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**KNOWING OTHERS, OR NOT:
PERFORMING, CARING, FOREBODING, AND ACKNOWLEDGING
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH FICTION**

By

Meechal Hoffman

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2017

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Performing, Caring, Foreboding, and Acknowledging
in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction

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Meechal Hoffman

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English
in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of
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ABSTRACT

Knowing Others, or Not: Performing, Caring, Foreboding, and Acknowledging
in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction

By
Meechal Hoffman

Advisor: Talia Schaffer

Knowing Others, Or Not makes two overarching claims about the nineteenth-century novel's depictions of relations. First, they are overwhelmingly concerned with epistemological questions about knowing others, and second, more often than not, the problem of other minds is portrayed as productive of both pleasure and valuable negative affects. While much scholarship on the relational nineteenth century focuses on either sympathy or social responsibility within the framework of liberal individualism, I show instead that the authors in this study—Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Wilkie Collins, and George Eliot—repeatedly register doubt about the usefulness or possibility of authenticity, and posit the pleasure that bad feelings can bring to characters and readers. As my subtitle indicates, I focus on four sites of epistemological inquiry: performances of authenticity, care relations that distinguish between care as an action and care as a feeling, foreboding as a feeling unlike anxiety that stems from accurate knowledge, and acknowledgment of others in the place of sympathy or knowledge. Throughout, this dissertation asks questions about performance, affect, and knowledge—What emotions are structurally expected in what contexts? What social performances are demanded and by whom? What options are there for acting out? How can we allow for radical difference while acknowledging shared values?—and attends to the centrality of, and indeed encouragement of, bad behavior and feelings in the nineteenth-century novel.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Knowing Others, Or Not: An Introduction.....	1
1. Performing Authenticity in Jane Austen’s <i>Mansfield Park</i> and <i>Emma</i>	29
2. Caring Uncaringly: Sadomasochism in Charlotte Brontë’s <i>Villette</i>	80
3. Foreboding as Critical Reading Practice: Or, Reader, You Were Right About Wilkie Collins’s <i>The Woman in White</i>	118
4. Acknowledging Others: George Eliot’s “extension of our sympathies,” Revisited...	152
Works Cited.....	204

KNOWING OTHERS, OR NOT: AN INTRODUCTION

DAPHNE. My dear Mrs. Humbug how d'ye do? Oh! Fanny, t'is all over.

FANNY. Is it indeed!

MRS HUM. I'm very sorry to hear it.

FANNY. Then t'was to no purpose that I...

DAPHNE. None upon Earth.

MRS HUM. And what is to become of?...

DAPHNE. Oh! That's all settled, (*whispers*

MRS HUMBUG)

FANNY. And how is it determined?

DAPHNE. I'll tell you. (*whispers* FANNY)

MRS. HUM. And is he to?...

DAPHNE. I'll tell you all I know of the

matter. (*whispers* MRS HUMBUG &

FANNY)

FANNY. Well! Now I know everything

about it, I'll go [and dress] away.

MRS HUM. And so will I.

DAPHNE. And so will I.

[*Exeunt.*]

– Jane Austen, “The Mystery: An Unfinished Comedy”

“What does knowledge *do*?”

–Eve Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You”

On the brink of marriage to Dorothea Brooke, Mr. Casaubon “did not find his spirits rising.” Instead, “Here was a weary experience in which he was utterly condemned to loneliness as in the despair which sometimes threatened him while toiling in the morass of authorship without seeming nearer to the goal. And his was that worst loneliness which would shrink from sympathy” (85-6). Even in the moments when we approach, finally, at long last, the relations we've sought, we are thrown, like “Poor Casaubon,” back into isolated despair, or anxious jealousy, or guarded secrecy, feelings more grievous for their very nearness to the desired object. Throughout George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, we are left with the gnawing feeling that *if only* they could tell one another

everything, it would all be okay: if only Casaubon could have told Dorothea of his self-doubt, if only Lydgate could be frank with Rosamond about their financial situation, if only Bulstrode and Featherstone could have gotten their news out in time, and so on. My dissertation spends time at this site of overlap between relations and epistemological uncertainty. What happens to relations when we accept the problem of other minds, conceding that we can't know or get adequately close to others, and yet live in constant, unavoidable proximity and reliance on them?

In the novels I consider, the answer is surprisingly exploratory, playful, and even, at times, perverse. Indeed, the spirit of the teenage Jane Austen, author of the epigraph above—a piece of juvenilia quoted in full—hovers over what follows: the mystery underpinning all our relations is a cause for whispering, sarcastic hilarity as much as for isolating self-doubt. As Austen wrote in dedicating this bit of mischief to her father, the “following Comedy, which tho' an unfinished one, is I flatter myself as *complete a Mystery* as any of its kind” (56, emphasis in the original). Austen's linguistic playfulness provides minimal cover for her layered paradox: her mystery is complete in having been whispered in full (albeit inaudibly to audiences or readers), it's complete because it is not truly a fragment but a finished piece of family fun (where the left-off and ambiguous style is part of the design), it's complete in the sense of being still a complete mystery (where not only the whisperings are unknowable, but the very nature of the mystery remains a mystery), and it's completely both a mystery and a comedy. Further, the enigma is delivered as a performance. In the novels by Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Wilkie Collins, and George Eliot that make up this study, knowledge of the other is presented as a complicated matter: a question with both the highest of stakes and an

enormous potential for experimentation and pleasure. And in these novels that interrogate the authenticity, veracity, and knowability of others, much attention is paid to the performances of self that are enacted as a matter of course in daily life. These performances differ greatly, as we will see, and correspond to historically shifting expectations for behavior and affect, and the ways those expectations are contravened. Throughout, the problem of other minds is a source of play and pleasure, even when it is also a source of anxiety or loss.

Rife with marriage plots, care relations, webs of coincidence, and intertwined or double plots, my dissertation shows the inescapable relationality of the novel form, but demonstrates that nineteenth-century novelists were invested foremost in their difficulty, performativity, and in the negative affects and behaviors they produce. While the novel insists formally on the inescapably social nature of human relations, nineteenth-century novels don't often depict happy, collaborative characters engaged in seamless or even functional interaction and communication. I argue that the novelists in this study, and often in the period more broadly, are invested and interested in this discomfort and nastiness. Meanwhile, however, scholarship on nineteenth-century British literature remains deeply invested in ideas of liberalism, individualism, and self-improvement, forms of political and philosophical theory designed to protect and solve against the volatility of epistemological doubt. As David Kurnick points out in *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (2012), it is still almost axiomatic to declare that the novel, and especially the novels of the nineteenth century whose innovations—such as free indirect discourse and stream of consciousness—led to what we might call the modern novel, is committed to individualism:

The novel of interiority seems to offer irrefutable support for Ian Watt's canonical description of the novel as "less concerned with the public and more with the private side of life than any previous" literary form, as well as for Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau's recent claim that "the history of the genre is related to that of contracting space." In a series of influential critiques, each of the writers treated here [Thackeray, Eliot, James, and Baldwin] has been faulted for a betrayal of the collective imagination [...] Although these novelists have received the harshest assessments from Marxist analysts, the terms of those critiques chime with descriptions of the novel of interiority articulated from a host of perspectives—from post-structuralist feminist Nancy Armstrong's claim that the novel's "phobic representations of the human aggregate" indicate that "the novel of course was not made to think beyond the individual" to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's assertion that "the psychological novel... maximize[s] denial of the social world" (2-3).

Elaine Hadley, in *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (2010), writes that "mid-Victorian liberalism offers the promise of abstracted individuality, which emancipates the subject from these diverse formulations of bodiliness and their constitutive social spaces through its twin practices of privatization and abstraction" (64). Hadley shows that liberalism consists of having opinions and being unique and individuated, but at the same time, not eccentric or threatening. This makes "living liberalism" a contradiction, or, at best, nearly impossible. David Wayne Thomas, in *Cultivating Victorians: Liberal Culture and the Aesthetic* (2003), argues that liberal

culture and aesthetics in the Victorian period are joined in a project of self-improvement and social amelioration. Hadley and Thomas both show that liberalism is central to the Victorian ethos, especially in the generation of moral self-improvement. Andrew Miller, writing about moral self-improvement in *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (2008), helps us see, though, the ways that this individualism is always relationally figured in the Victorian period. While on the one hand, Miller writes that “This desire [for moral self-improvement] has come to seem not merely an essential expression of individualism, though it has often been that, but a defining aspect of modernity,” he also writes that “this self *needs* discovering; we are not readily apparent to ourselves or to others but must be called forth and given support” (8, emphasis in the original). We come to know and improve ourselves through dialogue and reaction. “The individual who emerges in response to such an injunction is not the solitary subject of classical liberalism, cast against such imposing abstractions as the state of public opinion [...] Instead, moral perfectionism provides a complex, relational understanding of self-hood” (15). In contrast to, and sometimes in parallel to, scholarship on nineteenth-century individualism, much contemporary scholarship on the Victorian novel, its relational ethos, and its cultural context is highly invested in moral self-improvement as a relationally construed project in conversation with liberalism.

In addition to, and often in conjunction with, moral self-improvement, sympathy, or more broadly, the ways we think about others in light of our insuperable distance, is another highly trafficked site for relational nineteenth-century scholarship. Rachel Ablow, Rae Greiner, Audrey Jaffe, Andrew Miller, Adela Pinch, and others have contributed enormously to the field by historicizing and theorizing the way sympathy

functioned in the Victorian period, the way it harkened back to the moral sentimentalist discourse, especially of Hume and Smith, about sympathy, and the way it was used to formally structure the novel. Both thematically and formally, they show the ways that writers of the period opened up the novel's range and capacity to explore the nature of human relations and trouble the problem of other minds. Andrew Miller has shown how J. S. Mill "emphasiz[ed] the sustaining powers of 'ideal sympathy'" (8), and examines sympathy, whether readerly sympathy or that between characters, in a range of fiction from the period. Cara Weber writes that "Victorian writers often focus questions of ethics through scenes of sympathetic encounters that have been conceptualized, both by Victorian thinkers and by their recent critics, as a theater of identification in which an onlooking spectator identifies with the sufferer" (494). Audrey Jaffe, also interested in the role of spectatorship in sympathy, writes in *Scenes of Sympathy: Identification and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (2000), that "In Victorian fiction and the work of its critics, the term 'sympathy' has commonly been used to describe an individualistic, affective solution to the problem of class alienation: the attempt to ameliorate social differences with assurances of mutual feeling and universal humanity" (15). Jaffe argues that in Victorian fiction, "The scene of sympathy in effect effaces both its participants, substituting them for images, or fantasies, of social and cultural identity" (4). Rachel Ablow argues, in *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage* (2007), that the Victorian marriage plot figures the wife *as* the novel: both teach the urban, capital-driven, hardened person to be ethical, to have emotions, and to sympathize. A good wife and a novel can both "influence" people and help them "resist the depraved values of the marketplace" (1) but "the novel has additional resources and strategies no

woman could ever possess” (7) like the ability to see into people’s consciousness. Rae Greiner, in *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (2012), focuses on the importance of distance to sympathy, arguing that similarity or identification are destructive of sympathy. She argues that formal attention to the novel, in particular to free indirect discourse, metonymy, and characterization, helps us see “a social understanding of reality” (9) in which sympathy thrives on imaginative recreation of the other. Writing about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophical, poetic, and fictional texts, Nancy Yousef, in *Romantic Intimacy* (2015), looks to “intimacy” instead of sympathy “in order to investigate, without reduplicating, symptomatic conflicts around the term ‘sympathy’ and to hold in abeyance, as far as possible, the ethical and epistemic goal of mutual recognition that is always at stake in the imagination of intimacy as a form of sympathetic insight or achievement” (2). In other words, Yousef mobilizes intimacy to think about uneven relations that don’t require knowledge of the other. “Unlike sympathy, intimacy need not, and rarely does, entail a symmetrical relationship between one and another; need not, and rarely does, involve the discovery of similitude between one and another. Yet insofar as intimacy, like sympathy, designates feeling for and with another, it also admits and discloses affective expectations and disappointments—from aversion to self-abasing admiration, from gratitude and resentments, from frustration to fascination—that involve neither mutuality nor reciprocity but that certainly must be counted among the many ‘fine-spun and intricate’ threads of the web (to borrow from Lessing’s metaphor) that bind one to others” (2-3).

Building on all of these approaches to sympathy and its relation to the nineteenth-century novel, I focus less on the moral dimensions of and impediments to sympathy, and

more on the negative feelings that stem from the fundamental problem of other minds that sympathy is meant to solve. When I do treat sympathy directly, in my final chapter, it is found to be lacking, and productive of more bad feelings than epistemological solutions. This dissertation thus works against the resilient picture of a repressed, prudish, moralistic nineteenth century by looking at epistemological questions apart from sympathy, and by underscoring the pleasurable and productive outcomes of not feeling as one should in light of the skeptical impasse.

Peter K. Andersson writes in *The Journal of Victorian Culture* (2015) that “the established picture of the Victorian period [its supposed prudishness and repression] lingers...not only in popular media, but also in academic research” (439). In Nancy Armstrong’s influential *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900* (2006), she argues that while the eighteenth-century novel is populated by misfits, the nineteenth-century novel is dominated by attempts to fit in socially: this tension is often located within the female misfit who is cast out for her deviance. With a heavy reliance on Foucault, Armstrong’s argument draws a repressive and conservative picture of the period. As Bruce Robbins notes in his review in *Victorian Studies* (2007), Armstrong mythologizes and loves the Althusserian “bad subject” she finds in the first part of *Robinson Crusoe*, and feels its loss to be great in the Victorian period, where the individual’s needs are subordinated to the social good. In this dissertation, I argue that these persistent tropes of, in Andersson’s words, “visitations and hat-tippings” (440), in which “fiction began to think of itself as a means of discipline” (Armstrong, 49), are belied throughout the Victorian period, that they represent a fantasy of Victorian affluence and leisure and a discounting of lived experience, including among working

classes. Instead, this dissertation will look beyond the veneer of what seems alien to us—the visitations, the hat tipplings—to find an actually very recognizable current of rage, boredom, anxiety, and other bad feelings that accompany the compromised reality of a social existence defined by an inability to know others. Largely, then, this dissertation will draw a picture of nineteenth-century relationality not reflecting moral self-improvement and not describing sympathetic relations. More often than not, I'll show, we find failed marriages,¹ bad care, and untrustworthy people in positions of great authority. Courtship and marriage, care relations, and scenes of employment or cross-class interaction are thus crucial axes for this dissertation, as they are heightened scenes of problematic relations.

Theories of marriage have underpinned many studies of the relational nineteenth-century, from Rachel Ablow's *Marriage of Minds* to Talia Schaffer's *Romance's Rivals: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (2016). While this dissertation doesn't treat the history of marriage explicitly in its chapters, the subject of this scholarship not only impacts all the texts considered—from Austen's marriage plots to the radical form of coverture imagined in *The Woman in White*—it also serves as a model for the kind of epistemological questions and affective responses I study. Marriage, in the nineteenth century, is at once profoundly alienating and, structurally speaking, increasingly designed to unite two people into one flesh. Thus, a look at the impressive surge of scholarship historicizing the relationship between changing kinship networks in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the novels of the period will help me describe the epistemological questions this novel treats alongside the structural and historical nature

¹ See Kelly Hager's *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce* for an account of the period's preoccupation with the divorce, rather than the marriage, plot.

of affective expectations.² The scholars who have done this work have, importantly, argued for attention to the ways that marriage relates to the unknowability of others, and the affective expectations in response to a changing institution. Ruth Perry's *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (2006), for example, argues that the shift from arranged to consensual marriage created new anxieties for women, anxieties that the novel registered and responded to. Helena Michie, in *Victorian Honeymoons: Journeys to the Conjugal* (2007), describes marriage (and she is putting it mildly) as "very difficult cultural work," in that it brings together "two people with limited experience of the opposite sex, who often deeply identified with their families of origin and with communities of same-sex friends, into a conjugal unit that was to become their primary source of social and emotional identification" (2). To cope with these profoundly unsettling changes, Perry argues, women were forced to develop a new emotional framework within which to understand their roles in married life. Thus, shifting structures of family life lead to shifting affective expectations, responses, and performances of self.

There are four changes in particular that are central to the concerns of nineteenth-century fiction and that are reflected in many of the novels this dissertation treats. I'll describe them in relation to George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* which, as will be shown later in this dissertation, interrogates affective responses to "the great fundamental fact of blood" (129.) First, there's a radical shift in this period from sprawling kinship networks

² For the two most comprehensive histories of marriage and family, see Ruth Perry's *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818*, especially the Introduction, and Talia Schaffer's *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction*, especially the second chapter.

to tight nuclear families.³ When Mr. Tulliver tells his wife that he is going to send their son to a new school, she responds: “Well, Mr. Tulliver, you know best: *I’ve* no objections. But hadn’t I better kill a couple o’ fowl and have th’ aunts and uncles to dinner next week, so as you may hear what sister Glegg and sister Pullet have got to say about it?” (9-10, emphasis in the original). Mr. Tulliver “defiantly” refuses to “ask neither aunt nor uncle what I’m to do wi’ my own lad.” He sees himself as a part of a nuclear family, of which he is the head. Mrs. Tulliver, on the other hand, sees herself as a Dodson first, and a Tulliver second. This reflects a widespread shift, described by Ruth Perry, Lawrence Stone, Stephanie Coontz, Talia Schaffer, and others, as occurring at some point in the late eighteenth century, in which marriage overwhelmingly came to demand a departure from one’s family of origin, and the beginning of a new life in which one was defined exclusively in terms of the duties of wife and mother. Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver’s views on family clash here. Mrs. Tulliver feels a part of an older form of family, in which her ties to her kinship network are strong and persist beyond marriage. Mr. Tulliver, on the other hand, feels himself to have created a nuclear family when he married, and doesn’t see why her family of origin should impact their decisions about their children. His view on this particular issue reflects his period, although on other issues, like water rights and biblical forms of revenge, he is decidedly old-fashioned.

³ See Suzanne Graver’s *George Eliot and Community: A Study in Social Theory and Fictional Form* for a parallel historical change: the shift from what German social theorist Ferdinand Tönnies called *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. *Gemeinschaft* refers to “local, organic, agricultural communities that are modeled on the family and rooted in the traditional and sacred; and *Gesellschaft* denotes urban, heterogeneous, industrial societies that are culturally sophisticated and shaped by the rational pursuit of self-interest in a capitalistic and secular environment” (Graver, 14).

Next, according to many historians of marriage and family, the shift from open kinship networks to closed nuclear families brought about a shift from a culture that did not put a premium on privacy to one that did. This change went hand-in-hand with the previous one, bolstering the privacy and isolation from the larger kinship network that the nuclear family was newly expected to maintain, and, according to Perry, isolating women from their support networks. The need for private time, and space to spend it in, was a new development. Historian of marriage Lawrence Stone argues that even the architectural layout of homes reflected this shift, with houses newly arranged to have rooms like closets and studies.⁴ Maggie exists at both stages of this development. From the ritual she performs with her Fetish doll in the privacy of “her attic” (36), to her clandestine relationships with Philip Waken and Stephen Guest, Maggie is a character who chafes under the old standard of openness that the Dodsons expect and the voice of “public opinion” which “always knew what to think” about the actions, however private, of other people (490).

Third, marriage came to be seen as a binding together of two people who had chosen one another, and, what’s more, were in love. This is a view expounded on at length by Stone, who argues that affective relationships between husband and wife as well as between parent and child are a relatively new phenomenon. While Stone’s claim that relationships based on love were rare and incidental before 1700 is obviously faulty

⁴Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, pp. 253-4. Stone’s findings have been questioned and discredited by many. His sources are largely diaries and letters, thus favoring evidence from the upper and middle classes, and particularly, allows men to speak for the women they represent in their literature. Further, much of his material is drawn from France, and Stone regularly uses sources from multiple centuries while describing a single historical shift. However, many of his larger arguments and narrower claims, including this piece about domestic architecture, have formed the basis of later, more scrupulous studies and continue to be useful.

