Cohen discusses, however, British sentimental novels of the type that Mackenzie targets use their

self-created moral quandaries as an entirely contrived mechanism to advance plot, creating simulated problems that Mackenzie argues could reasonably be eliminated. More bothersome than this artificial tension to Mackenzie, though, is the questionable morality of excessive sentiment: “In the enthusiasm of sentiment there is much the same danger as in the enthusiasm of religion, of substituting certain impulses and feelings of what may be called a visionary kind, in the place of real practical duties, which in morals, as in theology, we might not improperly denominate *good works*,” he writes, calling to mind the frenzy of critical allegations surrounding the morality of Henry Brooke’s *The Fool of Quality*. Imaginary obligations come to overshadow real ones, and unreasonable (but sentimental) motivations overshadow more rational ones. “That creation of refined and subtile feeling,” Mackenzie concludes, “has an ill effect, not only on our ideas of virtue, but also on our estimate of happiness. That sickly sort of refinement creates imaginary evils and distresses, and imaginary blessings and enjoyments, which embitter the common disappointments, and depretiate [*sic*] the common attainments of life” (“Lounger No. 20” 79–80). Mackenzie accurately summarizes the most common objections to the sentimental novel—a lack of proportionality that distorts the reader’s ability to objectify and measure his or her own feelings, the creation and overinflation of tedious sentimentalized quarrels imagined into existence—but refuses to condemn the genre wholesale. Instead, he sees sentimental enthusiasm as dangerous, but only insofar as it deviates from practicality and reasonable behavior, and steals the luster from “common,” everyday life. Mackenzie posits that “the truths of Reason, or the laws of Principle” can ably counteract the “intricacies of Sentiment, or the dreams of Sensibility” (“Lounger No. 20” 80). Here, Mackenzie’s focus on the influence of fiction suggests that the key moral concern lies in the effect that novels produce on their readers, not in their form, format, or generic details. He makes a distinction between merely describing feelings, and

seeking to reproduce them, which is a thin line walked (with varying degrees of success) by many later sentimental novelists who attempt to carefully depict often overly-intense feelings without falling into the trap of compelling the reader to feel their effects just as keenly. While Mackenzie doesn't completely absolve novels of their responsibility to uphold ideals of decency and morality, their readers are not passive victims either: they can choose to mitigate their sentimental enthusiasm by exercising their reason and principle, and remaining grounded in their real—i.e. not self-created or imagined—lives. The “enthusiasm” and moral intricacy engendered by sentimental novels are preventable ailments, and one of the sentimental novel's primary sins (for Mackenzie, at least) is how it blurs the readers' ability to regulate, and exercise control, over extremity.

Excessive Sensibility, as the *European Magazine* noted, contains virtually none of the rhapsodic incitements to feeling that mark other novels of its type. Instead, it focuses on the negative ramifications of characters' sentimental behavior. They are not helpless victims of their own feelings, but of the stiltedly sentimentalized manners that they have been taught to follow and expect from others. At the beginning of *Excessive Sensibility*, the newly-married Lady St. Laurence receives advice from family and friends about proper conduct in married life. Julia's husband was chosen for her by her father, and her father portentously advises her to attend to “domestic duties” in preference to “the levities of the *gay* and *fashionable world*, for in these two epithets are comprehended more vices and miseries than I am able to name” (1: 19). Women, according to Julia's father, are saddled with maintaining elaborate rules of conduct to ensure their husbands' constancy, and must remain “submissive, fond, mild, even tempered, and faithful,” while seasoning their behavior with “a spice of humour and caprice” (1: 20–21). The world of fashion, and these complex rules of feminine conduct, prove to be the antagonists of

happiness in the novel: the naïve Julia's corruption is undertaken as a pet project by a coterie of bored London rakes and female members of the *ton*, while her husband is worked up into a rage in response to his wife's purported infidelity. *Excessive Sensibility*'s plot reads far more like a cross between that of a Restoration comedy and *Othello* than that of a typical sentimental novel, and this resemblance is deliberately referenced within the text: Lady Susan, one of the chief participants in the plot against Julia's virtue, at one point reminds her co-conspirator that "Trifles, light as air / Are to the jealous, confirmation strong / As proofs of holy writ" (2: 27). But in this story, Julia's evident sensibility is the tool used to enable her own deception. Her father's system of stilted, sentimental education has been thorough: she and her sister exchange letters professing the joys of exchanging sympathy; her sister Cecilia is pleased to find a mysterious woman "fallen in my way," giving thanks to God "for having placed me in a situation to feel for, and also to relieve, the unhappy" (1: 106). In true sentimental form, of course, the stranger's plight seems to be understood more as an excuse to celebrate the pleasures of sympathy than as a potentially tragic event. This mysterious woman, named Eliza, tells her story to her receptive audience, noting that she only reveals it to those "of sensibility and feeling, like yourself" (1: 166). Eliza, in fact, cries not from her own sorrow, "but joy, to have found a heart possessed of sensibility to feel for her misfortunes" (1: 153). This shared basis of typified sentimentality—feeling only for others, not one's self, and using such rarified sensibility as a basis for forming intimate friendships—turns sentiment into an exclusive club full of inherently trustworthy members. Of course, there's no sure test to separate genuine sensibility from feigned, and this fact is exploited by the members of Lord St. Laurence's circle who wish to destroy his marriage purely from a mixture of boredom and light jealousy.

Henry Dillon, the rakish chief instigator, writes to a friend requesting “some idea of a sentimental courtship” in order to court the unsuspecting, sentimental Lady St. Laurence, “as I suppose mine must commence in that style, and end as all sentimental, platonic, nonsensical follies do, in a downright amour” (1: 92). His letters voice a vociferous scorn of sentiment and sentimental behavior: “I again tell you, hang sentiment! Preach no more. I do not live by rule, nor I believe shall I die by it, but whilst I am in existence, will be free as air. No shackles, no chains, but those of the god of love!” (1: 138). Still, he follows its pattern in order to best ensnare Julia, and “love” enters little into the equation. He furnishes her library with “a number of sentimental Novels... They make a lively impression on susceptible minds, and may be of use. An able General does not always take by storm, but undermines the works, and renders himself more service that way, than by open battle” (2: 15). The novel in no way condones such sentimental abuse—according to the dedication, after all, such a depiction is presented solely as a cautionary tale—but also makes clear that sentimental novels, particularly in the hands of young women not taught the proper ratio of sense and rationality to counterbalance their effects, can serve as educational tools that enervate their readers. According to Henry—unconsciously echoing Henry Mackenzie’s *Lounger* piece at times—such novels exacerbate sentimentality: they subtly infiltrate the reader, slyly insinuating their way into the heart and mind of their reader. Moreover, he recognizes the sentimental as a substantially codified, objectified form: he seemingly has no problems switching into “that style” in his relations with Julia, nor is his ability to feign a sentimental courtship questioned, lack of personal experience notwithstanding. He takes advantage of Julia’s novel-induced susceptibility while escorting her to the theater: “In the middle of the fourth act, after having shed abundance of tears, her Ladyship’s sensibility was wound up too high by the inimitable Siddons, and she fainted away in my arms, who sat directly

behind her, and happily caught her from falling” (1: 236). The credit for this coup, of course, belongs to the formidable dramatic talents of Sarah Siddons, but it is nevertheless Julia whose extraordinary sensibility is “wound up” to an insupportable pitch by the performance, “an abundance of tears” inciting—rather than relieving—her feelings.

Julia’s susceptibility to displays of sentimentality is the origin of the excessive sensibility of the title. “You, my dear,” counsels her sister Cecilia, “have a heart I well know, replete with too great a share of sensibility. This certainly, is a misfortune, as it renders our lives miserable. With only a common share of feeling, many occurrences would give pleasure, which too great sensibility refines into objects of misery” (2: 93). Later on, Julia laments that “My sister blames me, and says that I am the author of my own unhappiness, by indulging too quick a sensibility of temper” (2: 141). While Julia’s oversensitivity is exploited in order to manipulate her and her husband, her “too great sensibility” is the product of her father’s sentimental overprotection of her own inherent innocence, and her indulgence of her own feeling makes her the “author” of her own misery. Julia is also told that she is “too susceptible of the slightest inattention” (2: 49), and it is not her own innate sensibility that transforms everyday pleasures into miseries. Along these lines, a family friend writes to Lord St. Laurence:

your Lady inherits from the best of fathers, an excessive sensibility of temper, which must be productive of exquisite happiness, or exquisite pain. A mind that reflects, like hers, every impression of nature; that beats time, and corresponds to every tone of emotion and passion of those with whom she converses; that sympathizes with the feelings of every creature that lives; a mind so susceptible of various impressions, and formed... according to the model of nature, in all its native simplicity and elegance, and polished by art, as far as art can improve, but not thwart and pervert nature; such a spirit cannot long delight in the fopperies and artificialness of a life in London, without conforming to them, nor conform to them without losing that native dignity and grace which distinguished the sweet nymph of Laurel Vale. (1: 221–2)

Nowhere in Mr. Mordaunt's description is a condemnation of any of the qualities that he describes, and all of these features—a keen appreciation of nature and aesthetics, ready sympathy, “native simplicity and elegance”—are celebrated, without hesitation, in other sentimental novels of the period. Cecilia was raised to value the same qualities, and she (though admittedly not quite as naturally sensitive as her younger sister) writes of her calm, contented married life. Julia's sentimental inheritance, however, leads her to be excessively reactive—she does not create or initiate feelings or ideas of her own, only responds (in either extreme pleasure, or extreme pain) to others' provocations. She is the model late-century victim of her own sentimentality: susceptible to become the object of others' manipulations, without being able to objectify and control her own native sentimental response; she “reflects,” mirror-like, too perfectly the feelings of others, and seems to not experience the dampening (or, in Adam Smith's terms, “flattening”) of emotion normally required in order to facilitate the transfer of such exquisite feeling. Mr. Mordaunt actually presents two slightly different interpretations of the problem of excessive sensibility. One is a sensibility that presses too keenly on Julia's too-sensitive temper, both inherited from and instructed by her father. The other is a more generalized naïveté, the susceptibility of a sheltered country girl entering a sophisticated and corrupt society. The former is the type of excess hinted at in the title, and the kind of excessive sensibility assumed to be the subject of the novel's critique by most eighteenth-century and modern critics alike. The latter is the effective root of the novel's problems, and one that could have been easily avoided under a different, less sentimentalized plan of education. Ultimately, the novel hedges at its end, when readers might expect a broader statement about how excessive sensibility like Julia's might be prevented or mitigated: the novel does not advocate a different model of feminine education or reform, and instead chooses to soothe and prevent Julia's future

sentimental trauma by transplanting the newly-reconciled Lord and Lady St. Laurence to the countryside, where “they should live in the ancient hospitality, do good to their neighbours, become acquainted with their situations, and thence know how to promote their interests in parliament, and having their hearts, as it were, still at home; only visit London at stated seasons, and on particular occasions” (2: 218). (The novel spends its penultimate page quoting King James I on the beauties and virtues of rural life.) Thomson goes so far as to present a couple of models of individualized excessive sentimentality, as well as how it can be manipulated and affected. She does not, however, offer any suggestions for how such a trend might be prevented, besides a renewed attention to rural duties. Despite not proposing any bolder solution for its titular sensibility, the novel’s own lack of emotionality in its telling of Julia’s history is perhaps one of its most distinctive choices. Julia’s story is full of pathos and sadness, but Thomson chooses not to luxuriate in her pain in ways designed to wring tears from her readers. Instead, *Excessive Sensibility* keeps its distance from Julia’s sensibility, thereby giving her readers space to process—and, in turn, objectify and distance themselves from—her problematic emotion.

Dodd’s *The Curse of Sentiment*

Also published in 1787, Charles Dodd’s *The Curse of Sentiment* appears to fit into the role of a boilerplate sentimental novel with greater ease than *Excessive Sensibility*. Although virtually nothing is known about the author, today the text is typically cited along with *Excessive Sensibility* and *Illusions of Sentiment* as a novel that critiques the extreme actions and misery that come from the single-minded pursuit of one’s own feelings.⁴⁶ At the time of its publication,

⁴⁶ Although the anonymously-published novel received brief notices in the *Critical Review*, *English Review*, *Town and Country Magazine*, and *General Magazine and Impartial Review*, only the British Library catalogue associates

reviewers praised it as “pathetic and engaging,” told in a “simple” style that displays its sentiment (“The Curse of Sentiment”; D). “This is a pathetic and an interesting tale,” wrote the *Critical Review*; “the feelings are hurried away in commiseration of the distress; the heart is softened, but, we fear, not amended” (“The Curse of Sentiment.”). *The Curse of Sentiment*’s sentimental energy comes, it seems, at the expense of any moralizing or improving influence that it might have upon the involved reader. While the reviewer finds the plot far-fetched, and notes that “there is little novelty in the narrative,” the “distress is worked up with singular power and pathos.” Given the text’s ability to work on the emotions, the *English Review* critiques its morality: “by affecting the heart, both with incident and sentiment,” it is “rendered extremely interesting” (“ART. 33. The Curse of Sentiment.”). “After all,” the reviewer continues, “it may be considered as tender rather than moral; and, like a tragedy injudiciously conducted, excites terror and commiseration, without inspiring proportionable impressions of virtue.” It is possible that other novels successfully combine an involving narrative with “proportionable” virtue and morality, but *The Curse of Sentiment* falls squarely on the side of indulging too much in the overindulgent feelings that it purports to present for criticism.

The morality of the novel is further critiqued by the *General Magazine and Impartial Review*, which specifically compares it to Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther* because it contains “some of the popular arguments in favour of Suicide, without any thing, but the title-page, to reprobate their tendency” (“The Curse of Sentiment.” 254). As I noted earlier, the shadow of Goethe’s *Werther* falls heavily over British sentimental novels; even though *The Curse of Sentiment* contains no actual suicides, merely wasting away to the point of an elegant

it with Dodd; I could find no other information in period or modern sources about the author, who appears to be linked to no other publications.

premature death, the idea of suicide as the inevitable end point of unbearable sentiment is the subject of much critical angst.⁴⁷ Popular treatises on suicide discuss it using the same terms and language as that of excessive, uncontrolled feeling: suicide, like excessive sentimentality, “may be conceived to arise from a too strong impression made on the mind; which impression owes the excess of its energy either to the want of ‘all’ good principle, or to such a great ‘refinement’ of principle, as leads to false and pernicious conclusions” (Moore 1: 8). Like excessive feeling, suicide is prompted by a combination of overstimulated sensibility and a disproportionate, distorted view of the world, and stimulated by overrefinement. The moral writer, argues Charles Moore in his *Full Inquiry into the Subject of Suicide* (1790), “may acknowledge and feel the keen pangs of sensibility” and “yearn with pity on the distresses of others,” but he must nevertheless “direct these amiable effusions of the heart towards lawful objects... In a word, it is his desire to ‘discriminate’—to expel the poison, to eradicate the thorn that lurks amid the sweets of an ‘undistinguishing’ pity” (2: 124). Just like the *General Magazine and Impartial Review*’s criticism of Dodd for not reprobating the tendencies of strong feeling, Moore argues that authors of sentimental novels must provide fit channels, checks, and outlets for the feelings they incite, preserving the beauties of sentiment by eliminating the excess that can surround it. The “extravagancies of conduct” found in a novel like Goethe’s are “often thrown on poor nature,” yet “a wide distinction is to be made between national passions ‘ungoverned’ and

⁴⁷ David Hume’s notorious essay “On Suicide” was posthumously published in 1783 after having been clandestinely circulated in England and France for several decades. The editor of the 1783 edition justifies the essay’s publication by stating that notes have been added to the edition “intended to expose the sophistry contained in the original Essays, and may shew how little we have to fear from the adversaries of these great truths, from the pitiful figure which even Mr. Hume makes in thus violently exhausting his last strength in an abortive attempt to traduce or discredit them” (Hume, *Essays on Suicide* iv). Hume’s editor accompanies this essay with extracts from Rousseau’s *Julie*, thereby demonstrating how enmeshed philosophical and literary considerations of suicide had become in popular discourse. See Bartel for the development of concern over the alleged rash of suicides in late eighteenth-century Britain.

‘ungovernable:’—a distinction however very little regarded by the writers of impassioned stories” (2: 127). Fatal excesses of feeling, in other words, are entirely preventable, and even one’s innate “poor nature” can be governed by the exercise of “sober sense and prudence” (2: 129).

The *General Magazine and Impartial Review* goes on to elaborate the moral problems of *The Curse of Sentiment*. Specifically, the sentiments “which... are supposed to be ridiculed, but which, we conceive, the author wishes to recommend, are such as do honour to human nature, when Religion prescribes their course of operation, marks their extent, and ratifies their purport. Sentiment is not productive of the evils ascribed to it; but the want of principle in persons of sentiment renders them the most dangerous, because the most artful and insinuating, of all characters.” Sentiment need not be amoral, but principles are here evoked as possessing the moral solidity and regulatory quality so lacking in most forms of sentimentality. The problem with the sentiments portrayed in novels like *The Curse of Sentiment*, the reviewer explains, is in their deracination: “A man of sentiment, void of religion, and that is the fashionable moral character of the day, is a perpetual hypocrite; and, such is the difference between a mere sentimental and a feeling mind, though the one is erroneously supposed always to accompany the other, that on the slightest temptation, sentiment degenerates into artifice, while feeling teaches us ‘to do as we would be done by,’ and preserves us from the reproaches of secret, but conscious guilt” (254-5). As we have seen in the contemporary responses to *The Fool of Quality* discussed in the previous chapter, sentimentality that is motivated by religion can be the stuff of controversy, even though few sentimental novels contain in-depth discussions of religion (save the usual platitudes about it being “divine” or “heaven-sent”). Here, however, the reviewer seizes religion as key to explaining the differences between virtuous and artificial sentimentality:

only feeling that is grounded in and guided by the moral duty set forth by religion (and presumably only standard-issue Church of England religion, at that) can properly guard against hypocrisy and artifice. The *European Magazine, and London Review* echoes the idea that characters' immorality is caused by their lack of moral discipline. The novel's characters, the reviewer explains, voluntarily become "martyrs to the wayward circumstances of their fate, rather than in the most remote degree wound the delicacy of their own feelings, or, what is nobler still, infringe upon 'the laws of society'" ("The Curse of Sentiment" 239). Here, the novel's sentimentality is wielded to cover a multitude of unsentimental errors and circumstances, and delicacy becomes an excuse for affected and artificial behavior. The biggest problems, however, come from the characters' own passivity: they see it as noble to judge their behavior according to some kind of unpolluted (if amoral) sentimental code, which will contort itself to fatal extremes in order to avoid even mild social offense. The delicacy of their feelings may be protected, but the reviewer points out how thoroughly these characters unwittingly become the authors of their own fate: like *Excessive Sensibility*'s Julia, they are deliberately reactive and passive in the name of sentimentality, instead of taking control of their own feelings and their own behavior.

Within the novel itself, the nature of the titular "curse" of sentiment remains vague, but feelings are frequently positioned as incompatible with social values. The nameless narrator's lament at the beginning of the second volume comes close to articulating this idea: "the cold and wretched policy of man operates so strongly against me, and makes those sentiments a curse, which Nature designed should be a blessing" (Dodd 2: 6). "Why do I possess sensations," he continues rhetorically, "which destroy all my happiness, and make me wish that I had never been born?" Social circumstance, it turns out, is the crux of the plot: that the narrator's love of the

lovely and innocent Adelina cannot be confessed or realized due to his already being married.

“‘Tis true,” he complains at the beginning of the novel, before he meets Adelina, “I am liberated in my mind and affections from a bad woman; but the bondage of the law still hangs over me—limits and restricts my future connections, and debars me from the common privileges of Nature, because I have been unfortunate” (1: 9). The law, and by extension society itself, has no recourse for sentimental would-be divorcés, no matter the purity and moral righteousness of their affections. “Is it not a curse to have sentiments above the level of society?” he writes later (2: 42). “Do they not, in such a case, bring certain sorrow and endless woe? I feel they do!” But, as the novel’s eighteenth-century critics point out, such misery is not exclusively attributable to sentimentality; bigamy, no matter for what reason or how “above the level of society,” remains outlawed, and the conflict of important rights and duties remains a central engine for the plot for countless novels, excessively sentimental and not. The narrator clearly prizes true feeling more than the strictures of society, but the law keeps his happiness in check. In a more general sense, the narrator’s complaint is against the restriction of feelings and affections that ought to be free-flowing. “Already I have sacrificed enough to laws and systems,” he writes (2: 192–3). “Can they require more than life and happiness?... The world imposes heavy burdens on very hard terms.—We are obliged to drive our best passions and dearest affections into holes and corners because they are not exactly suited to the despicable opinions of mankind.” One’s best passions and dearest affections, then, should be free and available for unlimited—even excessive—public expression, even if they are “above the level of society.” The fact that the narrator’s attempts to lead his life according to this principle are doomed to such failure is ostensibly intended to show the dangers of ceding to passion at the expense of reason. But when joined with the narrative’s fulsome descriptions of feelings, and characters’ ongoing insistence that their sentimental,

passion-driven actions are what's right, the veneer of morality asserted over the text by the title seems even more unconvincing. The narrator's complaints about the burdens imposed by social structures are not meant to persuade the reader of his utter righteousness, but they are intended to challenge the reader's unquestioning adherence to "laws and systems." Here, again, sentimentality runs counter to and critiques social standards.

All kinds of unrestrained sensibility are praised throughout the novel. Characters are constantly, viscerally fighting the restrained sensibility that chokes up their hearts and mouths: "Passion exceeded the power of speech" during one encounter, "and silence gave to the swelling heart, and throbbing bosom, a sensation which language destroys"; "bursting" tears must force passage, relieving "surcharged" hearts and giving "liberty to the organs of speech" (1: 171–2, 1: 205). With all of these displays of heartfelt, inarticulate emotionality, *The Curse of Sentiment* also argues for the dominance of these passions over any forces of reason that their sufferer might attempt to impose upon them. "Reason," we are told, "cannot calm the passions" (1: 73). Railing against "Hypocrisy and Pride, under the mask of Reason and Prudence," the narrator asserts that "the effusions of my soul have always flowed in copious and unconfined streams—my actions, my wishes, and feelings are all written on my forehead, and I go into society with them naked and uncovered—I will continue to do so in spite of systems and sanctioned customs" (1: 75–6). While this insistence on following sentimental inspiration at the expense of reason and moderation would seem to provide a justification for the narrator's unhappy fate, *The Curse of Sentiment* mostly just gives voice to the idea that true feelings should be neither restrained nor controlled, consequences be damned; to do otherwise would be "Hypocrisy." "Can man... govern passions, whose origin, nature and tendency, are wholly hid from him?" we're asked rhetorically (2: 78). "Absurd!—ridiculous... Can he by philosophical disquisitions subdue the

phrenzy of a fever, or restore to calmness and moderation the ravings of a lunatic? Most weak!—most pitiful!... As well may he confine with a cord, the swollen stream within its banks; or bind up the impetuous and incessant rains in a sheet, as confine the mind of man to a precise system, and say, ‘Thus far thou shalt go, but no farther’” (2: 78–9). Feelings possess an elemental irresistibility, and the narrator paints a portrait of feelings rooted deeply, immovably, and mysteriously within the body; to try and control them would be madness. The novel’s characters do not even understand the wholly hidden feelings that so motivate them—they remain victims, like the helpless sufferers of a contagious disease. Sentiments are dynamic and capricious—not only can they simply not be confined to a precise system, but to do so would be to place limits on the mind of man.

Even the mildest attempts to arrange emotions symbolically, through even the most modest system, are doomed to failure when subjected to the novel’s internal logic. Adelina, the novel’s gentle and thoroughly sentimental heroine, literally miniaturizes her overflowing emotions through the creation of a small bower: “an assemblage of the hardy shrubs and evergreens which I [the narrator] have arranged into a miniature form of her grandfather’s cottage” (1: 181). Inside this shared microcosm (itself an echo of the titular heroine’s similar efforts in Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*), “the first pair in Paradise were not so happy... we dedicated it to Love and Innocence” (1: 182). In the future, the narrator continues, “I’ll rear a bower like this—the form—the plants—the flowers shall be the same.... I’ll dedicate my bower the same, and [Adelina] shall still be patroness.—Thus by similitude of sentiment, of labour and device, our souls will correspond and feel the influence of instinctive love” (1: 185). And in a moment of distress, “Adelina’s little parterre of shrubs and evergreens was totally deranged” (1: 129). Adelina’s feelings, then, are decorously arranged and expressed through her

garden; there is no hint of the grandiosity that belongs to other characters' emotions, here or in any of the novel's scenery. The picturesque surrounding countryside, in fact, is characterized by a profusion of unrelentingly domesticated and well-manicured landscapes, including a "dwarf birch" and robins singing upon "a dwarf apple tree which grew in a pot" (1: 56, 69). In the following chapter, I will examine how the wild, untamed landscapes of the sublime serve to express and overawe characters' emotions, but in *The Curse of Sentiment* the world of honest and pure emotions—at least Adela's emotions, if not the narrator's—is paradoxically well-groomed. These dwarves and miniatures are not used to contrast with the bluster of the emotions that surround them, but—like the narrator's beloved household objects—to embody them or siphon them off, storing them perhaps indefinitely for safekeeping. In this, Dodd's usage of the parterre reverses what Ann Jessie Van Sant calls the sentimental "miniaturization of experience" in her discussion of Sterne (Van Sant 101). Van Sant frames Sterne's "reordering of scale" through the use of inanimate objects, like the notorious snuffbox, as a strategy that redefines experience itself: she cites Hugh Blair's alignment of specialized feelings with specialized observations and objects, and compares sentimental over-refinement to the idea of the "microscopic eye" first put forth in seventeenth-century writings by Newton, Boyle, Locke, and others (101–3).⁴⁸ In *The Curse of Sentiment*, characters suffer abundantly from what one 1772 essayist describes as the tendency of the "Person of delicate Judgment" to see "every Thing, as it were, with a microscopic Eye: so that what would be a pleasing Object, to a common Spectator, is, to him,

⁴⁸ Van Sant's idea of miniaturization contrasts with Kevis Goodman's, as it is outlined in her chapter "The microscopic eye and the noise of history in Thomson's *The Seasons*" in *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism*. Goodman sees Thomson's use of the microscopic eye as cacophonous, as an overstimulated state of enhanced sensation that is overwhelming and discordant. Dodd, however, uses miniaturization as a means to focus and dilate on sentimental feelings. For more on the history of seventeenth-century microscopic investigation, see also Cynthia Wall's chapter "Seeing Things." For more on the miniature, see Stewart.

unsupportably coarse, and disagreeable” (Talbot 138). The miniaturized love-bower, on the other hand, serves as a way of reducing (not magnifying to overwhelming proportions) Adelina’s overpowering feelings; in fact, it might be the *only* way that characters, with their overwhelming sensibility to the world’s perceived cruelties and coarseness, can manage their experiences. If the keen sensibility of eighteenth-century characters like Smollett’s Matthew Bramble leave them vulnerable to what Van Sant (among others) terms microsensations, then Adelina and the narrator use their miniatures to engage in a form of microexpression. But even this decorous form of emotional management is ultimately doomed: into Adelina’s haven of cultivated sentiment one day bounds a “young male deer,” chased by hunting dogs; in a rage, the narrator uses a nearby rake to kill several of the pursuant hounds (1: 223). He then leads the agitated deer—“the big tear, from his piteous eye, rolled down his dappled face, and from his wide distended nostrils the blood issued in streams”—away with a bridle improvised from a handkerchief (1: 224). This episode is the last mention of the bower. The now-tame deer is clearly intended as a stand-in for the narrator crashing into Adelina’s “sanctuary of innocence,” but the cost—which comes in the graphic form of piles of dead dogs—destroys, in bloody and dramatic fashion, the characters’ shared fiction of domesticated feeling, and their hopes of domesticating their own naturalized sentiments along with it.