(*Romeo and Juliet*, for example, suggests the centrality of romantic love to its culture), it is true that the doctrine of coverture, with its legal and affective expectations of two bodies becoming one flesh, represented a new ideal. Of course, this new ideal very often remained just that—an ideal—but it was now no longer possible to view marriage as the coldly functional institution it had been for many centuries. We see this in Maggie's difficulty in choosing between the safe, brotherly, disabled Philip and the romantic, perfumed Stephen. What *is* love in this period? Is it closeness? Is it comfort? Is it like siblinghood or cousinship? Does it require tingling sensations and sleepless nights? Is it being helped into a boat by a tall, rich man and borne away? Perry writes, in *Novel Relations*, that the shift to “privatized family” resulted in a net loss for women. The pressure to find someone you love and live with them in an isolated nuclear family was often impossible to enact, and marriage was thus more often than not the binding together more tightly than ever of two incompatible people, with one of them giving up all her rights. As Rachel Ablow puts it, “For most married couples [...] husband and wife were legally ‘one person,’ and, as one popular saying put it, ‘that one [was] the husband’” (One Flesh, par 1). Perry argues that in consanguineal families—families organized around many generations—women had clearly defined roles and were respected for their contribution to the family's work and life. In conjugal families women were commodified, isolated, and legally vulnerable. Essentially agreeing with Stone, Perry argues that this period saw the invention of love as we know it. In order to cope with their new status in a new marriage arrangement, women developed an affective bond with their husbands, or at least strove for one. Talia Schaffer has written about this new potential for danger in marriage, arguing that relationships with cousins, disabled men, or close

neighbors or brotherly types was a way of ensuring safety in marriage. In her reading, forsaking love in order to remain a part of a larger consanguineal family was a regular and acceptable choice for women in the nineteenth century.⁵ Regardless of whether the match was one made for love or for relative safety, love was in the air in a way it never had been before.

Fourth, and finally, childrearing came to be seen within the context of breeding, eugenics, and the production of strong offspring. Scientific and sociological discoveries, from Darwin and Spencer to McLennan, Engels, and Maine, changed the way people viewed their own children, and the way they viewed marriage. Rather than consider the interests of the family and the relative compatibility of the couple, fitness for producing offspring came to be central to the function of marriage and the work of women. Witness the Dodson sisters' confusion at the way in which "the Tulliver blood did not mix well with the Dodson blood" (60) or the narrator's description of the doomed Maggie as "a small mistake of nature" (13). Contemporary readers were struck by how Darwinistic the novel seemed in its depiction of the animal magnetism, the natural (erotic) pull between Maggie and Stephen.⁶ This evolutionary approach to marriage, in the context of coverture, pressure to love, and new forms of nuclear privacy, throws into relief the disparity between the institution of marriage as construed in the nineteenth century and the epistemological and affective underpinnings of marriage as a project.

As the institution of marriage underwent a significant shift in the period under consideration, and serves here to underscore the challenging relationship between epistemological uncertainty and affective expectation, so too did relationships organized

⁵See Talia Schaffer's *Romance's Rivals*.

⁶See Rohan Maitzen's "Queen of the Gypsies."

around the provision of care—another central site of relations in the nineteenth century. Just as with marriage, epistemological questions are at the heart of care relations, and the affective expectations in these relational contexts are more often than not defied in strange, unexpected ways. To better understand these relations, I turn not to historicist scholarship but instead to ethics of care, an ethical theory that privileges relatedness over independence and helps me think about what is at stake in care relations, especially as they became at once more isolated, and also more professionalized. Born in the late-nineteen seventies out of a feminist interest in elevating and theorizing care, the ethics of care argues that we are all born relational beings, completely dependent on others for survival, and that the care we give or receive to or from dependents is the central feature of our moral worlds and should be the basis for an ethical system. Ethics of care suggests that, by acknowledging our universal state of interdependence, we privilege actual care-giving over the abstractions of justice, and that we view scenes of care, maternal care, for example, as scenes of moral thinking. Virginia Held writes: “The ethics of care rejects the view of the dominant moral theories that the more abstract the reasoning about a moral problem the better because the more likely to avoid bias and arbitrariness, the more likely to achieve impartiality. The ethics of care respects rather than removes itself from the claims of particular others with whom we share actual relationships” (11). The ethics of care goes against our contemporary understanding of and practice of liberal individualism. Taking the emphasis off independence, ethics of care argues that as much as we might enact a semblance of independence, we are actually always interdependent, and that as a society we should acknowledge that fact—that we once were or will be again dependent on others—and build a moral system around care rather than on an

ethical system that promotes and supports an imaginary independence.⁷ Virginia Held sees the liberal emphasis on “autonomy, independence, noninterference, self-determination, fairness, and rights” as deluding and dangerous, as individuals don’t exist without the care and cooperation of others. “...From the perspective of an ethics of care, to construct morality *as if* we were Robinson Crusoe, or, to use Hobbes’s image, mushrooms sprung from nowhere, is misleading [...] The ethics of care is, instead, hospitable to the relatedness of persons [...] It often calls on us to *take* responsibility, while liberal individualist morality focuses on how we should leave each other alone” (14-15, emphasis in original). As Nancy Yousef writes in *Isolated Cases: The Anxieties of Autonomy in Enlightenment Philosophy and Romantic Literature* (2004), “Hobbes’s notorious invitation to ‘consider men as if but even now sprung out of the earth like mushrooms, come to full maturity without all kind of engagement to each other’ *flamboyantly* veers away from the familiar, the recognizable, and the obvious facts of how human beings come into the world” (19, italics in the original).

Ethics of care has been deeply connected to feminist and gender studies from its inception. Carol Gilligan for example, argues in *In A Difference Voice: Psychological*

⁷ In our contemporary context, these arguments are being made most visibly, though still on the margins of our cultural and political discourse, about taxation, social safety nets, and other forms of public care for the welfare of others. Think of Elizabeth’s Warren’s 2011 speech in Andover Massachusetts: “There is nobody in this country who got rich on his own — nobody. You built a factory out there? Good for you. But I want to be clear. You moved your goods to market on the roads the rest of us paid for. You hired workers the rest of us paid to educate. You were safe in your factory because of police-forces and fire-forces that the rest of us paid for. You didn’t have to worry that marauding bands would come and seize everything at your factory — and hire someone to protect against this — because of the work the rest of us did. Now look, you built a factory and it turned into something terrific, or a great idea. God bless — keep a big hunk of it. But part of the underlying social contract is, you take a hunk of that and pay forward for the next kid who comes along.”

Theory and Women's Development (1993) against the findings of Lawrence Kohlberg's morality test, which were used to show that the development of moral reasoning was less realized in girls than in boys. Gilligan argues that female respondents answered the prompts by turning to their own experience of moral choices in personal relationships, whereas the male respondents abstracted from moral principles. Because our political and moral system privileges abstractions, ethics rooted in particular circumstance weren't seen as reflecting advanced moral development. Sara Ruddick, in *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1995), makes the connection between caring and mothering explicit in her influential writing on the ethical work that takes place in the interpersonal relationship between parent and child. She argues that moral judgment comes into play in particular circumstances with particular others and challenges the idea that ethics only takes effect or has valence in the public sphere, where it serves as an abstract system of protection against the machinations of individuals.

Like the nineteenth-century novel, ethics of care asks us to take seriously the feelings and responsibilities we have about particular others, and to place primary ethical weight on those interpersonal relationships rather than on abstract principles about justice and autonomy.⁸ By taking abstract ideas about love or friendship or abuse or disappointment, and making them particular and specific, fixed in particular characters and plots, the novel is in many ways a vehicle for the ethics of care. The nineteenth century novel, in particular, is rooted in ethics of care, peopled as it is by characters

⁸ Indeed, thinking about ethics of care in relation to the novel form allows me to flip the argument that the novel is the form that best reflects individualism (see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* for the founding document of this line of thinking) because of its attention to particular people in particular circumstances. *Because* the novel attends to particular people in particular circumstances, it gives voice to the kind of moral thinking (or, as we shall see, immoral or irreverent thinking) that exists in the particular.

whose principle role is as care-giver—women, and in some cases, invalids (male and female) whose invalidism bestows on them the responsibility to variously receive and give care.⁹ The novel as a genre, and the nineteenth-century novel in particular, shows that the most interpersonal, domestic, and emotional interactions we have rely on ethical thinking. Think of Elizabeth Bennet’s agonizing, moral labor over the process of falling in love, or Ralph Touchett and Isabel Archer’s process of coming to understand the self and the other through a morally invested form of care and interdependence. Privileging this ethics that happens between people in observation of our interdependence, rather than relegating that kind of ethics to something that happens between women, for example, or among domestic care givers, aid-workers, nurses—in other words, the poorest and most disenfranchised—is the focus of relational ethics and of the nineteenth-century novel.¹⁰

However, ethics of care raises serious questions. For example, detractors have argued that privileging care has the effect of reinforcing the stereotype of the caring female. Elevating maternal care, for example, into a site of ethical action has the potential to re-instantiate essentialized gender roles. Virginia Held has argued that actually, the ethics of care provides a moral framework through which care is something done by everyone, not just women, and that its promotion to ethical work is meant not only to

⁹ Interestingly, disabled characters in Victorian novels are expert care-givers as well as recipients of care. Think, for example, of Ralph Touchett in *The Portrait of a Lady*, or Ermine Williams in *The Clever Woman of the Family*. See Talia Schaffer’s *Romance’s Rivals*.

¹⁰ In our introduction to a special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, Fuller, Woods, and I argued that the care work of contemporary higher education—the work of teaching, organizing conferences, performing departmental service—is most often performed by women, and problematically under-recognized in the marketplace of tenure and promotion that privileges productivity metrics.

enfranchise the disenfranchised who typically do the care work in a society but also to attract the historically enfranchised, including men, to care work.

Another complication in care theory is that care relationships are necessarily uneven: one person is charged to give care to another. The caregiver is providing for someone necessarily unable to reciprocate, and the likelihood that care will be returned in equal measure is limited, especially given that structurally, care-givers give care for a reason, and won't likely be structurally empowered to receive it in turn. Nel Noddings writes about this inequity by arguing that recognition of the care-giver's efforts is a form of returning care. She calls this "care completed in the other" (4). However, recognition often isn't given; when it is, it is more often than not affectively complicated, tinged with feelings of resentment, anger, and disdain, just as the delivery of care was likely tinged with feelings outside the boundaries of feeling caring.

The responses these challenges have elicited from care theorists have been unsatisfying, and it is in part because I am so invested in the recuperation of care work as a site of serious ethical work that I take on these challenges in this dissertation.¹¹ And indeed, nineteenth-century novels usefully complicate the power dynamics inherent in care work, challenge the affective expectations of both the cared-for and the care-giver, and struggle with the impossibility of knowing others in spite of the very interdependence insisted on by care theory. This dissertation troubles the structural inequity that is

¹¹ As I write, feminists are still arguing about the relative value (ethical, monetary) of maternal and paternal care and in some cases, promoting legislation that would not only secure a national requirement of 12 weeks of paid maternity leave, but a de-stigmatization of the labor of care, social security credits for parents who opt out of the workforce in favor of the work of care, and other, even more utopian reorganizations of our society's perception of care work. See Judith Shulevitz, "How to fix feminism," *New York Times*, June 10, 2016.

fundamental to care, the gulf between care work and care feelings, and the differences between free care (maternal care, for example, or care for the Aged P) and care as economic labor (as governess, teacher, or nurse). This dissertation argues that in fact, bad care, uneven care, or even care that degradingly reproduces hierarchically dominating relations can be both productive of pleasure and effective forms of care. This dissertation therefore extends the rubric of ethics of care to include care given with uncaring feelings.

Undergirding all of these discourses are feminist questions about the relation between affect and care; authenticity and the performances of social life; acting out and powers of control. Thinking about ethics of care in the context of the nineteenth-century novel helps me to understand the kinds of relationships available for women, the expectations surrounding and inscribed within these relations, and their inherent challenges. Again and again in the novels I consider, these challenges are narrated in terms of authenticity: the degree to which relations, and care relations in particular, are performed, and whether performance is figured negatively or even framed ethically. Thus, in looking at the feelings appropriate to interrelations and care, and discovering instead feelings distinctly *inappropriate*, many of which are either covered and hidden through performance, or are exhibited and flagrantly performed, this dissertation attends to affect theory: to structures of feelings, to the political and productive function of feelings, and to the dangers of interiorized, private affect that can serve to isolate and domesticate what might otherwise be the most politically powerful feelings of anger, frustration, and fed up-ness.

Ann Cvetkovich begins *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (1992) with the admission that “This book is the product of my own

mixed feelings about a feminist politics of affect” (1). Indeed, the claiming of feelings and personal stories in feminist writing, and the claim that the personal is political, is freighted. Affect has the power to be transgressive or transformative, but it also has the power to be made safe, interiorized, or contained, repressed, and privatized. In other words, Cvetkovich and many others writing about affect consider it an axis of power: it either grants, gives way to, responds to, or rejects forms of power, dominance, and control. I will never forget first reading Eve Sedgwick’s “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You” (1997), and seeing in affect a way out of political defeatism. In Sedgwick and Cvetkovich’s writing, there is a throbbing current of anger, shock, and sadness about contemporary life: in both cases, largely in relation to the AIDS crisis in America. Both are concerned about the power of affect in the face of outrage, and the responsibilities that power affords. This rootedness in contemporary forms of and uses for feeling circulates through the whole field,¹² and as we have been freshly, rudely, unfortunately reminded by the election of Donald Trump to the presidency, feelings are an important tool for coalition building, empowerment, and change, but can just as easily produce inertia, or excuse corruption and violence. Sianne Ngai, in *Ugly Feelings* (2005), is interested in just this possibility. She investigates “canonically minor” (11) twentieth century representations of what she calls “minor and generously unprestigious feelings” (6) that reflect “what T.W. Adorno calls the fully ‘administered world’ of late modernity” (1). Her focus is on negative affects that suspend agency rather than produce outcomes,

¹² See, for example, Naomi Greyser, “Beyond the ‘Feeling Woman’: Feminist Implications of Affect Studies.”

and that therefore counterintuitively *do* a lot: they reproduce the capitalist conditions that are responsible in the first place for distancing, disaffecting, ugly feelings.

While my dissertation, too, focuses on negative feelings, my period is different than Ngai's. Rachel Ablow, in her introduction to a special issue of *Victorian Studies* on Victorian Emotion (2008), writes that "Victorians commentators [...] were fascinated by the historical status of emotions. To what extent are emotions innate and to what extent are they social? Can we control or train them? Does the experience of the emotions change over time? These are questions to which the Victorians returned repeatedly, questions that contemporary scientists, historians, and literary scholars continue to puzzle over" (376). Affect theory assumes that emotions are relational and have histories. For Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), for example, this means a rejection of the psychological approach in which we have feelings inside of us, "within," and independently. It means, instead, that emotions circulate, and accrete meaning by repetition and "stickiness." Ahmed's affect theory, in seeing feelings as in circulation rather than originating from one's interior, makes a move similar to the one I make in this dissertation: instead of seeing the interiority of the nineteenth-century novel as a mark of privacy and independence, it is reflective of the circulation of feelings between interdependent bodies. This is a view of emotions that, as Adela Pinch shows in *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (1996), had currency in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries. As Pinch writes, "The books I study here [...] reveal the period's [...] tendency to characterize feelings as transpersonal, as autonomous entities that do not always belong to individuals but rather wander extravagantly from one person to another" (3). What happens in that circulation, and what is done with the

feelings in circulation—what *happens* to and from those feelings—varies, but what remains constant, deep into the nineteenth century, is that feelings don't do what they're supposed to do, and they don't do what social norms and codes of conduct would want them to do. The response to epistemological uncertainty is not, often, sympathy; the outcome of care relations is not, often, caring feelings; the effect of marriage is not flesh made one, except in the substantial legal sense of coverture. Thus, this dissertation looks at performances of authenticity, care dispensed with a range of uncaring feelings, cases like foreboding where knowledge is to some degree possible, and forms of knowing that don't require knowledge, such as acknowledgment.

One difficulty of writing this dissertation has been choosing what texts and authors to consider. While the claims wouldn't reflect fiction from the whole period under consideration nor all genres—Charlotte Yonge's novels, for example, or the socialist utopian *News from Nowhere* would not have found a comfortable home in these pages—the greater problem was that too many things seemed to want to find a place. Choosing to leave Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy out, for example, was ultimately a matter of necessity, rather than choice. Beginning with Austen, however, allowed me to establish some central ideas in relation to authenticity; Brontë enabled a study of the pleasure of perversion; Collins provided a much-needed detour into sensation fiction, which is so centrally concerned with questions of authenticity, bad behavior, and feelings; and any dissertation that demands attention to nineteenth-century novels and epistemology must, ultimately, return to Eliot's theories of sympathy. Those needs guided my selections, but one pleasure of the writing has been the imaginative project of

applying these arguments to Hardy's depressive characters, or Dickens's seemingly happy ones.

My first chapter argues that Jane Austen's novels, far from punishing or reforming her heroines and urging authenticity and right behavior, actually show that selfhood is fundamentally inauthentic and performative. In *Mansfield Park*, I argue that Austen's narrator aligns herself not with Fanny Price but, surprisingly, with the amoral Henry Crawford. Both are interested in inhabiting characters: Henry Crawford through performance and Austen's narrator through free indirect discourse. Further, though the inhabitation of others is similar to the work of sympathy, Austen shows that this kind of imaginative exercise can be divorced from ethical ends and mobilized purely for aesthetic ones. *Emma*, I argue, continues this exploration of the badly behaving character by challenging the very idea of authenticity that the "good" Mr. Knightley embodies. Austen, it turns out, is concerned with the relation between morals and aesthetics, but her work is not nearly as ideologically driven as Marilyn Butler or Claudia Johnson have argued. In this chapter, I set the stage for questions that persist through the period about whether there is such a thing as an authentic self, the degree to which behavior is performative, and the value in troublesome and unmoral feelings.

My second chapter looks to Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, which, I argue, explores the question of authenticity from the perspective of affective responses to labor, in particular, the paid care work Lucy Snowe performs throughout the novel. Lucy is often thought of as a paradigmatic individual, preferring and cultivating obscurity and isolation, but I argue that she is instead inextricably bound up in a network of care relations, and that her perplexing behavior is a response to the problematics of care. The

treachery of power—Madame Beck’s, M. Paul’s, her wards’ and then students’—is so great, and the forms of abuse are so pervasive, that Lucy’s *bildung* is toward the development of her ability to derive pleasure from pain, and eventually, to also derive pleasure from producing pain in others, such as M. Paul, her students, Ginevra, and her reader. In other words, *Villette* posits sadomasochism as a response to the problematics of care and of epistemological uncertainty. In thinking of Lucy as developing the capacity for pleasure through abuse—both received and meted out—it is clear that the novel’s interest in performance, though most explicit on the fete day and at the Vashti play, goes beyond literal performance and extends to performances of power and pleasure. Lucy’s ability to perform and manipulate her feelings is distinct from M. Paul, who is so authentic he can’t control his performance. Though he teaches Lucy a great deal about the pleasure of power-play in his delivery of abuse as a form of love, he is too authentic, not a skilled performer like Lucy, and therefore not in control of the measured, attentive, calibrated pleasures of sadomasochism.

Affect, performance, and care are particularly vexed in sensation fiction, centered as the genre is on the relationship between bodies and feelings, deceit and truths, and the terror of inescapable interrelatedness. In my third chapter I turn to sensation fiction’s ur-text, Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, a strange circus performance of a novel in which the two competing ringmasters -- the obese light-footed man and the aspirational drawing master—control the actions and narratives of the manly woman, the identical women, and the man so full of hot air he goes up in flames. By attending to Fosco and Hartright’s performances of authenticity on the one hand, and on the other to the surprising authenticity of the dangers imagined, I show that this novel encourages fear on

the grounds that foreboding is prophetic rather than delusional. In a world where inauthenticity is the norm, foreboding makes sense, and produces an uncomfortable, pleasurable frisson for reader and character alike. This novel, thus, offers an opportunity to deconstruct some of the assumptions inherent in one of our most interesting contemporary critical conversations, that of suspicious and just reading practices. By showing that a suspicious reading was right all along, the distinction between surface and depth is collapsed, suspicious and just readings are the same, and we are no closer to being able to differentiate between the authentic and inauthentic. And by attending to sensation fiction, which demands verisimilitude like realist fiction but attends more urgently to affective, sensational modes of describing reality, I show a broader dimensionality to the discourse of performance, authenticity, and feeling in the nineteenth century. In particular, I show that even in the face of epistemological uncertainty, there are things one can know, and that feelings play a role in making those things knowable.

Public rage, enjoyable perversity, and performative nastiness, I argue, are necessary in Victorian fiction because sympathy so often fails—even, and especially, in the work of George Eliot, who is often taken to be its greatest proponent. I argue in my final chapter that critics take as too static what I see as Eliot's shifting and increasingly skeptical view of sympathy. I show that in *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot investigates the use of sympathy among kin networks, and compares identificatory sympathy between characters to that between text and reader. By the time of her writing of *Romola*, Eliot uses the real, historical case of Savonarola, whose motivations remain unknowable in the novel and historical record alike, to investigate the epistemological difficulties inherent in knowing others, and posits a form of sympathy that forgoes knowledge of others

altogether in favor of something else: acknowledgment. This critique of sympathy is extended in her final novel, *Daniel Deronda*, but to the point that Eliot questions whether sympathy is even the best or most useful feeling in the first place, and whether it isn't, actually, damaging and disturbing. Her eponymous character is an expert sympathizer, but that leads him to an indolence and apathy that at times flares into deeply problematic domination and judgment, as in his relationship with Gwendolen Harleth. Not only does Eliot question whether sympathy is an impediment to action, she also shows that sympathy can produce disturbing inequality in interpersonal relations when only one person has the capacity to imagine the other. By closing this dissertation with George Eliot, I show that failures of sympathy, and the anger, resentment, envy, and feelings of inauthenticity that relations inspire, inform the period's novels. Far from encouraging a generation of docile readers disciplined into feeling as one ought, the nineteenth-century novel investigates, delights in, and encourages bad feelings.

The work of this dissertation is rooted in the nineteenth century, but I also hope that the questions it raises are transferable to our contemporary context. Looking at the people, mostly men, running our government, questions about authenticity and performance abound: What's he *really* up to? Is our President as childlike and intellectually compromised as he seems, or is he a mastermind with a plan for autocracy? If selfhood is necessarily performative and historically determined, how might we mobilize to construct new patterns of authenticity, where, for example, being a powerful woman or a feminist man doesn't look like a performance? More than ever in the modern history of our country, members of our society are being marginalized, discriminated

against, and violated. As we will see in the chapter on *Villette*, embracing the bad feelings inherent in hierarchically uneven relations might be not only acceptable, but useful. To care, bad feelings might be both natural and productive. Our current political predicament is so unbelievable, and yet so hostile to truth and facts, that we urgently need ways to think through what it means when we *can* know or *could have* foreseen. My chapter on *The Woman in White* attends to this dynamic by introducing the affective category of foreboding, and theorizing the implications of being able to know what is going wrong. The chapter asks questions about the role of patterns, historical structures, and facts, and troubles the relationship between the inability to know others and the stability of facts. While our president and his administration unveil an agenda that depends on a radical extension of epistemological doubt, in which no facts are knowable and all facts are alternatives, it is incumbent on us to think not just about our inability to know, but also our ability to know. Finally, while we recommit to the work of resistance, what kinds of sympathy and connection is possible? What does sympathy look like with members of one's own party or protest movement? If we, like Ezra and Mordecai in *Daniel Deronda*, form an ideal Victorian sympathetic marriage of two flesh made one, what comes of the very difference we were hoping to celebrate and protect? What does sympathy with others across coalitions look like, and what should it look like? My chapter on Eliot shows that accommodating and encouraging bad feelings is a way of protecting difference against threats to diversity and inclusion. Instead of consensus or knowledge, we might instead acknowledge difference, allowing for disappointment, difficulty, and disagreement.

PERFORMING AUTHENTICITY IN JANE AUSTEN'S

MANSFIELD PARK AND EMMA

“When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be.”
—Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

“She had not quite done nothing—for she had done mischief.”
—Jane Austen, *Emma*

Often considered a bridge between the forms she inherited and those she inaugurated, Jane Austen is no stranger to studies of the nineteenth-century novel. Indeed, Austen's carefully mannered characters, genteel drawing rooms, and castigated local villains have led some to describe her novels, *Mansfield Park* in particular, as proto-Victorian.¹³ As I will show, this reflects a misunderstanding of both Austen and the Victorians, neither of which exhibited the strict comfort with moralism and staid behavior that are often presumed. Austen's worlds are comprised of stifling small towns, very small numbers of people available for social interaction, and complete interdependence. All the while, there is little that can be known about others, there are countless secrets being kept, and even those entrusted with authority are often less than stable or reliable. From John Willoughby to General Tilney to Henry Crawford and even George Knightley, Austen is interested in the everyday problem of the opacity of others, and the performances of self, especially in men, that make up relations. As that character-list

¹³ See Barbara Bail Collins's "Jane Austen's Victorian Novel."

suggests, this preoccupation spans her career, but in this chapter I begin with her mid-late career *Mansfield Park*, a novel that contains an actual, though aborted, private theatrical. It is in this novel that I see Austen playing with the pleasure of performance, even when, especially when, performance is purposefully deceiving. From there, I turn to *Emma*, which, though it doesn't contain any performances in its plot, upends the very notion of authentic selfhood. I argue that by looking at these novels in light of the performances they imagine, we can discover an Austen deeply concerned with the relation in everyday life between the private and the social, and with the ways we perform our relationality. When the stakes are high, as they are in marriage plots, not being able to know the other is a troubling problem. But far from proposing that, through the vetting process that is the courtship plot, authentic selves can be discovered underneath social performances, Austen ultimately describes selves as inauthentic at their core, and even more radically, takes pleasure in these performances, and produces them for us.

There is a paradox in some of the orthodoxies of Austen scholarship: on the one hand, she is concerned first and foremost with interiority: indeed, her major innovation—free indirect discourse—promotes the deepening of her characters' inner lives. On the other hand, she is concerned first and foremost with moral and social codes of behavior: her novels enforce right and wrong and participate in punishment and correction. The first orthodoxy implies that the novels evidence an intensifying individualism, the second a relationality that regulates and prescribes. But in fact these apparently contradictory orthodoxies converge with the interiority expressed through, among other formal features, free indirect discourse, and the social expressed through an attention to social codes of behavior. Furthermore, these contradictory positions assume a truth to

interiority that is belied in her approach to selfhood. As Rachel Brownstein shows in *Why Jane Austen?* (2013), Austen's confidential tones flatter her readers into thinking that they can distinguish between "truth" and "truths universally acknowledged," but while certain facts can be ascertained (for example, as Brownstein explains, they know Darcy "is stalking the shrubbery near Rosings in order to meet [Elizabeth], that he is not turning up there (as she thinks) by accident" (28)) other truths are much harder to ascertain.

Crucially, Austen's depiction of interiority is actually experienced—by the character, the reader, and the narrator—more relationally and less individually than many have argued, and her depiction of the enforcement of social or moral norms does not actually reflect an ominous social order as many have argued. In my view, Austen's vision of interiority, as communicated through free indirect discourse, is actually an expression of the tendency we all have, and that authors especially need to have, to try others on for size and speak as if through their voices. And what Foucauldians might describe as Austen's sinister enforcement of social order is actually, I will show, an interrogation of this putting on of parts—manners, habits, tones—when we live relationally, and that even within our own selves, we don't even come close to knowing the full cast of characters we embody. I argue that in *Mansfield Park*, Austen is interested in the way that acting demands the actor to try on parts vastly different from the self and in *Emma*, I argue that this interest matures toward an exploration of whether a self really even is a stable entity, or whether, as the novel seems to suggest, the self/character dichotomy is actually problematic because it rests on the false supposition that there is an authentic self in the first place. Thus, my reading of Austen bridges this paradox in

Austen scholarship by noting the way that the self functions in relation to the social: in Austen, the self is constantly inhabiting others and playing parts.¹⁴

Further, I argue that in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, one of Austen's ethical but distinctly unmoralistic investigations is into the role of the novelist herself, whose professional charge is not only to make things up, but also to present that fiction as truth: in other words, she herself creates artificial authenticities. Indeed, I argue that some of the most central ideological concerns that her novels take up within the plot—about authenticity and relationality—are also examined in relation to form, the role of the author, and the primacy of pleasure. My reading reveals a deeply ethically-invested Austen rather than a moralistic one, whose understanding of relationality questions the very nature of authenticity. There is a long critical practice of reading political and moral philosophy into Jane Austen's novels. From Marilyn Butler's groundbreaking *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975) to Claudia Johnson's *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (1988), scholars have read the novels and the precious little external evidence (letters, socioeconomic status, marital status, etc.) to hazard claims about her ideological commitments. In this chapter, I argue that Austen's novels interrogate ideology but from a unmoralistic position that instead raises and plays with difficult but pleasurable ethical questions.

A few words, before moving on, about some of the loaded terminology in what follows. Throughout this chapter I consider two primary dialectical concepts: first, authenticity and performance, and second, ethics and moralism. Starting with the first

¹⁴ See Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* for more on the construction of an authentic, deep self in a changing, commercializing social world. For Lynch, "deep" novel characters served to facilitate the development for readers of inwardness, privacy, and authenticity.

pair, my aim in thinking about authenticity is to trouble the very notion that Austen's characters range from more or less authentic, culminating in complete authenticity among some choice specimens. We all know some people who seem the same across discourse communities: a woman who demonstrates the same humor, behavior, and relational patterns with her mother, whole family, work colleagues, best friends, and students. On the other hand, we all know people whose selves get refracted and seem altered depending on the social context. This is one measure of "authenticity." Is the person who retains a sense of self across discourse communities more authentic than the other? Or are both performing selves, with the first performing uniformity while the second performs, albeit against her will, fracture? These are questions this chapter addresses in discussion of authenticity and performance.

As for the second dialectical pair, the relationship between moralism and ethical thinking has been central to discussions, and disagreements, about Austen from the earliest reviews of her work. I will go into greater depth on this as this chapter progresses, but in short, the distinction is meant to reflect the difference between interest in the ethical dimensions of choice, behavior, and selfhood on one hand, and on the other, interest in making judgments about choices, behaviors, and authenticity. While Austen is without a doubt interested in tensions between representation, language, and moral thinking—in other words, an ethical thinker—I challenge the notion that Austen moralizes—in other words, resolved the tensions in favor of making moral judgments. As Gilbert Ryle established in "Jane Austen and the Moralists" (1966):

Jane Austen was a moralist in a thick sense, that she wrote what and as she wrote partly from a deep interest in some perfectly general, even

theoretical questions about human nature and human conduct. To say this is not, however, to say that she was a moraliser. There is indeed some moralising in *Sense and Sensibility* and she does descend to covert preaching in *Mansfield Park*. Here I do discern, with regret, the tones of voice of the anxious aunt, and even occasionally of the prig. But for the most part, I am glad to say, she explores and does not shepherd (5).

By looking at *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* together, we discover a distinctly unmoralizing Austen, one who is interested in theater and theatricality both as literal embodiment (the private theatricals) and as a metaphor (for human behavior) but who doesn't judge theatricality moralistically. Rather, theater becomes a vehicle for Austen's thinking about the form and function of fiction, the relation between performance and pleasure, and experiments in the nature of, and manifold meanings of, character. Looking at the novels this way reveals an Austen who is neither Tory nor Whig, moralist nor anarchist, individualist nor enforcer of a social order. Rather, in this chapter she is a dialectical writer and a thinker interested in the relation between subject and social world, in the confusing and complex ways that relationality manifests, and in the performances of self that constitute our experiences of life, courtship, and pleasure.

I. "To undertake any character" in *Mansfield Park*: The Performance of Sympathy

Acting as analog

Many critics of *Mansfield Park* have struggled to understand the novel's apparent moralistic strain, especially in relation to its puzzling stance on acting. How can the

author who created Elizabeth Bennet have gone on to create Fanny Price? How can the author who wrote plays for her family's consumption have written a novel that seems to condemn acting in private theatricals?¹⁵ Regardless of the approach critics have taken, their arguments have often been framed within the context of Austen's morals. Implicit in these arguments is the belief that the novel espouses a particular moral position as to private theatricals and conduct in general. I would instead like to suggest that Austen is more interested in thinking through philosophical arguments than in admonishing her characters' behavior, or prescribing behavior for her readers. In particular, she is interested in thinking about the relation between sympathy and identification, and further, in the idea that identification might end in non-sympathetic frames of mind that might work against moral behavior. By exploring different aspects of identification, as she does in this novel, Austen complicates and engages with ethical questions, playing the role of moral thinker rather than moralist.

Austen's own writing in *Mansfield Park*, and her characters' acting—that element of the novel often seen to be moralistically condemned—might actually, I argue, be usefully considered as analogs, in that both arts require their practitioners to imagine the inner lives of others and to act on that imaginative projection. Austen explores identification and sympathy as activities productive of aesthetic as well as ethical pleasures, and considers the relation and the tensions between ethics and aesthetics. Mostly, she plays with depicting forms of identification that don't lead to moral behavior or even sympathy, but that produce pleasure and underwrite aesthetic form, language, play, and performance.

¹⁵The two most puzzling features of the novel have been its puzzling stance on acting and its depiction of Fanny's disturbing passivity.

As the moral sentimentalists knew, and as many critics of moral sentimentalism have since noted, sympathy is in many ways theatrical, with the object of sympathy conceived of as a spectacle, and the sympathizer a spectator.¹⁶ It is not surprising, then, that this novel about sympathy hinges on a theatrical event. By looking closely at the rehearsals of “Lovers’ Vows” and at Henry Crawford’s reading of Shakespeare, as well as at Fanny’s sympathetic nature, we will see that Austen teases apart and plays with two aspects of sympathy—the moral motivation to recognize others and the aesthetic enjoyment of perception and insight—exploring their complicated and at times disturbing interconnection. Austen teases out aspects of this tension by holding open the possibility that first, Fanny Price (or Edmund Bertram, for that matter) is not actually the novel’s moral spokesperson, and, second, that Henry Crawford, in addition to being a scoundrel, is actually also, intriguingly, an authorial surrogate, someone who artfully navigates the inner lives of a whole cast of characters.

While Henry Crawford rightfully has a reputation among critics as one of the book’s most morally dubious character (and there’s certainly stiff competition), he is also the only truly gifted actor at Mansfield Park, able to act all roles equally well, in large part because of his chameleon-like gift for identification. This virtuosic omniscience is, of course, precisely what Austen achieves in *Mansfield Park* at large, the first of her novels to employ from its inception free indirect discourse, a style of narration in which the narrator shifts, often very subtly, from straight third person to one that seems to have

¹⁶ See Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth Century British Fiction*, and Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identification and Representation in Victorian Fiction*.

privileged access to a character's thoughts.¹⁷ In this novel, Austen shows us that this form of imaginative identification is not just a moral tool, but is also one that can derive aesthetic pleasure, not just for the subject of identification, but for the production of representative, realistic, mimetic artistic work (such as novels and plays). What's more, she is interested in what happens when the aesthetic function of identification is isolated from its moral function, as seems to be the case with Henry Crawford. While I don't want to argue that Austen is unconcerned with ethical conduct and ethical thinking (she is of course very interested in her characters as moral beings, and as characters undergoing moral development), I do think it is valuable to see the ways that, in this novel, she teases out sympathetic identification and applies it not just to Fanny Price, but also to Henry Crawford, who, like Austen, imagines himself into others.

My reading redresses a longstanding imbalance in critical attention to Fanny and her moralism as opposed to the novel's aesthetic investment.¹⁸ Austen vests the moral in Fanny, but embodies the aesthetic in Henry Crawford, who has been far less attended to. That Austen plays in this novel with the aesthetic function of sympathy, and its complex relation to its moral uses, may be gleaned from her enjoyment of her readers' often wildly

¹⁷Narelle Shaw, in her essay about free indirect discourse in Austen's 1816 revision of *Northanger Abbey*, writes that Austen uses the method sparsely in her earlier work (hardly at all in her juvenilia, only somewhat more pervasively in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, and probably, according to her argument, only in the later revisions of *Northanger Abbey* that were done after writing *Mansfield Park*). It is only, she argues, in what are generally agreed to be her "mature novels" (*Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*) that the narrative device is fully developed and deployed, and in which Austen developed her novels with an already fully-conceived idea of what free indirect discourse could achieve. See Shaw, 592.

¹⁸ For an overview of criticism on *Mansfield Park* and Fanny, especially, see "Critical Reception" in Marcia McClintock Folsom and John Wiltshire's *Approaches to Teaching Austen's Mansfield Park*. The editors of this volume reject criticism that is critical of Fanny, as this overview implies, but it usefully draws a history that follows the thread of Fanny's moral values, and their celebration or denigration by readers and critics.

off the mark reactions to *Mansfield Park*. Chapman tells us that Austen transcribed what she gleaned “from her correspondence, from hearsay, and from remarks passed on to her by members of the family” (*Minor Works*, 431). On their frequent (and frequently negative) comparisons of the new novel to *Pride and Prejudice*: “We certainly do not think it as a *whole* equal to P. & P.,” “Not so clever as P. & P.,” “My mother—not liked it so well as P. & P.,” “Your characters are drawn to Life—so *very, very* natural & just—but as you beg me to be perfectly honest, I must confess I prefer P. & P.” On their (often underwhelmed) responses to Fanny: “Edward admired Fanny—George disliked her;” “Highly pleased with Fanny Price--& a warm admirer of the Portsmouth scene.—Angry with Edmund for not being in love with her, & hating Mrs. Norris for teasing her;” “Mr. J. P. made *two* objections, but only one of them was remembered, the want of some character more striking & interesting to the generality of Readers, than Fanny was likely to be” (Southam, 48-51). One begins to think, after reading pages of these copied-out comments, that she relished them. Perhaps it was amusing to her to think that her readers judged her book on the likeability of her characters or on the moral justice of the plot. By writing them all out in her own hand she got a chance to laugh at and distance herself from her readers, especially the ones who read her novel as they might a book of sermons. In the novel, too, she often seems to be laughing quietly, under her breath. That Austen depicts Fanny as being capable of falling in love with Henry Crawford as he reads, among other parts, that of the power-hungry Wolsey in Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII*, or the womanizing king himself, is a fine comic touch.¹⁹ Austen seems to be poking fun at those who would look for moral direction, for moralism, in the novel.

¹⁹This irony was brought to my attention by Michael Dobson at a symposium entitled

Instead, Austen plays with the idea that Fanny is not the heroine, exactly, of the novel, and that her moral perspective is not the novel's. The distance between the novel's and Fanny's moral and aesthetic sense is thrown into relief when Fanny is sent back to Portsmouth by Sir Thomas Bertram, who correctly assumes that a trip back to a filthy, over-crowded home will change her mind about her place in society. What she most objects to, tellingly, is the noise:

The living in incessant noise was to a frame and temper, delicate and nervous like Fanny's, an evil which no super-added elegance or harmony could have entirely atoned for. It was the greatest misery of all. At Mansfield, no sounds of contention, no raised voice, no abrupt bursts, no tread of violence was ever heard [...] Here, every body was noisy, every voice was loud. (266-267)

Fanny's hatred of noise contrasts sharply with the novel in which she appears. *Mansfield Park* is, in a way, an exaltation of dissonance, a prime example of what Mikhail Bakhtin called heteroglossia. The novel is not Fanny's novel.

I argue, then, that it serves our understanding of Austen and of this novel if we train our attention on the complicated play between identification for aesthetic and moral ends, and look at how Austen explores this through her characters' acting. Rather than seeing this as her most moralistic novel, one that condemns acting, I argue that we should attend to the ways in which Austen uses the novel, via acting, to suggest that sympathy is

"What Signifies a Theatre?" which took place in Jane Austen's Chawton at which I delivered a version of this chapter, and was further developed in conversation with Talia Schaffer.

an artistic device as well as a moral one, and that identification can have very troubling but interesting results.

The moral problems with acting: A critical history

Before addressing in detail the moral and aesthetic aspects of sympathy that Austen was responding to in *Mansfield Park*, it will be helpful to give a sense of some of the ways that critics have addressed her use of theatricals in the novel, since it is through theater that Austen explores the aesthetic aspects of sympathy. E. M. Butler, who, in 1933 was the first critic to discuss the relationship between Elizabeth Inchbald's loose translation of August Friedrich Ferdinand von Kotzebue's play and the action of the novel, argued that *Mansfield Park* was a rewriting of *Lovers' Vows*, but one that reasserted the moral values that had been subverted in the original. "The real fact of the case I believe to be this: *Mansfield Park* is nothing more nor less than *Lovers' Vows* translated into terms of real life with the moral standard subverted by Kotzebue neatly re-inverted" (326). In other words, in *Lovers' Vows* immorality is rewarded, whereas in *Mansfield Park* it is punished. The main example for this, in Butler's essay, is that in *Lover's Vows* Agatha gets to marry the Baron in the end and is reinstated to respectability despite having had premarital sex with him, whereas in *Mansfield Park*, Maria, who plays Agatha in the play and mirrors her role in the novel, is exiled for her bad behavior. William Reitzel, later in 1933, reinforced Butler's claim that Kotzebue's play, and even Inchbald's bowdlerized translation of it, was widely considered immoral in England, quoting for proof a review in the anti-Jacobin magazine, *The Porcupine and Anti-Gallican Monitor*, which portrays the play as dangerous and un-English, an opinion

Reitzel says Austen would be aware of even if she hadn't ever picked up a copy of *The Porcupine* (451-456). Winifred Husbands, writing in 1934 in direct response to Butler, and to a lesser degree, to Reitzel, argues that Austen was not writing in protest against the immorality of *Lovers' Vows*, and that, indeed, Austen wouldn't have considered the play immoral in the least. *Lovers' Vows*, according to Husbands, depicts a woman who is betrayed, deceived, and left essentially for dead, but whose dignity is finally restored when she marries the very man who had taken her virginity. It is not, in other words, her sin that is rewarded (as Butler argued) but her perseverance and faith. Furthermore, Husbands argues, Maria's guilt in *Mansfield Park* is actually greater than Agatha's in *Lovers' Vows*—the former has an extramarital affair, the latter only has premarital sex after receiving a false promise of marriage—while her punishment is more lenient. Better, in Husbands' reading, to have to go abroad but still be monetarily supported than to be on the brink of death after a twenty-year period of deprivation and abandonment. Husbands argues that if the situation depicted in *Lovers' Vows* is more morally upstanding than that in *Mansfield Park*, then the novel's (or Austen's) problem with acting must be that Maria's "situation" (her engagement to be married) makes private theatricals inappropriate and morally unsound (Husbands, 176-179), an argument made by Edmund within the novel itself (Austen, 89).