As *The Curse of Sentiment* unfolds, its stance on sentimentality—that it is only a curse insofar as it cannot be contained or expressed within the unnatural strictures of society—never wavers. The only way that the novel can be read as an anti-sentimental text is in the ostensibly self-evident message of the title, and in the cautionary moral that could be extracted from the characters’ unfortunate fates. Adelina becomes seriously ill in the narrator’s self-imposed absence, and eventually dies (though not until declaring herself spiritually married to the narrator

while on her deathbed); the narrator also dies, finally succumbing to his self-fulfilling prophecy about the insupportability of feelings so above the level of society. Curiously, the same destiny awaits Adelina's best friend and confidante, Miss S. During Adelina's illness, Miss S.'s sympathy "was so pure and strong, that her grief and afflictions seemed to be measured by Adelina's—this mutual and undivided attachment rather increased, than abated each others' sorrow and disease" (2: 186–7). The two young women, along with the narrator, ultimately "formed a group—where Friendship and Sympathy, on one side—Love and Chastity, on the other—supporting Virtue and Honor; gave to the feeling mind a picture which far exceeds the power of Art to delineate" (2: 209). Adelina's heartsickness directly provokes the mirrored, sympathetic effects in her friend, and Miss S.'s silent love of the narrator is suffered silently, "sooner than wound the heart of her friend, or distress the happiness of the man she adored—her patient and meek spirit submitted without a murmur, to this torturing situation" (2: 212–3). This attachment isn't even suspected until immediately before Miss S., the narrator, and Adelina all die, and remains a minor plot point; Miss S.'s sympathetic devotion is treated by the text as a virtue, not a curse, though it is perhaps significant that the character who most elects to control the expression of her own feelings still meets an identical fate to the rest. This episode can be interpreted as a worst-case scenario to those suspicious of the great power of shared feeling: Adelina and Miss S. are both willing victims of their own sensibility, meekly and joyfully surrendering to an otherwise entirely avoidable death by sentimentality. Both the characters and the plot seem to defy any kind of cautionary message that modern readers might be tempted to read into the text, and also embody the pernicious lack of morality identified by contemporary critics.

The Curse of Sentiment does present a sentimental community that cuts itself off, culturally and geographically, from what it sees as an unsympathetic and ignorant society where it could not continue to exist; despite its voluntary isolation from society, the contagion of excessive feeling inevitably overcomes all of its members, and the society eventually dies off. Contrary to the widespread concern in the 1760s and 1770s about contagious, Humean emotions whose unchecked spread could overwhelm all of the individuals in their path, this portrait of communal emotion poses little threat to the outside world; no matter how brightly they burn during the main part of the narrative, the characters' exquisite sensibility and sympathy eventually extinguish themselves, unable to pass over the insurmountable barriers of dominant societal forms and systems. Dodd's narrator addresses an audience of kindred sentimentalists—the tale is chock-full of pathetic tableaux and episodes that invite the reader to shed tears upon the page along with the characters—but his invectives against social structures are just empty railing, not a persuasive call to action. The sentimental community that the reader is enfolded into over the course of two volumes is, like Adelina's miniaturized bower, only a temporary retreat. Despite the power of collective emotionality, the sentimental reader who finishes the *Curse* is implicitly expected to pause to finish drying her tears, then shake herself off and resume her position in the society that has been so hostile to Adelina and her friends, not settle down for a pathetic death caused by overwhelming sympathy for literary characters. *The Curse of Sentiment* is far from preaching self-control or emotional moderation, but the isolation of sympathetic characters by societal norms and standards only serves to quarantine its sentimentality. Moreover, critics' reactions to the novel's contents focus on the immorality that it might model for its readers, and demonstrate little concern over the possibility that the extremes of feeling portrayed in the novel will instigate anything more serious than responsive

readerly tears: its sentimentality is idealistic and escapist, and a threat sufficiently contained by the covers of the novel. *The Curse of Sentiment*'s excessive feeling is suffocated, not through effortful displays of stoicism and self-education, but through the extreme isolation of the sentimental community.

Williams' *Julia*

Helen Maria Williams' *Julia* (1790) does not have a title or subtitle that disavows the sentimentality that it trades in, but its Advertisement—cited in the introduction to this chapter—states its objection to unchecked feeling clearly and unequivocally. *Julia*, Williams' only novel, contains far less of the political charge that dominates its author's contemporaneous writings on the French Revolution, though we are given a poem (purportedly written by an anonymous, peripheral character) which decries the horrors of the Bastille as a "solitary dungeon" (H. M. Williams 2: 217). Given that *Julia* almost immediately preceded the publication of Williams' *Letters from France*, however, it isn't surprising that *Julia* is more polemical novel than either *Excessive Sensibility* or *The Curse of Sentiment*—Gary Kelly largely passes over *Julia* in his chapter on Williams in *Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790-1827*, but describes it as anticipating Williams' "imminent transformation of pre-Revolutionary Sensibility into Revolutionary sympathy" (Kelly 33). *Julia* is a novel that attempts to justify its own sentimentality by framing its displays of feeling as a cautionary device intended to impress the dangers of uncontrolled sentimental indulgence upon the reader, but it sometimes falls into the trap of representing too lovingly the effects that it purports to condemn (iii). In particular, it takes up the voguishness of fashionable, affected sensibility, and the necessary presence of reason to mitigate the overpowering tendencies of even the most natural and admirable sentimentality.

Julia presents a variety of personae (ranging from caricatured types to more rounded and realistic characters) who model different modes of sensibility and sentimentality popular at the end of the eighteenth century, and uses them all to prove this thesis. Julia Clifford, the heroine, is imbued by nature with both understanding and virtue: “her sensibility was quick, her disposition affectionate, and her taste was improved by the society of her father... her conversation simple and unstudied; she spoke from the impulse of her heart, and she possessed the most amiable candor and frankness of disposition” (1: 3). Soon after being introduced to Julia, however, we meet Mrs. Seymour, who performs virtually every stereotype about the self-fashioned man or woman of superficial sentiment. Mrs. Seymour perceives that “sentiment was amiable; she was, therefore, made up of sentiment:—she also knew, that persons of refinement were often, from the wayward circumstances of life, extremely miserable; she, therefore, deemed discontent the test of feeling” (1: 29). She serves tea slowly “with a sort of slow and solemn movement, to convince the company that she was in a frame of mind, from which it cost her a cruel effort to descend to the common offices of life”; she cannot hear an Italian air without weeping; she laments being “obliged, in conformity to her situation in life, to spend much more than she wished upon dress, which put it out of her power... to reckon the claims of benevolence” (1: 30). Mrs. Seymour pieces together a sentimental appearance and puts on a performance of theatricalized sentiment, but the effect is, of course, ridiculous. Nevertheless, the humor of her performance lies in the fact that her observations are correct: for the preceding two decades, sentimentality *has* been described as delightful and amiable, and refined sentimentalists *are* inevitably ill-circumstanced by their own feelings. Moreover, Mrs. Seymour’s performance is not particularly manipulative or malevolent in intent. She does have, we are told, a “considerable” share of native sensibility, “but in her eagerness to discover her feelings in the

most pathetic parts, to shew her admiration of the finest passages, and to weep at the precise moment when it would do her taste most honour, she lost the charm of the illusion; and her sympathy was so interrupted by her vanity, that at length she could scarcely force a tear” (1: 36). Mrs. Seymour’s ridiculous appearance is perhaps a just punishment for someone who forces and feigns the physiological markings of heartfelt emotion, but—because she is attempting to showily bolster her own sentimental impulses—she is presented to the reader as ridiculous, not malicious.

Julia blends its sentimental pathos with humor and occasional sharp observations, and has consequently received more recent critical attention than any of the other novels examined in this chapter. Markman Ellis cites its engagement with the plots and concerns of previous beloved sentimental narratives of the period: Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), Henry Mackenzie’s *Julia de Roubigné* (1777), and Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Werther* (1774) (M. Ellis 215). He sees the plot as “part of the novel’s engagement in the ongoing controversy over the morality of the novel,” while Gary Kelly and Vivien Jones see the novel as foreshadowing sensibility’s transition into Revolutionary sympathy (215). Ellis also notes the importance of sentimental restraint within the novel: much of the novel, he writes, details “feelings that are declared overwhelming, but that are consistently brought under command and suppressed. The novel repeatedly depicts depth of emotion not by excess but by restraint” (217). Indeed, the restriction of burgeoning feelings remains a perpetual theme, and so does their necessary restraint by reason—something that the main character advocates and actively performs, unlike the characters in *The Curse of Sentiment*. Julia, who is tortured by her love for the equally enamored but married Frederick Seymour, nevertheless conducts herself irreproachably (1: 128). “Her ideas of rectitude were of the most exalted kind,” Williams explains, “and no pain would

have been so insufferable to her pure and feeling bosom, as the consciousness of having in the smallest degree deviated from those principles of delicacy, truth, integrity, and honour, which were not only the inviolable sentiments of her soul, but the steadfast rules of her actions. If her heart was not quite at peace, its exquisite sensibility was corrected by the influence of reason; as the quivering needle, though subject to some variations, still tends to one fixed point” (1: 128–9). Julia feels just as keenly as any other sentimental heroine, but her feelings and her behaviors are guided by principle, not impulse. In this way, Julia possesses a kind of active resistance that the Julia of *Excessive Sensibility* and *The Curse of Sentiment*’s Adelina lack. All three heroines are portrayed as having innate “delicacy, truth, integrity, and honour,” but only Williams’ Julia uses these values as the basis of a socially responsible moral system. Other sentimental characters, moved as they are by others’ pain and distress, are fundamentally guided—whether they want to be or not—by their own responsive sympathy, and are consequently victimized by it. Julia, on the other hand, remains fixed on the morally correct path by the magnetic influence of reason, even if her heart leads her another way. Discipline and rationality, Williams shows us through her lead character, can cooperate with a firm sense of individual morality and be used to counterbalance the pressures of feeling without banishing it entirely. Moderate sentimentality, in other words, is an entirely attainable ideal.

Contrary to what one might expect, the “uncontroled indulgence of strong affections” and calamitous dominion of passion referred to in the Advertisement to *Julia* do not belong to its naturally sensitive and innately sympathetic main character. It is Frederick Seymour, Julia’s would-be suitor, whose lack of emotional discipline is presented as a cautionary tale. Seymour possesses the same quick sensibility and affectionate, candid disposition of Julia, but his tragic flaw is that he has no similar strength of reason or discipline to act as a check upon his passions.

Knowing that he is married, Julia resists entering into conversation with the appealing and amiable Frederick, but he pursues her despite the knowledge that “he was acting in direct opposition to every rule he had prescribed for his conduct; he felt that it was madness to court [Julia’s] dangerous society, which had already proved so fatal to his peace; but the sensations which impelled him to remain behind, were too powerful to be combated by any effort of his reason” (1: 136–7). Despite appeals to reason and “every rule” of responsible social conduct, Frederick cannot resist his emotional impulses, and this subversion of reason to the passions is what leads to his downfall. Unlike in *The Curse of Sentiment*, where the unfair rules of society are blamed and lamented, the responsibility for managing the incompatibility of feeling and society is placed firmly on the side of the individual: Williams’ sympathies might be revolutionary, but her characters battle the excesses of sympathy one-by-one. Still, the narrator sympathizes with Frederick’s plight: “Alas!” she continues, “there *are* moments when the exertions of reason are ineffectually opposed to the violence of passion!—there *are* moments in which passion, like the ocean-flood, overthrows the mounds which were opposed to its progress!” (1: 137). The distraught narrator of *The Curse of Sentiment* compared his overpowering feelings to a swollen stream or torrential rainfall, and here again we see a hydraulic model of the passions as an elemental, tidal force that individuals are helpless to resist. Near the end of the narrative, the narrator makes it even more explicit that a lack of reason and self-discipline cause his fate. He “fell,” we are told, “the victim of that fatal passion, which he at first unhappily indulged, and which he was at length unable to subdue. The conflicts of his mind, by insensibly weakening his frame, gave greater power to his disorder, and thus probably shortened the life they had embittered” (2: 237–8). Frederick’s lack of self-discipline has caused not just his unhappiness, but sapped his strength; eventually, he is left passive, entirely the victim

of his disordered body, and his defeat by his own passions is complete. Williams' use of a third-person narrator in *Julia* allows us to see Frederick's flaws even more clearly, at a judicious remove; it also keeps us, as readers, from identifying too closely with Frederick's "fatal passion," whereas *The Curse of Sentiment*'s first-person narrator used his narrative proximity to attempt to draw the reader in to his closed community of sympathy. Gary Kelly singles out *Julia*'s third-person narration as a device that allows Williams "to contain, relativize, or even criticize her novel's central subject consciousness," which also allows the narrator to draw back from certain emotions or to insert a layer of moralizing over events (33). Frederick's death is unfortunate, but functions as a case in point; his fate is not presented as a pathetic scene for us to identify with and to project ourselves into, but we are explicitly encouraged to learn from his mistakes.

Julia further reiterates the importance of rationality and self-discipline within an appropriately self-referential discussion of the influence of sentimental novels. In this episode, Julia is being instructed on properly sentimental reading habits. "Aren't you charm'd," Mrs. Chartres asks, "with the Pangs of Sensibility? ... Oh, pray do buy it," she continues, "it will only cost you six shillings, and its so excessively pretty; but the end's very dismal." "Well," Frederick replies, "I shall be prepared for the worst; and you may depend upon it we will have six shillings-worth of sensibility to-morrow morning" (2: 48–9). Frederick pokes wry fun at the market for overwrought sentimental fiction that gleefully makes money from pain and tears, but he comes to defend the worth of fictions that make one feel. "People talk of the bad tendency of [Goethe's *Werther*], and blame the author for blending virtue and vice in the same character, because the example is dangerous," he says. But "has not the Author of our being blended virtue and vice in the great book of nature? Why does Werter interest us? Because he is not a phoenix

of romance, but has the feelings and infirmities of man. He is subject to the power of passion—let those who never felt its influence, condemn him; those who *have* felt its influence, too well know that it is absolute, that it is unconquerable. The heart that is bleeding with an incurable wound, needs not the cold counsels of reason, to be informed that such feelings are painful, and ought to be subdued” (2: 202–4). Here again, Goethe’s hero is evoked as a figure who represents the fatal ends of unconquerable feeling. In his defense of Werther, Frederick defends himself, and his own choices. Frederick questions a commonplace critical maneuver at the time—the condemnation of sentimental novels for their mixed morality, and their mingling of virtue and vice—by arguing that such murky morality is a reflection of real life (and the intentions of God himself), not an attempt to corrupt readers. Those like Werther and Frederick who choose to be momentarily touched by great passion have already been fatally wounded; once the influence of such great feeling has been felt, it cannot be removed by mere reason. Markman Ellis reads the *Pangs of Sensibility* scene as emblematic of the novel’s generic uncertainty, but both of the above discussions also show contemporary concern about the social role of novels: they can be seen as instructional texts to readers striving to model their own behavior after that of fictional characters. Frederick argues for art imitating life, instead of the other way around, but the sentimental novel becomes increasingly implicated in the problem of sentimental self-destruction nevertheless: art imitates life, which imitates art, which imitates life in a series of responses and iterations upon a familiar sentimental theme. *Julia*, however, represents something of a turning point among novels that purport to critique their own sentimentality, marking profound emotion by the forces that individuals must summon in order to manage it, instead of by the grandiosity of its expression.

Vigorous Opposition to Excessive Sentiment: *Plain Sense* and *A Gossip’s Story*

Novels published later in the 1790s take *Julia*'s opposition to fatal sentimentality and push it one step farther. As I will go on to explore in Chapter Four, the 1790s are a decade characterized by the overt politicization of sentimentality; this is the period, after all, where we see the peak of the Jacobin novel and the appearance of open critiques of sensibility like Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Wollstonecraft's *Mary and Maria*, and Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. But, as I noted in at the beginning of this chapter, literary progress is neither widely coordinated nor particularly linear, so while some authors might have leapfrogged from the problems of sentimentality to overtly politicized writings, others have absorbed arguments against excessive sentimentality that express themselves in more subtle ways. The following novels are not written by notably revolutionary-minded authors, nor do their contents have the scent of a specific political agenda about them—they're simply part of the next generation of sentimental novels like *Excessive Sensibility* and *The Curse of Sentiment*, grappling with the intensity of the feelings that they admire. Because the supply of late-century novels with leading sentimental titles is actually fairly limited—hence why modern critics always cite the same half-dozen novels in their discussions of novels like *Errors of Sensibility*—I've again chosen to focus on several exemplary texts whose political agendas are all but nonexistent, but which, like *Julia*, clearly announce their views on the proper care and management of feelings.⁴⁹ Whereas *Julia* refuses to entirely disavow the desirability of sentiment and itself indulges in the feelings that the narrator argues should be held at arm's length, succeeding novels eliminate appealingly

⁴⁹ 1793's *The Errors of Sensibility* is not examined here because it somehow manages to be entirely unmemorable, despite containing a murder plot, multiple deaths, and a remote island refuge in the Hebrides. It hammers home the same point of *Excessive Sensibility*, but with less nuance: the titular error of sensibility comes exclusively from its heroine's habitual overindulgence by her late father. Maria is easily manipulated and imprisoned due to her own gullibility, and "the seclusion from the world in which [her mother] had lived... had kept her daughter, (notwithstanding the intelligence of her mind) in a state of almost infancy, as to the evils and the conduct of life" (1: 10).

sentimental scenes and dialogues altogether: their attractions lie in the vigorous, active resourcefulness of their heroines, and underscore their message with a generous helping of didacticism.

Frances Jacson's 1796 novel *Plain Sense* is up-front about its message, advocating a reason-based plan of education for its young female characters that contradicts the indulgent emotionality and encouragement of sensibility seen in earlier novels. Jacson wrote *Plain Sense*, her first novel, in response to her family's financial strain; her later novels further express her devout Christianity and are strongly didactic, and remained reasonably popular throughout her lifetime—*Plain Sense* went through three editions by 1799 (Percy). Young Ellen is terrorized by her unloving mother from a young age, and shows no early signs of intelligence or quickness. Unlike most precocious sentimental heroes and heroines, she displays only “a sullen indifference to all instruction or reproof,” without the generous helping of natural sweetness and sensibility that authors usually attribute to her kind (Jacson 1: 37). Under the tutelage of her loving guardians, however, she is reformed. “If her present habits are allowed to strengthen,” Mr. Mordaunt explains, “and her present principles to take root, she will never, in any circumstance, be the victim of ungoverned fancy, or the martyr to a selfish sensibility” (1:58–9). This scheme of education values sense and principle above “selfish” and undisciplined sentiment, but Mr. Mordaunt does not wish to keep her from the influence of feeling altogether. “I do not guard her from feeling,” he explains: “I guard her from selfishness; for others she will feel acutely, for herself moderately; and where self is out of the question, there is no fear but that reason will always be near enough to ward off any danger, from too lively a sensibility” (1: 59). “What is the leading feature of her mind? What is it that she is extremely—” asks his interlocutor, only to be interrupted: “Ellen knows no extremes.” (Except, interjects another character, “the extreme of

good-humour.”) Jacson sets up a complex educational system in this exchange. Ellen’s guardians still see feeling and sensitivity as important qualities to guide and cultivate: feeling in and of itself is desirable, but her guardian emphasizes its boundaries and moderation. Furthermore, “feeling” is here discussed in the broader, more modern sense of a generalized capacity to feel or be emotionally touched, and less in its previous, particularly sentimental sense of being exquisitely sensible; Jacson maintains the desirability of sympathy and feeling, but not of any specific, mannered forms of sentimentality.⁵⁰ The borders of the self, we learn, must be carefully drawn and defended by the young sentimentalist: she must feel more strongly for others than for herself. But unlike earlier sentimentalists—think, for example, of Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling*, who never meets a stranger with a pathetic tale that he declines to weep for—this prioritization is intended to serve as a form of restraint. Mr. Mordaunt does not explain how Ellen can be taught to determine the boundaries of appropriate feeling, or how he qualifies the “moderation” that he recommends for his young charge, but he offers up the idea of proportionality as a central rule. Ellen’s feelings for others must always be greater than her feelings for herself. This presents a curious inversion of the natural prioritization of feeling described by Hume and Smith, who found their theories of sympathy upon the idea one can *never* feel as strongly for another person as for one’s own self; but as excessive, self-spawned sentiment becomes more and more of a social threat, “selfish” feeling must be subordinated through the exertions of principle and reason. It is less dangerous for strong feeling to remain separate from the self, Ellen’s guardian explains: sentimentality leads to selfishness, and such self-centered interest in own feelings can be dangerous; it’s best to keep them at a distance. Mr. Mordaunt thus reasserts the new

⁵⁰ The 7th, 1785 edition of Johnson’s *Dictionary* still defines “Feeling” as “Expressive of great sensibility” and “Sensibly felt” (Johnson).

hierarchy of emotions falling into place, emphasizing the necessary externalization and objectification of one's own feelings as separate entities to be kept at bay, and the individual responsibility of keeping them in check. Through this process of objectifying and detaching one's self from one's feeling, Mordaunt implies, will come mastery.

The epigraph to *Plain Sense* is Pope's "Reason still use, to reason still attend," and the unfailing theme of all three volumes is the importance of relying upon reason, patience, and good sense, instead of yielding to the erratic impulses of emotion, during times of stress and trial. Like Williams' Julia, who allows her desires to be guided, compass-like, by the unfailing right influence of reason, Ellen calmly sorts out her complicated desires and duties by perceiving "that which ever way she turned, wherever she directed her view, *the wish to do right* still appeared, as a beacon on a distant hill, pointing out the coast to which she meant to direct her course" (1: 132). Not all characters in the book are as impressively composed, "but the mind where reason is habitually paramount, gives place but for a moment to the anarchy of the passions" (2: 1). Even while under extreme pressure, Ellen's "perfect good sense... taught her to keep her own passions under controul, it repressed the tyranny of imagination, it enabled her to balance the real good and evil of her situation, and it shewed her that in the scale of human miseries there were more above than below her" (2: 218). This "tyranny of imagination" is evoked to highlight Ellen's calmness, and her refusal to dwell upon her own misery. One of the hallmarks of sentimentality is, after all, the limitless expansion of feeling, where others' woes and one's own sentiments inflate to become the only thing of importance in the world; the discerning eye of sentiment is often focused back on one's self. This is particularly problematic when the original cause of woe is minor, and the sentimental novel sheds copious tears over flies, pets, and imaginary slights; see, for example, Sensibility weeping over a dead sparrow, with the King's

guillotined head underfoot, in Gillray's "The New Morality." Jacson refutes this kind of sentimental disproportion—and, by extension, reasserts a more orderly social foundation—by the reassertion of perspective about "the scale of human miseries." Even if not everyone shares this education, Ellen's responsibility is to avoid "all *self commiseration*," and to remain actively engaged in her present situation (2: 220). She never yields "to the supineness and langour which, from the hopelessness of her sorrow, would sometimes invade her mind; she considered it as a signal to rekindle her activity, and to double her efforts towards procuring occupation" (2: 221). Ellen does not suppress her feelings, but her self-involvement with them; she actively occupies her mind with other things, instead of passively reflecting upon her misfortunes or allowing her mind to idle, letting it be invaded with self-pity and sorrow. Instead of merely advocating "reason" as the cure for excessive sentimentality, without qualifying how that reason should be qualified or assessed, Jacson emphasizes the prophylactic importance of perception, comparison, proportionality, and activity. At the end of the novel, Ellen is rewarded for her adherence to reason and principle, and the concluding paragraph reiterates the novel's moral:

Such then is the history of Ellen. Instructed by her example, let no one affirm the *omnipotency of love*; let no one assert the *uncontroulableness of sorrow*: Be it remembered, that in the exertion of PLAIN SENSE, and the exercise of *unshaken integrity*, lay all her powers; and let not any one who means not to forego his claim to such distinctions, plead his excuse for *vice* or *weakness the dominion of passion* or *the irresistibility of grief*. (3: 260)

If Ellen can retain her integrity even after being abducted and transported to Bohemia against her will, Jacson says, then anybody can—and that includes the reader.⁵¹ The power to control one's own feelings is not, as Frederick in *Julia* claims, an ability that some people simply have and

⁵¹ This episode, though not aiming to evoke terror or fear in the reader in the style of Ann Radcliffe, does have some interesting early echoes of the Gothic: Ellen is isolated in a decrepit and isolated mansion for over three years and her infant is taken away from her, but she spends her imprisonment learning German and eventually engineers her own elaborate escape back to England through the use of her own native intelligence and tenacity.

others do not; feelings are naturally controllable, and exertion—plus a strong moral foundation—assure that the passions remain subordinate to reason, and separate from the self.

The idea that excessive feeling is an entirely surmountable, individually-created vice is echoed by Jane West's *A Gossip's Story, and Legendary Tale* (1796). West, like Jacson, developed a reputation at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century as a particularly didactic writer who focused upon her lessons for women, but West—unlike so many other Revolutionary-minded contemporary critics of sentimentality and feminine sensibility—was stridently conservative (Baylis). The *Oxford DNB* notes that West's *Letters to a Young Lady* (1806) forms a riposte to Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), insisting upon the preeminence of “Duties” as opposed to Wollstonecraft's “Rights.” Like Williams' *Julia*, West's *A Gossip Story* draws less critical attention than her other, more strenuously didactic novels, one of which Kevin Gilmartin goes so far as to label “the salient model of a transcription of conduct book morality into novel form” (159). Like the other novels in this chapter, *A Gossip's Story* is itself not explicitly political, but West's stance on the dangers of feminine over-refinement is clear. West's novel is most frequently cited by modern scholars as an influence on Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, and the surface similarities are obvious. The story is about two sisters, Louisa and Marianne; the latter is, like Austen's Marianne, driven by an acute sensibility which her sister does not share. Louisa, a contemporary reviewer explains, adheres “to the principles of duty and plain sense,” thereby attaining “the reward of virtue by becoming the wife of the man whom her sister has refused” (“A Gossip's Story and a Legendary Tale” 480). Marianne also marries, “but is led, by an affected sensibility, into many errors.” The *Critical Review* recommends the novel as “an antidote to the pernicious maxims inculcated in most of the modern tales of *sentiment*,” agreeing with the author “that the imaginary duties

which the extreme of modern refinement prescribes (and, by the bye, that refinement takes its rise entirely in works of imagination) are never practiced but at the expense of those solid virtues whose superior excellence has stood the test of ages” (“A Gossip’s Story and a Legendary Tale” 228–9). The *Critical Review* lays the blame for sentimental over-refinement squarely on imagination, and—like Henry Mackenzie, who condemned the “visionary” impulses and feelings that sentiment substitutes for solid morality—sees the self-centered preoccupation with “imaginary” duties as occupying valuable space that would otherwise be taken up by solid, moral virtues. (In the process, the *Critical Review* implies that both novels and overpowering sentimentality can be classified as “works of imagination”; both are fictional creations.)

Even more than *Plain Sense*, *A Gossip’s Story* foregrounds its moral purpose. The Dedication summarizes the novel’s purpose as illustrating “the Advantages of CONSISTENCY, FORTITUDE, and the DOMESTICK VIRTUES; and to expose to ridicule, CAPRICE, AFFECTED SENSIBILITY, and an IDLE CENSORIOUS HUMOUR” (West 1: iv). Texts like *Julia* and *The Curse of Sentiment* concentrate on sentimentality as a potentially isolating force that muffles the sentimentalist’s will, immobilizing them in a cocoon of their own feeling. Here, sentimentality’s social liabilities are presented as far more superficial (though nevertheless troublesome), leading to ridiculous and affected behavior. Marianne, the sentimental sister, is all trembling softness and melting sensibility (1: 18–19). She has an

amiable and ingenuous mind, solicitous to excel, and desirous to be happy, but destitute of natural vigour or acquired stability; forming to itself a romantick standard, to which nothing human ever attained; perplexed by imaginary difficulties; sinking under fancied evils; destroying its own peace by the very means which it takes to secure it; and acting with a degree of folly beneath the common level, though its desire of aspiring above the usual limits of female excellence. (1: 47)

Neither natural inclination nor education has given Marianne the strength that she needs for happiness, and instead she adheres to false standards. “Imaginary difficulties” are again cited as

a problem, as are “fancied evils”; in a way, sentimentalism is self-destructive, consuming its adherents while it satisfies them. Sentimentalism is also presented as a codified mode of response and behavior, but one that increasingly strays farther and farther from the dictates of reality and responsibility.

West makes it clear that this self-destructive sentimentality can be entirely prevented and corrected by education, and that the invention of sentimental difficulties goes against the foundations of Christian morality. “I wish to ask the fair enthusiasts who indulge in all the extravagance of heroic generosity, romantick love, and exuberant friendship,” West continues, “whether they really suppose it possible to improve upon the model which Christianity (our best comfort in this world and sure guide to the next) presents for our imitation” (1: 48). Whereas critics of Brooke’s *Fool of Quality* saw extreme feeling as a prelude for extreme religious and social beliefs, West reverses that relationship: Christianity, she says, presents “no puzzling question to tear the divided heart by contrary duties.... From [life’s] mixture of good and evil it directs our pursuit after the former, by teaching us to *curb* our passions, and to *moderate* our desires; to expect with diffidence, enjoy with gratitude, and resign with submission” (1: 48–9). For West, the Bible presents all of the firm moral foundations that anybody could ever need, and sentimentalized constructs like benevolence, as well as self-control and the moderation of feeling, can be based entirely upon traditional Christian beliefs instead of the mannered and artificial indulgence of fashionable late-century sentimentality. There is still a certain degree of volition and individual choice in the portrait that West paints: her God does not merely guide passive followers, but teaches them what values to use in order to pursue good for themselves. West’s heroines, therefore, must assume the mantle of active virtue, controlling their *own* feelings and moderating their expectations. “Should,” West asks rhetorically, “the love of a man

to a married woman ever be softened into an innocent attachment, or described as a tender weakness which he *cannot* conquer, consequently rather as the error of nature and necessity, than of choice?" (1: 50). The plots of *The Curse of Sentiment* and *Julia* both revolve around heroes who claim that they cannot resist the pull of such illicit attachments, but *A Gossip's Story* directly refutes these claims. While the efficacy of reason as a counteragent to sentiment has yet to be thoroughly tested—the next chapter presents alternate methods of managing extreme feeling—novels like *A Gossip's Story* and *Plain Sense* have reached a unity of plot, character, and message that weren't achieved in *The Curse of Sentiment* or *Julia*, which purport to condemn sentimentality while still engaging in it. *A Gossip's Story* and *Plain Sense* value sentiment without becoming sentimental, and establish clear stances on how it should be corralled. In the process, they separate feeling from all of the accreted trappings of sentimentality, detaching feeling from its sentimental associations with irresistibility, inherent excessiveness, imaginative caprice, and dangerous contagiousness, instead installing it back within the context of familiar cultural, moral, and religious constructs. Ultimately, these novels advance the increasingly common perception of excessive sentimentality as something that is no longer an irresistible, uncontrollable threat to those who are unlucky enough to become its victims, but an easily-moderated, self-indulgent tendency that is distinct from the individual who houses it. Sentiment's victims, according to West and other authors within the constellation of late-century sentimental novelists, should more properly be termed its volunteers.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUBLIME INTERRUPTIONS AND SUBLIME PERSONIFICATIONS: ANN RADCLIFFE'S
 PORTRAITS OF FEELING EXCESS

First published in 1794—making it the contemporary of novels like *Plain Sense* and *A Gossip's Story*—Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* takes pains to distinguish itself from the teary wallowing in emotionality still associated with popular sentimental novels. *Udolpho*, like virtually all of Radcliffe's novels, features a portentous warning against excessive feeling, issued by the heroine's beloved father before his death: "sensibility... is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight, from every surrounding circumstance," Monsieur St. Aubert advises his daughter Emily (*Udolpho* 79–80). "We become the victims of our feelings, unless we can in some degree command them." As we saw within so many of the novels examined in Chapter 3, Radcliffe advocates for the necessity of individual self-restraint and authority over one's own feeling in order to avoid becoming, in the familiar words also used in the cautionary introduction to Helen Maria Williams' *Julia*, its "victim."

Modern critics often gloss Radcliffe's sentimental disclaimers as a denunciation of the literary sentimentality falling increasingly under censure at the end of the eighteenth century, and instead attribute the contemporary success of a novel like *Udolpho* to its interestingly Gothicized admixture of "suspense, teasing its readers with suggestions of the spectral, and its poetic descriptions of picturesque and sublime scenery" (Howard vii).⁵² However, Radcliffe's use of

⁵² See, for example, Janet Todd's observation in *Sensibility: An Introduction* that "*The Mysteries of Udolpho* warns against the sensibility that is the salient characteristic of her heroine; she does so in a dying speech from a father who has first wiped away his single tear" (144), and Marilyn Butler's discussion of changing literary taste in the 1790s, which describes Radcliffe as "carefully including warnings against sentiment... but these could not save the

suspense and scenery is nevertheless accompanied by—and is not a rejection of—the familiar plot conventions and boilerplate character types of the late-century sentimental (and ostensibly anti-sentimental) novel. Radcliffe's novels, like their peers *Julia*, *Plain Sense*, and *A Gossip's Story*, explicitly interrogate the dangers of excessive feeling and sentimentality, while retaining sentimentality's interest in provoking and portraying individual and collective affect. Radcliffe does not definitively reject the conventions of the sentimental novel. She instead represents the next significant progression in the waves of sentimental critique and emotional objectification that we see radiating outwards as the sentimental novel evolves throughout the 1780s and 1790s, transmitting now-familiar displays of feeling within the new and exciting vehicle of the Gothic, which also places emotional excess within the context of the sublime.

The intermingling of the sentimental and the sublime lets Radcliffe explore two sometimes complementary and sometimes oppositional models of where feelings are located, how they expand, and the ways that they can be transferred. Excessive sentimentality, as we saw in the rhetorical manuals and medical texts examined in Chapter One, was frequently conceived at the beginning of the eighteenth century as a form of inner superfluity that could be manifested or conveyed through gestures and signs like the tear, and by the 1790s authors and critics were responding to Revolution-inspired anxieties about the power of collective emotion by assigning sentimental individuals the responsibility for disciplining and isolating their unruly and enfeebling feelings. The heavily Burke-inspired sublime of the 1790s, on the other hand, conjures up feelings that can exist outside of the individual body, independent from the constraints of reason, education, and responsibility; the Kantian sublime then turns even further

genre," in *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries* (94–95). These observations are entirely valid, but both authors use them as evidence for larger readings that treat Radcliffe's use of the sentimental as superficial or self-serving. They see Radcliffe's turn towards the Gothic as a true departure from such sentimental warnings.

away from affect, rooting itself in the kind of self-reflection and moral reason that can only be inspired by the utter impassivity of and unboundedness of nature.⁵³ But Radcliffe takes up neither the sentimental nor the sublime as fully ossified, fully oppositional forms of expression; both are evolving, debated modes even within her novels alone, which revolve at times around a set of common questions about sympathy and affect. With each successive novel, Radcliffe increasingly uses the sublime's intrusion into characters' minds—as we see, for example, in characters' innumerable encounters with their grandiose, awe-inspiring surroundings—to interrupt their descent into self-indulgent sentimentality, allowing that character the space to step back and recalibrate their emotions to avoid getting fully swept into a vortex of sentimental self-absorption. Burke tells us that the sublime is “productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling,” managing to circumvent our powers of reason and hurry “us on by an irresistible force,” but Radcliffe's novels don't use the overwhelming force of the sublime to drown out all remaining strains of sentiment (Burke 39, 57). Instead, they use one form of excess to interrupt another, thereby using the sublime to keep sentimentality in check while still allowing the reader to indulge in all kinds of vicarious thrills—with both sentimental and sublime origins—along the way. Even the Kantian sublime—which Frances Ferguson describes almost as a black hole of affect, or a brick wall against which sentimentalists futilely hurl their emotions, only to have them shattered—uses nature, which is “by definition, indifferent to your reactions,” to produce self-consciousness (Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime* 130). Here, too,

⁵³ In this chapter I will refer, in the Burkean style, to the “sublime objects” described in Radcliffe's novels; objects or vistas in her books also embody a terrifying “sublimity.” It's important to note, however, that Kant strenuously denies the existence of “sublimity” as an atmospheric adjective, or as a descriptive quality possessed by something: “we express ourselves entirely incorrectly when we call this or that *object of nature* sublime, even though we may quite correctly call a great many natural objects beautiful... all we are entitled to say is that the object is suitable for exhibiting a sublimity that can be found in the mind. For what is sublime, in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility” (Kant 99).

the Kantian sublime's unyielding indifference deflects an individual's feelings in a way that somehow engenders more self-consciousness and self-reflexivity.

The generic fluidity of the Gothic novel is what allows the sentimental and the sublime to coexist with a minimum of friction. As Michael Gamer argues, the Gothic is an organic and changing form that moves across disparate modes, shifting from narrative to dramatic and poetic modes without adhering to a defined set of characteristics or standards (Gamer 4). The Gothic is constructed and recentered anew in each novel that Radcliffe writes, which is another reason why—while there may be a certain consistency of atmosphere and in the tropes sprinkled throughout the novels examined below—the ways that the sentimental and the sublime abut, and the techniques through which the sublime is invoked, vary so greatly. The late-eighteenth-century Gothic, as modern critics like Gamer and David Morris argue, does more than mechanically tick off all of the boxes on an implicit checklist of Burke's aesthetic characteristics of the sublime. While Radcliffe is undeniably fond of exploiting the affective potential of Burkean terror, obscurity, power, vastness, and so on, she also experiments with the mechanics of sublime feelings triggered by rhetorical and performative, theatrical displays of power, which ultimately culminates in *The Italian's* Schedoni: a figure who wholly embodies so many facets of the sublime that he seems to personify the entire phenomenon in an act of sublime self-inflation. The generic flexibility of the Gothic lets Radcliffe create a character who finally inhabits the kind of unchecked, all-consuming emotion that so many sentimental novels have warned against—but Schedoni's inescapable power manifests itself in a kind of sublime antipathy, thereby causing the extremes of sentiment and the sublime to intersect in unsettling ways.

Radcliffe mainly uses the sublime—with all of the thrills generated by its innate, “irresistible force”—to provoke the kind of readerly excitement and affective wallop once

reserved as the exclusive domain of excessive sentimentality. But instead of phasing sentiment out of the Gothic novel entirely or decrying it as obsolete, characters' potentially extreme feelings are interrupted and thrown into relief by the imminent threat of and juxtaposition with the sublime, under which (Burke notes in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*) we can be "alarmed into reflexion" (Burke, *Reflections* 80). The sublime's ability to force spectators' minds into being "purified by terror and pity" acts as a check to their emotional self-involvement (Burke 80). In Kant's reading, the sublime also prompts us to turn inward, expressly because it is so inscrutable and nonreactive: nature carries no inherent meaning, except "only in what *use* we can make of our intuitions of nature so that we can feel a purposiveness within ourselves entirely independent of nature" (Kant 100). In a strictly Kantian system, Radcliffe's heroines would never hear an answering voice, or the faint strains of a lute, emanating back from the wilderness; the incommensurability of our feelings when they collide against something as absolutely large, or as absolutely unforgiving, as the sublime prompts us to turn inward. The sublime thereby enables characters to gain a more balanced perspective on their own feelings—and, in the process, dwarfs the potential religious, political, and moral extremes of sentimentality.

While Radcliffe presents the sublime's effects as inescapable and absolute, she shapes and cultivates its force through sources united by the rhetorical and tropological vocabulary of the Gothic: objects, people, Gothicized atmospherics, and the presence of God. The experience of shrinking before the sublime helps characters change their relationship to their own feelings without necessarily altering the essential nature of those same feelings: they are "purified" as we are alarmed into reconsidering them, or thrown against an incomprehensible, unsympathetic natural world, not eliminated altogether. Romantic travails, for example, are put into perspective

before an awe-inspiring mountain landscape, but of course there is no danger of the estranged beloved actually being replaced by an Alp; similarly, a character is shocked out of her tear-filled self-pity by the consciousness of her precarious existence on a small boat in the middle of a vast sea, but this realization doesn't eliminate the reasons for her sorrow, merely its magnitude. Radcliffe turns the sublime into an instrument for disrupting unchecked sentimentality, strengthening the sentimentalist's skill at the emotional self-monitoring and self-control seen as so necessary to prevent runaway individual and collective emotion. At the same time, she experiments with the potential sources and methods through which that sublime can be evoked, lending it the kind of power and flexibility that the sentimental must increasingly keep in check. "Sympathy," Steven Knapp writes, "provides a point of contact between the opposing passions of society and self-preservation; it subordinates the individuating experience of the sublime to social needs" (Knapp 71). As Radcliffe's heroines vacillate between the extremes of self-absorbed self-pity and being held in thrall by the sublime, they occupy a middle ground of prosocial self-awareness that grows in between.

Gothic Intersections of Sympathy and the Sublime

Longinus and the Afterlife of Rhetorical Power

The Longinian sublime animates a speaker who masters the expression of lofty emotion, which in turn elevates the spectator who sympathetically appropriates the speaker's lofty feelings. Its emphasis on the interchange of sublimity between actor and audience is surprisingly compatible with the sentimental tradition, and establishes the sublime as a far more rhetorical, dialogic, and personal mode than many modern accounts allow, letting Radcliffe employ it as a quality that can be evoked and personified, as well as one that can empower the beholder. On

the surface, Longinus' description of the sublime has little to do with the pictorial and architectural characteristics which dominate the sublime of Burke's *Enquiry*, and the kind of grandiose, painterly sublime landscapes which characterize Radcliffe's prose in both the contemporary and the modern imagination—an impassive, aestheticized sublime nearly always confronted by the solitary individual, seemingly far from the social, performative rhetoric of Longinus'. Longinus focuses on the stylistic qualities and rhetorical figures that the skilled orator may command which can properly be termed sublime, and, unlike Burke, he spends little time describing and categorizing the sublime's potential effects. But despite this initial dissimilarity, Longinus' eighteenth-century translators awaken an interest in the sublime's potential to be invoked, personified, and then shared, all through the deployment of expert rhetorical skill—qualities which will soon be superimposed onto Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* as a way of explaining and understanding how rhetorical give-and-take can be mapped onto even the most seemingly remote instances of the natural sublime, and onto Kant's aesthetically distinct, unreactive sublime. Longinus' treatise is oriented around how speakers and “the greatest Writers” command the sublime not only to persuade, but to throw “an Audience into Transport” (W. Smith 3), and his focus on a spectator who is—like the sentimental subject in the theatrical model of sentimentality—free to move and reposition herself around the speaker however she sees fit while the speaker alters his discourse to make the strongest impression possible serves as an imaginative model for the interplay between subject and object that lends both players agency: the sublime spectator isn't just a captive audience, held in thrall before any clumsy display of heightened emotion that muscles its way into her consciousness via brute force.

Contemporary translations of Longinus' *Peri Hupsous*, particularly those by Boileau into French (as *Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours*, 1674) and by William Smith into English (as *Dionysius Longinus on the Sublime*, 1739), introduced eighteenth-century readers to a sublime rooted in the rhetorical postures and performance of profound nonverbal sympathy that are the bread and butter of sentimental novels of the 1760s and 1770s, resembling the carefully-modulated contemporary techniques of theatrical performance meant to convey feeling from the actor to his spectators.⁵⁴ Smith's translation, *Dionysius Longinus on the Sublime*, describes its subject as arising from five primary, performative sources, presupposing "an Ability of Speaking well": a boldness and grandeur in the thoughts; the power of raising the passions to a violent or even enthusiastic degree; the skillful application of sentimental and rhetorical figures; noble and graceful expression; and dignity and grandeur in composition (W.

⁵⁴ Modern critics dispute the importance of Longinus to the eighteenth-century sublime, and question the strength of the connection between Longinus' emphasis on sublime style and the aestheticized sublime of Burke and Kant. Samuel Holt Monk's influential *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (1960) refutes Longinus' influence on Burke, arguing that Longinus' work addresses the "sublime style," which is to "write on rhetoric," whereas "to write on sublimity is to write on aesthetic. The sublime style is a means to an end; sublimity is an end in itself" (Monk 12). For Monk, the Longinian sublime's value lies in its ability to forge an intimate connection between the spectator and art—and this effect originates in the spectator's mind, not in the sublime object. More recently, Monk's distinction has been challenged: Ashfield and de Bolla contend that Monk's thesis "distorts the eighteenth-century debate through its devaluation of rhetorically centered discussions of the sublime," since the rhetorical tradition "provides the conceptual base for the entire development of aesthetics" (Ashfield and De Bolla 10). They do not propose that Longinian rhetorical and Burkean aesthetic concepts of the sublime form an unbroken, cohesive whole, but that the rhetorical tradition provides the broader conceptual base for the entire development of aesthetics at large (10), instead of being the minor historical curiosity that Monk positions it as. Sublime rhetoric is important in and of itself, but has a much broader influence than Monk acknowledges, informing the "transformational capacities of the discourse of the sublime" that are so important for connecting aesthetics to politics, and linking the ethical sublime to the politics of the imagination (11). But other scholars portray this perceived division between rhetoric and aesthetics as beside the point. Neil Hertz's influential reading of Longinus in *The End of the Line* examines how Longinus draws rhetoric and language in to his own argument about the sublime, becoming part of what Hertz calls "the sublime turning" (Hertz 1–3, 8). Rhetoric is what powers the sublime, but this rhetoric is also cloaked in more rhetoric to avoid calling attention to itself: no matter which way you look at it, language is essential to constituting and producing the sublime. Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime* concentrates more on the distinction between the "so-called rhetorical sublime" of Longinus and what he identifies as the Kantian Romantic sublime, but the change that he traces—from a naturalized, affective eighteenth-century sublime to a wild and visionary Romantic sublime—fuses the rhetorical sublime of Longinus to more aestheticized Kantian notions of transcendence (Weiskel 11).

Smith 16). These are qualities of the sublime similar to those qualities of oratory delineated by John Hill and Aaron Hill in Chapter 1, but Smith's description has prescriptive, as well as descriptive, overtones: the Longinian sublime thus becomes something that can be generated or produced if one properly follows a set of guidelines, and a quality that can be performed by the passionate orator. It is rhetorically based, but possesses many of the key characteristics of the theatrical and performative transfer of feeling that underlie the popular mid-century theories of sentiment from which late-century interpretations of the sublime will drastically differentiate themselves; aesthetically, the sublime enters popular literature as a bracing blast of fresh air, but the dynamic that it plumbs between impressionable spectator and dramatic object is patterned on a familiar model. The sublime, Longinus writes, is not only highly persuasive, but actually irresistible as it "strikes home, and triumphs over every Hearer"—yet this power is not an immutable, external force that somehow inhabits the speaker's thoughts, but a quality that can be groomed and amplified through the means of expression (3). Later, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*'s Montoni and *The Italian*'s Schedoni will demonstrate their ability to wield impressive degrees of rhetorically-induced sublimity over others. Radcliffe's passionate antagonists are dramatic and theatrical in their emotional display, and—following the logic of the Longinian sublime—the violence and grandeur of their expression has the capacity to sweep their vulnerable audience up along with them, allowing certain characters to instigate the sublime.

The Longinian sublime also formally integrates sentimentality's elbow-rubbing proximity to the kinds of religious transport that characterize novels like Brooke's *Fool of Quality*. In *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Shaun Irlam analyzes John Dennis's readings of Longinus in service of Dennis's own religious, rhetorical enthusiasm. Even for Dennis, who subordinates the sublime as a derivation of religious ideas, Longinus's sublime

can be simplified into a “transparent conduit of affect,” capable of producing effects in the minds of its witnesses (Irlam 64). Indeed, Marjorie Hope Nicolson’s *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959) cites both Dennis’ and Shaftesbury’s reliance upon “enthusiasm” and “enthusiastic” as trademark descriptors of the early eighteenth-century sublime, although Nicholson contends that both authors offer up distinct readings of a “non-Longinian Sublime” (Nicolson 299); the language of even the early-eighteenth-century sublime intermingles with that of divine elation. Thomas Weiskel parses this similarity as “a way of having it both ways, a transcendence without any controversial theology, a natural religion,” calling the appeal of the natural sublime as it is articulated in “certain passages plucked from the *Peri Hypsous*” a “response to the darker implications of Locke’s psychology.... If the only route to the intellect lies through the senses, belief in a supernatural Being finds itself insecure” (Weiskel 12–14). More generally, Weiskel reads the appeal of the natural sublime as the result of a kind of subverted religious impulse: “The emotions traditionally religious were displaced from the Deity and became associated first with the immensity of space and secondarily with the natural phenomena (oceans, mountains) which seemed to approach that immensity,” he writes (14).⁵⁵ Here, Weiskel touches on a major question for scholars of Burke—how, and how much, does the sublime play the role of a secularized divine?—but, instead of isolating Longinus as an irrelevant antecedent to the eighteenth-century and Romantic sublime, Weiskel links Longinus’ rhetoric of transport to the kind of natural sublime and enthusiastic affect that we tend to associate with Burke. As I will go on to discuss, Radcliffe’s

⁵⁵ Weiskel, however, also makes a fundamental distinction between what he sees as a thoroughly delimited and stable (if emotion-drenched) eighteenth-century sublime, which he contrasts with a wild, visionary Romantic sublime. While his analysis is still relevant and interesting, I do not see as strong of a disjunction between what he describes as two separate modes, nor such a dramatic difference in their originality and efficacy.

heroines often experience the sublime as just this kind of displaced religious experience, with the stunning natural landscape intimating the nearby presence of a Maker, but these moments of near-divine sublimity rarely presage any further religious enquiry. Nevertheless, even a hint of the divine manages to effectively snap the heroine out of her sentimental reverie, and—more broadly—links one more concern of the sentimental with multiple accounts of the sublime.

Luke Gibbons goes on to further empower Longinian transport. In *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Colonial Sublime*, Gibbons directly connects the “idea of ‘transport’, a force which carries us beyond or outside ourselves, which featured prominently in Longinus’s characterization of the sublime” with the sympathetic “imaginative leap, at an ethical or sympathetic level,” between two opposites or cultures (Gibbons 106). This sublime transport could spawn near-religious ecstasy, as in the case of the sublime “enthusiasm” discussed above, or the kind of sympathetic connection which lies at the heart of both sentimentality and the sublime. Gibbons further clarifies that Longinian sublime transport “did not necessarily involve the eclipse of the self but by a dual process may even invigorate it, the mind appropriating to itself some of the power of the force—the originally incommensurable ‘other’—which challenged it” (106). This reading offers tantalizing clues about the workings of the sublime interruption that appears throughout Radcliffe’s novels. Here, the beholder needn’t be paralyzed before the thrall of the sublime, but can potentially become empowered by it, borrowing some of the sublime’s power—and, in the process, gaining just enough self-empowerment and agency to resist becoming wholly consumed either by the sublime *or* the sentimental.⁵⁶ Although Radcliffe’s novels deliberately steer clear of the colonial sublime, her sentimental, sympathetic

⁵⁶ Gibbons goes on to explain this relationship with Sara Suleri’s observations about the operations of sympathy across a colonial divide, where the spectator is empowered at the expense of the spectacle (106-107).

heroines are simultaneously transported and challenged by the sublime in the way that Gibbons describes, while gaining the power to resist it.