Lionel Trilling, writing in 1955, thought that acting was presented in the novel as problematic in the Platonic sense—Austen's concern, according to Trilling, was that the amateur actors would lose their identity and begin to imagine themselves as something other than what they are (427-428). In this sense, acting risks hardening you into the character you are portraying—a souped up don't-cross-your-eyes-or-they'll-get-stuck-

that-way argument. Many have questioned this position, in particular those who see a ready-made correspondence rather than a disjunction between the characters and the parts they play (Maria corresponds with Agatha, Mary with Amelia, Edmund with Anhalt, Mr. Rushworth with Count Cassel, and so on). Whereas most early critics saw the characters in the play as bad influences and argued that it was perilous to expose the Mansfield Park crowd to their behavior lest they themselves engage in premarital sex, reverse gender-roles, or overturn class boundaries, Dvora Zelicovici argues just the opposite: “If anything, *Lovers’ Vows* is a didactic play with an over-insistence on poetic justice and moral judgment” (531). The problem isn’t that the amateur actors are playing parts they are at risk of becoming themselves, she argues, but that they fail to learn the lessons offered to them by the characters in the play: “But—and this is Austen’s keenest irony—in sharp distinction to the main characters in *Lovers’ Vows*, who learn the right lessons, the actors do not profit from studying and rehearsing the play” (532). In spite of the fact that the *Mansfield Park* characters play roles perfectly suited to their own situations, or closely enough related that it should have been easy for them to recognize themselves and the pertinent moral lesson in Kotzebue’s play, they remain none the wiser. Had the cast done a better job and studied their roles more imaginatively,²⁰ they might have profited from acting. All they do, though, is further their own agendas: for Maria, the play allows her to flirt with the man she prefers to her fiancé; Edmund and Mary are able to explore their affection for one another under the guise of the script; Mr. Rushworth gets the opportunity to wear, among other costumes, “a blue dress, and a pink satin coat” (98).

²⁰It is not a coincidence, as others have pointed out (notably Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*), that it is the study that gets sealed off in order to create a theater.

The problem with acting that Zelicovici offers is anti-Platonic: the actors remain themselves instead of becoming their characters, and thus lose the opportunity to learn from them. This argument, though quite different from the previous arguments, is still moralistic at its core: it is about a failure to learn the right lessons. Indeed, it assumes that portraying a character on the stage is somewhat like the work involved in moral forms of sympathy: if you imagine your way into another character, you might improve morally. Zelicovici is correct that the novel relates acting to sympathy, but, crucially, Austen's interest is not moralistic and is instead about the relation between sympathy and acting—or novel writing.

In “The Infection of Acting: Theatricals and Theatricality in *Mansfield Park*,” Joseph Litvak writes: “The question, in other words, is not so much ‘What motivated Austen’s anti-theatricalism?’ as ‘What motivated her to create the *impression* of antitheatricalism?’” (333). Litvak argues that theatricality serves as a cover for more subtle forms of theater at Mansfield Park: “the theatricals serve....as a ‘diversion,’ as Hazlitt would say, from the subtler and more comprehensive theatricality that persists long after Sir Thomas has reclaimed his study” (343), especially and most interestingly, in the form of Fanny who “has in fact been playing a role, albeit ‘sincerely’” (348). Litvak, in destabilizing our impression of Fanny, goes on to conclude that “Indeed, in reading the final chapter of the novel one has the impression that its protagonist is less Fanny than Sir Thomas himself, or the ‘governing body’ that he represents” and that “Sir Thomas maybe be viewed as the agent of Jane Austen, insofar as both appear to endorse the fortification of a conservative social order” (351). But then, he argues, “No sooner has Sir Thomas expelled his demonic counterpart [Mrs. Norris]—whose ‘anxiety for

everybody's comfort' mocks his own need to keep everybody in their place—than she returns in the form of the anxious, 'impatient,' comfort-oriented author herself" (352). In other words, for Litvak, "theatricality is not a single, unitary phenomenon but an already self-divided set of practices capable of serving both reactionary and subversive causes" (352). This subtle expansion of theatricality to include its subversive and repressive forces runs parallel to my thinking on the multiple implications of identification in *Mansfield Park*.

Austen's ethical interests

Austen inherited her interest in the relationship between acting and sympathy from the moral sentimentalists. Even without access to a reading journal or letters like the ones we have for George Eliot, it is safe to say that Austen was a reader and thinker intimately familiar with the fundamental concerns of the Enlightenment, including sympathy.²¹ In this novel, you can see that familiarity at work, as she plays with and explores, in particular, the theatrical nature of sympathy. Hume and Smith both described

²¹ The question of what Jane Austen read, and how philosophical or otherwise learned she was is a matter for debate. See especially Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*; Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*; Devoney Looser, ed. *Jane Austen and the Discourses of Feminism*; Gilbert Ryle, "Jane Austen and the Moralists;" Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*. In order to give a sense of the range of the debate, I'll offer two brief claims from the above. Butler argues that Austen was an anti-Jacobin conservative whose morality was "preconceived and inflexible" (298). Knox-Shaw, on the other hand, argues that "Austen is a writer of centrist views who derives in large measure from the Enlightenment, more particularly from that skeptical tradition within it that flourished in England and Scotland during the second half of the eighteenth century" (5). He shows how "deeply the ideas of writers like David Hume and Adam Smith penetrated" (5) the institutions Austen grew up with, such as Anglicanism, and he reminds Austen scholars that Enlightenment thinking was coursing through her family home, via her brothers and her father.

sympathy as being like a theatrical event, an activity that starts with spectatorship, and culminates in role-playing. For Hume, sympathy is largely a question of point of view, of the position from which one spectates. He is concerned, throughout *A Treatise of Human Nature*, to determine what point of view, or frame of mind—what seat in the theater—one sympathizes from. Sympathy is naturally strongest for those we are close to, he says. It “gives the preference to ourselves and friends, above strangers” (3.2.2.11) and thus it is necessary “to fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view” (3.3.1.15) that take into account the general good of mankind. Our sympathy is biased, and so we need to learn to sympathize with the general good. Hume’s preoccupation, then, is about the position from which one spectates, and the effects that has on the sympathetic exchange. Audrey Jaffe, in *Scenes of Sympathy*, writes of Victorian fiction that “the term ‘sympathy’ has commonly been used to describe an individualistic, affective solution to the problem of class alienation: the attempt to ameliorate social differences with assurances of mutual feeling and universal humanity” and that “sympathy thus formulated seeks to efface the social and political problems for which it is offered as a resolution” (15). While for Jaffe, Victorian sympathy entails a kind of sour rejection of failed others as opposed to Hume’s more convivial eighteenth-century version, for both, the spectacle of the other breaks down the atomism of social difference and provides access to a “general point of view,” in Hume’s terms, or, in Jaffe’s, “a universal humanity.” Thus, in these readings, sympathy is a way around the individualism of experience, and a requirement for moral action.

Adam Smith is even more commonly associated with depicting sympathy as a dramatic affair, largely due to the stirring opening image of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: “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. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations” (11). The observer is passively watching, contemplating his difference in circumstance and experience from the sufferer on the rack. But through imaginatively identifying with the sufferer, by getting worked up by the scene being played out, we are carried “beyond our own person.” For Rae Greiner, Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is the ur-text for understanding sympathy in the nineteenth-century novel, and in particular, she argues that Smith is correct in depicting the maintenance of difference and distance as being central to the sympathetic exchange. “Against the standard claim that knowing more and seeing further into the hidden hearts and minds of characters heightens our sympathy with them, novels of the period are dubious of the tie that binds sympathy to knowledge. What’s more, sympathy resists identification” (4). The mirror that identification props up, Greiner argues, is counterproductive for sympathy or the consideration of a real and individuated other. Better to look at the other from a distance, and without assumptions of identification and knowledge. She cites James Chandler and Ian Duncan as postulating the major difference between Hume and Smith as being “that Smith’s sympathizer abstracts feelings, routing it through cognition, while Hume allows for sensation to be transmitted both directly and unconsciously from one person to the next” (5). Greiner’s argument is that realist fiction is actually more invested in Smith’s form of sympathy than Hume’s—moral sympathy is a distant and cognitive process rather than a feeling-driven one. Like Greiner, I’m interested in separating identification from sympathy, but what Greiner neglects is that identification can lead to aesthetic enjoyment, bypassing all moral outcomes. Instead of

looking at our brother suffering on the rack and, through imagining what he feels, entering sympathetically into his position, what if this identification is simply aesthetically interesting?

I argue that *Mansfield* can be read as an oblique commentary on, and a novel hugely influenced by, these theories of sympathy. Austen's characters are famous for their ability to imagine the thoughts of others, to think about what another person will need before that person has even thought of it, and to respond to others as unique and independent subjects. Or she shows that they aren't. On a formal level, too, she was fascinated with the uses of, and problems with, sympathy. Her newly developed narrative style, free indirect discourse, seems especially to draw from arguments, like those made by Hume and Smith, about the perspectives from which one sympathizes—removed and remote, or involved and implicated—and the moral repercussions of those perspectives. *Mansfield Park*, in particular, relates sympathy to acting, stressing the imaginative, theatrical nature of sympathy. Hume and Smith postulated that imaginative identification with others would lead to some kind of moral behavior. Austen shows that it might or it might not. And in many cases, it might just end at identification—and that identification might be an aesthetic process rather than anything moral or other-directed.

Fanny and Henry's different sympathies

Austen shows that sympathy can be a moral or an aesthetic faculty in part by dividing the two functions of sympathy between two of her main characters: Fanny and Henry. Fanny Price, in the word of Austen's mother, is "insipid" (Southam, 49). Kingsley Amis put it well when he said that he would not take lightly the decision of whether to

accept a dinner invitation from her and Edmund (14). Passive, sickly, and retiring though she may be, she is also fascinating for our purposes. Fanny is the only character in the novel who enters sympathetically into all her peers' minds. She imagines what they might be thinking or feeling, and thinks and feels for them and with them.²² When the strict and forbidding patriarch of Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas Bertram, departs for Antigua, leaving the younger generation to their own devices, they do the nineteenth-century equivalent of throwing a house party: they begin planning a private theatrical. Fanny, however, refuses to participate. "Higher consequence was against it" (93) she tells herself. Regardless, in her role as wallflower,²³ Fanny masters *Lovers' Vows*. Whereas the others fail to learn even their own parts, and stage rehearsals mainly in order to flirt, Fanny memorizes the whole play simply by observing. Not only is Fanny the only one in the house who actually knows the play, she is the only one who sees, as it were, the play taking place outside the play, and the erotic motives behind the decision to stage *Lovers' Vows*. When Henry Crawford slyly chooses Maria to play the part of Agatha, thereby slighting Julia, Fanny alone comprehends Julia's disappointment, and does so despite the fact that Julia has always ignored or outright mistreated her. Once the rehearsals are underway and Julia is devoting herself to her misery while watching her sister, Maria, flirt with Henry, the narrator says: "Fanny saw and pitied much of this in Julia; but there was no outward fellowship between them. Julia made no communication, and Fanny took no liberties. They were two solitary sufferers, or connected only by Fanny's consciousness" (114).

²²Fanny's frequent insights into the emotional lives of others sometimes leads her to think *against* them, as it were, rather than, or in addition to, *for* them or *with* them. This is of course most often the case with Mary and Henry Crawford. Fanny, whose passivity is one of the most hated aspects of the book, is actually quite remorseless, in her thoughts, especially when she has seen into someone and disliked what she found.

²³ See Litvak.

Fanny is the only one who sees the relationship between Julia, Maria, and the flirtatious Henry Crawford for what it is: a quagmire of jealousy on the female side and a pleased puffing of the chest on the male side. Of Maria's acting, Fanny thinks, "Maria [...] acted well—too well..." (115). She knows exactly what is going on between Maria and Henry, who have chosen to act the mother and son pair largely, it seems, because mother and son do a fair amount of touching in the play. Of Edmund's participation in the play, despite his objection to the activity, Fanny sees that he joins in order to be closer to the girl with whom he is smitten, and to ensure that nobody else ends up playing the part of her lover. Edmund is not fully aware of his own reasons—only Fanny has entered into his mind and imagined what he must be feeling. This is Fanny's mode of sympathetic engagement.

Henry Crawford, on the other hand, is neither insipid nor high-minded. He is a cad. Nevertheless, he, too, has a highly developed ability to enter sympathetically into others—even if it's only as an actor, not as a person. Before *Lovers' Vows* has been chosen for the group's theatricals, Henry says in a moment of exultation:

I really believe I could be fool enough at this moment to undertake any character that ever was written, from Shylock or Richard III down to the singing hero of a farce in his scarlet cloak and cocked hat. I feel as if I could be any thing or every thing, as if I could rant and storm, or sigh, or cut capers in any tragedy or comedy in the English language. (87)

Henry is as good as his word. He proves this ability in the novel, not just by consummately preparing to play Frederick in *Lovers' Vows*, but also later, after he decides he is in love with Fanny and continues his attempted seduction by reading from Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. The narrator says:

[...] in Mr. Crawford's reading there was a variety of excellence beyond what she [Fanny] had ever met with. The King, the Queen, Buckingham, Wolsey, Cromwell, all were given in turn; for with the happiest knack, the happiest power of jumping and guessing, he could always alight at will on the best scene, or the best speeches of each; and whether it were dignity, or pride, or tenderness, or remorse, or whatever were to be expressed, he could do it with equal beauty. It was truly dramatic. His acting had first taught Fanny what pleasure a play might give, and his reading brought all his acting before her again. (228)

Henry's "truly dramatic" performance is so powerful that it compels Fanny, against her will, to drop her needle-work and watch him attentively. The remarkable thing about his acting is that he does all the parts, and does them all well. He can inhabit any character, exhibit any quality or expression. However, this ability to enter imaginatively into other selves evaporates when Henry is not reading Shakespeare or acting in private theatricals. Although he can enter into a fictional character's subjectivity, he shows little interest in identifying with actual people. Fanny's thoughts are a mystery to him—indeed, as his sister notes, his attraction to her is based on precisely the fact that she is the only woman he hasn't been able to comprehend, the only woman who hasn't fallen for him without his having to try to imagine what she might be like inside.

Fanny Price's moral artlessness and Henry Crawford's joy in rendering others represent the novel's two models of sympathetic engagement. Critics of the novel have almost always worked under the assumption that Austen, whose narrator refers affectionately to "my Fanny," quietly but unmistakably endorses Fanny's model of

sympathy. This is one of the reasons the novel is so controversial, even disliked. Looked at another way, however, the novel is even *more* controversial than commonly supposed, for Austen is showing that, contrary to prevailing notions, sympathy as a purely aesthetically productive act has its own distinct power. She invites us to appreciate Henry's charm and talent, his moral dubiousness notwithstanding, precisely because he is the novel's one creative character whose skill relies on an imaginative activity related to the sympathy that we find so overwhelmingly moralistic and irritating in Fanny.

Jane Austen and Henry Crawford

I propose that Austen is exploring her alignment with the aesthetically charged dimensions of sympathy in *Mansfield Park*. This novel is Austen's first to fully employ (from its inception as a novel, rather than in its revision) what many credit to be her major innovation, free indirect discourse. The narrator moves freely in and out of different characters' minds, undertaking any character, to paraphrase Henry Crawford. The narrator enters into Fanny's mind most frequently in this way, but the narrator enters everyone's mind, including Henry's—one count has it at nine times for Henry to Fanny's ninety seven.²⁴

The narrator, at Austen's direction, identifies well and promiscuously, “undertaking all the characters,” and thereby allowing the readers to do the same. Even if we never come to like Mrs. Norris, we have still entered into her thoughts and come to know her a little more. This feels morally productive—our access to her allows us insight into her moral character, and affects our own moral calculus. But gaining insight into her

²⁴ Louis Ann Flavin, *The Aesthetic Effects of Free Indirect Discourse in the Novels of Jane Austen*.

thoughts also simply brings us intense pleasure. The affects involved in identification are limitless, but whether identification is felt as funny, pleasurable, morally productive, or disturbing, the experience is aesthetically charged. It begins with a dramatic entering into another, “beyond our own person,” and culminates in an aesthetic, affectively layered response.

By readjusting our focus and attending to these multiple aspects of identification, we get a fuller understanding of this novel. In doing so, we find an author who is interested in the central role that language and pleasure play in the work of sympathy. Henry Crawford is able to find his way into any text, especially if he reads it aloud, as he does with Shakespeare and *Lovers' Vows*, and even if he knows little else, he knows the pleasure of language. Despite the fact that Mary Crawford is shallow and thoughtless, we derive great pleasure from her language game about rears and vices. Instead of seeing this as a moralistic novel that censures theatricality and asks us to admire an insipid heroine, it is productive to retrain our gaze and recognize it as a novel about the pleasures of reading and of identification, and about the way that sympathy is a process steeped in language and in narrative. Instead of mourning that Mary Crawford—whose zest and verbal playfulness reminds us wistfully of Lizzy Bennet—isn't the main character, we might see her as simply one of the many characters, like Fanny, like Henry, that Austen inhabits and gives voice to. Rather than view this as Fanny's novel, and feel frustrated with Austen for giving us this wilting, speechless girl for a heroine, I argue that we should see the narrative voice, and Austen behind it, as the novel's main character. In Patricia Rozema's 1999 film version of *Mansfield Park*, Fanny is depicted as a stronger, more interesting and talkative character than she is in the novel. Most controversially, she

is depicted as a writer, and we are encouraged to imagine her as a young Austen. The film even has Fanny write Austen's own impressive piece of juvenilia, a mock school-room exercise, "The History of England." Rozema is battling with the same issue I am: the problem of Fanny, and the problem of the novel's seeming conservatism.²⁵ My conclusion, however, is different than hers. Rather than rehabilitate Fanny by making her more like Austen, I see the novel as one in which Fanny is a decoy. We are forgiven, certainly, for assuming at first that she is the heroine; the novel sets us up for that reading. But by examining her in relation to Henry Crawford, and in light of the novel's focus on acting, we can see that the real main character of the novel is Austen herself, undertaking any character, imagining her way into all of them: the sassy, superficial Mary Crawford, the talented and handsome but morally bankrupt Henry Crawford, the silly but dangerously powerful Mrs. Norris, as well as the fainting, insipid Fanny Price.

More than moralistic pronouncements or disavowals, this is a novel that admires beauty and wit, and enjoys making fun of others. Mary Crawford's jokes, beauty, and skill with the harpsichord are admired and held in contrast to Fanny's boring attempt to say something improving about trees to Edmund: "Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does it not make you think of Cowper? 'Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited'" (41). We can't help but laugh at Mr. Rushworth when, after we've been told that he "liked the idea of his finery [for his part in the performance] very well, though affecting to despise it," he "step[s] forward with great alacrity to tell [Edmund] the agreeable news. 'We have got a play,' said he. 'It is to be Lovers' Vows; and I am to be

²⁵ In addition to tweaking Fanny's character, Rozema's film also differs from the novel in its more explicit incorporation of the issue of slavery on Sir Thomas Bertram's Antigua estate. In Rozema's version, Fanny becomes increasingly outraged the more she learns.

Count Cassel, and am to come in first with a blue dress and a pink satin cloak, and afterwards am to have another fine fancy suit, by way of a shooting-dress. I do not know how I shall like it” (98). Another, more thorough takedown is of Mrs. Norris, and it is done largely through free indirect discourse. While the young occupants of Mansfield Park are choosing a play that will suit them for a private theatrical, the narrator reports that “an enormous roll of green baize had arrived from Northampton, and been cut out by Mrs. Norris (with a saving, by her good management, of full three quarters of a yard), and was actually forming into a curtain by the housemaids” (92). The reader knows that in fact Mrs. Norris spends her brother in law’s money quite freely, and is only frugal when it comes to her own small fortune. However, within that parenthesis, we see Mrs. Norris patting herself on the back for her excellent management of Sir Thomas’s expenses despite the fact that she has just bought baize for a private theatrical of which he would surely disapprove. (There is also the fact that the amount—three-quarters of a yard—is negligible.) The joke continues after Sir Thomas returns from Antigua and shuts down the theatricals:

Mrs. Norris contrived to remove one article from his sight that might have distressed him. The curtain, over which she had presided with such talent and such success, went off with her to her cottage, where she happened to be particularly in want of green baize (134).