Edmund Burke and the Obscure Workings of Sublimity

Edmund Burke's tremendously influential account of the sublime shares Longinus' interest in rhetoric, performance, and the capacity to generate overpowering affect, but his project transforms the sublime into a systematized aesthetic project with its roots in moral sense theory. For our purposes, Burke's emphasis on the contagiousness of sublime affect, and its potential to be caught by others and personified within a human agent, set the stage for Radcliffe's novelistic experimentation with locating and identifying the sources of the sublime: it can spread aggressively from both natural objects as well as other people, and even carries the potential to be fully absorbed and self-consciously inhabited. Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) seeks to articulate and systematize the rules governing human passion by planting them in a common ground of sense-perception (Burke, *Enquiry* 1).⁵⁷ Burke argues that the senses are the origins for all of our ideas, and that the pleasure of sensory perception and response is uniformly shared by all; if we all have the same eyes and ears, he reasons, then we should perceive external objects in the same way, "or with little difference" (13).⁵⁸ In Burke's reasoning, our shared faculties of perception

⁵⁷ Burke's alignment of the sublime with masculine power and the beautiful with more passive femininity sets the stage for the intersection of sociality and gender with the sublime. A thorough discussion on the role of the beautiful and picturesque is beyond the scope of this chapter, but for more, see Mellor, particularly "Domesticating the Sublime" (85-106) and its discussion of how characters' positive experience of sharing the sublime functions in Radcliffe's novels as a form of sympathy; Freeman, especially "Sublime Speculations" (40-67) where Freeman argues for the Burkean sublime's ability to blur gender-based and political boundaries; Johnson's *Equivocal Beings*; Frances Ferguson's *Solitude and the Sublime*, particularly Chapters 1 and 2; and Furniss.

enable a surprising degree of consistency in how feelings and sensations are produced and felt across a wide variety of spectators; he presumes that the sublime acts similarly upon all beholders. His one caveat is that a sensation like the sublime must operate “naturally, simply, and by its proper powers only,” instead of being artificially induced as an absurd effect (13-14). Burke refuses to entertain the possibility of the sublime being controlled or incited, because in his view it is such a direct product of the passions and the senses (provided that the senses “are not uncertain and arbitrary”) (14, 23). Our senses equip us to apprehend the sublime, thereby linking the sublime with the physiological frameworks that underlie contemporary theories of sensibility; so far, though, the sublime is immune to the kinds of accusations about being artificially or self-gratifyingly whipped up into a fervor that will soon come to dog the sentimental. In her later novels, Radcliffe seizes upon the play within the “not uncertain and arbitrary” clause of Burke’s commentary to exert more control over the sensations evoked by the sublime. As I will discuss, the distinction that she makes between terror and horror famously allows her to evoke thrills over Emily’s mistaken encounter with what lies beneath the black veil in *Udolpho* without renouncing the integrity of the sublime and sublime response. Burke’s foundation of the sublime upon sense and response means that Radcliffe can exploit the unreliable, fallible senses to produce sublime affect, making the trappings and tropes of the Gothic the perfect location for such experimentation in cause-and-effect and the explained supernatural.

Burke’s theory of the sublime, grounded in sensory perception as it is, shares some basic common ground with the theory of sympathy that will be set forth by Adam Smith in his *Theory*

⁵⁸ Burke connects this common foundation of sensory experience to the universality of taste. His construction therefore shares common ground with earlier pre-Burkean conceptions of the sublime like those put forth in Addison’s essays on “The Pleasures of the Imagination” in *The Spectator* 411-421 (1712), which root their taxonomies of the sublime upon a shared base of taste and aesthetics.

of *Moral Sentiments* (1759).⁵⁹ (While it's easy to assume that Burke is responding to or building from the concerns of Smithian sympathy, Burke's *Enquiry* was published two years before Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and both works—released before 1760—comfortably precede the heyday of literary sentimentalism.) The Burkean sublime is marked by an astonishment that completely dominates the minds of those who behold it. Its celebrated powers are capable of entirely overtaking the mind's faculties and eliminating reason, making its growing popularity during the 1790s an interesting counterpoint to that same decade's increasingly strenuous emphasis on individual reason and rationality. Both Burke and Smith rely upon the sympathetic, sensitive, imaginative spectator. Burke invokes the commonality of the passions that such a spectator sympathizes with to account for the universality of the sublime experience, citing those passions as what enables us to “enter into the concerns of others; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost any thing that men can do or suffer” (44). Burke formulates this sympathy as a “sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected,” claiming that “we have a degree of delight... in the real misfortunes and pains of others” because “[i]f this passion was simply painful, we would shun with the greatest care all persons and places that could excite such a passion,” but our “delight... in such things, hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel, prompts us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer” (44-46). Our joy in self-preservation, then, allows us a feeling of

⁵⁹ This is not to imply that Burke and Smith present the only representative or dominant views of sublimity and sympathy in the eighteenth century; as two influential voices on their respective subjects who work from similar cultural and intellectual material, however, they provide convenient touchstones with which to examine the intersections and divergences between these two influential branches of thought. Nor do I mean to imply that the sublime's evolution throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century is a smooth or continuous transformation; much like sentimentality branches off into various generic and sub-generic offshoots of the same tree during this time period, the sublime gradually ripples outwards in its various—though loosely-related—forms and mutations.

delight in even the most intuitive acts of sympathy, as well as moving us towards morally correct actions; it is a common denominator for both the sentimental and the sublime, and explains why eighteenth-century men and women of sensibility so often willingly engage themselves in demanding and potentially dangerous emotional vicissitudes, whether of a sentimental or sublime character.

Despite the pleasure that may result, Luke Gibbons emphasizes the close, contagious nature of Burkean sympathy: Burke describes the effects that “a moving tone of voice, an impassioned countenance, an agitated gesture” can have in stoking “the contagion of our passions,” allowing us to “catch a fire already kindled in another” (Burke, *Enquiry* 175). Although we predominantly associate Burke with dramatic feelings that are caught from sublime natural objects, Burke also cites distinctively Longinian physical, oratorical rhetoric as an instrument for the kind of sympathy that can enable and lead to the sublime. His final remarks on this contagious sympathy are focused around the ability of words and languages to “strongly convey” the passions to observers, and whether they are capable of “being the representatives of these natural things, and by what powers they were able to affect us often as strongly as the things they represent, and sometimes much more strongly” (176-7). This seemingly off-hand conclusion elevates the rhetorical sublime to the same importance as the natural sublime, and even admits that words can be *more* affecting than the most imposing natural objects; an Alp, in other words, does not necessarily convey more passion than a skilled orator.

Moreover, the irresistible pull of sympathy grabs spectators and involves them in others’ pleasure or pain—the latter of which, involving the passions of self-preservation, “may be a source of the sublime” (44). For Burke, Gibbons argues, sympathy is necessary and detachment is unacceptable, which is why we are (in Burke’s terms) never to be “indifferent spectators”;

there is a difference between beholding suffering and suffering ourselves, but Burke's reworking of the sublime "in terms of sympathy attempts to close the gap between the two, rather than to open it up" (Gibbons 109–110). (As Steven Bruhm points out, Adam Smith begins with the assumption that "we have no immediate experience of what other men feel," and feelings are always diminished in their transferral, whereas for Burke, sympathetic pain can "press too close" and be felt too strongly (Bruhm 17); for Burke, we can enter into another's passions with devastating speed.) Gibbons argues that this attempt to shrink the gap between witnessing and sharing pain is part and parcel of the sublime's ability to not only alleviate our own suffering, but that of others: it prevents us from being repulsed by or shunning others' pain, and instead prompts us "to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer" (Gibbons 110; Burke 46). In other words, sympathy doesn't place us dangerously close to the sublime object, merely close *enough* to engage with, not necessarily become subsumed by, it. Gibbons, however, downplays the elements of disengagement and detachment also present in Burke's theory: despite the necessary involvement of sympathy, the Burkean sublime requires that some distance remain between the spectator and the sublime object for self-preservation, and it does not strive to efface the separation between spectator and sufferer like the sentimental will so strenuously (not to mention vociferously) attempt to do. Radcliffe's heroines are rarely indifferent spectators—as I will go on to show, they are all cast from the same mold as most literary sentimental heroines throughout the mid- to late-eighteenth century, which is hardly a model that accommodates traits like icy detachment—and in addition to preventing the subject from getting dangerously close to the sublime, the spectatorial gap also leaves room for one mode to place the other in check. Her heroines' sympathy, in other words, places them just close enough to engage with the sublime, and for the sublime to disrupt and check runaway sentimentality.

If Longinus's sublime is constituted by the language that gives birth to it, then Burke's sublime is equally, deliberately obscured by the atmosphere of divinity and God-given power that is its aesthetic hallmark. While Burke spends some time describing the various passions evoked by the sublime, he dedicates an equal—if not greater—amount of space to cataloguing and describing the qualities which can trigger these effects. Unfortunately, Burke deliberately absolves himself of the responsibility for explaining the connections that he forges between sublime objects, the body, and the mind. “I do not pretend that I shall ever be able to explain,” he writes, “why the body is at all affected by the mind, or the mind by the body,” although he concedes that discovering how “certain emotions of the body” produce, and are produced by, “affections of the mind” would be “not unuseful” (129). “This is all, I believe, we can do,” he continues. “If we could advance a step farther, difficulties would still remain.” Burke then recalls Newton, whose *Opticks* (1704) comes to be so influential on sentimental thought about how the body responds to stimuli, and criticizes Newton's later attempts in the *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* to create a “general system of things” explaining cause and effect as insufficiently cautious, leaving us with “as many difficulties as it found us... That great chain of causes, which linking one to another even to the throne of God himself, can never be unraveled by any industry of ours” (129). Burke doesn't just neglect to connect the dots linking individual perception and effect: he stubbornly refuses to do so. The Burkean sublime is largely associative; it strikes us when “we have not capacity to reflect” on it, defying attempts to untangle the emotions produced associatively from sympathy from “natural effects” (130). The sublime stubbornly remains a black box: we know its causes (in the forms of terror, obscurity, vastness, etc.) and its effects, but Burke will not unveil its inner workings any further. This intentional vagueness on Burke's part is what allows novelists like Radcliffe to experiment with

such wildly divergent explanations for and exhibitions of its mechanics, variously filling in the blanks with sublime rhetoric, objects, landscapes, and people.

Steven Knapp, writing in *Personification and the Sublime*, observes that the “most notorious obstacle confronting historians of the sublime is the difficulty of deciding who or what, in any given case, the critic means to call ‘sublime’”: the object itself, the authorial agent producing it, or the spectator encountering it (Knapp 67). Both the author—or, as we will come to see most often in Radcliffe’s novels, the divine Author—of the sublime figure, and the experience that it generates, are potential sources of sublimity, and these ambiguous origins persist within Burke’s *Enquiry*. Knapp describes the sublime as depending “on an ideal of perfect, self-originating agency that no one really expects or wants to fulfill,” arguing that the sublime experience has less to do with the subject striving to identify with “a transcendent ideal of pure subjective power” but the freedom to “entertain that ideal as an abstract... possibility” (3). The sublime, as Burke abundantly makes clear in the *Enquiry*, is inherently dangerous; like moths to a flame, we might be irresistibly drawn to it, but that doesn’t mean that we really want to get close enough to burn ourselves or become entranced enough to seek self-immolation. If we follow Knapp’s reading, the origins of the sublime are something of a moot point; it is how the “transcendent ideal” of the sublime filters down into our fallible, ordinary, everyday lives that is of interest, and also explains why so relatively little ink—on Radcliffe’s, eighteenth-century authors’, and contemporary critics’ collective parts—has been spilled over the sublime’s divine Source. God, for the eighteenth-century literary sublime, is a theoretical MacGuffin, proving its motivations but not its intrigue. Knapp explains the sublime’s “self-originating agency” in terms of sublime personification, where the sublime agent’s “personification is self-consciously obsessed with the grounds of its own allegorical being” (3). The sublime in

Radcliffe's novels is rarely explicitly allegorical, but it breeds precisely the kind of self-consciousness that Knapp introduces here: heroines who experience the sublime develop the ability to sculpt and discipline their own sentimental, solipsistic excesses (or "radical self-absorption," to borrow another of Knapp's terms), and—on the farthest end of the spectrum—a character like Schedoni arises who appears to represent an attempt to embody pure, malevolent sublimity in good earnest.⁶⁰ Sublime personification can thus be read as a form of self-creation, and, as I will show in my readings of Radcliffe below, the seemingly unstoppable force of the sublime paradoxically enables sentimental characters to gain more control over their own sensibility. Furthermore, the Gothic is the ideal testing ground for experimenting with the reflexive interplay of these two modes, for it is nothing if not a generic playground for evoking and adjudicating emotional response.

Immanuel Kant and the Opacity of the Sublime

It is unlikely that Ann Radcliffe had any firsthand exposure to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) during the eight-year-long period at the end of the eighteenth century when she produced her five major novels, but her works are not faithful, step-by-step fictional enactments of existing theories on sentimentality and the sublime, nor were they produced within

⁶⁰ Frances Ferguson takes her reading of Burke to an equally suggestive but different place, arguing that Burke's model of the sublime encourages individuals' affective responses to themselves become "constitutive of aesthetic objects," thereby potentially rendering the *representations* of experience to become the very *objects* of response themselves (Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime* 2). This, too, is a confusion shared by sentimentality: when readers, or even characters within fictions, weep at a pathetic novel, the contents of that novel become moot; the novel becomes the symbol and encapsulation of deep and profound distress, regardless of its actual substance. Burke's representative fuzziness is shared by the expressions of the sublime that take place in Radcliffe's novels: it is often unclear whether the sublime is located in the scene or person before a character, or whether it takes place somewhere within the character's response to that sublime stimulus. For Ferguson, this ambiguity in the sublime will only be satisfactorily explained within the firmer, less affect-driven framework of Kantian aesthetics (Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime* 2–3).

a cultural vacuum. By reading her works through the lens of the Kantian sublime, we gain valuable perspective on how her sentimental characters react to and against the sublime, and how other characters personify it; Kant's resolutely anti-social sublime resists the forces of sympathy and understanding even more than Longinus' or Burke's, instead prompting characters to reflect back on themselves.

Like Burke before him, Kant questions the aesthetic judgments often used to distinguish between the beautiful and the sublime. Using the same method of investigation that he uses in his investigation of the beautiful, Kant begins his analysis of the sublime with one key distinction: he divides the sublime into the mathematically and the dynamically sublime (Kant 101). The former refers to the "agitation" that arises from the "cognitive power" in encounters with the sublime; the latter, with the "power of desire" that it inspires (101). The mathematical sublime surpasses "any standard of sensibility" and sense-knowledge; it is "large beyond any comparison even with the power of mathematical estimation" (112). By feeling our imagination's frustrated attempts to comprehend a seemingly infinite whole all at once, we get a sense of how impossibly immense an object can be, even if we abstract our attempts at measurement (by trying to comprehend, for example, the size of the solar system in terms of how large it is in comparison to the earth's diameter) (113).

The dynamical sublime hews more closely to the familiar aesthetics of the Burkean sublime and its locus in wild, fearsome, and unbounded natural objects: "consider," Kant invites us, "bold, overhanging and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piling up in the sky and moving about accompanied by lightning and thunderclaps... the boundless ocean heaved up... Compared to the might of any of these, our ability to resist becomes an insignificant trifle" (120). But, when viewed from a position of safety, "the sight of them becomes all the more attractive

the more fearful it is... we like to call these objects sublime because they raise the soul's fortitude above its usual middle range and allow us to discover in ourselves an ability to resist which is of a quite different kind, and which gives us the courage [to believe] that we could be a match for nature's seeming omnipotence." It is this "ability to resist" the incredible power of nature that gives us a new sense of comparative smallness of our human woes: we "regard as small" concerns about "property, health, and life," thereby elevating our minds and imaginations (121). Our initial fear of imposing natural phenomena yields to a sense of self-possession, even a perceived "superiority over nature itself in its immensity" (120), instantly recalibrating the spectator's judgment of the size and severity of her own travails.

Whereas Burke fills most of the space in his *Enquiry* with catalogues detailing the aesthetic characteristics of the sublime, Kant is emphatic that "sublimity" is not a fixed category or objective quality. "Nothing that can be an object of the senses is to be called sublime," he writes (106). It is "the attunement that the intellect [gets]" through the perception and judgment of absolutely large objects that generates the sublime, "not the object" that inspires that mental processing. In fact, Kant declares that the entire phenomenon of the sublime is a "mere appendix" to the more important task of judging the purposiveness of nature (100). Here again, he is less interested in defining what, precisely, the sublime *is*, and more in declaring its importance in relation to its effects on the beholder. Frances Ferguson, in *Solitude and the Sublime*, emphasizes how stubbornly the Kantian natural sublime resists our attempts at scrutiny and understanding: the "sublime aesthetic experience as the communication of intentionlessness" (Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime* 4). Kantian aesthetics can be seen as a site for an "examination of the meaningfulness of the very lack of fit between objects and the individuals that perceive them" (5); whereas the Burkean sublime is asocial or antisocial, the "failure of an

individual in the face of sensation” (8), Kant presents “a completely different system of representation” that directs us away from sensory experience (22). The individuality of Kantian aesthetic experience even means that “the communication of sympathy, understood as parallel responses to similar objects, ceases to exist” (29)—not only is the sublime incomprehensible and undefinable, but it provides no common social ground in which to establish sympathetic communication. As such, the Kantian sublime is unchanged by affect and inherently indifferent. This fundamental ambivalence and refutation of attempts to pin human affect onto the sublime makes it a provocative counterpoint to the depictions of sentimentality and sympathy in Radcliffe’s novels: the dramatic natural landscape then changes from a background designed to inspire affect, to an unresponsive aesthetic mass that flatly refuses to mirror the subject’s feelings and instead forces the subject to reconsider their own self-representation.

The newfound emotional self-consciousness generated by the Kantian sublime also plays into the undercurrent of theatricality that undergirds so many eighteenth-century models of emotional and aesthetic response. In the previous section, I returned to the figure of the impartial spectator and the close operation of sympathy within the mechanics of the Burkean sublime; Kant denies the existence of sympathy within the sublime, but nevertheless relies on the same underlying theatrical metaphor. Ferguson takes up the “natural theatrics” of Kant’s “threatening rocks,” noting that their threatening potential is the product of “the personifying projection,” not any threatening, deceptive behavior on the part of the rock—as human spectators, we are prone to fill in the blanks and ascribe nonexistent intention to the natural world (Ferguson 72-73). Here again, we are reminded that our pleasure in nature comes “outside... of the question of design or intention”; the Kantian sublime does not participate in the “eighteenth-century obsession” of trying to represent one’s consciousness to another’s consciousness (Ferguson 130),

freeing the individual from the burden of performing clear emotional self-representation for the eyes of the impartial spectator. Instead, Kant's sublime "establishes nature as the instrument for the production of individuality itself." Any pleasure that we derive from nature comes from us, as humans; nature is of course "indifferent to our reactions" (130). Consequently, our pleasure in nature generates "self-consciousness as a version of imagining where any kind of meaning might originate"—the natural sublime is merely the insurmountable obstacle whose utter unresponsiveness forces its spectator to turn back to herself in a state of solitary self-reflection, freeing her from the exchange of sympathy or representation of affect. When nature inspires pain or pleasure, that self-consciousness appears natural, "like the forced product of nature's coercive force," but that projection of intention onto the natural world is illusory. Ferguson concludes that "nature's might provides the model for an extraordinarily productive confusion" (131); I see it as another example of how the Kantian sublime, for all of its aloof disinterest, can generate a kind of sentimental self-consciousness in the frustrated sympathetic beholder.

Gothic Expansions

"Gothic," as an adjective loosely used to describe Germanic or medieval languages and architecture, has been in use since the 1600s, and use of the term in Britain through the 1760s is similarly restricted to the Goths, typography, and architecture.⁶¹ It begins to be applied to novels following the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* in 1764, which contains many elements of what will come to be thought of as the typical apparatus of

⁶¹ See, for example, the first edition of Chambers' *Cyclopædia* (1728), which defines it as "something that has a relation to the *Goths*," with subheadings for Gothic characters and Gothic Architecture (Chambers 1: 173); Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum* (1736) also restricts its definitions to "Gothick Building," "Gothic Character," and "Gothic Column" (N. Bailey). None of the editions or adaptations of Johnson's *Dictionary* published between 1755 and 1800 use the word, except in reference to architecture.

Gothic fiction: castles, an atmospheric, vaguely medieval setting, terrifying supernatural elements, echoes of Catholicism, and ominous, domineering father figures. While subsequent Gothic novels, like Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1777), do not feel the need to hew too closely to Walpole's original formula, these features nevertheless loosely become part of the canon of typically Gothic tropes: above all else, the evocation of terror and hints of the *outré* come to be seen as its defining trademarks.⁶² As Elizabeth R. Napier points out, contemporary critics were well aware of how many self-proclaimed Gothic novels were simply sentimental novels with their tropes switched out, and Radcliffe herself was a frequent target of censure for her "historical veneering" of tales of romance (21–22, 25). A footnote to 1810's *The Age; A Poem* details the changes necessary to transform a (Gothic) romance into a (sentimental) novel:

"From any romance to make a novel.	
"Where you find—	
"A castle, ...	put An house.
"A cavern, ...	A bower.
"A groan, ...	A sigh.
"A giant, ...	A father.
"A blood-stained dagger	A fan,
"Howling blasts	Zephyrs.
"A knight	A gentleman without whiskers.
"A lady who is the heroine, ...	Need not be changed, being versatile.
"Assassins, ...	Killing glances.
"A monk, ...	An old steward.
"Skeletons, skulls, &c.	Compliments, sentiments, &c.
"A lamp, ...	A candle.
"A magic book sprinkled with blood	A letter bedewed with tears.
"Mysterious voices, ...	Abstruse words, (easily found in a
dictionary.	
"A secret oath, ...	A tender hint accompanied with naiveté.
"A gliding ghost, ...	A usurer, or an attorney.
"A witch, ...	An old housekeeper.
"A wound, ...	A kiss.

⁶² For more studies on the early literary Gothic, see Gamer, Bruhm, Varma, Mishra, Howard, Haggerty, Richter, Kate Ferguson Ellis, Brooks, and Sedgwick's *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*.

“A midnight murder, ... A marriage.

“The same table of course answers for transmuting a novel into a romance.” (209–210)

Even the key elements of the Gothic that have been made much of by critics of more recent years are, in the eyes of *The Age*, merely superficial and entirely interchangeable figures: blood-stained daggers are nothing more than trumped-up fans, and midnight murders come to fill the same plot holes as marriages. But, as the facetious comparison of sprinkled blood with bedewed tears indicates, the Gothic romance preserves the sentimental novel’s underlying desire to signify and elicit (in however hackneyed a manner) intimate emotions. Tears and blood are both physical, elemental bodily productions; the tear is the currency of sentimentality, signifying true and deeply-felt emotion, while blood is a far more lurid—but equally vital—bodily essence. Gothic novels may move in different directions than their sentimental peers, but they use a similar set of genre-based tools to do so, and strive equally for affect. Napier notes that many late-eighteenth-century novelists like Clara Reeve, Regina Maria Roche, and Eliza Parsons switched between the sentimental and the Gothic modes from work to work, and authors like Charlotte Smith made free use of Gothic devices; “both modes assume the primacy of feeling, and the pleasure of exercising it vicariously, and gain their effect by encouraging particularly strong emotional responses from their readers” (26). In other words, the intensity of emotional response is at the core of these novelists’ works, and the means used to get there—whether drawing from sentimentalized or Gothic conventions—remains secondary to that goal. For this reason, the Gothic traits of Radcliffe’s novels can be read not as a departure from the sentimental tradition, but a variation upon it. Gothicism, Napier concludes, is much less about evil, “the fascination of the abomination” as Hume terms it, than it is “a standardized, absolutely formulaic system of creating a certain kind of atmosphere in which a reader’s sensibility toward fear and horror is

exercised in predictable ways” (29). One might question the extent of the “absolutely formulaic” predictability that Napier cites here—the ghosts, monks, and castles listed in *The Age*’s table are not unreasonably expected to extract readerly thrills, but their success in doing so depends in equal part upon the skill of the author—but the Gothic, like the sentimental, relies upon a formulaic system of cause and effect.

But the Gothic is far from just a turn-of-the-century rebranding of the sentimental. David Morris, Robert Miles, and Michael Gamer, among others, have convincingly argued that the Gothic is an important site for the construction of a unique and mutable mode that blends genres, discourses, and conventions; it possesses a structural flexibility that, for Radcliffe, makes it the perfect site in which to continue some of the concerns and conventions of the sentimental while introducing various modes of evoking and embodying the sublime, and letting the two modes interrogate (not fight or overwrite) each other. David Morris, in “Gothic Sublimity,” posits that the Gothic novel significantly revises the eighteenth-century sublime (Morris 300). Morris argues that the eighteenth-century novelistic sublime is extended far beyond the initial frameworks established by Longinus, Burke, *et al.*; the sublime has not a “single, unchanging nature or essence,” even though many of its most distinctive features are consolidated by Burke. Furthermore, the “standard critical reading which interprets Gothic sublimity as merely instrumental... a repertoire of terrifying devices... reduc[ing] Gothic sublimity to the familiar inventory of ghosts and dark passageways cannot help us understand what was both profoundly innovative and yet also deeply inadequate in Burke’s account” (301). Here, Morris makes several significant claims. Firstly, he, like Thomas Weiskel and others before him, distinguishes between various revisions of the sublime, but views the eighteenth-century sublime as being revised by the Gothic novel, letting it depart from the realistic tradition: a move which lends the

often-parodied and humble Gothic novel some meaningful weight, allowing it to go beyond the catalogues of Burkean features that it's often reduced to. Secondly, he posits that there is no one singular, canonical Gothic form, even though there are shared characteristics like excessive feeling (303). Although I don't view the original verses that pepper Radcliffe's novels as the product of an especially Gothic generic freedom—one finds plenty of purple prosody in sentimental novels, too—Morris' larger point about how the Gothic ranges far beyond the limits erected by Burke's *Enquiry* is well-taken, and does much to explain how Radcliffe can simultaneously draw from conventions of the sentimental as well as the sublime to interrogate contrasting modes of excess.

Michael Gamer's reading of the Gothic in *Romanticism and the Gothic* builds from the argument of Robert Miles, who in *Gothic Writing 1750-1820* asserts that we should not understand the Gothic as a set of flexible prose conventions, "but as a discursive site crossing the genres" (Gamer 3). Gamer labels the Gothic not a site ("which carries with it suggestions of anchored stability") but a shifting, moving aesthetic (Gamer 4). Gamer's Gothic—as his description of it as "organic and protean" makes clear—cannot be tamed and delimited by attempts to appropriate it in forms like ballads, tragedy, and metrical romance, or reduce it to formulaic fiction-by-numbers (4, 9). Gamer emphatically (and repeatedly) cautions against trying to assign the Gothic a "static identity," urging us to instead "understand the historical changes and generic transformations that led it to embody its various forms" (9-10). Gamer does not set out to deny the Gothic's reliance upon its own repertoire of figures and clichés or to refute its inheritance from the sentimental, but his insistence that the Gothic is an ad hoc mutable form constructed by its writers and its readers lets us read Radcliffe's novels as evolving, not

initially failed, attempts at constructing meaning through the integration, reinvention, and overlap of various (and often excessive) genres. It is this evolution to which we now turn.

Suspending Sentiment and Cultivating the Sublime through Radcliffe's Gothic Novels

The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne

Radcliffe's first novel, 1789's anonymously-published *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne: A Highland Story*, illustrates how closely Radcliffe's earlier Gothic novels adhere to sentimental conventions of character and plot while illuminating some of the gaps in sentimentality's existing strategies for regulating excessive feeling that have yet to be satisfactorily filled. The book features many of the titular warring clans, medieval castles in isolated, craggy landscapes, and malevolent, megalomaniacal patriarchs who so frequently inhabit the Gothic, but beneath these trappings it contains all of the typical character types and descriptions of feeling that one could find in any of the sentimental novels discussed in the previous chapter. The chiefs of each of the two warring clans are introduced in terms of their sensibility and susceptibility to the passions, and Osbert of Athlin's younger sister Mary cuts a familiar figure as the novel's stock sentimental heroine, who struggles to control her feelings under the tutelage of her mother. While listening to the sad history of a local villager, Mary suffers "a variety of emotions sympathetic to all the vicissitudes of his situation"; despite her best efforts to control her emotional response, "so unequal were her efforts to the strength of her emotions, that... her cheek grew pale and she relapsed into a fainting fit" (*The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* 30). (Nelson C. Smith notes that Mary faints "nine times in forty pages, including twice in one paragraph," her sustained weeping acting as "the truest test of the person of refined sensibility" (581).) Mary struggles to control her susceptibility to "all the fine

emotions of delicate passion” (44), but, as Elizabeth R. Napier points out, the Gothic heroine’s job—just like that of the sentimental heroine—is to “call into question the very novel that engendered her” by using the natural sensibility that she is endowed with to *resist* that same vulnerability to affect (Napier 42).

Mary, however, goes one step beyond exercising emotional restraint, and voluntarily elects to suffer through a hateful marriage with Malcolm of Dunbayne in order to save her brother. “She resolved,” Radcliffe explains, “that since she must be wretched, she would be nobly wretched; since misery demanded one sacrifice, she would devote herself the victim” (*Athlin and Dunbayne* 45). Mary’s decision is ambiguous: it could be seen as a noble sacrifice to save her brother, or as a form of self-martyrdom, wherein she elects to become the victim of her own “excess of feeling” (45). Radcliffe doesn’t force the comparison, but Mary positions herself as a willing (if momentary, given her weakness for tears) Stoic in the Smithian mold, attempting to ignore her own self-interest by sacrificing her desires in order to save her brother. Yet it is this resolution that exhausts her with excess of feeling almost to the point of “insensibility”: Mary’s sacrifice, in other words, seems to be less one of voluntary, altruistic stoicism, and more one that plunges her into unbearably keen feelings, rendering her even more of the traditional sentimental heroine despite the veneer of decisive self-command motivating her decision. As readers, we are invited to admire her gesture towards restraint and moderation, although we’re unlikely to identify with her or believe that she’ll successfully follow through.

The atmospheric elements of nascent Gothicism in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* do little to alter the sentimental substructure of its characters and plot. The lovelorn Mary’s typically romantic longing for Alleyn (the noble peasant whose troubles lead her into her earlier fainting fit) leads to an inevitable decline in health, which her mother—who sympathetically

suffers “a distress almost equal to that of her daughter”—believes can be conquered by time, effort, and “gentle reasoning.”⁶³ Mary resolves, with her mother’s help, to “overcome” her weakness by devoting herself to “the cultivation of her mind, and improvement of her various accomplishments” (38). These vigorous efforts at self-control and self-improvement are rather vaguely described as “not unsuccessful,” but Mary—who is described in devotional terms as preoccupied with “the enthusiasm of love”—continues to be physically and emotionally “overcome” by the effort of controlling her “overflowing” heart (38, 47). Just the memory of Alleyn “excited emotions dangerous to her fortitude,” and his unexpected reappearance triggers a tide of joy “which hurried to her heart, and threatened to overwhelm her” (68, 74). Ultimately, when the timely revelation of a strategically-located strawberry mark proves Alleyn to be the rightful heir of Dunbayne, the obstacles preventing his and Mary’s union are removed, and Mary’s “emotions almost overcame her, and were too powerful for utterance” (112). Even at the end of the novel, deep sentiment still surpasses the expressive capacity of language and tests the limits of rationality, but to distinctively sentimental—not sublime—ends.

Despite the lip service paid to education and the disciplined resistance to feeling, the take-home message of Mary’s story still seems to be that, for those with innate sensibility, deeply-rooted feelings are barely manageable at best. Mary’s attempts at stoicism and restraint only feed her sentimental weakness, and without the fortunate plot machinations that take place at the end of *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, it seems likely that Mary would be perpetually mired in an unhappy sentimental limbo—not able to fully indulge her powerful feelings, but not

⁶³ The Countess’s sympathy for her daughter is distinctly Smithian in its description; the Countess, as spectator, can at most feel *almost* as much for her daughter, but her affectionate heart swells with “equal wishes for her happiness” (38). She can never sympathetically suffer as much as her daughter, but can equal her in benevolence and good wishes.

able to fully resist them, either. “There is a certain point of misery,” a narrator warns readers near the end of the novel, “beyond which the mind becomes callous, and acquires a sort of artificial calm. Excess of misery may be said to blast the vital powers of feeling, and by a natural consequence consumes its own principle” (98). Mary exerts enough control over both her feelings and her circumstances to avoid this benumbing, all-consuming point of excess, but Radcliffe hardly warns her readers to stay away from the dangers of profound feeling altogether, and provides no examples of more successful, vigorous resistance to it. Given that neither the novel’s sentimental nor its superficially Gothic elements provide a satisfactory solution to the question of how excessive feeling is to be capably managed—and even Radcliffe herself seems uninterested in plumbing the depths of her characters’ abilities to wallow in feeling—it is unsurprising that her next novel begins to experiment with locating emotions in different sources, and turning the Gothic towards integrating elements of the sublime.

A Sicilian Romance

Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance*, published a year later in 1790, initially appears to trade even more explicitly in the familiar tropes that are a mainstay of contemporary sentimental novels, although the author takes a firmer stance about the necessity of feeling’s restriction and regulation. The plot revolves around a pair of sisters, one of whom has a disposition given to sensibility, and the necessity of tempering this sensibility with understanding; in this, Radcliffe anticipates the sisters of sense and sensibility in Jane West’s *A Gossip’s Story* by six years, and Austen’s composition of the earliest draft of *Sense and Sensibility* by five. Elder sister Emilia has a “mild and sweet temper, united with a clear and comprehensive mind” (*A Sicilian Romance* 4). In contrast, younger sister Julia is often uneasy due to her “extreme sensibility,” and her

tendency to be both quickly irritated and quickly appeased; her feelings “trembled in unison” to the charms of music (4). The sisters’ tutor takes care to “counteract those traits in the disposition of her young pupils, which appeared inimical to their future happiness”—in other words, training and guiding her charges’ qualities and natural sensibility. Madame de Menon is particularly well-chosen for this task because “a series of early misfortunes had entended her heart, without weakening the powers of her understanding.” Over time, she recovered from this misfortune with “tranquility, and had almost lost the consciousness of those sorrows which yet threw a soft and not unpleasing shade over her character.” Madame de Menon provides the sisters—as well as the readers—with a model of mellowed, mature sensibility: she blends sensibility with understanding (which is, for Radcliffe as well as so many other sentimental novelists, the ideal), and her early emotional scars only serve to make her more attractive.

Radcliffe argues that innate sensibility and refinement must be united with “a knowledge of the world” as well as “that elegance of manner, which is to be acquired only by frequenting the higher circles of polished life,” since experience—as the example of Madame de Menon demonstrates—only refines sentimentality (7). “Here fancy flourishes,—the sensibilities expand—and wit, guided by delicacy and embellished by taste—points to the heart” (7-8). This nod towards a form of moderated sensibility capable of operating within the world presents a less purist model of desirable sentimentality than those found in earlier novels, where any mitigation of feeling—through self-command, education, or restraint—was seen as an undesirable dilution of something that ought to be natural and beautiful. Similarly, Julia’s “too late” discovery that “in order to have a due command of our passions, it is necessary to subject them to early obedience” is clearly presented as a potential flaw or downfall (25). “Passion, in its undue influence,” the narrator continues, “produces weakness as well as injustice,” and Radcliffe

clarifies that Julia's weakness—driven by her lack of strength for disciplining and experience with regulating her own feelings—means that all of her internal torture is self-inflicted, as she sits in solitude “indulg[ing] in melancholy thoughts” and despair (25-26). The contrast between Julia's behavior and that of Emilia, her more sensible older sister, only makes such a critique more apparent, and Radcliffe's censure of Julia's lack of command is a far cry from her ambivalent treatment of the sentimentally self-sacrificing Mary in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*. Furthermore, Julia's sentimental weakness is explicitly noted early in the novel; the narrative establishes the problems of unregulated feeling as one of its starting assumptions, not seeing the necessity of working towards this point as an ultimate conclusion.

Julia's descent into sentimental despair comes during the first few pages of *A Sicilian Romance*; afterward, the novel's focus shifts to more identifiably Gothic plot elements. As Alison Milbank notes, *A Sicilian Romance* bears a marked resemblance to Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1785), which similarly follows the seclusion and imprisonment of a pair of sisters within a distinctly Gothic milieu (Milbank xxvii–xxviii).⁶⁴ Whereas *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* contains, despite its ominous, craggy castles, little else in the way of Gothicized atmospherics, *A Sicilian Romance* sees the entrance of the mysteries and foreboding, potentially sublime scenery that will become Radcliffe's aesthetic and affective trademarks. The novel's introduction establishes the castle as a scene of “sublimity and grandeur,” leading the narrator to follow the “natural association of ideas” it prompts to a heart-swelling scene of reflection—establishing emotions, in other words, that arise from one's surroundings, not from within (1).

⁶⁴ This is a particularly tantalizing resemblance for modern critics because—since biographical information on Radcliffe's life is famously thin on the ground—some nineteenth-century sources speculated that she attended a boarding school run by the Lee sisters, and this suggestion is often repeated in modern biographies. See Norton 46–48 for a thorough discussion of this claim, which Norton dismisses as groundless. Nevertheless, Radcliffe was certainly familiar with Lee's literary work, however unlikely a personal connection may have been.

Soon after the sisters' introduction as sentimental heroines, their callous stepmother relocates them to a gloomy portion of their castle, prompting them and their brother Frederick to undertake the candlelit exploration of a decrepit and ruined annex accompanied by a soundtrack of blood-curdling groans. The Marquis, the siblings' distant and impervious father, reveals the castle's bloody and dreadful history to Frederick, while ordering the lovelorn Julia to marry a tyrannical and grasping Duke. Frederick and Hippolitus—Julia's lover—appear to help her escape on the night before her decision is due, and Julia's response to their arrival is a perfect mixture of the scruples of a sentimental heroine with the reactive terror that comes to characterize the Gothic. "A sense of delicacy" makes her hesitate to make the decision "which her heart so warmly prompted" (62). Fleeing with Hippolitus would enable her to avoid the "dreadful destiny awaiting her, but must," in the tradition of Richardson's *Clarissa*, "sully the purity of that reputation, which was dearer to her than existence." Julia, in the tradition of so many Gothic heroines to come (see, for example, Kate Ferguson Ellis' reading of the Gothic novel as a site of feminine resistance to patriarchal ideology in *The Contested Castle*) feels the looming tyranny of her father's decision to marry her to the Duke for his own nefarious purposes, but her sentimental scruples guide her honorable behavior. So far, the presence of the Gothic has merely infused the sentimental Julia and Emilia's adventures with some added piquancy and hints of terror, but Julia's eventual flight from the Duke allows for the first significant incursion of Radcliffe's descriptions of the sublime and their intervention into her characters' experiences of feeling.

The sought-for Julia disappears for the middle portion of the novel, but in her stead Radcliffe first presents the powers of the sublime as seen through the more mature, but equally sensible, eyes of Madame de Menon. Even in the midst of a hectic search, her surroundings

infuse Madame de Menon with a “pleasing and complacent melancholy,” and the sight of a view “various and sublime,” marked by an irregular group of “grotesque” rocks, is enough to elevate “the mind of the beholder to enthusiasm” (104). Thus far, Radcliffe has chiefly connected “enthusiasm” with sentimental feeling—with the vigor and profundity of Mary’s emotions in *Castles*, for example. Here, however, the sublimity of nature elevates Madame’s mind to a state of rapture and “reverential awe.” The aesthetic power of her surroundings subtly forces her (presumably heavy) thoughts “into a pleasing and complacent melancholy,” and she continues in this state with her feelings benumbed into a pleasant “insensibility” before the elevating power of the “vast magnificence” before her. While her concern over Julia’s increasingly dire situation would seem to give Madame the perfect excuse to repeatedly (not to mention tearfully) worry over her fate, her susceptibility to her surroundings allows the sublime to quell her overriding anxiety, and to place her fears into perspective through the sublime’s “involuntary” association between “Nature and up to Nature’s God.” This last citation, editor Alison Milbank explains in a note, is a slight misquotation from Epistle IV of Pope’s *Essay on Man*: the “sole Bliss” that can be bestowed on man can be found by looking “thro’ *Nature* up to *Nature’s* GOD” to “that *Chain* which links th’ immense Design, / Joyns Heav’n, and Earth, and mortal, and divine” in the familiar links forged by the great chain of being (Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance* 207–8; Pope 15–16).

In this scene, Radcliffe evokes some familiar aesthetic elements of the sentimental, but her reference to Pope gestures towards the vastness and the divine origins of the Burkean sublime. The sight “captivated her heart”—in short, the sublime has effaced the hold of Madame’s more sentimental concerns, and re-centered her feelings around the God-given impact of the sublime. (Note, too, that in this case the sublime seems to operate within the same

territory of the sentimental—it specifically captivates Madame’s *heart*, not merely her faculties or her mind.) As if to underscore the importance of this shift and show how the sublime has metaphorically re-opened Madame’s eyes, she spots the long-lost Julia “at some distance” on the following page. In turn, we then discover that Julia has taken refuge in an abbey, whose “large magnificent mass of Gothic architecture, whose gloomy battlements, and majestic towers arose in proud sublimity from amid the darkness of the surrounding shades,” and whose most “striking” characteristic is that of a paradoxical tranquility (116). In the abbey, the Gothic provides a literal and figurative refuge for menacing sublimity and more delicate sentiments at the same time.

The specter of Catholicism is a thematic mainstay of the Gothic novel—Radcliffe’s own *The Italian* will soon exploit ominous monks and the corrupt workings of the Inquisition for the sake of readerly thrills, and the threat to later Gothic heroines of punitive imprisonment inside a convent is itself an amplified rendition of the retreat to a nunnery that so often haunts many proper sentimental heroines—but here, spiritual solace and uplift are evoked in a way that emphasizes their contiguity with the sublime. For Burke, the sublime is a “modification of power,” and when we contemplate vast objects “under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him” (Burke, *Edmund Burke* 64, 68). Although “a consideration of his other attributes may relieve in some measure our apprehensions... no conviction of the justice with which it is exercised, nor the mercy with which it is tempered, can wholly remove the terror that naturally arises from a force which nothing can withstand” (68). Fear, Burke says, unavoidably accompanies God’s power, but although this power “is undoubtedly a capital source of the sublime” it is not necessarily the *only* emotion that such

power evokes. For this reason, the elevation that Madame de Menon feels upon the contemplation of a rocky view is both sublime and linked to the divine; her awe is a response to both nature and the God who has joined the divine to nature in a Popean chain, and Radcliffe explicitly combines them into the same moment of affective response. In the process, Madame's feelings are diminished into "minuteness," shrunken—but not, in the sentimental style, concentrated or distilled—before the sublime. Burke's spectator is "annihilated," but only "in a manner"; at best, the sublime effaces self-consciousness and stuns the individual into awed docility, but only temporarily. This nudge from the sublime returns Madame de Menon back to her poised sentimental self.

Similarly, the tranquility that Julia feels inside the walls of the abbey is connected both to the devotional uplift encouraged by her surroundings, and the sublimity of its majestic, obscure ambiance. Both Madame de Menon and Julia encounter the sublime while deep in the throes of their own emotional preoccupations. The elevation of the sublime does not supplant their concerns, but essentially removes each woman from her respective sentimental mire, leaving them in states of "insensibility" and relative tranquility. Robert J. Mayhew draws particular attention to how so many of Radcliffe's sublime scenarios lead characters to "an appreciation of God's benevolence," as in an early scene in the novel where a distressed Julia finds herself first "insensibly tranquilized" by the scene beneath her chamber window and then filled with ecstatic, "holy enthusiasm" by the sound of a distant hymn (Mayhew 284; *A Sicilian Romance* 58). In this episode, Julia's response to the sublime is similar to Madame's: her emotional distress is tranquilized, then replaced by the ecstasy of the sublime. The sublime seems to serve as a form of emotional Novocain, benumbing the keenness of excessive feeling by removing each subject—emotionally and mentally, at any rate—from her pain with reminders of the sublime

and holy. Characters are effectively removed from the repetitive contemplation of their own self-centered miseries; Julia, after all, has found refuge in a convent, where the rhythms of everyday life are chronologically and spiritually dictated by divine influence. Her absence of sentimental self-command means that Julia is particularly prone to the weaknesses of passion, but such weakness can be not only overpowered, but dulled, by the imposition of the sublime. The sublime is, by most contemporary definitions, a painful, violent, and unpredictable experience, but in Radcliffe's *Sicilian Romance* it's also one capable of calming its beholders as much as it agitates. Characters' zealous sentimental enthusiasm is beginning to be suspended by sublime awe; both modes are similarly devotional in nature, but the sublime's appearance as an uninvited imposition upon the subject contrasts with the portrait of sentimentality as an increasingly cultivated, increasingly preventable form of weakness.

The Romance of the Forest

1791's *The Romance of the Forest* is the most fully-developed of Radcliffe's three early works, and was, with five London printings in as many years, by far the most popular of them.⁶⁵ Like Radcliffe's previous two novels, *The Romance of the Forest* features the familiar trappings of the sentimental novel, updating them with Gothic décor, but it also expands upon the aesthetics of *A Sicilian Romance*, focusing on the effects that her lavishly-described foreign landscapes have on her characters and using the irresistible force of the sublime—most notably that exerted by the ocean, not just the mountains—to confront their lingering sentimentality.

⁶⁵ Between its publication in 1791 and the end of the century, *The Romance of the Forest* also went through two Dublin printings, two American printings, and the 1794 transformation into a play called *Fontainville Forest* by James Boaden. See Gamer 69 ff. for more on the particularly positive critical response that Radcliffe received to *Romance*, which he calls "a high point of gothic's cultural prestige and Radcliffe's critical standing" (71).

Here again, we begin with a pair of sentimental young women. The novel's secondary heroine, Clara, provides a model of decorous, self-regulated sentimentality in the style of so many model late-century sentimental-but-not-*too*-sentimental characters. She is guided by the loving paternal advice of her father, La Luc, and consciously exerts self-command to avoid being controlled by her feelings. In one notable passage, Clara effectively talks herself into, and then out of, an episode of sentimental indulgence, which takes the unlikely form of yielding to the temptation to play her lute all day. "I prided myself on controlling my inclinations," she says to herself, "and I have weakly yielded to their direction. But what evil have I incurred by indulging them this evening? I have neglected no duty, for I have none to perform. Of what then have I to accuse myself? It would have been absurd to have kept my resolution, and denied myself a pleasure when there appeared no reason for this self-denial" (Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 252). Clara initially justifies the indulgence of her own sentimental "enthusiasm" as a "pleasure," since it conflicts with no duties. At the same time, she recognizes that such indulgence is a weakness, and a failure of exercising self-denial. "But how," she continues to herself, "am I certain that I should have resisted my inclinations if there *had* been a reason for opposing them? If the poor family whom I neglected yesterday had been unsupplied to-day, I fear I should again have forgotten them while I played on my lute on the banks of the lake." Now, Clara recognizes the broader dangers of sentimental self-absorption: the selfish pleasures of sentimental indulgence can override the benevolent, outward expressions of compassion that are so often touted—particularly in sentimental novels of the 1760s and 1770s, like Brooke's *Fool of Quality*—as sentimentality's greatest material and social benefit. "No," she concludes, "if I do not consider that to preserve a resolution to control my inclinations, I fear no other motive would restrain me. I seriously determined not to touch my lute this whole day, and I have

broken my resolution. Tomorrow perhaps I may be tempted to neglect some duty, for I have discovered that I cannot rely on my own prudence. Since I cannot conquer temptation, I will fly from it” (253). Clara’s decision echoes the conclusion reached by many other contemporary critics and questioners of sentimentality. A character like *Julia*’s Frederick, who repeatedly flits too close to the flame of unfettered passion, finds out the hard way that indulged feelings quickly gain too much force to be restrained, and he eventually falls victim to them. Clara recognizes her inability to abide by her own resolutions, and decides “to fly” from temptation, instead of attempting to try and muscle it aside purely through determination and brute force. Habit and weakness motivate her seeming addiction to sentimental indulgence, which—despite Clara’s innate dispositional sentimentality—Radcliffe paints as a lapse in self-command.

Shortly before this episode, we’re told that Clara’s sentimentality is grounded upon her sensitivity to the sublimity of her surroundings. “Born amid scenes of grandeur and sublimity,” Radcliffe writes, “[Clara] had quickly imbibed a taste for their charms, which taste was heightened by the influence of a warm imagination” (248). Her father’s château is not merely picturesque, but surrounded by “grotesque” mountains that compose “a scenery singularly solemn and sublime” (247). Clara’s aesthetic sensibility (which extends itself to poetry, music, and painting) is grounded upon a combination of innate taste with imagination. As we see in her decision to deny herself the potentially dangerous pleasures of the lute, Clara’s sensibility finds an outlet in benevolence and sentimentality, but Radcliffe specifies that it is founded upon her proximity to the sublime. The “earliest pleasures” that Clara experiences are in the fiery sunrises over the Alps that surround her, and their “grandeur and sublimity”; the essential wholesomeness of her sensibility derives from “imbib[ing] a taste for their charms” while young, and enables her to thoughtfully exert and control her emotional responses in deliberate, productive ways (248-9).

Radcliffe stresses both the aesthetic and the moral benefits of Clara's education by the sublime. Clara's appreciation of her surroundings encourages her to develop her own artistic talents, and La Luc defends the choice of letting "experience," not precept, to be her teacher (249, 253): Clara's knowledge of art, music, and literature is entirely directed by her inspiration by and imitations of her sublime surroundings, not the indulgent diet of fiction, fashion, and affected behavior that enervates so many sentimental heroines. To this end, Clara's sublime education strengthens her and gives her the confidence "to fly" from what she cannot responsibly indulge: her early experience with the sublime develops her experience and taste, leading her not to exhaust her resolution by confronting the temptations of her lute head-on. She does not spend her childhood being constantly battered and struck by intrusive appearances of the sublime, but manages to borrow its power to strengthen her own resolve.

The origins and education of Adeline, the novel's primary heroine, are decidedly more mysterious. After leaving Paris, Pierre de la Motte and his family seek shelter from a nighttime storm in the forlorn house of a stranger, who reappears dragging the distressed girl and demanding that the la Mottes take her with them if he is to spare her life. Despite her ambiguous origins, Adeline is the model of well-bred sensibility. Following her rescue, she can only weep "in silence, and taking the hand of Madame, pressed it to her bosom. These were not merely tears of grief—they were mingled with those which flow from the grateful heart, when, unexpectedly, it meets with sympathy. Madame la Motte understood them" (*The Romance of the Forest* 11). Despite Madame de la Motte's mistrust of Adeline, the two women nevertheless form a genuine sympathetic bond; this passage even describes the kind of sentimental circuit that we see so often in eighteenth-century fiction, where tears are hailed into action as physiological signifiers of emotions that sympathetically travel from the heart, to the eye, and into the bosom

of a sympathetic other. Radcliffe presents Adeline's sentimentality as admirable and acceptable because it is not Adeline's only mode; she does not solely inhabit the role of passive sentimental heroine. Adeline remains grateful for her rescue, despite her discomfort at being the object of charity; "sighs swelled her heart, and the frequent tear started to her eye" as faithful sentimental indicators of deep feeling, but these would be "ungrateful to reveal" since her sorrow derives from being "wholly dependent upon strangers, with no other claim than what distress demands from the common sympathy of kindred beings" (21). Adeline does not regret her sensibility, but has no desire to exist as an object of pity, or to be utterly dependent upon others' sympathy; she does not relish her role as a tragic sentimental heroine, and is conscious of the dynamics of sympathy in others' perception of her situation. And, as Claudia L. Johnson points out, Adeline is hardly mired in her own passivity: she employs "magnanimity" and self-command to overcome her own fears, and energetically engineers her own escapes (C. L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 78).