Again, Mrs. Norris’s thoughts are being accessed by the narrator for fun: it is Mrs. Norris who invents the pretext that it will upset Sir Thomas to see the green baize, remembers her talent and success at overseeing the curtain-making, and decides that she truly needs some green baize. *Mansfield Park* is a novel invested in language, playfulness, nasty

humor, and playful, interesting, but not necessarily moral, imagination into the lives and minds of others. This investment in the pleasure of performance and the multiplicity of selves that good actors can produce is extended in *Emma* to even more radical ends.

II. “If it was a falsehood, it was a very pleasant one.” Playing Your Part in *Emma*

Austen the “Imaginist”

Among Austen critics, *Emma* tends to be everyone’s favorite, and *Mansfield Park* everyone’s least favorite novel. Emma is an “imaginist,” Fanny is “insipid;” Emma flirts, Fanny withdraws; Emma makes mistakes and is loved in spite of, or because of this quality, Fanny watches and judges the mistakes of others. And yet, there are similarities in the approach critics tend to take in discussing the two novels, especially a tendency to describe both in moralistic terms. *Mansfield Park* teaches, according to many critics, that acting in private theatricals is bad and leads to loose morals, problematic flirtations, and even adultery. In *Emma*, the moral lessons are all directed at Emma herself. As Eve Sedgwick puts it in “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl” (1991), “Austen criticism is notable [...] for its unrelenting exaction of the spectacle of a Girl Being Taught a Lesson — for the vengefulness it vents on the heroines whom it purports to love, and whom, perhaps, it does...” (833) In response to this critical landscape, Sedgwick made available an alternative mode of reading Austen: “It is partly to interrupt this seemingly interminable scene of punitive / pedagogical reading, interminably structured as it is by the concept of repression, that I want to make available the sense of an alternative, passionate sexual ecology — one fully available to Austen for her exciting, productive,

and deliberate use, in a way it no longer is to us.” (834). With Sedgwick, I hope to show some of the ways that Austen is not a moralistic writer, slapping her heroines on the wrist, but rather one who explores the delicate boundary between thinking morally and being a creator of fiction—an “imaginist.”

One area to which Austen’s imagination returns again and again is the subject of authenticity. She was forever, in her fiction, thinking about whether people are what they purport to be and what happens if they aren’t. This exploration, with *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, is, I argue, conducted by thinking about authenticity and acting, or the act of putting on roles. In *Mansfield Park* this was overt. Under the cover of her overwhelmingly moral heroine, Austen creates enough clearance to explore her relation, as author, to the novel’s best actor and worst person. In so doing, she suggests that a self can contain many characters, and that identification can be a performance without any moral component. In *Emma*, the relation between acting and fiction-writing is less overt, but, in some ways, more pervasive. In *Emma*, I argue, acting is what everyone is doing all the time. Such a claim may seem perverse—*Emma* wraps up, after all, with Knightley saying things like: “My Emma, does not every thing serve to prove more and more the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other?” (457) Mr. George Knightley, arbiter of all that is true in this novel, representative of the right thoughts and best behaviors, knight in shining armor, and Saint George of England, schools devious Emma and makes things all right in the end. Or, that’s how the novel is often read. I argue, however, that Knightley is himself a master of characters, and that the novel shows that human relations are a constant putting on of characters. This is to say that Austen posits, in this novel, that there is no such thing as an authentic self or behavior. Instead,

Austen is exploring what it means to be a character in many senses: a character in a novel who is characterized, for example, as having fine moral judgment but who nevertheless loves a naughty woman like Emma; in life, one might be described as *having* character (being a fine upstanding gentleman like Knightley, for example); in a novel and in life, being a character implies that the self might be unstable, and that one's character might really be one of several characters (as is the case most obviously with Frank Churchill). Austen considers the character of her fictional character, Knightley, in both senses—he is a fine character, and he is also a person in character. Thus, Knightley is not entirely dissimilar from Frank Churchill who is characterized by his putting on multiple characters, or, for that matter, from Henry Crawford. By looking at the way *Emma* portrays people portraying themselves to others, I will show that the author's representative is not Knightley who schools Emma into marriageability with his message of authenticity and truth. Instead, I argue that Austen shows truthfulness itself to be but a performance, a character to assume but not an authentic self. In *Emma*, Austen shows that we are all, even Knightley, always playing a role.

“Dear Jane”

Reading Austen as a moralistic writer satisfies a longstanding critical urge that is still hard to work against, but this perception of Austen is a feature of history, not a reliable truth. The image of “dear Aunt Jane,” later shortened to “Dear Jane” or just “Jane,” began in earnest, as is well know, with her nephew's 1869 publication, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, which increased the popularity and circulation of her works dramatically, but hardened the image of the author into, as Kathryn Sutherland has written, “a

comfortable figure, shunning fame and professional status, centered in home, writing only in the intervals permitted from the important domestic duties of a devoted daughter, sister, and aunt” (Sutherland, *Memoir*, xv). In short: by the mid-Victorian period, Austen had received public treatment that painted her as perfectly reflective of the Victorian cult of true womanhood. Sutherland brilliantly plots what happens with this image of the kindly aunt through the long and storied course of readership and criticism, revealing the ways that certain narratives came to congeal. For example, Sutherland argues that during the dislocating and horrific experience of the First World War, Austen’s seemingly regulated world and language served the much-needed function of making the world appear to have meaning and coherence. For Kipling’s “Janeites,” for example, “Jane” is a therapeutic presence who creates order out of a hellish war experience and holds out the promise of a stable England. The epigraph alone tells the story of a whole century of Austen criticism:

Jane lies in Winchester—blessed be her shade!
 Praise the Lord for making her, and her for all she made!
 And while the stones of Winchester, or Milsom Street, remain,
 Glory, love, and honour unto England’s Jane!

“Jane” is England’s mascot, representing virtue and as much stability as the stones on which her heroes and heroines walk. Sutherland then connects the post-war pride in national values, and the production of, among other things, R. W. Chapman’s Oxford University Press editions of Austen. These texts, Sutherland suggests, participated in the promotion of old-fashioned English values, and depicted a version of Austen that has had a lasting and troubling effect on Austen scholarship to this day. The Chapman edition, as

Sutherland shows, leaves out many things, most strikingly the fact that Austen was a wartime writer (as Chapman was a wartime editor) and obscures her relation to ideas in the act of making her a safe and stable vehicle for the reproduction of moral English life. Austen the moralist is, thus, a product of our uses for her.

D.W. Harding, one of the first to argue against the “Dear Jane” narrative, wrote, rather radically in 1939, that Jane Austen “has none of the underlying didactic intention ordinarily attributed to the satirist.” Gilbert Ryle, in his 1966 essay on what he argues is Austen’s Shaftesburian influence, argues that in her novels she was concerned with moral problems, but was not didactic or what I’ll call moralistic. Lionel Trilling’s influential writing on Austen, however, suggests that Harding’s and Ryle’s writing on a non-moralistic Austen was outside the critical norm. For Trilling, Austen was interested in moral thinking insofar as her novels promoted and produced moral growth, both in her characters and for her readers. As Marilyn Butler has written, “He saw *Mansfield Park* as a case-study of the process whereby, with pain and danger, the self became a moral agent” (xi).

That Austen is a moral thinker is clear. Her novels give character and action to the moral debates of her time. Whether she is a didactic moralist is, it would seem from contemporary criticism, still a lot less clear. D.A. Miller, for example, in *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (1989), argues that Austen’s closures are always moral. He writes that the paradox in Austen’s writing is that though her novels always promote knowledge, truth, and goodness prevailing over falsehood, error, and evil or less-goodness, she first needs, in order for there to be a story, the absence of all the good stuff in order for it to be prevailed over. For Miller, this

constitutes a real problem: what is a novelist who ideologically stands at the closure side of things to do about the fact that if she is to create a story, she needs to mostly spend her time withholding closure? Miller, in this book, sees Austen as ideologically opposed to ambiguity. Rather than show that narrative and ideology are in constant and unsettled battle in Austen, he argues that ideology wins. Miller's claims are of a piece with a larger trend of Foucault-inspired criticism that is suspicious of the past for the covert ways its values were enforced and that sees Austen as, ultimately, another promoter and enforcer of conservative values.²⁶

Among contemporary Austen critics, there are, broadly speaking, two camps: those who, along with Marilyn Butler, see the novels as betraying a political and social conservatism and those who, along with Claudia Johnson, see Austen as essentially an

²⁶ In his later book on Austen, *Jane Austen and the Secret of Style*, Miller writes about what he calls "Austen Style"—an "Absolute Style" derived from being outside of what she describes. Miller shows that Austen creates protagonists who are themselves stylish and outsider-ish, but who then necessarily renounce this status at the novel's end. He observes that this renunciation of Style always happens, surprisingly, rather happily, and argues that it is because Style is wedded to a fear of shame. To renounce Style in favor of marriage, then, is a liberating act, and even her most Stylish leading ladies are more than happy to trade insecure Style for secure ordinariness. Austen, though, if she is to remain Austen the writer, must not release herself from Austen Style, and must retain her intimate relationship with shame. In this later reading of Austen, Miller recognizes and indeed builds a dialectical tension into his reading of Austen: she recognizes what might be an easier and happier choice (marriage, ordinariness, insider-status) but chooses to maintain a harder, less happy position (single, extraordinary, outsider-y). While I take issue with some of Miller's assumptions (that she is unhappy as a single woman and that marriage mattered as much to her as he says it does) his premise that her writing comes from a divided place is similar to mine: to be a moral person and follow the rules is certainly good, and perhaps easier, too. To think deeply about the rules, and about right and wrong, and from that interrogation, to discover the potential for dark, unmoral thoughts is harder and alienating, and yet it is Austen's writerly necessity. In order to marry, Emma must tamp her overly active imagination, but Austen can never tamp hers. *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* are absorbing and masterful marriage-plot novels with satisfying endings, but they are also meditations about the art of the imagination and the slippery, hall-of-mirrors Style moral path it takes one down if one is to do it at all well.

ironic writer who depicts with biting sarcasm that which appears conservative. The Butlerians tend to focus on the staid settings, customs, characters, and expectations we see represented in the novels, while the Johnsonians tend to focus on language and pleasure and the way those undercut the novels' depictions of conservatism. In Butler's preface to the 1988 edition of *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* she quotes Terry Eagleton on the "scandal of [her] book:" "it sheared coolly through decades of diplomatic Trillingsque talk about Austen's 'tensions' and finely tuned ambivalences and actually said that, well, when you get down to it, she's just a straight *Tory*" (Butler, xvii; Eagleton, 24-25). To sheer coolly through decades of ambivalent talk and to offer some straight truth sounds admirable, but, I argue, inappropriate to a discussion of Austen, whose writing is deeply committed to ambiguity rather than to ideology. In what follows, I will show that rather than shearing coolly through anything, in Knightley's adamant, declarative mode, Austen asks questions that don't have clear answers about the complexity of identity, and the social demands of being somebody stable when in fact we are multiple. I will show that it is precisely ambiguity that Austen aims to identify as the universal human experience, and that, contrary to the critical history of Austen that, from its "Dear Jane" narrative to the Foucauldian or the Butlerian assertions of her old-fashioned conservatism, she is not a moralistic or didactic writer, nor a *Tory* writer, nor even an ideological writer. In this study of *Emma*, I will show that she is a writer interrogating the degree to which anyone can ever be a truthful and authentic self.

Seeming, not being, in *Emma*

Emma begins with these words: “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.” Critics have focused on that word, “seemed,” often asking some variety of the question: Why did it only seem, and what was the reality? I argue that there is no straightforward answer to that question and that in fact the “seemed” is only meant to suggest that, in fact, everything “seems” but nothing “is.” It’s not that Emma “seems” one thing but “is” another—it’s that she, and everyone, “seems” one thing or another all the time.

This “seeming” but not being extends to Knightley and to the very character of the English gentleman. Claudia Johnson argues convincingly, in her afterword to *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s—Wolstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (1995), that Austen’s novels, especially *Emma*, were central to the construction of the nineteenth-century English Gentleman. Responding to the tradition of *Emma* criticism that addresses Emma as transgressive in some gendered way -- frigid, lesbian, or masculine—Johnson argues that actually, “Where this novel *is* concerned with gender transgression, it is from the masculine, not the feminine side” (196). Rather than show the normative English gentleman as an eighteenth-century sentimental hero, Austen invents the English gentleman that, to this day, we associate with gentlemanliness. Johnson shows that Mr. Woodhouse is a man in the sentimental mode and should be, therefore, the gentleman of the novel. “The qualities that typify him—sensitivity, tenderness, ‘benevolent nerves,’ allegiance to the good old ways, courtesies to the fair sex, endearing irrationality, and even slowness, frailty, and

ineptitude itself—also typify the venerated paternal figures crowding the pages of Burney and Radcliffe, to say nothing of those of Edmund Burke” (198). Of course, Mr. Woodhouse is not the model for manhood in this novel, nor is “gallant Mr. Elton” or the “chattering coxcomb” Frank Churchill; Knightley is.

Deviating from the model for the sentimental hero of the eighteenth-century, that of the nineteenth, which Knightley originates, is, according to Johnson, “a man of few words. Whereas an earlier generation of sentimental men had made a spectacle of their affect—of honorable feelings so powerful as to exceed all possibility of control, thus saturating handkerchiefs and liberally bedewing eloquent pages—the manful Knightley retreats from display, cultivating containment rather than excess... And this new, plain style of manliness is a matter of national import, constituting the *amiable*, ‘the true English style,’ as opposed of course, to the *aimable*, the artificial, the courtly, the dissembling, the servile, and (as the tradition goes) the feminized French” (201). In other words, what Austen does in *Emma* is to recreate the English gentleman in a style of reticence, quiet strength, and benevolent wisdom—a revision so powerful that it now strikes us as normative, to the point that, as Johnson argues, criticism of *Emma* takes it for granted. But, in fact, Knightley is a new type in English literature. Drawing on Johnson’s reading of *Emma*, I argue that the next step in re-seeing Knightley is to see that even the Truth-upholding Knightley is engaged in role-playing. He originates and enters into the character of the English Gentleman with such aplomb that he inspires a shift in literary and historical masculinity so successful that it is almost unnoticed.

Knightley is often taken to be Austen’s surrogate in the novel—the person who foresees much of the plot and is in the right regarding behavior and character. I argue that

once again, as in *Mansfield Park*, Austen is playing with character-surrogacy, and that in this novel, she investigates what it means to be both a truth-teller and an actor—a double-life that, as a novelist, she is particularly interested in. Contrary to most interpretations that take for granted that the novel promotes authenticity and truth, I argue that the novel shows relations to be necessarily performative and identities to be various. Further, I argue that Austen, through Knightley, shows truth itself to be unstable given that we are all always playing a role.

The idea that people are characters who take on multiple characters (who “seem” but never actually are) is suggested everywhere in *Emma*. When the Westons host a dinner party on a snowy winter evening, Mr. Elton is delighted by the idea of an extended opportunity for flirtation, while John Knightley, as uptight as his brother and as hypochondriacal as his father-in-law, is vexed at the idea of going out in the snow. But when they arrive, they have to arrange their faces, arrange the outward depiction of their moods, and put on the right character for a social evening: “Some change of countenance was necessary for each gentleman as they walked into Mrs. Weston's drawing-room;—Mr. Elton must compose his joyous looks, and Mr. John Knightley disperse his ill-humour. Mr. Elton must smile less, and Mr. John Knightley more, to fit them for the place” (117). When Emma is coaching Harriet into swapping her romantic interest in Mr. Martin for Mr. Elton, she highlights Mr. Eliot’s virtues by describing them as a good model or pattern for any young man in search of a persona.

In one respect, perhaps, Mr. Elton's manners are superior to Mr. Knightley's or Mr. Weston's. They have more gentleness. They might be more safely held up as a pattern. There is an openness, a quickness, almost

a bluntness in Mr. Weston, which every body likes in *him*, because there is so much good-humour with it—but that would not do to be copied.

Neither would Mr. Knightley's downright, decided, commanding sort of manner, though it suits *him* very well; his figure, and look, and situation in life seem to allow it; but if any young man were to set about copying him, he would not be sufferable. On the contrary, I think a young man might be very safely recommended to take Mr. Elton as a model. Mr. Elton is good-humoured, cheerful, obliging, and gentle. (E, 31).

Emma speaks of these men as patterns and models as if they have slipped into costume and as if any young man in the market for a character could do the same. Indeed, what Emma is discussing here is the matter of manners, and she is using the language of the conduct manual in a novel that, among Austen's other novels, became one of the textbook novels of manners. Emma takes for granted that manners are assumed, not indexes to the soul. Conduct manuals and novels of manners describe the moral imperative to behave correctly. What Austen shows, however, is that this moral imperative is to behave well, but not to *be* anything except an adopter of the appropriate behavior, calibrated to the context. Manners are transferable and situational, not reflective of the self, the real, or the authentic—if they weren't there wouldn't be conduct manuals.

The fact that manners are context-driven and transferable, which is to say not tethered to an “authentic” origin, is hard to square with Knightley who, as Emma points out, is not an easy model to follow precisely because of how fixed and authentic he seems. But Knightley, as the novel shows, has assumed a role defined by its performance of truth. Knightley's supposed authenticity is a persona that he performs expertly, though

he does, importantly, slip from time to time. Take, for instance, his uncharacteristic arrival in a carriage at a party at the Coles'. Emma "was pleased to see that it [the carriage] was Mr. Knightley's; for Mr. Knightley [...] was too apt, in Emma's opinion, to get about as he could, and not use his carriage so often as became the owner of Donwell Abbey." Their conversation about his character, and her commendation of his playing it, in her mind, correctly, is telling:

"This is coming as you should do," said she; "like a gentleman.—I am quite glad to see you."

He thanked her, observing, "How lucky that we should arrive at the same moment! for, if we had met first in the drawing-room, I doubt whether you would have discerned me to be more of a gentleman than usual.—You might not have distinguished how I came, by my look or manner."

"Yes I should, I am sure I should. There is always a look of consciousness or bustle when people come in a way which they know to be beneath them. You think you carry it off very well, I dare say, but with you it is a sort of bravado, an air of affected unconcern; I always observe it whenever I meet you under those circumstances. *Now* you have nothing to try for. You are not afraid of being supposed ashamed. You are not striving to look taller than any body else. *Now* I shall really be very happy to walk into the same room with you."

"Nonsensical girl!" was his reply, but not at all in anger. (216-217)

The question is not just what the appropriate manners are for someone in Knightley's station—whether it befits the master of Donwell Abbey to use a carriage at all times, or to save money and healthfully walk instead—not only whether these manners and behaviors are visibly reflected but also whether they reflect what they seem to reflect. Emma thinks that Knightley is, for once, traveling through Hartfield in the manner appropriate to a gentleman and the owner of the best property in the area. What he doesn't reveal is that his behavior is indeed gentlemanly, but in a different way: he arrives in his carriage because he wants Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax to have a method of conveyance to and from the party, and not have to walk, a fact only revealed to Emma through Frank's gossipy patter later that night: "Mr. Knightley's carriage had brought, and was to take them home again. Such a very kind attention—and so thoughtful an attention!—the sort of thing that so few men would think of. And, in short, from knowing his usual ways, I am very much inclined to think that it was for their accommodation the carriage was used at all. I do suspect he would not have had a pair of horses for himself, and that it was only as an excuse for assisting them" (226). Emma reads his arrival in a carriage as an appropriate status marker. In fact, though, it is an act of noblesse oblige. He performs his position in society, and enacts an authentic gentlemanly self. But, crucially, part of this performance requires of Knightley to keep the truth from Emma. He lets her think what she wants and smiles at the disparity in their understanding of the situation, hiding the truth because it suits him to hide his good deed and because in this case, it is required for this particular performance. If this act of gentlemanliness serves to

make him even more authentic a gentleman, it also serves to make his authenticity that much more a performance of authenticity.

“The whole truth”

At stake in this argument is whether Austen is making any claims about truth and authenticity in this novel, what they are, and whether they coincide with Knightley’s claims to and about truth and authenticity. By way of addressing this question, I want to look at the depiction of “truth” in the novel. Knightley is, notoriously, often right in predictions for the future and in his readings of people. He predicts that the relationship between Emma and Harriet won’t come to any good. He is right that there’s something going on between Frank and Jane. He is right that there’s something disingenuous about Frank’s claim that he is unable to manage his own time and visit his father whenever he chooses. He is right about many things. But so are many other people, including people who are regularly schooled by Knightley for being wrong.