Adeline, like *A Sicilian Romance*'s Julia, also allows herself to be distracted from her feelings by the experience of the sublime. *The Romance of the Forest* does not try to displace the sentimental with the sublime—both modes continue to coexist, and Radcliffe does not pinpoint Adeline's sentimentality as something that needs to be eliminated or overcome—but the sublime is used both as a capstone to deep feeling (as in the case of the "sublime" force of her own overwhelming gratitude for her rescue by the La Mottes (14)) and as something so powerful that it compels the subject to place herself at a remove from her self-involvement with her own feelings. Elements of the sublime descend upon Adeline from her circumstances and her surroundings, simultaneously rendering her a passive subject to its effects while removing her from her sentimentalized, emotional passivity. It's a kind of incapacitation that paradoxically

removes the inner incapacitation of sentiment, letting, as Gibbons suggests in his discussion of Longinus, the sublime “invigorate” the self instead of eclipsing it (Gibbons 106). Despite the very different directions of both modes—one more inward and reflective, the other sudden and invasive—Radcliffe’s descriptions of Adeline’s emotional turmoil intermix the language of the sublime with the familiar rhetoric of the sentimental.

While she is being held by the Marquis, Adeline uncovers a dusty old manuscript hidden, in characteristically Gothic form, inside a secret chamber near decaying furniture and a rusted dagger (*Romance* 116). Adeline is moved by the pathos and terror of its contents to the point of nearly fainting (on multiple occasions, no less). Radcliffe describes her as fluctuating between being frozen by terror—“afraid to move and almost to breathe... a dreadful chillness came over her, and she sat fixed in her chair”—and then being “awfully interest[ed]” (or “invigorated,” in Gibbons’ terms) by it, then being seized by the feelings within the manuscript only to subsequently be “awakened” by them (134, 128).⁶⁶ She is filled with compassion for the manuscript’s unknown author: “Wretched, wretched victim!” she exclaims out loud, only to pause her lament at the hint of a mysterious sigh (140). Feelings, sentimental novelists tell us, warm and animate the blood, but Adeline’s blood is “chilled” and she is left “motionless” and close to fainting by the force of that sigh—itself also the sentimental encapsulation of a thousand unspoken tender feelings—upon her imagination. Radcliffe’s blending of sentimental tropes with the Gothic lets her construct a scene that still houses genuine emotion, while nevertheless also embodying and foregrounding terror. Adeline’s spirits are eventually calmed by a combination

⁶⁶ The trope of the hidden or discovered manuscript is, of course, common to the eighteenth-century novel in general—think, for example, of the dramatic attempts made to possess and violate Clarissa’s furiously scribbled letters—but it’s particularly boilerplate for sentimental novels of the 1760s-1800s, which more often than not begin with an authorial or narratorial note detailing their discovery in some obscure shop, desk drawer, or, in the case of Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling*, ecclesiastical gun wadding.

of effort and prayer, but further perusal of the manuscript finds her vacillating between courage, self-control, and imaginative terror, until she finally collapses insensibly into a chair (142).

Neither the sentimental nor the sublime retain their dominance over Adeline's mind, which allows her to dramatically—and intriguingly, to the reader—vacillate between the two extremes.

In one central episode, the susceptible Adeline sighs and her eyes “filled with tears” while on a boat departing from some friends; “her heart was full” as she imagines her future “like the waste of waters that surround me,” and she retreats to indulge her tears (292). But Adeline's sentimental indulgence is soon overcome by the undeniable impact of her surroundings. As the coast disappears from view, Adeline gazes “with an emotion the most sublime, on the boundless expanse of waters that spread on all sides: she seemed as if launched into a new world; the grandeur and immensity of the view astonished and overpowered her.... And when she considered that a plank alone separated her from death, a sensation of unmixed terror superceded that of sublimity, and she hastily turned her eyes from the prospect, and her thoughts from the subject” (293). In this passage, Adeline's emotions quickly journey from the pedestrian territory of imaginative, sentimental wallowing into terrified—if only momentary—receptivity to the sublime. The grandeur and immensity of the ocean—a “new world” far from the cares initially occupying her heart—both astonishes and “overpowered” her, effacing her self-indulgent fretting over her departure with the force of the sublime, followed by pure, “unmixed” terror. Adeline's encounter with the infinitude of the ocean prompts the same emotional response to the sublime that Burke describes in his *Enquiry*, where the ocean is specifically cited as an object “of no small terror,” and which Kant describes in his *Critique*, of “the boundless ocean heaved up” (Burke 58; Kant 120). Here, Adeline's terror appears as the product of the sublime, but just as quickly becomes something that she regains control over (as

she is able to hastily turn “her thoughts,” as well as her eyes, “from the subject”). The sublime isn’t capable of permanently supplanting sentiment in Adeline’s thoughts, but it seems to temporarily short-circuit her sadness, first distracting her from her tears and sighs and then empowering her to regain control over her subsequent terror. This episode of emotional redirection acts as a precedent to Radcliffe’s use of the sublime as a mode that forces her heroes and heroines to discipline their own tendencies towards self-involved sentimentality in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*, and the Gothic as a location that allows both to interact and coexist in relatively peaceful, if unconventional, ways.

Sublimity and Sensibility in The Mysteries of Udolpho

One of the most often-cited passages in 1794’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*—both in modern criticism as well as in contemporary periodical reviews—comes from the first volume of the novel, where the heroine’s ailing father issues a final warning to her about the dangers of emotional indulgence:

‘Above all, my dear Emily,’ said he, ‘do not indulge in the pride of fine feeling, the romantic error of amiable minds. Those, who really possess sensibility, ought to be taught, that it is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight, from every surrounding circumstance... And, since our sense of evil is, I fear, more acute than our sense of good, we become the victims of our feelings, unless we can in some degree command them... I know you will say, that you are contented sometimes to suffer, rather than to give up your refined sense of happiness, at others; but, when your mind has been long harassed by vicissitude, you will be content to rest, and you will then recover from your delusion. You will perceive, that the phantom of happiness is exchanged for the substance; for happiness arises in a state of peace, not of tumult. It is of a temperate and uniform nature, and can no more exist in a heart, that is continually alive to minute circumstances, than in one that is dead to feeling.’ (*The Mysteries of Udolpho* 79–80)⁶⁷

Fathers frequently act as the guardians of their daughters' sentimental educations in Radcliffe's novels, and *Udolpho* is no exception. But M. St. Aubert is not warning Emily against sensibility as a whole, or against great emotionality in general—he clarifies within the same passage that he “would not teach [her] to become insensible”—but about the negative consequences that such sentimentality can have when taken to extremes, or even when just inadequately managed. Here, St. Aubert cautions Emily against the tendency that one can have of taking *pride* in the exhibition or possession of fine feelings. St. Aubert's caution can be taken as a warning against the kind of deliberately inflated or self-consciously cultivated feeling that can begin to feed upon itself, seeming to obtain an unpredictable power of its own. More broadly, this tendency of feeling to reach extremes leads to a common late-century complaint about sentimentality and unchecked sensibility: that they will overtake even the most well-meaning individuals, rendering them the helpless “victims” of feeling without the defense of sufficient command. St. Aubert advises Emily—like La Luc advises Clara—to exercise reason and control to prevent sentiment from running rampant, and issues a more specific argument against voluntary victimization: the kinds of emotional agitation encouraged by indulged sentimentality are merely the unnecessary fabrication of distress, and prevent genuine happiness.

M. St. Aubert's caution is not *Udolpho*'s first or only warning against too much feeling. The novel's first 20 pages contain ample examples and details about Emily's sentimental education. Emily's sensibility is established during early childhood: she has “uncommon delicacy of mind, warm affections, and ready benevolence; but with these was observable a

⁶⁷ This passage is paraphrased in *Udolpho*'s review in the *Monthly Review* 15 (November 1794): 278-283, and quoted in the *British Critic* 4 (August 1794): 112. It appears in a seemingly endless number of books of modern criticism, both of Radcliffe and of the Gothic more generally, as a typical example of late-eighteenth-century literary sentimentality.

degree of susceptibility too exquisite to admit of lasting peace” (5). This susceptibility is not described as a flaw; in fact, it adds “a pensive tone to her spirits, and a softness to her manner, which added grace to beauty, and rendered her a very interesting object to persons of a congenial disposition”—making her a traditionally attractive sentimental heroine, in short. St. Aubert, however, has “too much good sense to prefer a charm to a virtue,” and detects how Emily’s appealing sensibility is “too dangerous to its possessor to be allowed the character of a blessing.” Emily’s sentimental appeal is not, in and of itself, anything other than the product of an unusual degree of sensitivity, but its effect—creating a kind of “charm” that threatens to overpower morality—is what makes it necessary to restrict it. St. Aubert thus embarks upon the task of educating her sensibility, and encouraging his daughter to understand the limits of her own feeling while acquiring the detachment necessary for emotional self-evaluation. St. Aubert instills “habits of self-command,” teaching Emily to “reject the first impulse of her feelings, and to look, with cool examination, upon the disappointments he sometimes threw in her way... to acquire that steady dignity of mind, that can alone counterbalance the passions.” In the process, he himself must learn additional fortitude while seeing Emily’s “tears and struggles” as she tries to take in his instructions. St. Aubert’s educational project is framed in familiar terms of counterbalancing the passions and impulses of feelings with strength and fortitude, and it considers the limitations of its student in the process: he respects the limits of Emily’s individual’s “nature,” and teaches her science, Latin, and English in an attempt to give his daughter a “well-informed mind” stored up with cultivated ideas that leave no room for vice and indolence (6).

But this process also requires the hardening of both student and teacher, as Emily tearfully struggles with St. Aubert’s instruction and her father, in response, must steel himself to

deliberately disappoint his daughter. Emily goes through nothing less than a sentimental boot camp, which breaks down and then re-forms her natural sentimentality into a newly re-strengthened asset not only to herself, but to society at large. Early in the novel, Emily and St. Aubert go to visit “some old pensioners of St. Aubert, which, from his very moderate income, he contrived to support,” and distribute stipends, sympathy, and benevolence (15). St. Aubert intends for Emily’s sensibility to be turned outward into a productive, useful social virtue, instead of guarded as the “grace to beauty” that it remains in its untutored, raw form. But Radcliffe doesn’t stop at neutralizing sentiment’s potential for selfishness by turning it into an outward good—M. St. Aubert disapproves of *any* form of excessive feeling, even feeling expressed through extreme benevolence. “The duty of self-command,” St. Aubert reminds Emily, must be what determines the appropriate extent and limitations of feeling (20). Not only does self-command allow one to resist temptation, he reminds his daughter, but it “limits the indulgences which are termed virtuous, yet which, extended beyond a certain boundary, are vicious, for their consequence is evil. All excess is vicious; even... sorrow... indulged at the expence of our duties—by our duties I mean what we owe to ourselves, as well as to others.” Here, St. Aubert cites excessive feeling as a threat to both the individual feeler and their social responsibilities; there is no circumstance under which it is benign or acceptable, since even the most innocently-indulged feeling might—as in the case with the hypothetical, benign neglect of charity that Clara worries might have been the unintentional result of her immoderate lute-playing—obstruct virtue, transforming it into vice. Here, as always, the boundaries that determine excess are contingent; anything, even charity, is a danger to both the individual and society when indulged too much.

Emily's vigorous efforts to resist sentimental indulgence position her as the antithesis of the passionate, impulsive, and spirited women who populate Udolpho's history. These women have histories marked with oppression and repression, and their stories demonstrate how their liberal indulgence of feeling can become disabling and incapacitating. Signora Laurentini, who doubly haunts Emily through her role in the castle's history and in the past of M. St. Aubert, repents of her former rash behavior and cautions Emily against taking the same path as her in now-familiar language: "Sister! beware of the first indulgence of the passions; beware of the first!" she warns (646). Instead of citing the expected opposition between sentiment and rationality, however, the Signora breathlessly elaborates upon the rapid, runaway momentum that one single instance of passionate indulgence can gather:

Their course, if not checked then, is rapid—their force is uncontrollable—they lead us we know not whither—they lead us perhaps to the commission of crimes, for which whole years of prayer and penitence cannot atone!—Such may be the force of even a single passion, that it overcomes every other, and sears up every other approach to the heart. Possessing us like a fiend, it leads us on to the acts of a fiend, making us insensible to pity and to conscience. And, when its purpose is accomplished, like a fiend, it leaves us to the torture of those feelings, which its power had suspended—not annihilated,—to the tortures of compassion, remorse, and conscience....Remember, sister, that the passions are the seeds of vices as well as of virtues, from which either may spring, accordingly as they are nurtured. Unhappy they who have never been taught the art to govern them! (646-7)

The Signora paints a darker portrait of the problems caused by unchecked passion than St. Aubert: one who indulges their feelings risks not only unhappiness, but ravenous, all-encompassing possession. She begins by warning Emily against the passions, plural, then focuses on the pernicious assault that just one emotion can undertake against self-control and traditional morality. This transition—of one potent single passion carrying and embodying the many—echoes the single tear's encapsulation of unbearable feeling, except in this case that power of emotional containment and expansion is seen as entirely negative. The Signora's

unfortunate “single passion” is distinct from the natural sensibility exhibited by Emily, and is more akin to Montoni’s furious, passionate indulgence—neither Laurentini nor Montoni are in danger of indulging in too much sympathy, for example, or of becoming too weepily sentimental. Here, as in her earlier novels, Radcliffe is careful to distinguish between sentimental indulgence and the unsentimental yielding to the passions, but both the Signora’s wild passions and Emily’s native sentimental impulses come from a place of self-centered, “uncontrollable,” and too-easily-accruing feeling. Radcliffe encompasses this very unsentimental form of excess into the kind of sentimental excess exhibited (and condemned) by traditionally sentimental heroines like Emily; now, Radcliffe’s particular iteration of late-century sentimentality deemphasizes the origins and nature of passionate excess in favor of underscoring the dangers presented by its unruliness, carrying its host along to an indeterminate, uncertain end. It is also the first time that Radcliffe’s model of the strong passions has been linked with a female character, instead of a strong male figure. This, along with Laurentini’s direct address to Emily, tightens the parallel between the two characters, and between their dual struggles to cope with their respective forms of excessive feeling.

The Signora stresses how imperative it is that action against the passions be preventative, not responsive—“even a single passion” can lead to fiendish possession, considering its ability to isolate its subject. As Stephen Ahern argues, reigning in the unruly passions is more than a reassertion of control and balance: a character like Emily must continually exert her will to “‘conquer’ the excesses of passion that threaten to turn the autonomous, self-actualizing agent into a passive object of forces beyond her control,” only then reestablishing the dominion of reason over overpowering feeling (154, 159). Furthermore, such runaway feelings leave the traditional sentimental virtues of compassion, remorse, and conscience paralyzed—

“suspended—not annihilated” in the words of the Signora—eventually rendering them the instruments of further torture. At their core, Laurentini says, the passions are only seeds, capable of turning to vice or virtue as they are cultivated (much as how M. St. Aubert contends that dangerous excess can be created by even virtuous passions). But whereas Emily grew up under the watchful eye of St. Aubert, who was careful to teach her the art of governing them, Laurentini’s childhood friends did not teach her to restrain and govern her “strong passions,” but “nurtured them by early indulgence” (655). This conduct, Emily is informed, “was not the result of rational kindness,” but of self-centered self-gratification. Laurentini was misled, and “every effort, that had been employed to subdue” the passions only resulted in their growing stronger—thereby once again stressing the importance of a responsible sentimental education, and of mastering the skill of restraint early on. Laurentini is only one of the adult figures who appear in the text to caution Emily against indulging her feelings, and the sheer amount of time dedicated to warning Emily against the domination of feeling starts to call into question just how enjoyable the responsible possession of even the most well-groomed, well-regulated sensibility could possibly be. Given that the passions in general come to be defined in negative terms within the novel—paragraphs are dedicated to their potential pains, and virtually none to their joys—depictions of the pleasures of sympathetic fellow-feeling are largely absent prior to Emily’s arrival, and it seems to become a dour, thankless enterprise.

In this world where the passions cannot be encouraged and sensibility must be dutifully restrained, the stunning, outsized, and extraordinarily expansive appearance of the sublime saves characters from a life of emotional mediocrity, allowing them to experience the overwhelming emotions that they can’t otherwise responsibly indulge. As I have discussed, the Burkean sublime and the sentimental share a similar interest in the movements of unconstrained affect,

and how it is produced through social and natural encounters, while the Kantian sublime turns away from sympathy and aesthetic response to describe a natural sublime that galvanizes its witness into a state of resistance and action. The sublime gradually assumes a larger and larger presence in Gothic novels of the 1790s, while the emphasis on sentimental feeling is correspondingly reduced: sentimentality remains, albeit in smaller and carefully-regulated amounts, as the sublime becomes the dominant mode through which characters mediate and indulge in dramatic, exciting, and dangerous emotional and aesthetic experiences. But none of Radcliffe's novels contain warnings against the uncontrollable power of the sublime, even though its ability to overwhelm and overtake the individual is just as great, if not greater, than that of the sentimental; it doesn't occur as a substitute or replacement for what were once the rewards of sentimentality, becoming instead a newer, more exciting mode of emotional occupation.

The Mysteries of Udolpho makes a distinct turn towards the sublime at the beginning of Volume II. This is not to argue that Volume I is entirely sentimental—it contains, for example, Emily's journey with her father through the Pyrenees, where they first encounter Valancourt—but it is also dominated by the details of Emily's sentimental education, her relationship with Valancourt, and the picturesque sentimental scenery of La Vallée. The beginning of Volume II, however, sees the start of Emily's, her aunt's, and Montoni's journey to Italy, and their arrival at the Alps changes the narrative's tone and focus considerably:

During several days the travelers journeyed over the plains of Languedoc; and then entering Dauphiny, and winding for some time among the mountains of that romantic province, they quitted their carriages and began to ascend the Alps. And here such scenes of sublimity opened upon them as no colours of language must dare to paint! Emily's mind was even so much engaged with new and wonderful images, that they sometimes banished the idea of Valancourt, though they more frequently revived it. These brought to her recollection the prospects among the Pyrenées, which they had admired together, and had believed nothing could excel

in grandeur. How often did she wish to express to him the new emotions which this astonishing scenery awakened, and that he could partake of them!... She seemed to have arisen into another world, and to have left every trifling thought, every trifling sentiment, in that below; those only of grandeur and sublimity now dilated her mind, and elevated the affections of her heart. (163)

Emily spends the journey through Languedoc and the Dauphiné mourning her separation from Valancourt and attempting to keep her sorrow in check; there is little in that “romantic” landscape, as seen through the windows of their carriages, to distract her from her own emotions. Once they must leave the carriages behind and begin climbing the Alps, however, Emily’s mind takes a similarly dramatic ascent away from maudlin sentiment and into the sublime. Instead of laying out docilely and passively before them, the sublime landscape of the Alps opens and unfolds upon the travelers, completely surrounding them with new and dramatic scenery that “no colours of language must dare to paint!” The powers of the sublime, like those of sentiment, are sufficiently great as to surpass the powers of language; Radcliffe’s use of the language of painting and art, however, gives the sublime an extra echo of its aesthetic groundings. Emily’s mind is so much “engaged” by her surroundings that she’s even able to forget Valancourt at times, although the landscape holds the agency in his appearances and disappearances in her mind: the “new and wonderful images” surrounding Emily alternately “banish” and “revive” his memory, intermittently submerging and removing her from her sympathetic urges to partake in “the new emotions” with him. Here, we see Emily’s mind and moods being conducted and magnified by the “astonishing scenery”; her surroundings are able to engage her enough to manipulate her emotions without eliminating Emily’s wishes for sympathy and fellow-feeling altogether, and still allowing Valancourt’s memory to be revived more frequently than it’s forgotten. The sublime “dilate[s] her mind,” but it “elevate[s] the affections of her heart”—changing their quality, perhaps, but not their direction.

Anne K. Mellor describes this rendition of the sublime—capable of overriding sentimentality and sympathy while, as in the scene above, not requiring characters to cringe before the “glory of divine creation” with “fear and trembling”—as founded upon the “*distance* of the perceiving self from the other” (Mellor 95). Mellor sees this portrait of the sublime as essentially social in nature, capable of producing “a sympathy or love that connects the self with other people. A shared enthusiasm for the grandeurs of Alpine scenery is what draws Emily and Valancourt together in love; the memory of those shared experiences unites them through their separate sufferings” (95). Mellor stresses the anti-patriarchal potential of what she terms the “positive Radcliffian sublime,” which arouses a sense of “personal exaltation, a consciousness of virtue and self-esteem, and hence of tranquility” that instills in characters like Emily and *The Italian*’s Ellena “a mental freedom from the tyrannies of men and women who are now reduced to impotent insignificance” and renews the connections these heroines feel between themselves and their lovers “grounded in individual integrity, self-esteem, and mutual respect” (96). This interpretation of the Radcliffian sublime reframes it as an empowering, positive experience capable of creating and nurturing sympathy. Mellor’s interest chiefly lies in how Radcliffe’s rendition of the Burkean sublime anticipates its Romantic representations by Wordsworth and Coleridge, and she doesn’t venture to posit what the motivation for this sea change in the sublime might be. Her observations, however, do translate to Emily’s early experiences in the Pyrenees quite well: Emily’s mind is constantly being “awakened” by “new emotions” that do not include Valancourt, yet she longs to share them with him; her mind “arises” into another world in typically sublime style, leaving her with “emotions of sublimity, softened by tenderness” (Radcliffe, *Udolpho* 163). Radcliffe does not present the sentimental and the sublime as mutually exclusive modes, but the rarified air of the sublime has the capability of

elevating appropriate sentiments while dwarfing the more frivolous. The striking, sublime impact of the Pyrenees does not erase Valancourt from Emily's memory, but the emotional and aesthetic force of the mountains' appearance compels her to reevaluate her feelings about him well before she would have were she left to her own, wholly sentimental devices.

Emily's initial foray into the Alps is filled with sublimity that is initially provided solely by the landscape, but the broader effects of terror and horror soon enter the picture. Specifically, terror is the primary source of Burkean sublimity, which Radcliffe explains thusly: "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them... and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil?" (Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry" 149–150).⁶⁸ Radcliffe's version of the sublime in *Udolpho* is most often used to awaken and expand—or elevate and dilate, to use the language of the passage above—the beholder's mind, and one of the most powerful ways to instigate this expansion is through terror. Radcliffe's novels also contain ample examples of the power of horror—think, for example, of Emily's overwhelming fright after peeking behind the black veil—although an extensive taxonomy of the appearances of both

⁶⁸ It's interesting to note that Radcliffe mentions Sarah Siddons in the same essay as an example an actor whose profound sensibility and talent enable her audience to lose "all consciousness of fiction" while watching theatrical productions, even to the extent of fully exposing the sentimentality at the heart of what would be a cross-gender role. (We've already seen Siddons make a cameo appearance in *Excessive Sensibility*, where she "wound up" the heroine's sensibility to the point of causing her to faint.) Here, one of Radcliffe's fictional interlocutors notes that "I should suppose she would be the finest Hamlet that ever appeared, excelling even her own brother in that character; she would more fully preserve the tender and refined melancholy, the deep sensibility, which are the peculiar charm of Hamlet... A sensibility so profound can with difficulty be justly imagined, and therefore can very rarely be assumed" (Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry" 147). Norton posits that Radcliffe "certainly" saw Siddons perform the role of Lady Macbeth, either in London or in Bath (50). Theatrical performance, then, remains an idealized locus for the performance of sensibility, and remains a consistent reference point even as Radcliffe writes near the end of her life. Burke will also go on to reference Siddons in his later denouncement of "superficial, theatric... painted distress": "People would think the tears that Garrick formerly, or that Siddons not long since, have extorted from me, were the tears of hypocrisy; I should know them to be the tears of folly" (Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* 81).

modes is beyond the scope of this chapter.⁶⁹ As I have discussed, the Gothic draws together the sentimental and the sublime in so many late-eighteenth-century novels because of their shared interest in intense emotional response, not out of any sense of predetermined taxonomic duty, or slavish devotion to the task of ticking off all of the features of the sublime listed in Burke's *Enquiry*. As David Morris notes, "Burke's account of the sublime is clearly relevant to the almost simultaneous Gothic explorations of terror," yet the whole of Gothic literature is not necessarily erected upon a foundation of the Burkean sublime (Morris 300). David Richter, drawing from contemporary reviews and letters between 1795-1805, contends that the Gothic emerges as a complex interaction between authors and audiences already accustomed to reading sentimental novels, "a tendency rather than a revolution: nothing abruptly occurred in 1795" (Richter 123). Here, I read Radcliffe's distinction between terror and horror as one of the experimental explorations of sublime mechanics that is made possible by the looseness of the Gothic, further expanding the ways that the sublime can invigorate, alarm, and otherwise awaken the subject to overwhelming sensations taking place both outside and inside of themselves.

Burke's *Enquiry* not only emphasizes the powerful role of emotional response in the construction of aesthetic experiences, but specifically addresses "ideas of pain, and danger... whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror" as sources of the sublime, which he describes as "productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling," since ideas of pain "are much more powerful than

⁶⁹ Radcliffe specifically names Burke in her essay: "I apprehend," one of her interlocutors comments, "that neither Shakspeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one; and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil?" (149-150). The distinction being made here between terror and horror has more to do with the aesthetics and circumstances surrounding each mode than any more fundamental difference between them.

those which enter on the part of pleasure” (Burke 39). Natural objects and scenes that are obscure, powerful, solitary, irregular, and vast best provoke the tremendous passions that characterize the pleasure and pain of the sublime, and Radcliffe quickly furnishes Emily with ominous new surroundings that provide more fuel for feelings of sublime terror than of pleasure or sympathy. Burke describes viewers’ powerful responses to “whatever is in any sort terrible,” but he also includes things which are “conversant” about terrible objects as well as things which operate in an *analogous* fashion to terror beneath that same broad umbrella. Radcliffe seizes upon this additional flexibility; as sentimentality’s boundaries consolidate and diminish, the potential sources of the sublime expand—as does the number of potential ways that affect can be instigated, even by a distant and unknown source, within the individual.