The discussion Emma and Knightley first have about Harriet and Mr. Martin is often taken as another example of Knightley getting it right, but nestled within this conversation are some very interesting statements of truth that come from Emma. Knightley expresses “surprise and displeasure” and stands up “tall in indignation” upon hearing that Harriet refused Mr. Martin’s proposal of marriage. Emma responds by reminding Knightley that women, who have very little power at all, do have the power of refusal. In her typically playful manner, she scoffs, “Oh! To be sure, it is always incomprehensible to a man that a woman should ever refuse an offer of marriage. A man always imagines a woman to be ready for anybody who asks her” (58). Later, in the same

conversation, she reminds Knightley that it wouldn't be so odd if a man above Harriet in station fell in love with her, as men often do fall in love with women for their looks rather than for their qualities of mind: "Till it appears that men are much more philosophic on the subject of beauty than they are generally supposed; till they fall in love with well-informed minds instead of handsome faces, a girl with such loveliness as Harriet, has a certainty of being admired and sought after..." (61). This is an example of something that happens again and again throughout the course of the novel. Of course, she is wrong: she shouldn't have meddled and Harriet should have accepted Mr. Martin. But Emma's truth-telling should not be overlooked. It is true that women are valued primarily for their beauty and not for their opinions, that they are thought idiotic if they exercise any of them, and that as such women have very little power. Again, Austen weaves a paradox for her readers: characters are often both right and wrong, and truth is less stable than it might appear. As Knightley later concedes, Emma is right that Harriet has some excellent qualities, and that Emma has really improved her. This novel is narrated in two modes, primarily: unmediated dialogue and free indirect discourse. This scene is notably told in the former mode, a narrative mode that excludes the narrator's voice and opinion. Each person's words are taken at face value, and the reader responds to them based on everything else that has come before, and based on what they bring to the text. It is up to the reader here to make judgments on each conversant's truth-telling or rightness, and, like in actual conversations, the result is probably that each person seems somewhat right and somewhat wrong. That's the best we can get: what *seems* right.

Another example of the murkiness between truth and falsehood in the novel is Emma's Mr. Dixon theory. Every time I re-read *Emma*, her theory is more compelling,

even though I know it to be false. This is perhaps enhanced by my forgetting the details every time (largely because Austen designed the novel to keep these characters at a remove, never to appear) but every time I return to the novel, I can't quite remember what the details of Emma's misconception are, and each time I read her theory, I think to myself that it's actually not that unfounded. She suspects that a plain girl is jealous of her beautiful friend for being preferred, at times, by her husband. Not only is this not that unlikely, we don't actually know that it isn't the case, since we never hear from Mrs. Dixon. It is probably likely that, even if Mr. Dixon never gave a thought to Jane in any romantic way, Mrs. Dixon still at times doubted herself and feared the worst. Furthermore, in this novel of desires that don't always get directed at the right object at first, it wouldn't be that strange if Mr. Dixon *did* at first desire Jane, or at least consider Jane an object of potential desire before marrying Jane's plain but wealthy and class-appropriate friend. Even if he's not the one who bought the piano, which is really all that we know, who is to say that he didn't harbor a little flame for the more beautiful, more accomplished friend? This is, of course, a bit of imaginative play on my part, and yet none of it seems unfounded in a novel that is itself a series of close observations of the blunders and missteps that are the stuff of love. In fact, it is the kind of "imaginist" matchmaking that the novel itself depicts and plays with denouncing, while all the while showing its powerful "imaginist" pleasures.²⁷

²⁷ See Bharat Tandon's "Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation" for more on Austen's "gleefully disproportionate and indecorous" juvenilia, the way it informs her mature work, and especially for his exploration of her "double ironies" in which characters can be right in larger ways even when they're wrong. Tandon's example is Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*: she is wrong about General Tilney being a murderer, but she is certainly right that he's even worse than he at first appears.

Truth, far from being straightforwardly upheld in the embodied form of Knightley, is actually destabilized in this novel. Not only is Emma sometimes right even when she's wrong, but what's right and wrong is sometimes unknowable. Much has been written about the fact that Frank Churchill's letter explaining his behavior doesn't explain nearly enough, but I argue that this is not because it's Frank, for whom secrets and evasions are natural—it's because there is no central, accurate narrative, for him or anyone. A fully explanatory letter cannot, in keeping with the vision of human nature this novel depicts, exist. Which is all to say that Frank Churchill's remarkable sin of concealment (his first name is one of the novel's most simplistic but satisfying jokes) is not actually such a sin after all, nor is it so remarkable. We are always concealing things, intentionally and unintentionally, to others and ourselves. Mrs. Weston exclaims to Emma, upon their discovery of Frank's engagement, "I can hardly believe it.—I thought I knew him" (405). What Frank did was wrong, surely, but perhaps Mrs. Weston's first mistake was thinking she knew him, or anyone. Frank was acting—playing the part of a single man, and playing it too well—but everyone in the novel has secrets, including from themselves, and plays multiple characters.

Even in the moment of Emma and Knightley's love becoming known to each other, in which they supposedly open up to one another completely, a secret remains unconfessed, and feelings and thoughts in general move at too "wonderful [a] velocity" to be shared in their entirety. Despite being, as he claims, unable to make speeches, Knightley delivers a touching confession of love to Emma. While he does so, "Emma's mind was most busy." While she listens to him and comprehends every word, she is also managing to think about all of the following: her newfound happiness, her latest mistake

with Harriet, her real sorrow at Harriet's predicament, her belief, though, that a Knightley-Harriet match would have been "unequal and degrading." Knightley speaks in his plain and honest manner, and while he does so, Emma's mind races and any response she might offer, the novel insists, would necessarily be incomplete. How to tell the whole truth when the mind can move so rapidly and contain so many conflicting emotions? Emma refrains from telling Knightley that she had accidentally caused Harriet to fall in love with him, and it's a secret she takes with her to the end of the book. Even in this moment of love-fueled confessions, her heart is closed on at least one important matter. Even in the moment where Emma is supposed to be schooled into truthful authenticity by the exemplary Knightley, she maintains her selfhood, which is to say that she remains unknowable to him. Further, we don't ever learn what she said in response to Knightley's confession of love. He tells her it is hard for him to make speeches and then makes one. The narrator then takes over to report: "She spoke then, on being so entreated.—What did she say?—Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does." We never find out; all we know is that she plays her part, the role of the lady in love being proposed to by a reticent gentleman, admirably.

Once Emma and Knightley have become lovers, Emma shows him Frank's letter of explanation, to which Knightley responds, in his rather school-master-y manner, "My dear Emma, does not everything serve to prove more and more the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other?" (457). Not only does this little speech make any serious reader of Austen's playful irony groan, it is completely outside the tone and tenor of the novel as a whole. Further, it's unrealistic and undesirable. Truth and sincerity in all our dealings? Does he now want to hear exactly and in full what's on Emma's mind,

as he was wise enough not to want on Box Hill? Putting aside the obviously dystopic effects of a world with complete truth and sincerity in all our dealings (or, at least the brain-numbing effects of a world of honest and open Miss Bateses), truth and sincerity are shown to be aspirations, but not practicable and not even always desirable.

Furthermore, truth and sincerity, when we do see them, are themselves a role.

Knightley is not truth itself, he is not the embodiment of truth, he performs it. Truthfulness is part of his character's persona. But even Knightley slips from his role. As Mary Waldron writes, "Far from being above it all, Mr. Knightley is involved in the same kind of social/moral confusion as Emma and all the other characters..." (115). He takes his carriage to the party in order to perform his noblesse oblige, and withholds from Emma why he brought his carriage, while being ribbed by her for having finally done the proper gentlemanly thing, because it suits his role to retain that information, even though it is an omission and a deviation from straight-forward openness. Additionally, he isn't honest with himself or anyone about his feelings about Frank. He dislikes him and distrusts him from the beginning, and while some of his reasons are legitimate (it's not likely that Frank is truly unable to visit his father on occasion and it is ridiculous to go all the way to London to get a haircut), the real reason he doesn't like Frank is because he's jealous of his flirtation with Emma, and resents the general assumption that Frank and Emma are intended for one another. Knightley's performance of honesty has a blind spot when it comes to Frank; he breaks character when it comes to his exaggerated antipathy to Frank because of his feelings for Emma. And it's not just with Frank that Knightley's performance of honesty and sincerity are compromised. Knightley has biases about Harriet that he doesn't acknowledge and that are as deluded as Emma's. When he expects

her to marry Mr. Martin, he thinks highly of her. When he hears that she has turned down Mr. Martin's proposal, he speaks of her as an idiot who has neither birth nor merit to recommend her. Waldron writes in depth about this scene in which Knightley's opinion of Harriet (and of Mr. Martin) changes rapidly and unfairly, concluding: "In his previous account, Martin has been "very well judging", now his love has overcome reason; before, "he could not do better", now "he could not do worse"; and the "fair lady" is little better than a base-born idiot. Is this the sober, rational thinker we have at one level been led to expect?" (123). Knightley is not the novel's spokesperson, nor is he even perfectly truthful. Rather, he performs truthfulness expertly, though with notable breaks in character, and in doing so, underscores the novel's representation of character as a performance, even when the character is one that performs unperformativeness.

"Very great amusement in tricking us"

So, if the novel isn't a public service announcement on behalf of truth, what is it? It might help to look first at the moment when Emma and Frank first meet after Frank's engagement becomes openly known. Emma tells Frank that he must have enjoyed his secret immensely, and gotten "great amusement in tricking us" (489). He insists that he didn't and that it was torture, but we readers saw him at it. If it did produce a few moments of torture for him, it also produced many more of pleasure. And it is along these lines that I propose to look for meaning in this novel, rather than accept Knightley's

lesson about truth. The novel is full of little in-jokes and winking gestures, to say nothing of the word games, charades, enigmas, riddles, and quizzes the characters partake in.²⁸

The novel promotes pleasure, lightheartedness, jokes, and tricks by showing its opposite in Knightley, a veritable party-pooper. At the party at the Coles', Jane, whose musical talent has been touted throughout the novel, plays and sings for the group, and does so beautifully. Knightley, however, breaks it up like a parent telling the kids to knock it off.

Towards the end of Jane's second song, her voice grew thick.

"That will do," said he, when it was finished, thinking aloud—"you have sung quite enough for one evening—now be quiet."

²⁸ For pleasure's sake, I'll go through a few of my favorite of the novel's little tricks. As Jill Heydt-Stevenson has written in her book, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History*, about the persistent presence of the body in Austen's novels (which many consider to be body-less), Mr. Woodhouse is perhaps not a hypochondriac for nothing—his symptoms and concerns call to mind venereal disease. This in itself is a hilarious joke, which, Heydt-Stevenson argues, contemporary readers would have picked up, and the frequency with which Mr. Woodhouse sits by the fire or vaunts the healing powers of gruel (supposed treatments for syphilitic symptoms) makes the joke repeatedly pleasurable. (Heydt-Stevenson doesn't mention one thing I noticed on a recent re-reading, which is that Mrs. Goddard, the head of the school in which Harriet is placed, is said to have "formerly owed much to Mr. Woodhouse's kindness, [and] felt his particular claim on her." I couldn't help feel, after having read Heydt-Stevenson, that one wouldn't be remiss to wonder whether Mr. Woodhouse paid a great deal of attention to Mrs. Goddard and her pupils in any way untoward. This is just a hypothesis, but another one that made me giggle in a way that felt sanctioned by the text itself.) Another favorite trick of mine is one that the narrator plays. Early in the novel, the narrator suggests that Mr. and Mrs. Weston have their hearts set on a match for Emma. At this point, Frank hasn't showed up, and the main male contender for this role is the ever-present Knightley. The reader wouldn't be faulted for thinking that it is Knightley they mean, and only finds out much later that the hoped for match is one between Emma and Frank. Through this little trick, the narrator plants the idea of a Knightley and Emma union in the mind of the reader, while also providing a moment of pleasure for re-readers who will only pick up on the trick the second time through.

Another song, however, was soon begged for. "One more;—they would not fatigue Miss Fairfax on any account, and would only ask for one more." And Frank Churchill was heard to say, "I think you could manage this without effort; the first part is so very trifling. The strength of the song falls on the second."

Mr. Knightley grew angry.

"That fellow," said he, indignantly, "thinks of nothing but shewing off his own voice. This must not be." And touching Miss Bates, who at that moment passed near—"Miss Bates, are you mad, to let your niece sing herself hoarse in this manner? Go, and interfere. They have no mercy on her" (232).

Miss Bates, in her real anxiety for Jane, could hardly stay even to be grateful, before she stepped forward and put an end to all farther singing. Here ceased the concert part of the evening, for Miss Woodhouse and Miss Fairfax were the only young lady performers; but soon (within five minutes) the proposal of dancing—originating nobody exactly knew where—was so effectually promoted by Mr. and Mrs. Cole, that every thing was rapidly clearing away, to give proper space.

It is of course Frank, in contrast to the over-protective fogey Knightley, who originates the suggestion that people dance and continue to have some pleasure. Knightley doesn't object to the dance (the reader waits for it, and can hardly believe he doesn't) and we

catch a glimpse of him, through Emma's eyes, standing, as per usual, outside the fun. Emma's observation that "He was no dancer in general" is, especially at this moment, a rather comic understatement.

Another night of entertainment and fun is planned, this time at the Westons' (the novel is structured around opportunities for fun: planning, waiting for, and then enjoying (or not) various social engagements) and Knightley's response (reminiscent of Fanny Price in its hatred of noise and fun) is: "Very well. If the Westons think it worth while to be at all this trouble for a few hours of noisy entertainment, I have nothing to say against it, but that they shall not chuse pleasures for me.—Oh! yes, I must be there; I could not refuse; and I will keep as much awake as I can; but I would rather be at home, looking over William Larkins's week's account; much rather, I confess.—Pleasure in seeing dancing!—not I, indeed—I never look at it—I do not know who does." Could any statement be more against the mood and tone of the novel?

"What a banal, reductive and limiting 'moral'"

The novel, then, puts Knightley's overly sober and the novel's playful ways in opposition. Michael Gamer, in a collection of essays on the Box Hill scene published in *Romantic Circles* (2000), writes: "But as [Claudia] Johnson has argued persuasively, Austen often raises such polemical antitheses—here opposing verbal transparency to verbal play and obfuscation—'in an exploratory and interrogative, rather than hortatory and prescriptive, manner' (Johnson, xxi)" (Gamer, paragraph 2). Verbal transparency (Knightley's truth) versus verbal play (Austen's interest): this is the polemical antithesis *Emma* sets up. So what of the arguments that many critics have made, and extremely

persuasively, that Knightley is the novel's spokesperson, the representative of Austen's message (and here we move back again to Butler's camp)? George Levine, in the same issue, bemoans the unsavory moralism of the novel as he sees it:

Perhaps the most difficult thing for a modern reader of *Emma* to do is to take it straight, to accept Mr. Knightley as the moral authority the story seems to make him and to agree that Emma should indeed marry him (paragraph 1).

But, Levine argues, it must be taken "straight:"

[...] *Emma* offers itself as a novel that is, through its various detours and duplicities, what it claims to be, and this, for skeptical modern readers, is rather hard to take (paragraph 5).

Levine, himself a modern reader, doesn't like the fact that this novel teaches "humility and circumspection." "What a banal, reductive and limiting 'moral' for a novel so extraordinarily rich in nuanced dancing around doubleness of meaning, around the virtual inaccessibility of a stable and verifiable truth, around the edgy if muted excitement of female independence and imaginative play!" (Levine, paragraph 1). But where Levine argues that this dancing around doubleness is ultimately not the novel's message, and that Knightley's moral message *is*, I argue that Knightley's moral message is continually and variously played with and cannot be held up as Austen's message. Knightley is not always "right"—nor is he in a novel that values being right above being imaginative. The tension between being right and being an "imaginist" is the point. It is not a novel about pure pleasure, nor is it a novel about the value of moral lesson-making. It is about the tension between those. The novel is so interesting because it is a dialectical text, not one

that can be settled one way or another; it is so compelling and formally interesting *because of* the tension between Knightley's correctness and Emma's playfulness, and everything these opposing ideals stand for. This novel would be a bore if it were more clearly Knightley's novel. It wouldn't allow Emma's brilliant, naughty playfulness and, to be frank, it would be a party pooper. And if it were Emma's novel, it wouldn't have the seriousness and interest in moral questions. But it has both—the two elements are married literally and figuratively—and I argue that it is a novel that is interested in what happens to play and imagination in the face of morality.

CARING UNCARINGLY: SADOMASOCHISM IN
CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *VILLETTE*

"Lucy is the bossiest bottom"
—Eve Sedgwick²⁹

Our various ways of theorizing such encounters with relation shape our different views of the political and affective consequences of social embeddedness. We are constantly asking, What do our distinctive responses to each other and our cases tell us about the structural conditions that produce the encounter with nonsovereignty in the first place?
—Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, viii

In this chapter, I continue to argue for the frequency of nineteenth-century novelists' investment in depicting a relational, rather than individual, framework for experience that is centrally defined by the inability to know others. Furthermore, I show that this unknowable relationality often produces negative feelings and behaviors that the novelists in this study, far from condemning, actually encourage, showing that they can often be productive of pleasure or other useful outcomes. This chapter addresses these questions through an analysis of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and the role of these feelings and the behaviors they elicit in the context of ethics of care theory. I show that even the paradigmatically isolated, individual Lucy Snowe is deeply embedded in a social context revolving, largely, around care-relations. Furthermore, I show that Brontë's investment is not in Lucy's redemption through a therapeutic recovery of healthy subjectivity, but rather, in her pleasure, perversion, and the normality of anti-social feelings and behaviors

²⁹ This was said in a 2007 Seminar at the CUNY Graduate Center entitled "Reading Relations in the British Novel." While I wasn't there, Sedgwick's remark was passed on to me by Miciah Hussey.

inherent in care relations.³⁰ Over the course of the novel, Lucy experiments with the odd power-dynamics that care entails—the powers that employ you in care-giving roles, and the powers invested in the act of caring—and develops the ability to control both her abasement and her mastery. Because of this particular set of power dynamics, trust is essential to care relations, and yet, the problem of other minds can be more pronounced and damaging in these contexts than in others. In response to these challenges, power dynamics, and tendencies toward both self-concealment and careful watching of others, Lucy becomes adept at sadomasochistic roleplay, and learns to derive pleasure in both being controlled and in controlling others.

Christopher Lane, in “Charlotte Brontë on the Pleasure of Hating” (2002), writes that “few critics have addressed her novels’ preoccupation with hatred or claimed that this trait determined her characters’ ontological relationship to the world. Highlighting the obstacles that thwart these protagonists, these critics turn her fiction into a form of protest while finding ways to reconcile her heroines to women’s limited opportunities. This curtails Brontë’s interest in hostility, viewing her work as redemptive in aim and merely a therapeutic extension of her life” (199). With Lane, I argue that to view Brontë’s novels, especially her last—which Matthew Arnold described as “disagreeable,”³¹ and which Harriet Martineau called “almost intolerably painful” because “[Lucy Snowe] allows us no respite”³²—as ultimately redemptive or therapeutic, whether for its characters or its author, is to overlook Brontë’s pleasure in the tensions

³⁰ Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* rejects normative, socially productive and reproductive forms of relationality and serves as a foundation for some of my thinking in this chapter.

³¹ Letter to Mrs. Forester, 14 April 1853. McNees, *Critical Assessments*. Vol 3, 610.

³² Review of *Villette*, in McNees, *Critical Assessments*. Vol 3, 589.

she constructs. Where Lane focuses on hatred, I look instead at a range of negative affects that inhere in and around power, and I look at the pleasures, rather than the recuperations, those affects can produce.

In the groundbreaking *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (1979), Gilbert and Gubar do attend to Lucy's more negative, strange cast of feelings, but in the context of their repression. Here, I focus instead on the pleasure Lucy derives from these feelings and behaviors. For good reason, Lucy's professional and social disenfranchisement as a woman has been a central node of *Villette* scholarship, and this feminist criticism often either depicts her as repressed and oppressed or, alternatively, as writing from a place of ultimate professional and authorial release. Brenda Silver, for example, writes in "The Reflecting Reader in *Villette*" (1983) that *Villette* "responds to the limited plots available for women" by creating an unconventional narrator who shapes a new kind of fiction. "Lucy is deliberately creating not only a new form of fiction for women, but a new audience—part critic, part confidant, part sounding board—whose willingness to enter her world and interpret her text will provide the recognition denied to women who do not follow traditional paths of development" (92). Lucy, in this reading, is a feminist vanguard creating community and opportunity for women, and if she has a tendency toward isolation or silence, it is nullified by the text itself. Silver writes: "Speak she must, though, for to remain silent would be to become the cretin who makes mouths instead of talking, and whose silence becomes a metaphor for Lucy's own potentially arrested development. To overcome this two-fold silence, Lucy evolves another reader, a nonjudgmental reader, a sharer of the insights that she cannot communicate to those more in tune with the accepted social

codes” (103). I agree with Silver that Lucy creates her own community through a readership she is intently focused on forming and training. However, the readership she creates is far from reformed or nonjudgmental; on the contrary, Lucy, who constantly judges, expresses disdain, or disgust, trains a readership to be eminently judgmental, hostile, and unrepentant.