On her way to Udolpho, Emily passes dark woods, tremendous precipices, and “images of gloomy grandeur, or of dreadful sublimity, around her” that reflect her dismal situation of “going where she scarcely knew whither, under the dominion of a person, from whose arbitrary disposition she had already suffered so much, to marry, perhaps, a man who possessed neither her affection, or esteem; or to endure, beyond the hope of succor, whatever punishment revenge... might dictate” (224-5). Here, Radcliffe implies that Emily is oppressed not only by the “gloomy grandeur” of her surroundings, but also by the arbitrary “dominion of a person”—a kind of intimidation by a sublime personified within Montoni, showing how an individual is capable of channeling and even possibly producing sublime affect alongside of the cliffs, mountains, and dim Apennine woods. (This suggestion—of the possibility for containing and personifying the sublime within a figure—is more fully explored in the title character of Radcliffe’s next and final novel, *The Italian*.) Radcliffe funnels the human and the naturalized sources of the sublime together into the same wave of awe and dread: Emily begins her journey

“dead to the beautiful country” surrounding her as she pines for Valancourt, but the collective force of both her mountainous surroundings and Montoni turn her feelings into awe. Soon enough, her resistance is momentarily muted when her party stops on a small plain and she “lost, for a moment, her sorrows, in the immensity of nature”; these “splendours” initially provide solace, but quickly “increase her regret on leaving” the world and Valancourt. The sublime, in other words, has the ability to overcome self-involved feeling, allowing Emily to suppress (if only momentarily) her own sorrows and feelings and focus instead on the greater import of her situation. At the same time, it becomes a greater and greater force in its own right—insistent and overwhelming, and not merely a distraction.

The emotional impact of Emily’s new surroundings soon dominates Radcliffe’s account of her arrival. Emily feels the full effect of sublime awe as she gazes “with melancholy awe” upon Udolpho for the first time, whose “mouldering walls” defy the light of the setting sun and render it “a gloomy and sublime object... Silent, lonely and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity” (226-7). The imminent danger in the castle’s appearance conjures up “terrific images” in Emily’s mind, and “fearful emotions” assail her, including fear of banditti (227). These surroundings activate Emily’s imagination, and, presumably, the reader’s as well; Radcliffe supplies another two pages describing Udolpho’s gloomy interior, and its appearance—combined with Montoni’s uncertain motivations—is enough to set Emily’s mind swimming with doubt, if only to be momentarily “softened... into sorrow” at the eventual recollection of Valancourt (229). But even Emily’s repetitive returns to the memory of Valancourt have little new or interesting in them to hold the reader’s attention, or to involve their sympathy through sentiment; instead, it is the implied pain

and danger imbued within her mysterious surroundings that fixes our interest, and is most likely to involve our sympathy. While Emily's sentiments tread the same tired, worn-out track, emanating from the same tired, worn-out source, the sublime lurks within a number of different potential sources: the castle, its occupants, banditti, or perhaps even Emily's mind itself, rendering its elusiveness even more unnerving.

There's nothing unstable or overwhelming in Emily's memories of Valancourt that threatens to overcome her sentimental self-control, and she can therefore dedicate her energies towards the more imminent threats apparently posed by her new environment. The force of the sublime does not subdue her sentiments, but encourages her to widen her focus from her own sentimental miseries to the more demanding concerns presented by the world around her—which are also the most engaging and terrifying elements of the novel that so interested its contemporary readers and critics. Throughout much of *Udolpho*, Valancourt exists as a static, faded echo of Emily's most ardent sentimentality, the faint strains of his flute lurking around the edges of the castle and occasionally triggering light melancholy (which is inevitably disrupted by some fresher, more dynamic piece of Gothic intrigue). The castle of Udolpho itself, on the other hand, is an immediate presence; it presents an animated face and a personality even at the moment where Emily first sees it, standing like a “sovereign” and frowning in omnipotent disapproval over all who “dare” to confront it, becoming only “more awful” as time passes. The sublime gains a sovereign power over the observer even across time and distance, whereas sentiments—at least for Emily—grow less pressing. But, as we will see in Radcliffe's final novel, the sublime becomes predominantly personified and individualized, transforming it into an even more powerful, pressing, and inescapable menace.

The Italian's *Embodiment of the Sublime*

Radcliffe's descriptions of dramatic Alpine landscapes are at their most florid in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, but *The Italian* (1797) further expands Radcliffe's command of the sublime by embodying it in the character and the actions of Schedoni. Radcliffe's previous novels all contain some variation upon the figure of the ominous, morally questionable patriarch, but Schedoni is the first to explicitly personify and inspire the sublime through the "violent effect[s]" that his feelings produce upon his body and impress upon others (Radcliffe, *The Italian* 250). Knapp summarizes the loose relations between personification and the sublime as centering around the relationship between "the nature of personified agency, and in the contrast between such agency and the lives of our ordinary selves. For the sublime depends on an ideal of perfect, self-originating agency that no one really expects or wants to fulfill" (Knapp 3). Nobody, Knapp posits, can—or, for that matter, really wants to—completely embody such a radical ideal, but Schedoni (who is about as far from one of Knapp's "ordinary selves" as a character can get) takes on so many of the sublime's characteristics with such a ferocity that he manages to personify and induce its affect.

Schedoni represents a further extension of the sublime's ability to spur and encapsulate feeling—moving from the realm of landscape into that of the human—but this does not mean that Radcliffe rejects her previous methods of evoking intense emotion within her characters. Feelings within *The Italian* are inspired by the sublimity of nature and the now-familiar sentimentalized ideals of moderated sensibility alongside instances of their stimulus by the sublime aspects of Schedoni's character; the sublime is thereby able to act upon characters and to interrogate their tendencies towards emotional excess in increasingly complex ways. Many of the constituent parts of Schedoni's sublimity, however, are also familiar, and hearken back to the nonverbal grounding of sentimentality in performance and postural display: they are physically

expressed through physiognomy and have a bodily grounding in the novel's highly theatrical scenes and set-pieces. The novel most memorably conjures up the terror and tension of the sublime through episodes like Schedoni's near-murder of Ellena and the long, drawn-out climactic courtroom scene, wherein Schedoni's imposing presence helps him to personify sometimes terrifyingly intimate sublimity through once-sentimental mechanisms of emotional incitement that can range from the grandest gestures to the most minute twitches and impassive stares. *The Italian* does not deny its foundation of Gothicized sentiment, and reinforces the continuing efficacy and appeal of traditional sentimentality through its repeated use (with the caveat that it must be kept within individual control) towards sublime ends. Radcliffe's strategies for the extraction of emotion are not progressive or linear, but an aggregation of techniques; much like we see the sentimental mode evolving in a series of wave-like variations throughout novels from the 1760s through the 1790s, Radcliffe's wide-ranging use of the sublime in *The Italian* revisits and revises her other, earlier methods of experiencing and expressing great feeling.

The Italian is far from forsaking the now-entrenched novelistic ideal of attractive, but thoroughly controlled, feminine sensibility. Ellena, the novel's heroine, identifies her own emotional self-control as one of her most attractive virtues. This moderation, she reflects, enables her to avoid the twin perils of "the vehemence of passion, or... the weakness of fear" (85). Like Mary in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, Ellena knows "that she must suffer, and she resolved to endure" whatever "indignity might be offered her" (85). But Ellena is uninterested in self-martyrdom: whereas Mary volunteers herself for an undesirable marriage and dooms herself to certain misery, Ellena decides that the choices of "threatened marriage, or a formal renunciation of the world" would be merely devoting herself "during life, to misery, and

that by her own act.” Instead of this self-induced misery, Ellena chooses seclusion, and to “endure with calmness the hardships which she could not avoid,” strenuously fortifying herself with “the strength of mind, which was necessary to support such equanimity.” Strength and endurance are the traits that she sees as most desirable, not unnecessary self-sacrifice. “I have accustomed myself to contemplate those sufferings,” she later repeats to Olivia; “I have chosen the least of such as were given to my choice, and I will endure them with fortitude; can you then say that I am subjected?” (96). Ellena views even suffering as a choice of sorts, and cites resolute endurance as a strategy for actively avoiding extreme pain as well as extreme pleasure. She is introduced, then, not as the potential object of masculine whims, but as her own agent, who empowers herself through the choice to endure.

Even though her resolution to refuse choices that would make her miserable is not specifically typed as a form of sentimental exercise, the importance of strength and moderation for all characters is again invoked in later discussions of passionate virtues and vices. After his imprisonment, Vivaldi must make “a strong effort for self command” to avoid rushing heatedly to “certain destruction” (198). “His passions,” Radcliffe writes, “thus restrained, seemed to become virtues, and to display themselves in the energy of his courage and his fortitude.” Here, Radcliffe specifically praises the restraint of the passions as a worthy ideal, and one that paradoxically encourages other positive forms of “energy”; extreme passion is only problematic because of the fact of its extremity, not its essential character, and simply exercising restraint transforms passionate excess into an active virtue. “His soul,” Radcliffe continues, “became stern and vigorous in despair ... The pain of his wounds was no longer felt; it appeared as if the strength of his intellectual self had subdued the infirmities of the body, and, perhaps, in these moments of elevation, he could have endured the torture without shrinking” (198-9). Vivaldi’s

self-discipline is cast as a strengthening exercise; his emotional discipline does not coldly minimize his feelings, but controls them to bolster his “intellectual self” and allow his rational mind to triumph over physical pain and the weakness of his body. By now, the virtue of well-regulated sensibility has become but one facet of the larger idea of individual self-control and moderation at play in so many late-century novels; feeling is not reduced down to nothing, but herded into a virtuous middle ground. Intriguingly, this discipline of the passions not only subdues Vivaldi’s pain, but elevates him to the point of perhaps being able to withstand torture. Vivaldi’s self-discipline keeps his feelings in check, and opens the door to what could be a kind of sublime transcendence through spiritual regulation.

Like *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Italian* contains a number of scenes where characters experience sublime elation as they travel through dramatic landscapes. Early in the novel, Ellena’s party passes above a dramatic, precipitous mountain torrent whose overall impact is “more terrific than the pencil could describe, or language can express” (63). Like powerful sentiment, it provokes affect that surpasses the talents of art and language. In the face of this sight, Ellena ascends “not with indifference but with calmness,” experiencing “somewhat of a dreadful pleasure in looking down upon the irresistible flood.” This sensation of deriving pleasure from what is dreadful is a mainstay of the natural sublime, but the insertion of a bridge across the river, highlighting the delicacy of humanity when juxtaposed with the “immense” chasm, “heighten[s]” Ellena’s pleasure “into awe,” and she “almost forgot her misfortunes.” Ellena, in the true fashion of a Burkean spectator remaining at a safe, certain distance from genuine harm, is able to feel sublime pleasure and awe at the sight, but she is not completely carried away by it in the way that sentimental characters are so often overpowered by their own emotions. Ellena retains her agency, choosing to traverse the bridge and look down on the

waterfall below her, despite the relative precariousness of her position when compared to the torrent. She is able to retain her “calmness”; even though she is deeply, irresistibly moved, she does not lose control. The sublime is strong enough for her to “almost” forget her misfortunes—despite its strength, the sublime does not threaten to completely overcome her self-possession, or totally dominate and detach her from her own feelings. It does, however, allow her a momentary reprieve from her misfortunes, and prevents her from dwelling on them while reestablishing a sense of proportionality.

In fact, sublime encounters are often threaded into the narrative, instead of interrupting it: while making her uneasy way towards her ill-fated initial attempt to marry Vivaldi, the ominous surroundings “appeared to sympathize with the spirits of Ellena”; earlier, the view of the grand landscape from her turret allows her to “acquire strength to bear her, with equanimity, thro’ the persecutions that might await her” (183, 90). Ellena’s mind, Radcliffe explains, “was capable of being highly elevated, or sweetly soothed, by scenes of nature,” and the views from the turret allow her to look

beyond the awful veil which obscures the features of the Deity, and conceals Him from the eyes of his creatures, dwelling as with a present God in the midst of his sublime works; with a mind thus elevated, how insignificant would appear to her the transactions, and the sufferings of this world! How poor the boasted power of man... Thus man, the giant who now held her in captivity, would shrink to the diminutiveness of a fairy; and she would experience, that his utmost force was unable to enchain her soul, or compel her to fear him, while he was destitute of virtue.” (90-1)

The sublime has the power to diminish Ellena’s own trials into insignificance and strip even her most formidable tormenters of their power. But it’s also imbued with an extra dose of moral authority: the sublime is explicitly God-given by nature, and access to the sublime is, according to this formulation, akin to a clear glimpse of “the features of the Deity.” Here, Ellena’s encounter with the sublime’s “features” recalls Udolpho, whose “features” “frown” at Emily;

earlier in the same novel, too, Ellena is revived and elevated by the sublime “face of nature,” which makes it “scarcely possible to yield to the pressure of misfortune, while we walk, as with the Deity, amidst his most stupendous works!” (62-3). In her later novels, Radcliffe quite literally puts a face on the sublime landscape. Whenever a sublime object threatens to become too imposing in its personified, menacing intimacy, Radcliffe connects it back to the power of “the Deity,” and the features of God’s face are described as perpetually peeking out from around the edges of the landscape.⁷⁰

This association prevents the sublime from acting merely as a form of amoral terror, and frames it as something that is, despite all of its overwhelming power, grounded in the divine. Ellena’s imposing surroundings enable her to look beyond the prototypically Gothic “veil” that shields her from God’s presence, and minimizes the potentially sublime menace of “the giant” holding her captive, thereby restoring perspective.⁷¹ Such divinity is, however, most often—in a form of Gothicized literary obfuscation meant to vaguely, romantically hint at wilder undercurrents of paganism—euphemistically almost never referred to by name, allowing Ellena’s captor to be imaginatively diminished into “a fairy.” (The passage above is the novel’s only explicit invocation of God, even as a potentially polytheistic “present God,” apart from characters’ expostulations.) Ellena’s sublime elevation allows her to resist the “utmost force” of her captor, as well as the compulsion “to fear him”—in other words, it steels her against

⁷⁰ See, for example, *Udolpho*: “She leaned pensively on the little open casement, and in deep thought fixed her eyes upon the heaven, whose blue unclouded concave was studded thick with stars, the worlds, perhaps, of spirits, unsphered of mortal mould. As her eyes wandered along the boundless aether, her thoughts rose, as before, towards the sublimity of the Deity, and to the contemplation of futurity” (72); and “Then drying her tears and looking up, her thoughts rose again to the sublime subject she had contemplated; the same divine complacency stole over her heart, and, hushing its throbs, inspired hope and confidence and resignation to the will of the Deity, whose works filled her mind with adoration” (114). Radcliffe’s characters are thus obliquely presented as sublime enthusiasts.

⁷¹ For more on the Gothicized veil, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “The Character in the Veil.”

emotional manipulation, but only under the condition that these efforts at emotional menace occur “while he was destitute of virtue.” In this episode, the sublime and the sentimental collaborate, with the sublime’s operations building from and bolstering Ellena’s sentimental foundation: her sensitive mind, perceptive and strong soul, and virtue (90). Claudia L. Johnson reads Ellena’s absorption in the landscape as seen from her turret as a method of stabilizing the self while under stress, both effacing and augmenting her emotions (C. L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 117). But, Johnson continues, such transport is at best only a temporary escape: the landscape can encode “anxiety about obliteration in monumental proportions” just as often as it soothes and pacifies, and Radcliffe’s characters themselves reject readings of the sublime that lopsidedly attempt to equate it solely with a natural, untouched outer world (*Equivocal Beings* 118). Here, the sublime calms Ellena’s panic, keeping her focus both literally and metaphorically on the compelling scenery and phenomena just outside while she reaches towards God. But the introduction of a character like Schedoni lends an even more immediate, more terrifyingly human face to the potential personifications of the sublime.

Burke cites God-like power as a primary source of the sublime, and Schedoni’s irresistibly compelling appearance and actions—not to mention his affiliation with the church—lend institutional authority and inescapable force to his antagonism of the novel’s main characters. Kim Ian Michasiw argues that *The Italian* generates much of its impact from “the terror generated by real, institutionalized power,” represented by the Inquisition (Michasiw 337–8). We can think of some of Schedoni’s affective wallop as originating from the institution that powers him—the collective, shadowy force of the Catholic Church wreaking inquisitional havoc across Europe. Michasiw points out that when Vivaldi is led through the dark passages of the Inquisition, the distant sounds of “persons in their last extremity” chills him with “horror,” not

the more certain terror that one might expect Radcliffe to identify instead (Michasiw 340).

“Shrouded in obscurity as it is,” Michasiw writes, “the power of the Inquisition does not depend on sensory or imaginative failure. The more clearly Vivaldi perceives, the worse his situation becomes; the terror inspired in these scenes defies rationalizing dissipation” (340). For readers, the immediacy of Schedoni’s menace presses far more closely than, say, the threat posed by a storm at sea or nearby bands of banditti since it is rooted in a very real history, and a still-real institution regarded suspiciously (at best) by eighteenth-century British readers. (It’s also interesting to note that, at the end of the century, the extremes of sublimity imagined by the British Gothic novel point towards Roman Catholicism, whereas the extremes of sentimentalism envisioned forty years earlier pointed towards Methodist enthusiasm; the prevailing winds of politics have updated the religious trappings of representations of undesirably excessive emotionality, and Schedoni seems poised to mete out the wrath of a Catholic God.) But while, as Michasiw argues, Schedoni’s Catholicism contributes heavy Gothic and thematic weight to the character, it is not in and of itself sublime: his religious clout may be horrifying, but that does not mean that it becomes a source of sublime horror.

Despite the apparent obscurity of his motives, Schedoni’s sublimity is clearly performed through his presence, gestures, and imposing countenance, linking the postural, gesture-based foundations of sentimental expression to the spectacle of the theater which both Burke and Kant discuss as a key testing ground of the sublime. This theatricality is closely linked to the forms of sympathy elaborated on by both Burke and Smith: Burke employs the image of the spectator at a tragedy as an example of the kind of sympathy, separated by a safe distance, that allows for the effect of the sublime; Smith famously uses the example of an execution as an instance of how we sympathetically respond to performed distress. Schedoni’s theatricality also links back to the

striking oratorical genius detailed by Longinus, which, as Steven Knapp observes, roughly interweaves two independent effects into his depiction of the sublime: an overpowering stroke of rhetoric, followed by the revelation of outsized—even transporting—oratorical genius (Knapp 68). While he remains a character far from the types of victims, actors, and orators discussed by Burke, Smith, and Longinus, Schedoni is a magnetic figure; the first time that he passes him in a hallway, Vivaldi “recoiled with involuntary emotion” as a “shuddering presentiment of what this monk was preparing for him, had crossed his mind,” despite the fact that Schedoni bows his head and “assumed a meek and holy countenance” as Vivaldi passes by (35).

Schedoni is seemingly unable to mute the power that his presence has on others; despite his veneer of benign piety, his appearance and demeanor incite instinctive fear in Vivaldi as he passes near. There is “something almost super-human” and “extremely singular” about Schedoni’s irresistible, adaptable physiognomy, and eyes which “few persons could... endure to meet” twice (34-5). Whether consciously exercised or not, the striking, sublime effect that Schedoni has on others—even when he tries to hide his malign light beneath a mask of holiness—seems to originate from within, deriving not from the particular lines of his features, but the power lurking beneath them. Newton and Locke, we might recall from Chapter One, both view the eye as an eloquent organ capable of transporting profound emotions and feelings that surpass the limits of speech; the eye is not the source of the affect that it engenders. Radcliffe’s description of Schedoni does not delve into the origins of his sublimity, but its strength and presence within him are unquestionable. With *The Italian*, Radcliffe takes one of the central, unanswered questions of the sentimental novel—what happens to the man or woman of feeling who feels *too much*?—and translates it into the sublime by pouring seemingly impossible quantities of destructive, contagious emotional power into one figure. There is “something

almost super-human” about Schedoni’s sublime excess, hinting that such a profound and immediate personification of the sublime goes beyond ordinary human limitations, and contrasting with the divine origins of the sublime.

Schedoni’s protracted decline places him right in the middle of the kind of spectatorial milieu that could so easily extract tears and sympathy from his receptive audience, but which Schedoni instead turns to resist sentiment. In her discussion of Burkean theatricality in *Solitude and the Sublime*, Frances Ferguson describes the peculiar appeal of the delight in spectators’ witnessing of executions as a “direct conflict between society and sympathy: the legal system through which society punishes a failure of social sympathy becomes the occasion for individuals to experience a bond with a person who is being executed in the name of the social bond” (*Solitude and the Sublime* 61). Schedoni is not given a public execution, but he does have one final audience with Vivaldi, Nicola, and the Marchese, where he reluctantly issues a deathbed confession. All present at the scene suffer strong emotions: Vivaldi suffers “agitation... with redoubled force,” and the Marchese’s “reluctance” to see Schedoni is mingled with “a degree of curiosity” (389). Schedoni, despite his rapid deterioration, retains aspects of his sublime power: “Hear me!” he cries “in a voice which the strength of his spirit contending with the feebleness of his condition, rendered hollow and terrible” (391-2). Even in his dying state, Schedoni has the ability to stimulate an “excess” of despair in Vivaldi (392). In turn, the questions of the Marchese and Nicola take their toll on Schedoni; like the victim at an execution, he “appeared almost to writhe under the agony, which his mind inflicted upon him, and it was only by strong effort, that he sustained his spirit so far as to go through with the interrogations” (393-4). Like Ellena, Schedoni is distinguished by his self-discipline; unlike Ellena, his strength

of mind enables him to maintain his powers of sublime intimidation, and it is only his own mind—not an outside source—that causes him so much agony.

After deciding to give his confession, he “remained for some moments reclining on his pillow in silence, with his eyes shut, while the changes in his features indicated the strong emotion of his mind. Then, as if by a violent effort, he half raised himself, and made an ample confession of the arts he had practiced against Vivaldi” (394). While Schedoni remained stubbornly impassive throughout his public trial, he finally reveals strong emotion during these final moments, and yields to the collective sympathy that, like Ferguson describes, allows him to bond—however briefly—with Vivaldi, despite having consistently rejected social sympathy up until this point. Schedoni critiques Vivaldi’s ardent and irrational imagination, at which Vivaldi blushes, “now conscious of its justness; and was surprised that Schedoni should so well have understood the nature of his mind, while he himself, with whom conjecture had never assumed the stability of opinion, on the subject to which the Confessor alluded, had been ignorant even of its propensities” (397-8). Schedoni remains internal and inscrutable throughout his final hours—we know only how he “appeared” or “seemed” and his agony is self-inflicted and mitigated through excruciating self-discipline—yet he accurately judges Vivaldi’s character with only a minimum of foreknowledge. As Schedoni dies, “every person present seemed to feel at least a momentary compassion, except Nicola, who stood unmoved beside Schedoni, and looked steadfastly upon his pangs, while a smile of derision marked his countenance” (401). This seeming exception to the group’s sympathy with the dying man, however, is soon converted: “a slight spasm darted over Nicola’s face, and his muscles also seemed to labour with sudden contraction.” No one is immune from being moved; despite turning away, Nicola’s manner “appeared to betray that he had not been permitted to triumph in the sufferings of his enemy,

without participating at least in their horror” (402). Unlike the scenes of communal deathbed sympathy that take place in so many sentimental novels of the 1760s and 1770s (think, for example, of the massive death-by-grief that concludes Dodd’s *The Curse of Sentiment*), Schedoni’s demise—provocative and affecting as it may be to even the most reluctant witness—retains its tint of sublime horror, and it is not the tear-filled scene of sociable forgiveness and reunion that its situation might lead the reader to expect. Although sympathetic tears are shed, they are not exchanged in the kind of boundless, free emotional exchange that sentimental readers have come to idealize; the reader is certainly not overcome by a wave of tender pity for the dying Schedoni, and others’ pity for him is still tinged with fear.

Unlike the quiet, docile deaths suffered by fictional men and women of feeling, Schedoni’s passing is equally protracted, but violent and fearsome. After a struggle, he re-opens his eyes: “presently a faint gleam of recollection shot from them, and gradually lighting them up, the character of his soul appeared there; the expression was indeed feeble, but it was true” (402). Part of the reason why Schedoni’s death is so slow is because it is accompanied by the drawn-out revelations of truth that are still being extorted from him; even though he is no longer in front of the tribunal, his trial still goes on, until all those present see his “true” character. His sublime power is no longer veiled by the conventional signs of sentimentality; his authentic self shines through his eyes, and strikes down his opponents. After making some inarticulate sounds, he looks at Nicola with “malignant triumph... His glance seemed suddenly impowered with the destructive fascination attributed to that of the basilisk, for while it now met Nicola’s, that monk seemed as if transfixed to the spot, and unable to withdraw his eyes from the glare of Schedoni’s; in their expression he read the dreadful sentence of his fate, the triumph of revenge and cunning.” Schedoni, we learn, has covertly poisoned Nicola, but his glance alone has a nearly

fatal ability to freeze and destroy its target; the action of the poison seems almost secondary. His eyes contain a sublime power, capable of destruction, snake-like malice and venomous incapacitation, and a dreadful, fatal ability to sentence someone to death. As Nicola receives this glance, “a pallid hue overspread [Nicola’s] face; at the same time an involuntary motion convulsed his features, cold trembling seized upon his frame, and, uttering a deep groan, he fell back, and was caught in the arms of the people near him.”

Schedoni’s dangerousness derives from his ability to materialize negative, excessive feelings—he manifests antipathy, not sympathy, while still being able to manipulate the others’ sympathetic impulses. Schedoni’s “demoniacal sound of exultation” is “so strange and horrible, so convulsed, yet so loud, so exulting, yet so unlike any human voice, that every person in the chamber... struck with irresistible terror, endeavoured to make their way out of it.” Ultimately, Radcliffe has presented us with a character who fully embodies the nightmarish potential of sentimentality when taken to extremes: someone able to manipulate sympathy for their own malicious purposes, who transforms it into an inescapable, powerful instrument of terror and horror.⁷² The force of this ability is sublime, but—when personified within a figure like Schedoni, instead of lurking, at a near but safe remove within the landscape—its thrill is deadly, not pleasurable. Radcliffe doesn’t necessarily present Schedoni as a cautionary tale about the dangers of fully embodying and personifying the sublime—by all major contemporary definitions, the sublime is not an effect that most people can conjure up in others at will—but

⁷² Michasiw describes Schedoni’s final moments as transitioning from “awe through fear” to compelling “admiration through his own fearlessness. The ‘terrific Schedoni’ becomes, in the moments before his death, an avatar of the humanist sublime. That is, in the default of his specious powers, he achieves something approaching superhuman grandeur, as Clarissa Harlowe does, in death” (341). Michasiw’s comparison to Clarissa is particularly interesting, given that she meets her demise while incarnating a nearly opposite kind of proto-sentimental principled virtue; Schedoni’s sublimity, to follow Michasiw’s formulation, comes from his ultimate personification of antipathy, and his refusal to admit the least hint of humanizing detail.