Indeed, Lucy’s strange, untrusting, mildly abusive treatment of her readers forms a readership that teeters from submissive to aggressive. In *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (1996), Garrett Stewart follows Silver’s line of thinking and expands on *Villette*’s relationality vis-à-vis the Lucy-reader relationship. Most famously, she not only hides her recognition of Dr. John from him, but she also keeps it from her readers. Another episode of this perverse treatment is the elusive, much discussed ending. Lucy’s reticence about M. Paul’s end requires us, her trained readers, to do the killing and the mourning of M. Paul for her. She has trained her readers to not be naïve, and so when she dangles the possibility that he might be alive, she willfully demands that her readers be the ones to reject that possibility and declare him dead. Lucy has trained her reader to be executioner. The novel ends not with a transformed Lucy, trained to behave, feel appropriately, and exhibiting a healthier subjectivity. Instead, she remains a character immune to our therapeutic expectations, unrepentantly perverse in her relationships, including with her readers, and likely with her students and teachers at her new school.³³

³³ *Villette* interestingly complicates Frank Kermode and D.A. Miller’s arguments about the unnarratability of happiness and marriage. It ends not on a life of fulfilled marriage, nor on a life of fulfilled and healthy subjectivity, but because it simply isn’t practicable to continue narrating a life of unrepentant, pleasure-producing nastiness.

Part of my intention is to contribute to a broader reexamination of the Victorian period, one that challenges the impression, which has proven more resilient than a cockroach in the pensionnat's attic, that the Victorians were prudes, controlled by their manners, consumed by conduct manuals, and above all, civilized.³⁴ Peter K. Andersson, argues that “the established picture of the Victorian period [its supposed prudishness and repression] lingers...not only in popular media, but also in academic research” (439). He traces this established picture to two main sources. First, to Norbert Elias's writing, furthered by Cas Wouter's research, on the “history of mentalities from the late Middle Ages until today” (439) which led to “an ‘informalization’ of manners and an ‘emancipation of emotions’ in the twentieth century” (439) only after an “increasingly formalized regime of manners” in the nineteenth that produced a “complicated system of introductions, invitations, calls, leaving calling cards, ‘at homes,’ receptions, dinners, and so on” (440). Second, and much more notoriously in the context of Victorian literary scholarship, and also more directly pertinent to scholarship on *Villette*, Andersson traces this established picture to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and its outside influence on Victorian scholarship. In large part because of Foucault's historicist theorization of reformist movements and their impact in the creation of a totalizing culture of discipline, scholars continue to depict the period as cartoonishly civilized and straitlaced, and, in so doing, maintain a flattering distance between savvy contemporary scholar and repressed, repressing Victorians. In this chapter, I argue that these persistent

³⁴ Kelly Hager's provocative *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce* destabilizes the idea that the Victorian novel is dominated by conclusive and productive marriages, and argues that it is instead replete with depictions of far-from ideal relationships. This work has served as a useful model and complement for this chapter, which argues for a complete reevaluation of our assumptions about a period and asks us to see new patterns or to see in optical illusion of the vase two faces.

tropes of, in Andersson's words, "visitations and hat-tippings" (440) are belied throughout the Victorian period, that they represent a fantasy of Victorians affluence and leisure and a discounting of lived experience, particularly among working classes, and that *Villette* shows us perhaps most explicitly what is actually a dominant, if obscured from view, trope of the nineteenth-century novel: the manipulation of power in pursuit of queer or non-normative forms of pleasure.

Neither Lucy's writing, nor her relationship with M. Paul, nor her care relationships, even when she becomes master of her own school, bring Lucy into a closer or more productive society with others. On the contrary, these relationships—with her readers, her distant partner, her wards—thrive on the basis of her comfort in and pleasure with powerplay and sadomasochism. As Talia Schaffer puts it, "In the simplest form, we can say that Lucy... does not care for the objects of her caregiving. In Lucy's case, this dissonance causes intense stress, but she also, paradoxically, cherishes it as a guarantor of her psychological liberation" (Lucy, 2). The fact that she contains all these habits, behaviors, and feelings, that she is at once, for example, self-abasing and prone to abasing others, brings to the fore the final aspect of *Villette* I will address: Lucy's multiple personalities are explored in part through the novel's focus on acting and the performances inherent in powerplay. In the context of acting, sadomasochism and the role-playing it entails, Lucy's variety of selves is less perplexing. The acting scenes remind us that the authenticity of selfhood is a specter, as ghostly as the novel's nun, and as changeable as the nun who turns out to be Alfred de Hamal. Artless authenticity is possible, but not for chameleon-like Lucy Snowe, whose very name suggests heat and cold, light and dark.

Liberal individualism and ethics of care

Lucy Snowe has been considered a paradigmatic isolated individual for good reason. She has no relations, no background or family, no home, and offers no explanations; she prefers to be left alone, unattached, and independent; she resists being known. Mary Jacobus writes in “The Buried Letter: Feminism and Romanticism in *Villette*” (1980) that “the seed of *Villette*” (42) is the inalienable rights of self. And yet, she is in fact deeply embedded in several interconnected social worlds. This social life, however, is not based on mutual respect and reciprocity. On the contrary, her relationships are marked by uneven care and sadomasochism. Lucy isn’t an atomistic individual, she is a relational being who functions fluently in the language of disturbing relationships that are phenomenologically normative. If this strikes readers as odd—and it still does—it is because we are not accustomed to seeing a character so at home in the dangers and disappointments of relationships. Lucy’s oddity lies not in her isolation, but rather, in her disturbing expectation that relationships are necessarily disturbing.

Lucy’s social orbit is continually disappointing: Dr. John fails to recognize her feelings, Ginevra Fanshawe teases and annoys her, Polly takes her for granted, Madame Beck abuses and surveils, and M. Paul’s love takes on abusive, constricting forms. But this is not to say that we should read Lucy’s social alterity, her proclivity for seeking out privacy, and her narrative deceptions at face value. Lucy is always in some way engaged in a conversation with her social world—with people from her past whose literal return is an uncanny event that seems paranormal but reflects her continued relationship with people not in her immediate proximity, as well as, of course, with people she is engaged

with in her present—and her supposed desire to be a free agent is not only never possible, but is also never actually depicted as desirable from the perspective of the narrative that Lucy herself produces. And yet, this continual disappointment underscores the fact that Brontë isn't writing about happiness, and her writing isn't oriented toward emancipation. Lucy's relationships are unsatisfying and lopsided. They are not sympathetic encounters in which there is fellow feeling or mutual understanding. Not even, or perhaps especially not, her relationship with M. Paul.

This novel, in addition to being about a person who claims to be independent but is in fact extremely interdependent, is about the backbone of interdependence: care relationships. As I wrote in my introduction, care theory both responds to the inequities inherent in justice-approaches to ethics, and creates inequities that it doesn't adequately resolve. Ethics of care argues for the interdependence of all people, both at their infancy, and throughout their lives in ways that fluctuate and always loom. To build an ethics around this central fact of interdependence that privileges care as a site of ethical thinking and work yields a system oriented toward equality across spectra that aren't typically equal especially in care relations. Ethics of care aims to prioritize care work not just among women, the poor, migrants, and those to whom care work often calls, but among men, and those more affluent and enfranchised. However, in the rehabilitation of care, in its elevation to a field of ethical thinking and society-construction, there is an overreliance in the theory on the good sides of care, on embracing and taking back a site of ethical work that is centered on love, respect, protection, and mutuality.

However, it is a fact of care that it is built on structural inequities—someone needs care for a reason, and the other is giving care for a reason—and that these

inequities can be difficult to overcome, and can produce distinctly uncaring feelings. For example, a parent caring for an infant can become overwhelmed at the helplessness of the cared-for and the thanklessness of the tasks associated with keeping it alive. A care worker employed to look after someone else's children might be forced into performing aspects of love and care that are not felt simply to keep their job.³⁵ Thus a central problem in ethics of care is the question of what to do about the wide gulf between care and one's feelings while providing care. Frustratingly, this chasm is not sufficiently addressed in ethics of care theory. Often enough, the care-giver provides care while inhabiting a variety of affective states, including, for example, love, guilt, or hatred. And of course, people in care-taking roles often dispense bad or unsympathetic care. Where *Jane Eyre* ends in a marriage that is made possible by Rochester's disability and need for care, and highlights care as an attractive vocational outlet for women and men alike, thus promising a kind of ideal mutual care relationship,³⁶ *Villette* returns to the issue of care but presents instead an array of badly given care, care that doesn't ever get returned to the care-giver, and care given with feelings that are far from caring. While ethics of care theory doesn't do enough to theorize these discrepancies, the novel as a form, and *Villette* in particular, can help us understand what it means to care without caring, to care for pay, and to care while learning to experiment with the power dynamics inherent in care work. In this chapter, I extend the ethics of care to include bad care, mutual antagonism, and intentionally charged power relations. Rather than just focusing on the more pleasing

³⁵ See Arlie Russell Hochschild's *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's "Blowups and Other Unhappy endings," in Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild's *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*.

³⁶ See Christopher D. Gabbard's "From Custodial Care to Caring Labor: The Discourse of Who Cares in *Jane Eyre*."

aspects of care, *Villette* helps us see that the uglier sides of care can also be built into an ethics of care. Care can be exercised through dominating, uglier forms of care, and performed with a range of negative feelings. Indeed, it often is.

Sadomasochism, Power, and Lucy Snowe

The power dynamics inherent in care work, especially in care work performed as labor in an economic marketplace, produce a variety of affective responses in the characters thus employed. Zelig St. Pierre peacocks and performs her understanding of her own sexual power. Madame Beck and Dr. John, care-givers of a different class but still caring for payment and not quite affluent, wield power in radically different ways, Madame Beck through close guard of her troops, Dr. John through obliviousness, which has a power of its own. In Lucy's telling, she began her social existence as a docile, meek wretch, but even from the earliest scenes, by being a close observer of others, Lucy obtains a kind of power. What she learns over the course of the novel is how to use this attention and insight, and to use this power for her own pleasure, whether by controlling her own abuse, or abusing others. That is to say, Lucy's response to the power dynamics inherent in care work is to be insistently antisocial and to learn to use power as a tool in her own transgressions. The novel posits sadomasochism as a response to the problematics of care.

From her unpaid care for Paulina when they are both children, to her paid care for Miss Marchmont (a job she initially turns down), and her paid work first as *bonne* for Madame Beck's children, then as English teacher in her school (most care theorists include education as a form of care work), Lucy learns to derive pleasure from the abuse

inherent in caregiving, and she also discovers her own power to abuse others. She learns, in other words, to use the uneven power dynamics inherent in care relations as a tool for pleasure. Claire Jarvis, in *Exquisite Masochism: Marriage, Sex, and the Novel Form* (2016), argues that masochism is a vehicle for para-sexual sexual pleasure in a novel form that has trouble containing actual sex. The pleasure I argue that Lucy derives from the abuses of care work is, likewise, non-genital but nevertheless deeply sexually gratifying.

For Freud and later Gilles Deleuze and Frances Ferguson, sadism and masochism were completely different emotional states with different perversions and impulses. Deleuze argued that sadomasochism was a problematic term, bringing together two states and forms of desire that are radically opposed. Jarvis is similarly interested in masochism as distinct from sadism. Havelock Ellis and later Foucault argued that sadism and masochism were complementary and as impulses often existed within the same person. Indeed, masochism requires a paradoxical capacity to ask for and direct one's own abasement, while sadism requires an attention to the limits and needs of the other so extreme that power is only a part of the pleasure, which must also derive from studied attention to the others' limits. The lines between masochism and sadism are blurred, and their expression constitutes a very complex form of deeply layered role-play.

With these latter thinkers, I argue that Lucy's response to the tyranny of power in this novel is to learn the pleasures of sadism and masochism in order to move between them. Sara Ahmed, calling power an affective economy, writes that, like all affects, it doesn't reside in a person or outside a person but rather moves between people. Contrary to the psychological approach, feelings aren't "within," they are in circulation. I use this

thinking to help me understand Lucy's sadomasochism: the feelings associated with pleasure through abjection or through abuse circulate, they don't inhere within a person. The feelings of abjection and, complementarily, of pleasure in abusing others, are not "within" Lucy, but rather "stick" to her in certain social circumstances, to use Ahmed's term. Lucy discovers access to these affective economies—the pleasure of abusing and painning others, and of being abused and pained—primarily in her relationships, especially with Ginevra Fanshawe, Dr. John, and M. Paul, Madame Beck, and in her pedagogy.

Lucy's complex, layered sadomasochism can be seen in her signature social stance of keeping others at arm's length while at the same time drawing them very close. Often, this is coupled with finding others repellent while also being deeply attracted to them. This can be seen in her relationship with Ginevra Fanshawe, the coquette with whom Lucy herself coquettes.

She was not proud; and—*bonne d'enfants* as I was—she would forthwith have made of me a sort of friend and confidant. She teased me with a thousand vapid complaints about school-quarrels and household economy: the cookery was not to her taste; the people about her, teachers and pupils, she held to be despicable, because they were foreigners. I bore with her abuse of the Friday's salt fish and hard eggs—with her invective against the soup, the bread, the coffee—with some patience for a time; but at last, wearied by iteration, I turned crusty, and put her to rights: a thing I ought to have done in the very beginning, for a salutary setting down always agreed with her (96).

Lucy discovers early that she can be rough with this hardy tease, and that she doesn't have to fawn at her or even be nice. Ginevra comes to Lucy to complain, to ask for many little favors, Ginevra eats half of Lucy's breakfast ("the morningpistolets or rolls, which were new-baked and very good"), and Lucy in turn can speak bluntly, and tease her back, and have someone light and bright in her company. What she establishes with Ginevra is a relationship in which she can assert boundaries and establish her independence, gain a kind of social satisfaction, and be both the abused and the abuser. She constantly marvels at her beauty and enjoys simply looking at her. "Notwithstanding these foibles, and various others needless to mention—but by no means of a refined or elevating character—how pretty she was! How charming she looked, when she came down on a sunny Sunday morning, well-dressed and well-humoured, robed in pale lilac silk, and with her fair long curls reposing on her white shoulders." Lucy revels in Ginevra's beauty, and in the fact that this creature has chosen Lucy as her confidante. There is a pleasure in the self-abasement inherent in being chosen by the beauty. Lucy has a perverse attraction to Ginevra's annoying qualities, and makes an effort to keep her close because of these qualities. In the passage describing Lucy's habit of sharing her breakfast, Lucy writes with a faux-naiveté about the nature of their relationship:

This way consisted in a habit she had of making me convenient. [...] I don't know why I chose to give my bread rather to Ginevra than to another; nor why, if two had to share the convenience of one drinking-vessel, as sometimes happened—for instance, when we took a long walk into the country, and halted for refreshment at a farm—I always contrived that she should be my convive, and rather liked to let her take the lion's

share, whether of the white beer, the sweet wine, or the new milk: so it was, however, and she knew it; and, therefore, while we wrangled daily, we were never alienated. (2771)

Lucy claims to notice that Ginevra makes her convenient (she gets extra breakfast, and the lion's share of beer, wine, or milk while on expeditions), but of course the more interesting thing about this passage is the fact that Lucy is making herself convenient to Lucy because Ginevra is convenient to Lucy. Having a companion clinging to her arm who she can abuse but who also abuses her is Lucy's social position of choice. Ginevra is a beautiful girl who is sought after by many men, including one that she herself is interested in. This is a form of torture Lucy can't resist, and it's amplified by the flirtatious, even sexual frisson of their roleplaying. With Ginevra, Lucy gets the pleasure of submission but also the corollary pleasure of knowing her own power, should she choose to flip Ginevra over and force her to submit.

The two men in Lucy's life—Dr. John and M. Paul—are also tested and experimented with on these terms: to what degree will they be satisfying partners for abuse given and received? Both challenge Lucy's self-determination, and both elicit a wide range of emotions from her. Importantly, none of these emotions allow for complacency, satisfaction, or even happiness, and yet both are attractive to her on those very grounds. Her relationships with both Dr. John and M. Paul suggest that troubling relationality defines our social existence, and that the choice to remain apart and self-governing is not practicable. Lucy's strangeness, therefore, is not that she prefers isolation, and it is not that her relations are so troubled and troubling, but, rather, that unlike most other fictional characters, and unlike us, her readers, she expects the

relational world she finds herself in and maneuvers deftly within it, mobilizing sadism, masochism, shame, and hauteur, aggression and passivity as they suit her.

Full of abuses for its readers, the novel fools us for at least the whole middle section into imagining that it will close with Lucy and Dr. John's wedding bells. Indeed, so many of Lucy's narrative deceits involve Dr. John (most famously she refrains from telling her reader and Dr. John himself that she knows who he is), and many of her feelings in the first half of the novel—and her experiments producing feelings in others, including her readers—are worked through with Dr. John. Dr. John cares for others professionally, and yet he is distinctly ineffectual as a carer for Lucy. He has no sympathy, no ability to know how she feels or what might hurt her. He writes to her and then ignores her, lavishes her with attention when it suits him and then forgets about her when he falls in love with Paulina (after having used her previously during his infatuation with Ginevra). Oblivious to her feelings for him, oblivious to anything that doesn't relate to himself, he is a care-giver without the capacity for emotional care or support.

In particular, Dr. John lacks depth and insight, making him an inadequate care-giver to those whose wretchedness demands depth and sensitivity. He falls in love first with the shallow and beautiful Ginevra Fanshawe, and then with the simpler Paulina Home, whose surname reveals her safe distance from the uncanny. Most damning of all, he fails to read Lucy and know her feelings toward him, and this shallowness is a feature of the limits of his care. In a novel of abasement, buried letters, and workaday wretchedness, Dr. John's care is inadequate. His shallowness is in some ways most apparent when he fails to respond deeply to the performance he spontaneously takes Lucy to. Lucy watches Dr. John watching the play, recognizes keenly that his failures are in the

shallowness of his feeling, and his resultant inability to respond adequately to needs that are wild, pained, and untamed:

For what belonged to storm, what was wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming, he had no sympathy, and held with it no communion. When I took time and regained inclination to glance at him, it amused and enlightened me to discover that he was watching that sinister and sovereign Vashti, not with wonder, nor worship, nor yet dismay, but simply with intense curiosity. Her agony did not pain him, her wild moan—worse than a shriek—did not much move him; her fury revolted him somewhat, but not to the point of horror. Cool young Briton! The pale cliffs of his own England do not look down on the tides of the Channel more calmly than he watched the Pythian inspiration of that night (301).

The fire that comes next, and that leads Dr. John to Paulina, springs not from him, who is described by Lucy as “*impressionable*...as dimpling water, but almost, as water, *unimpressible*” (300, italics in the original). Dr. John’s failure is his simplicity, his blindness to the moans and shrieks that surround him, and this sets the limits of his care.

Lucy’s well-known deceit, both to Dr. John and the reader, of keeping her knowledge of his identity to herself, is just one example of her perverse enjoyment of his abuse. In the face of not being known by someone who should really have recognized her, Lucy suffered but also derived satisfaction and gratification. Rather than tell him the truth when he catches her looking at him intently, “observing the colouring of his hair, whiskers, complexion” (111), and accuses her, speaking to her for the first time, she puts her head down and resumes some work she had dropped. The pleasure of keeping herself

in an abased position to him is also tinged with the pleasure of holding power over him. He thinks she has been looking at him critically, and her silence and show of humility only serves to allow him to continue to think that if he wishes. “There is a perverse mood of the mind which is rather soothed than irritated by misconstruction; and in quarters where we can never be rightly known, we take pleasure, I think, in being consummately ignored. What honest man on casually being taken for a housebreaker, does not feel rather tickled than vexed at the mistake?” (112). Because Dr. John is not susceptible to being abused by Lucy—he couldn’t care less, really, and you have to care to be a satisfying object of someone’s abuse—Lucy turns it outward, to her reader. It’s not a coincidence that Lucy’s biggest, most notorious trick and degradation of her reader is in relation to Dr. John.

When it becomes clear, if it was ever unclear for any credulous readers, that Dr. John is not going to be the man to make Lucy an offer of marriage, the novel’s focus switches abruptly to M. Paul—indeed, the penultimate section ends with a chapter on M. Paul and the entire final section is dedicated to illuminating the progress of Lucy and M. Paul’s relationship—and his form of relating is tested, shown to be more complex than it first seemed, and ultimately turns out to be a more ideal form of relationality for Lucy. Like Madame Beck, M. Paul is an expert in espionage. His surveillance extends to a secret room rented across the alley from the school, a perfect perch from which to observe the students and teachers, especially, Lucy. Unlike Madame Beck, M. Paul’s characterization never portrays him as an independent, atomistic individual. He is needy and jealous—his moods depend entirely on his perception of the treatment and esteem he receives from others, and his surveillance is more a method for gathering as much

intelligence on how others view him as a method for controlling others in a world dependent on individualist self-protections. He seems to live entirely for the opinions of others—he knows himself only by comparing himself to others, and through the esteem of others. Early in the novel, Lucy’s opinion of him becomes one of the most important for M. Paul, and her responses to him either give him validation, or they knock him off his feet and cause him to sulk, or, more often, to rage. At first his obsessive tracking of her opinion of him seems to derive from a competitive interest and unease. He insists, to her chagrin, that she is very much like him, and this insistence seems to fuel his anxiety that he will lose his special place as the most powerful teacher in the pensionnat. As the narrative progresses, his concern with her opinion of him is more clearly the result of his growing romantic attachment to her, however conscious.