Schedoni does demonstrate how excessive feeling, no matter its source or mode, eventually, inevitably destroys the individual who houses or channels it. Schedoni's personification of the sublime closes the gap between the subject and observed pain, rendering him the nightmarish, cautionary example of what happens to those who embody their own excess.

Schedoni's ability to personify the sublime makes him the rare exemplar of the embodied, Kantian sublime described by Steven Knapp. "To 'experience' the sublime was not quite," Knapp writes, "to identify oneself with a transcendent ideal of pure subjective power, but rather to entertain that ideal as an abstract, fantastic, unattainable possibility" (Knapp 3). Schedoni is such a unique and fantastic case because he *does* manage to achieve that unattainable ideal of sublime, otherworldly power, finally demonstrating the dark side of what the sentimental novel has always flirted with: what happens when an individual is wholly given over to transcendent, unmitigated excess. The Kantian sublime "demands a simultaneous identification with and dissociation from images of ideal power," Knapp argues (3). The experience "reduces to mere pretense" "unless the subject in some degree identifies with the ideal"—which Schedoni, deeply invested as he is within the Catholic church, does. Schedoni, corrupt as he may be, is part of an immense religious organization that wraps itself around every personal and institutional aspect of the plot—he first appears as a family confessor of obscure origins; he hides Ellena in a convent; the Inquisition forms the primary instrument of justice and punishment in characters' lives. Schedoni has none of the Kantian fanatic's delusion ("raving with reason" (Kant 135)) and little of the adherence to "immutable principles" that characterizes enthusiasm (132-133), but his reinforcement by the religious, political, organizational, and judicial force of the church allows him to get close enough to "ideal power" to exercise a sublime influence over virtually everyone

that he encounters. Schedoni is all personified, inscrutable Kantian agency, a suitably immovable object against which characters must react and readjust.

As Syndy M. Conger argues, *The Italian* resists recent attempts to “cast Radcliffe in the role of the opponent of sensibility,” which position her as someone who, in the words of Nelson C. Smith, “like Jane Austen two decades later, shows its weaknesses and flaws” (Syndy M. Conger 136). Such a position, Conger continues, “fails to recognize Radcliffe’s increasingly adamant defense of sensibility. While both her liberal and conservative contemporaries grew increasingly caustic about sensibility—to the former, it was too restrictive, to the latter, too libertine a doctrine—she quietly launches a campaign against them. Sensibility, she insists, has little to do with passion or physical action but has everything to do with thoughtful compassion.” Sensibility, we see in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*, remains a valuable and admirable quality, as long as it is responsibly managed and consciously observed; in the hands of an Emily or an Ellena it remains a private virtue, despite its potential for abuse by a Schedoni. Even as Schedoni is in his protracted death throes, Ellena’s tender reunion with Olivia and the fête of Vivaldi and Ellena show how well-regulated doses of sensibility, sentimentality and sympathy remain attractive qualities to be admired. At the same time, mature and balanced sentimentality becomes a less interesting engine (to contemporary readers, anyway) for single-handedly sustaining the plots and contents of entire novels with the pursuit of boundless feeling. But despite its increasing presence in Radcliffe’s novels, the sublime mode does not come to surpass or supplant the sentimental. Instead, sensibility ossifies onto the skeleton of the Gothic, becoming one of the stable of foundational virtues that inform explorations of excessive feeling through the newer and more vital venue of the sublime. Although the type of affect at the center

of Radcliffe's novels might be shifting, the boundaries that she erects around individual emotional experience remain the same: feelings, even strong feelings, may be brought on by the sublime, but those feelings must be held at bay by the subject's reflexive consciousness. Ultimately, characters like Emily and Ellena must remain emotional tourists.

CONCLUSION

JANE AUSTEN, FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE, AND THE MAGNIFICATION OF

STOICISM

“Oh!” cried Marianne, “with what transporting sensations have I formerly seen them fall! How have I delighted, as I walked, to see them driven in showers about me by the wind! What feelings have they, the season, the air altogether inspired! Now there is no one to regard them. They are seen only as a nuisance, swept hastily off, and driven as much as possible from the sight.”

“It is not every one,” said Elinor, “who has your passion for dead leaves.” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 67)

In the novels whose prose, plots, and characters are strewn across the previous four chapters, “excess” remains a masked, encoded quality. Cultural fears of excessive feeling, as I have shown, most often conceal underlying social and critical worries about the other forms of excess that could be triggered by the unpredictable powers of sympathy and fellow-feeling: how emotional excess might leave its mark on the body, or inspire religious fervor, or be subject to strenuous individual discipline, or bleed over into even more dramatic aesthetic expressions like the sublime. In other words, for all of their hand-wringing over the excesses of sentimentality, eighteenth-century writers spend surprisingly little time clarifying how that excessiveness can be qualified, or what happens to those who feel it; instead, it’s the excess that spills out past the lines of sentimentality that drives their concern, as well as the question of how that excess might then be swept back into bounds or translated into more socially-acceptable forms. In this conclusion, I look ahead to Jane Austen to see how we might read her novels as shifting their attentions from the sentimental fascination with excessive feeling over to the kind of impassive self-denial that forms sentimentality’s Janus-like flip side. As we see in the novels discussed in

Chapter Three, novelists overwhelmingly prefer to advocate for the virtues of sensible self-restraint by illustrating the lurid fates of sentimentalists who dwell, unwisely, in the realm of unbridled emotionality; prudent decision-making and quiet personal agendas full of improving reading material make for much less juicy narrative fodder than lavish suffering. Here, I look at Austen's rendering of the sentimental novel in 1811's *Sense and Sensibility* to see how she turns from one character's excess to another's restraint, using the new technique of free indirect discourse as a tool for the expression and articulation of restrained and buried emotions.⁷³

In many ways, *Sense and Sensibility* harkens back to a stable of familiar sentimental types and tropes, and bears a superficial resemblance to the plot and characters of Jane West's 1796 *A Gossip's Story*. Austen's novel remains infinitely more popular than its eighteenth-century predecessors due in part to its author's technical and narrative prowess, but Austen can't resist drawing from the deep well of hoary sentimental clichés in her portrait of Marianne and her "indulgence of feeling" (Austen 63). Marianne, we are told, is "sensible and clever... her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation" (6). Marianne's sister Elinor is concerned about the "excess of her sister's sensibility" which is encouraged by their mother; following the arrival of Fanny Dashwood into their home, Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood spur each other on in "the violence of their affliction," which—no longer a spontaneous reaction of grief—is "voluntarily renewed, was sought for, was created again and again." Elinor, however, is fortified against such emotional self-indulgence by her self-command: "still she could struggle, she could exert herself," choosing not to wallow in her sorrow and instead overseeing the necessary operations of the household. Elinor is the family's emotional stoic, remaining pragmatic and self-controlled

⁷³ *Sense and Sensibility*'s early drafts took the form of the epistolary *Elinor and Marianne* as Austen worked on them through the 1790s, and prepared them for publication in 1797 (Austen vii, xxxx); despite its eventual publication a decade later, *Sense and Sensibility* is very much a cultural and literary product of the 1790s.

despite the Dashwoods' fall from fortune, her sober common sense contrasting with Marianne's adolescent sensibility.

Students of Austen's novel sometimes interpret its titular qualities as a pair of warring polarities, understanding Marianne's romantic disappointments, illnesses, and eventual marriage to Colonel Brandon as signifying the triumph of practical good sense over fatuous sensibility, and Marianne's ultimate comeuppance. At a glance, after all, Austen's novel resembles the narratives discussed in Chapter Three: showing the danger of what Helen Maria Williams' Advertisement to *Julia* terms "the danger arising from the uncontrolled indulgence of strong affections... disapproved by reason, and uncircumscribed by prudence" (H. M. Williams iii); demonstrating the careful attendance to duty, practicality, and reason advocated by Frances Jacson's *Plain Sense*; and cautioning against the pursuit of the "romantick standard" followed by "the fair enthusiasts who indulge in all the extravagance of heroick generosity, romantic love, and exuberant friendship" who are censured by the narrator in West's *A Gossip's Story* (1: 47–8).⁷⁴ But Austen's novels are far more than the sum of their influences, even though we may look at them as the latest, greatest iteration of the wave-like evolution of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel.⁷⁵ Austen has none of West's rigorous didacticism, and carries little of Williams' radical political and educational agendas; nor does she cast Elinor and Marianne as the allegorical embodiments of sober sense and heedless sensibility, respectively. What is remarkable—to the devoted reader of eighteenth-century sentimental novels, at least—is how

⁷⁴ West's novel is itself also a story of two sisters (one also named Marianne) who seemingly embody pragmatism and sentimentality in all that they do.

⁷⁵ Claudia L. Johnson makes a similar argument for Austen's relationship to the Gothic novel that she so gleefully parodies in *Northanger Abbey*, stating that "Austen is actually replicating rather than undermining a prominent formula of gothic fiction" (C. L. Johnson, "Introduction" xiii). "Clearly," Johnson writes, "Austen is not simply disavowing gothic. To be sure, all parody denaturalizes the conventions of what it is parodying, and so in its very nature is demystifying... But at the same time, parody reaffirms and reconstitutes what it is parodying" (xiv).

little Marianne's excessiveness is coded: her sentimentality is not deemed "excessive" because it veils some other, more dangerous proclivity to excess lurking beneath her passionate exterior. (It is difficult to imagine Austen's literary universe encompassing, for instance, the potential that Marianne's excessive grief would prompt her to run off and join a nunnery. And Austen's portraits of health and illness—as evinced in the uncompleted *Sanditon*, or *Emma*'s peevishly hypochondriacal Mr. Woodhouse—also make Marianne's tragic demise from a vague excess of nervous overexertion equally unlikely.) *Sense and Sensibility* is not the story of excess's chastisement, reformation, and reconsolidation, nor is Marianne positioned as a failure for her inability to follow Elinor's model of sensible restraint and self-discipline. Instead, it's the obvious danger that Marianne's excessive sensibility poses for her social standing that Elinor views with such chagrin, and her refusal to consider "the propriety of some self-command" (41). Marianne abhors "all concealment where no real disgrace could attend unreserve," and Mrs. Dashwood enters into her daughter's feelings "with a warmth which left her no inclination for checking this excessive display of them. To her it was but the natural consequence of a strong affection in a young and ardent mind." Elinor, Marianne, and Mrs. Dashwood disagree about the degree to which true feeling ought to be tempered in deference to social standards; it is here that Marianne's sentimentality, her unchecked public exhibition of her natural feeling, is determined to be "excessive."

Marianne can never force herself to model her emotional expressions upon those of her stoic sister: she reaches the end of the novel with her excesses unchecked. Marianne is aware of the comparison "necessarily produced between Elinor's conduct and her own," but that comparison does not "urge her to exertion" (203); instead, she experiences "all the pain of continual self-reproach," her awareness—without accompanying action—bringing only "the

torture of penitence, without the hope of amendment.” Elinor’s powers of self-possession, which she successfully rallies throughout all of Lucy Steele’s nettling conversational barbs as well as the public discovery of Edward Ferrars’ secret engagement, are not a virtue that Marianne can hope to emulate; Marianne is perfectly aware of how impulsive she appears in comparison to her sister, but remains incapable of altering her behavior to better follow her sister’s model. If Austen were truly writing in the mode of novels like *Julia* or *Plain Sense*, Marianne’s ultimate lack of self-discipline would be her undoing. Instead, Marianne remains her passionate, ardent self, but bends her tendencies towards excess in a different direction. As the novel winds towards its conclusion, Elinor smiles at the newly-subdued Marianne’s ambitious plan of self-improvement through a combination of strenuous walks, early rising, and “reading only six hours a-day,” seeing the same “eager fancy which had been leading her to the extreme of languid indolence and selfish repining, now at work in introducing excess into a scheme of such rational employment and virtuous self-controul” (260). Marianne’s enthusiasm remains unchecked, even though its object has changed—excess, in other words, can now be fully detached from sentimentality; Marianne remains just as passionate as she has always been, but less sentimental. Her excess is to be humored, not mitigated or controlled, now that Marianne has gained maturity. Marianne’s excessiveness has not been wrung out of her by the events of the novel, nor does she become a sentimental martyr: Austen sees Marianne’s essential excessiveness as posing no threat to her well-being. Excess presents less of a danger or threat.

Austen thus does not preach the same message of individual discipline and restraint that we have seen in other late eighteenth-century novels. At the end of *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne has learned to route her inclinations towards excess along more responsible and profitable routes, and has not been transformed into a model of stoic self-denial. As Adela Pinch

notes, novels of manners like Austen's are concerned with "calibrating feelings to 'social habits'" not by "discouraging extravagant feelings but by routing them along improving paths" (Pinch 142). Emerging contemporary genres like the Gothic and the Regency novel of manners therefore "do similar work" in spite of their "different emotional registers," placing strong feelings into "social circulation" (142). She describes this process as one that does not restrain emotions for the sake of polite society, but one that trains them "to flourish in certain domains" (141). Pinch's model provides a useful way to think about the evolution of the sentimental novels that I trace throughout this dissertation: at times endlessly reiterative in their descriptions of excessive feeling and its powers, sentimental novels nevertheless subtly evolve through the strategies and modes that they seize upon as methods to carry and give form to their excess. Ultimately, some of sentimentality's familiar motifs are enfolded into emerging strains, like the Gothic of Ann Radcliffe or the novel of manners. *Sense and Sensibility* undergoes no dramatic change in genre or mode, however. At the end of the novel, Austen recounts Marianne's fate in a gently mock-heroic tone in a way that emphasizes its mundanity. "Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favorite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as seventeen..." (288). Instead of martyring herself unnecessarily upon the proverbial Sternean bed of straw reserved for sensibility's devotees, the Marianne at the end of the novel exchanges the allure of "sacrific[ing]" herself to an "irresistible passion" for a more prosaic place in "a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village" (288). This Marianne does not have her excess chastened, but her comportment is corrected into a framework of domesticity which seems capable of enduring even her excessively fanciful efforts towards self-improvement.

Here, however, I turn to Austen's command of form and language to explore how free indirect discourse can also be wielded to channel and, to use Pinch's terminology, re-route feelings along more productive pathways. Free indirect discourse precisely negotiates the distance between a character, the narrator, and the reader—the three actors also most intimately involved in the triangulation of sympathy—and the degree to which we can draw near, and in turn be moved by, a character's feelings. Given this intricate interplay of affect and control, we might expect Austen to employ it with Marianne, her most passionately sentimental character, and the character most likely to publically exhibit her emotions in a manner that invites the spectator's sympathetic involvement. Instead, Austen uses free indirect discourse to give us glimpses into the mind and the feelings of the seemingly stoic Elinor, illuminating her effortful struggles with emotion and self-discipline. But while Pinch sees Austen's novels as productively recirculating antisocial forms of emotion, Elinor's feelings are not subject to this particular brand of discipline and improvement: free indirect discourse in *Sense and Sensibility* is a tool of expression, not correction. Free indirect discourse serves to articulate Elinor's private, unspoken feelings, and not serve as an emergency release valve for their excesses. It allows us to draw far nearer to her inner thoughts and emotions than previous narrative models would allow, giving intimate expression, pathos, and interest to Elinor's restrained inner life. In the process, we are given a far more compelling and nuanced portrait of the kind of virtuous self-restraint that is lionized—but rarely pursued for any length of time—in earlier sentimental novels as the counterpart to sentimentalism. Elinor's disciplined inner turmoil is thereby elevated to the same narrative significance as Marianne's dramatic emotional displays.

Free indirect discourse undampens Elinor's muted emotional trajectory. Whereas so many sentimental novels are concerned with the process of contracting and encapsulating

immense emotions for better transport between the feeler and their observer, Elinor's feelings undergo an inverse process of inflation back into proper proportion, allowing her woes—which are just as keen, but far less theatrically and publicly displayed, than Marianne's—to assume their rightful magnitude. It would be difficult to perform this act of stoic inflation while operating strictly within the sentimental mode—the florid descriptions of misery and agony that would result seem incompatible with Elinor's refusal to dwell on her misfortunes, or cast herself as a figure of romantic pity—but giving us insight into Elinor's character through the formal means of free indirect discourse opens her up without excessive sentimentalization. It also counterbalances the self-created bombast of emotionality by turning up the volume on her self-denial, showing how a quality as quiet and un-showy as stoicism can still be strong enough to counterbalance sentimentality.

Free indirect discourse allows Austen's narrator to be intimately familiar with Elinor's innermost feelings without becoming entangled in them. D.A. Miller's virtuosic *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style* sees Austen's deployment of free indirect discourse as a mechanism that distances the narrator from the characters whose tale she tells. In free indirect style, Miller writes, “the narration's way of *saying* is constantly both mimicking, and distancing itself from, the character's way of *seeing*” (27). Austen's narration allows the narrator to be simultaneously intimate and ironically detached from the character that she surveys (27). Austen walks the line opposing character and narration at “ostentatiously close quarters”: narration “comes as near to a character's psychic and linguistic reality as it can get without collapsing into it, and the character does as much of the work of narration as she may without acquiring its authority” (59). Free indirect style structures the relationship between character and narrator, granting us “at one and the same time the experience of a character's inner life as she herself lives it, and an experience

of the same inner life as she never could,” granting the reader an “impersonal intimacy” (60).

Austen’s narrative technique thus formally generates self-consciousness within and around her characters, allowing readers a clear view of their thoughts and emotions while the narrator holds them at a remove. The narrator recognizes Elinor’s reserve, and respects her distaste for romantic self-aggrandizement; free indirect discourse lets Austen recount Elinor’s interior monologue in her own voice, before detaching itself and resuming the narration in the objective third person.⁷⁶

Marianne struggles little during the initial stages of *Sense and Sensibility* with emotional self-management; in fact, she prides herself upon the free expression of her true sentimental feelings, dismissing “the business of self-command” as “impossible” for those with “strong affections,” and as having “no merit” for those with calm affections (with a guilty, half-realized acknowledgement that this pattern perhaps does not quite accommodate her sister) (79). Elinor is the one whom Austen describes as constantly “exerting” herself in various social and personal circumstances, while Marianne is content to lean into them, nourishing her grief and courting her

⁷⁶ Not all scholars agree that Austen’s use of free indirect discourse generates distance and detachment between the narrator and her characters, however. Daniel P. Gunn reads Austen’s novels as deliberately intertwining free indirect discourse with narratorial commentary, where *Emma*’s narrator closely mimics her main character’s voice, embedding Emma’s language within the narrator’s speech in a form of modulated imitation (Gunn 37). This model of a free indirect discourse that promotes narratorial closeness lends the narrator more nuanced control over her characters, inflecting them with “the narrator’s irony and her moral sensibility” (41). Gunn refers to Wayne C. Booth’s description of *Emma*’s narrative technique as a kind of “double vision,” which gives us access to both an “inside view” of Emma’s subjectivity and an “objective view of her great faults” (qtd. in Gunn 41). Free indirect discourse allows the narrator to “represent Emma’s subjectivity with great immediacy while still providing a frame within which that subjectivity can be understood and placed,” what Booth might term a “control of distance” (41). The relationship of *Sense and Sensibility*’s narrator to Elinor can also be read as following this model; Elinor, however, is a less flawed character than Emma, so the narrator’s moments of detachment from Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility* can be read more as highlighting the differences between Elinor and Marianne than as singling her out as a subject for censure.

own misery (69).⁷⁷ Elinor's emotional exertions against being "overcome" by the "oppression of her feelings" (102) are far less showy than those of her sister; by approaching them via free indirect discourse, Austen fully, sympathetically articulates Elinor's efforts without embellishment:

What Lucy had asserted to be true, therefore, Elinor could not, dared not longer doubt; supported as it was too on every side by such probabilities and proofs, and contradicted by nothing but her own wishes.... Her resentment of such behaviour, her indignation at having been its dupe, for a short time made her feel only for herself; but other ideas, other considerations soon arose. Had Edward been intentionally deceiving her? Had he feigned a regard for her which he did not feel? No; whatever it might once have been, she could not believe it such at present. His affection was all her own. She could not be deceived in that. Her mother, sisters, Fanny, all had been conscious of his regard for her at Norland; it was not an illusion of her own vanity. He certainly loved her. What a softener of the heart was this persuasion! How much could it not tempt her to forgive! He had been blameable, highly blameable, in remaining at Norland after he first felt her influence over him to be more than it ought to be (103)

Elinor's immediate reaction to Lucy Steele's revelation is to assess and mitigate her own emotional response. But by being led through Elinor's thoughts via free indirect discourse, the reader is able to appreciate a clearer portrait of Elinor's disappointment: contrary to what Marianne might occasionally suggest, her older sister is not a natural stoic. We're given our first hint of Elinor's voice peeking through the narration with the despairing "could not, dared not longer doubt," as Elinor cedes her hopes to logic, subordinating her "wishes" to "proofs." Soon, though, her feeling "only for herself" turns to other, outside questions, here of deceit or disingenuousness. She is softened and tempted to forgive Edward, positioning his feelings as genuine, and not the self-serving imaginings of her own "vanity"—but then we see Elinor's thoughts shift around again. "He had been blameable, highly blameable," Elinor's voice

⁷⁷ "Exert yourself, dear Marianne" Elinor cries after Marianne receives Willoughby's letter (138). "I cannot, I cannot" replies Marianne. "Oh! how easy for those who have no sorrow of their own to talk of exertion! Happy, happy Elinor, *you* cannot have an idea of what I suffer."

indignantly informs us through Austen's narrative veil. Through free indirect discourse, we see that the key to Elinor's self-discipline comes from how she is able to act as her own honest interlocutor. "Had Edward been intentionally deceiving her?" she asks herself, before answering "No"; the back-and-forth of her internal monologue illustrates the innermost workings of her capacity for self-denial. She is heartbroken, but not duped; Edward's feelings were genuine, but he shares the blame for her disappointment by deciding to remain at Norland well after their attraction began. Free indirect discourse shows us the accuracy of Elinor's internal assessment: Edward's feelings were both genuine and poorly managed. What we see of Marianne's perceptions of her relationship with Willoughby is considerably more fraught with bias.

Austen does not employ free indirect discourse in her narration of Elinor's thoughts in order to prevent us from drawing too close to excessive emotionality. Instead, free indirect discourse here allows us to see inside the tumultuous internal battles of self-discipline and self-regulation that characterize an outwardly composed character like Elinor, who, unlike Marianne, is able to command her feelings in a way that matches the considerable demands of society. The formal, narrative discipline imposed by free indirect discourse echoes how Elinor views herself: as embedded within an overarching social narrative, not distinct from it. The insight that it provides allows Austen's reader to sympathize even more fully with Elinor's plight, and gives her stoicism a degree of importance and magnitude that it would lack if its innermost workings were masked invisibly beneath third-person omniscience. Free indirect discourse lends Elinor's struggles deserved consequence, and establishes her self-discipline as a viable alternative to Marianne's excessive sentimentality.

Frances Ferguson compares the goals of Austen's free indirect discourse to the ways that eighteenth-century philosophers like Hume and Burke dealt with the problem "that the emotions

posed for communicability, since being able to hear others talk about their emotions and empathize with them was patently different from actually feeling those emotions” (Ferguson, “Jane Austen, Emma, and the Impact of Form” 166). Ferguson recalls Burke’s idea that “in principle we could experience other people’s emotions if we bothered to put our bodies in the same postures that they adopted,” which hearkens back to the larger question addressed in Chapter One: how accurately, and intimately, can feelings be sympathetically communicated through the body? And how intimately can they transfer from the actor to the spectator? “For Austen,” Ferguson states, “the emotions are not so much to be experienced as deduced.” Ferguson sees free indirect discourse as working on a cognitive level, instead of an affective one—an approach well-suited for exploring the inner thoughts of an emotionally disciplined character like Elinor, whose story is not one of romanticized, sentimentalized pathos. Free indirect discourse gives us access to the true inner workings of another’s mind and feelings (what Dorrit Cohn might call the transparency of characters’ inner lives to their omniscient narrators (Cohn 3–4)), without inviting excess. Austen has thereby completed a novel which is famously *about* sentimentality, yet whose key formal technique resolutely resists its excesses.

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that “sentimental excess” is, more often than not, not exclusively sentimental in nature, and that sentimentality’s distinctive and stylized public displays of private emotion often veil other significant social and cultural anxieties which themselves verge, to the nervous eighteenth-century eye, upon excessiveness. I have also argued that, despite its reliance upon familiar tropes and threadbare clichés, the sentimental novel evolves despite the critical and popular excitement over sentimental novels in the 1760s cooling into the ambivalence and animosity exhibited towards the genre in the 1790s. As we have seen,

even the most anonymous and generic sentimental novels come to incorporate diverse methods and modes into their lachrymose pages, counterbalancing, interrupting, and offsetting their excessive sentimentality with new and evolving strategies that counter them. But even Ann Radcliffe's strikingly original novels rely upon a familiar foundation of sentimentality to undergird their Gothicized sublimity, suggesting that the sentimental is not a mode that eighteenth-century fiction quickly, or even willingly, outgrows.

As we skip several decades into the future from Radcliffe, then, we can see how Austen's work does not seek to paper over the problem of too much feeling by replacing sentimentality with the Gothic, or moralistic didacticism, or politics, or aesthetic fixations. Instead, with free indirect discourse she allows us to plumb the inner depths of characters who feel deeply, but who are not sentimental. Austen's narrative innovations let her novels explore feelings which, unlike the emotions depicted within sentimental novels, are not perpetually detonating at full force. Free indirect discourse has room for subtlety and nuance, as well as emotions that are undoubtedly profound and important, but not excessive or sentimental. Feelings can be fully expressed without reaching the point of overflow. Given the binary tendencies of late-eighteenth-century fiction—characters are either entirely sentimental, or entirely rational and unfeeling; novels are either written in the sentimental mode, or protest vigorously against it—Austen's formal innovations reveal new, refined facets of complex characters who do not necessarily wear their hearts upon their figurative sleeves. Through the narrator's brief interventions into the minds of characters, another's feelings are finally rendered knowable. I do not wish to suggest that Austen's illuminations of private feeling render sentimentality obsolete, and sentimentality's strains continue long into the nineteenth century under the auspices of domestic fiction. But the ability to articulate feelings without relying upon sentimentality

removes the inseparable association of “excess” with individual feeling, allowing readers, writers, and critics to focus, once again, on whatever it is that they deem “too much.”

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