Lucy’s opinion of M. Paul becomes so important to him that her behavior has the capacity to change his humor from “a mood which made him as good as a new sunbeam to the already well-lit first classe” to, a few moments later, exhibiting “the shadow of some great paroxysm—the swell of wrath, scorn, resolve.” M. Paul has the capacity to abuse Lucy, as in the time he locks her in the roach-infested attic to learn her lines for a last-minute performance in Madame Beck’s fete day play. But sometimes his storming, influenced as it is by Lucy’s power over him, makes him vulnerable to Lucy’s abuse. Take for instance M. Paul’s fete day, when everyone brings him gifts, stacking them in a great pyramid on his desk. One by one, everyone makes their offering, including Mademoiselle Zélie St. Pierre who leaves him an extravagant “bouquet of hot-house flowers.” When he notices that Lucy hasn’t added to the growing pyramid, “five minutes might have elapsed, and the hush remained unbroken; ten—and there was no sound.”

Lucy knows why he is silent and what he is waiting for—a present from Lucy—and Lucy has brought something to give him: the watchguard that he saw her making, and which caused him to fly into a rage because he thought it was for someone else. And yet she sits on her box with the watchguard, keeping him in suspense. Finally breaking his silence, he asks several times, “Est-ce là tout?” Still, she keeps silent instead of giving him the watchguard. She knows just what will anger him and cause him to feel insecure of her approval or care, and her discovery of this power is significant for her, the withholding of gratification pleasurable. As M. Paul begins his lesson, Lucy says, “I can't at all remember what this "discours" was; I did not listen to it: the gulping-down process, the abrupt dismissal of his mortification or vexation, had given me a sensation which half-counteracted the ludicrous effect of the reiterated "Est-ce là tout?"” With M. Paul, she has the opportunity to experiment with her relationality in ways she hadn't had before. Most of her scenes of abuse involve withholding, making him wait, delaying his gratification—his body contorts and responds, while hers is immovable, controlled, and—in her more modest and stern dress—untouchable.

Madame Beck's school management is an important model for Lucy, and Madame Beck herself is an important player in Lucy's universe of powerplay and shifting hierarchies of domination. Indeed, Madame Beck functions as a nexus of many of the critical concepts here, and serves to usefully complicate discussions about ethics of care, the feelings appropriate to care, and the relationship between liberal individualism and the relational power dynamics of sadomasochism. Madame Beck is a rugged individualist who is nevertheless enmeshed in several interlocked communities, and she provides for Lucy an arena in which she thrives, largely due to Madame Beck's abuses.

Though most critical attention to *Villette* focuses on Lucy Snowe herself, there has certainly been a great deal of criticism on Madame Beck's surveillance, and surveillance in the novel in general.³⁷ I argue that this surveillance is a form of social attention, an aspect of relationality, and that Foucault's panopticon is an important site of relational attention. Though she is described in terms of archetypal liberal individualism, Lucy's narrative undermines the very concept of autonomous agency, instead showing Madame Beck to be an interdependent relational being whose disturbing relationality relies on all manner of deception and exploitation. Her relationality is, crucially, couched in the language of liberalism:

Yet, woe be to that man or woman who relied on her [Madame Beck] one inch beyond the point where it was her interest to be trustworthy: interest was the master-key of Madame's nature—the mainspring of her motives—the alpha and omega of her life. I have seen her *feelings* appealed to, and I have smiled in half-pity, half-scorn at the appellants. None ever gained her ear through that channel, or swayed her purpose by that means. On the contrary, to attempt to touch her heart was the surest way to rouse her antipathy, and to make of her a secret foe. It proved to her that she had no heart to be touched: it reminded her where she was impotent and dead. Never was the distinction between charity and mercy better exemplified than in her. While devoid of sympathy, she had a sufficiency of rational benevolence: she would give in the readiest manner to people she had

³⁷ See for example Joseph Boone's "Depolicing *Villette*: Surveillance, Invisibility, and the Female Erotics of "Heretic Narrative," *NOVEL: Vol 26, No. 1* (Autumn 1992), pp. 20-42.

never seen—rather, however, to classes than to individuals. "Pour les pauvres," she opened her purse freely—against *the poor man*, as a rule, she kept it closed. In philanthropic schemes for the benefit of society at large she took a cheerful part; no private sorrow touched her: no force or mass of suffering concentrated in one heart had power to pierce hers. Not the agony in Gethsemane, not the death on Calvary, could have wrung from her eyes one tear (83).

Madame Beck does only what is in her "interest," a central word in the discourse of individualism. If that interest aligns with yours, you're in luck. If not, then don't expect any favors. Furthermore, in the tradition of liberal individualism, she privileges the abstract over the particular. Justice relies on abstract principles: for it to work, the court of law must prevail over the suasion of particular and sympathetic parties that complicate principles.

Relatedly, her characterization as a classic liberal individual centers around her distinct absence of sympathy. Her heart is locked and immune to the influence of others. If her feelings are appealed to, she recoils. Only if a request is made known to her in rational, abstract terms can she be motivated to offer aid. She would give charity to "les pauvres," the abstract poor, but never to the individual making a specific and personal claim on her sympathy. Even with her own children, she has no feeling, only a rational desire that they be healthy, have a good education, and grow up to be functioning adults and citizens. It is in her interest that her children thrive, but she does not feel for them or display anything approaching love or even affection. This safety from feeling, and this outright unembarrassed care for self is, as Lucy observes, immensely impressive, and

represents a fitness for a greater sphere of influence—a political one, even. Lucy is only partly facetious when she claims: “That school offered her for her powers too limited a sphere; she ought to have swayed a nation: she should have been the leader of a turbulent legislative assembly... In her own single person, she could have comprised the duties of a first minister and a superintendent of police” (84). The ideal outlet for her individualism, were she not a woman, would be leadership of the foremost nation of individuals, themselves striving to achieve higher stations in life.

But the novel is more complex than that, and reveals just how reliant she actually is on others. First, and most obviously, she is reliant on her pupils and their families for sustenance. She organizes her pedagogical aims around what will please the students and the families. She relies on them and panders to them accordingly. She makes leisure a regular feature of her pupils’ days because more than anything, she needs to keep everyone happy to keep the engine of her school, and income, running smoothly. She plans her fete to engage and entertain her pupils and their families. Additionally, her surveillance, far from typifying her independence and individualism, points to how reliant she is on her teachers, and how important she feels it is to have information about them. In a world in which you need others, but in which those others might lie, cheat, or steal (in Hobbes’s brutish world), it isn’t unreasonable to feel you need to spy on them. The social contract, even as it focuses on the individualism inherent in human relations—the opacity of other people and the safety we therefore need for our persons and property—is founded on the realities of relations: deception, violence, and competition. Madame Beck’s surveillance reminds us that the social contract is an admission of our reliance on unreliable others.

She is also reliant, in more sinister ways, on a few people in particular. Madame Beck relies on her cousin and employee, M. Paul, for the important role he plays in the school, as well as for the social role he plays for her, often keeping her company in her private salon and occupying the role, it turns out, of love interest. Along with Madame Walvarens and Pere Silas, Madame Beck conspires to keep Lucy Snowe and M. Emanuel apart. Madame Walvarens and Pere Silas don't want him to marry because they don't want him to find a new outlet for his generosity, off of which they are living. Madame Beck doesn't want them to marry because she entertains thoughts of marrying M. Emanuel herself. At any event, she doesn't want him to belong to anyone other than her. Lucy, happening upon this group of co-conspirators in the park one semi-hallucinatory evening, calls them "the secret junta."

The fact that Madame Beck's relationality is disturbing and sinister shouldn't blind us to the fact of her social connectedness, her reliance on others, and her particular social contract with those in her orbit. This disturbing relationality serves Lucy, strangely enough, particularly when Madame Beck forces Lucy to, without warning, teach a class, an activity which serves to instill in Lucy a new understanding of her pleasure in abusing others and obtaining power over them. When Madame Beck invites her to teach a lesson as a substitute at the last minute, her anger, resentment, irritation, and disgust are mobilized into classroom management tools and ultimately garner respect and obedience from her students. Importantly, her pleasure in dominating never becomes domesticated or safe through her work in the classroom, and her teaching is in no way figured as therapeutic. Lucy's feelings persist, but they become productive as well as pleasurable. By tapping into the variety of roles she is becoming adept at taking on, Lucy enacts a

performance of abuse. In the moment of struggle, as Schaffer puts it, “Lucy must quickly develop a new method, and what she develops is acting. She substitutes dramatic visual tableaux of violence for words” (Lucy, 14).

Madame Beck, plotting to fire her English teacher Mr. Wilson, begins scrutinizing Lucy, first asking her whether she has teaching experience, which Lucy assures her she does not, and then watching her anyway, over the course of two weeks, while Lucy is teaching her children. Finally, Madame Beck comes abruptly to Lucy with the request that she teach one lesson, “just that the pupils might not have it to say that they had missed their English lesson” (86). Lucy describes her immediate reaction: “with my usual base habit of cowardice, I shrank into my sloth like a snail into a shell...If let to myself, I should infallibly have let this chance slip” (86). Lucy’s apathy, her preference for inaction now that she has the comfort of a secure job and a place to live, might have prevented her from taking the opportunity to take on a more challenging and fulfilling job and improving her status, both socially and economically. “I was capable of sitting twenty years teaching infants the hornbook, turning silk dresses, and making children’s frocks” (86). Madame Beck’s insistence, her aggressive and insensitive demand that Lucy drop her work and come do a “short dictation exercise” (86), changes Lucy’s life, in part because Lucy learns in this scene to perform aggression, insensitivity, and nastiness herself. She is crying on her way to the classroom, and when they’ve “reached the *carre*, a large square hall between the dwelling-house and the *pensionnat*” Madame Beck says “sternly:” “*Dites donc...vous sentez vous reellement trop faible?*” (“Tell me, you really think you are that weak?”) (87). This challenge rouses Lucy, who otherwise might have “gone back to nursery obscurity, and there, perhaps mouldered for the rest of my life; but

looking up at madame, I saw something that made me think twice ere I decided” (87). Lucy’s apathy, an affect best maintained in isolation, is challenged when she comes up against Madame Beck. Her affects don’t become more positive—she doesn’t become motivated, or excited about the prospect of educating young minds. She doesn’t develop socially productive feelings to ease her transition into teaching. On the contrary, her fear, defensiveness, anger, competitiveness, and resentment are mobilized into something useful. She doesn’t become invested in her care work, she becomes attentive to the ways she can use the power inherent in the position for her own gratification.

These negative but relational affects continue to serve Lucy when she enters the classroom full of girls not so much younger than herself, but importantly superior in class status, who are “rondes, franches, brusques, et tant soit rebelles” (straightforward, frank, brusque, and a little rebellious) and who have experience “throw[ing] over timid teachers” (88). True to form, the students attempt to sabotage her, disdaining the idea that a *bonne* will teach their class, and also simply enjoying the opportunity to cause trouble and have fun rather than work in class. Three “titled belles in the first row...opened the campaign against her...by a series of titterings and whisperings” (89) which spreads quickly into “a growing revolt of sixty against one” (90). In the face of this insolence and rebellion, Lucy is anxious, feels inferior to her position, fears her lack of French language skills, and is disgusted by these students and their behavior. But her growing pleasure in being both powerless and powerful is called upon in this scene. “All I could now do was to walk up to Blanche—Mademoiselle de Melcy, a young baronne—the eldest, tallest, handsomest, and most vicious—stand before her desk, take from under her hand her exercise-book, remount the estrade, deliberately read the composition, which I found very

stupid, and, as deliberately, and in the face of the whole school, tear the blotted page in two.”

This doesn't quite quell the rebellion, however, and a dark-eyed Catalanian is still rioting loudly in the back, so Lucy coolly surveys her body structure and facial features, thinks to herself, “I thought I might manage her,” and marches up to her with an air of casual carelessness, and then swiftly pushes her into a closet and locks the door. It turns out nobody likes this girl anyway, and the students are all thrilled to see this action taken against her. Lucy's campaign against the students is won, and it is precisely her abuse of them—through some carefully chosen proxies—that seals her victory. Madame Beck, who has characteristically been watching through a spy-hole, promotes her from nursery-governess to English teacher.

Lucy's long-felt powerlessness is turned around in this scene, as she practices the performance of power, meting out abuse instead of only receiving it. Her abuse from her care-work employer, Madame Beck, and from those she is charged to care, gives way to a charged scene with props—the workbook, the closet—flushed cheeks and beating heart, and a discovery of her own sadistic pleasure in power. While this scene might not be the sexiest—though Lucy's performative, exhibitionist tearing of the blotted page in two is quite suggestive—it sets the stage for the kinds of power play Lucy learns over the course of the novel, and suggests how deeply connected it is to her employment as a care worker.

This short episode, in which Lucy is approached by Madame Beck and then enters into a kind of battle in the classroom, is a central moment in Lucy's story. Compared to Nel Nodding's description of the centrality of education to care work, it is a shocking

account. Whereas Noddings focuses on fostering happiness in education, on responsiveness and modeling, and on holistic approaches to the student rather than on punitive measures and tests, Lucy's education-as-care is punitive, violent, and distinctly unfocused on happiness.³⁸ For the first time in her story, her ugly feelings are central to her comfort, her self-respect, and her position in society and among her peers.³⁹ The scene also highlights the usefulness of the ugly feelings of others—Madame Beck's aggressive disgust and pushy impatience are central to Lucy's decision to act and break out of her apathetic comfort as a *bonne*. Likewise, the students' disdain of Lucy's lower class position and their nastiness toward her as a substitute teacher inspires in her a corresponding nastiness. She embarrasses one of the titled belles, producing a rippling of fear, awe, and probably schadenfreude among the students, who no doubt enjoy a public shaming of the "eldest, tallest, handsomest, and most vivacious" of the school's young nobility. She ambushes another girl, whose imprisonment in a closet probably also produces a round of schadenfreude among the students—delight at the swift and harsh punishment of a racially marked girl the students all "dreaded and hated." Lucy's actions as a teacher are hardly calm, sweet, or loving. She does not possess any of the ideal educator's qualities—she would not receive any teaching awards in today's schools. And yet, it is her nastiness, anxiety, disdain, frustration, feelings of inferiority, and pent up anger that propel her to success in this classroom. By mobilizing ugly feelings among her students, capitalizing on their long-simmering, class- and race-based prejudices, Lucy

³⁸ See Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, and *Happiness and Education*.

³⁹ See Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* for the negative affects reflected in and derived from late capitalism. While it would be anachronistic to apply Ngai's arguments to the Victorian period, her book applies most directly to *Villette*, in which negative feelings get translated into action most explicitly in depictions of labor.

asserts her power, makes use of her feelings, and practices ways of tapping into the abuses that give her pleasure.

Crucially, Lucy's success, her entrance into a new and more esteemed socio-economic position, and her battling of her apathy comes not from socially or morally productive feelings like sympathy, but her ugly, antisocial feelings like resentment, anger, anxiety, and disdain. Lucy's resentment of these students, and of Madame Beck's power, is crucially not figured in this scene as *ressentiment*, a passive-aggressive and non-productive figuration of overly aggressive negative feelings, but as a resentment that has traction and aids her in her labor. The ugly feelings are not transformed into safe or domesticated feelings—they retain their dangerous, ugly edge—and the scene in the classroom is in no way figured as therapeutic. Lucy's ugly feelings persist, but they become productive.

“Rather than be a companion, I would have made shirts and starved”

Fundamentally, both sadomasochism and relationality trade on boundary-crossing, welcome and unwelcome. The blurring of personal boundaries is a risk inherent in care professions, especially when the care worker comes from outside the dependent's family, and is at once in need of boundaries and expected to be worker, friend, and quasi-family member. Lucy is keenly aware of this danger and its impact on her professional choices. Of the standard nineteenth-century employments available for single women, being a governess (a'la Jane Eyre) or a nurse (a'la Mary Garth) mixes you up in the family in ways that constrict one's independence and potentially one's sense of self, or dignity. Working in a school, even as governess to the headmistress's children, provides

more boundaries: there, her boss is another worker, drawn in many directions, and though she is notorious for surveillance, her surveillance, in its strange pleasures for Lucy and in its pervasiveness, is not as personally invasive as is, for example, Mary Garth's place with Mr. Featherstone. While there is hardly any personal time or space at a school, there is at least the freedom of not being in someone else's private home. This confusion between personal and professional is evident in Lucy's description of her first prospect of employment, with Miss Marchmont: "It seemed that a maid, or rather companion, who had waited on her for some years, was about to be married; and she, hearing of my bereaved lot, had sent for me, with the idea that I might supply this person's place" (38-9). In the off-hand remark, "or rather companion," Lucy implies that not only is there a vast difference between being a maid and being a companion, but that the difference is often elided in reality. Miss Marchmont, however, has the goodness, as an employer, to be frank about the difficulty of the life she is offering to Lucy, and Lucy, not liking the sound of the job, turns it down. Having had the opportunity to assert her rights as an applicant on the job market—to hear the job description, to meet the employer, and to accept or deny the offer—paves the way for her ultimate acceptance of the job. If she hadn't first said no and received respect and approval despite her refusal, she might not have said yes. Immediately after turning down the job and receiving a sympathetic response, Miss Marchmont undergoes "a paroxysm of pain." Lucy tends to her, and discovers that Miss Marchmont is an impressive and admirable patient. The experience of tending to her, and of seeing what kind of sufferer she is, allows for a bond to develop. "... By the time she was relieved, a sort of intimacy was already formed between us [...]. She sent for me the next day; for five or six successive days she claimed my company.

Closer acquaintance, while it developed both faults and eccentricities, opened, at the same time, a view of a character I could respect” (39-40). Once Lucy sees what kind of relationship her position in the house will entail—once she sees that it will be hard work, that she will be intensely intimate with Miss Marchmont, but that she can respect this person for whom she will serve as maid as well as companion—she can accept the position, and the relationality it occasions. She will suffer, but she will suffer for and with someone whose simultaneous suffering is compelling and suggestive of depth.

Lucy receives another job offer to be a “companion” later in the novel from Paulina Home, one she refuses. Paulina views Lucy as indispensable, latching onto her when she is present and summoning her when she is not. She suggests that Lucy leave the pensionnat and Rue Fossette to live with her and her father. Lucy reports:

Mr. Home himself offered me a handsome sum—thrice my present salary—if I would accept the office of companion to his daughter. I declined. I think I should have declined had I been poorer than I was, and with scantier fund of resource, more stunted narrowness of future prospect. I had not that vocation. I could teach; I could give lessons; but to be either a private governess or a companion was unnatural to me. Rather than fill the former post in any great house, I would deliberately have taken a housemaid's place, bought a strong pair of gloves, swept bedrooms and staircases, and cleaned stoves and locks, in peace and independence.

Rather than be a companion, I would have made shirts and starved (345).

Lucy frames the above claim as a general unwillingness and unfitness for private care work (being a governess or a companion). This is to some extent hyperbolic, an

extreme response to the particular case of being companion to Paulina. After all, she has already worked as someone's companion (Miss Marchmont's) and as someone's governess (for Madame Beck's children, before being promoted to English teacher). To say that she would rather "make shirts and starve" is then not entirely true as a general claim but this passage brings into focus many of the same concerns with caretaking that were raised when Lucy had the opportunity to work for Miss Marchmont, and that clearly depict a consistent opinion on both her fitness as an employee in various fields, and on her needs when it comes to finding work that suits her. Care work, especially in the cared-for's home, threatens to reduce freedom, complicate the boundaries between employee and employer, and, importantly, to isolate the care worker. When working for Miss Marchmont, Lucy found that these concerns were in check, and that her employer respected Lucy's need for boundaries and self-governance (which Lucy established in her original rejection of the job offer and which Miss Marchmont accepted, however provisionally) and offered companionship in turn that she enjoyed.

Paulina, a much weaker woman than Mrs. Marchmont, would not have the mental and emotional resources to give Lucy the boundaries she would need, nor is she someone who commands Lucy's respect as Mrs. Marchmont and Madame Beck both do in their different ways. Paulina follows Lucy around from room to room, literally refusing to give Lucy space. Many have remarked on Paulina's last name for the second half of the novel, "Home," suggesting not only the uncanny returns in the novel, but also underscoring the difference between Lucy and Paulina: Paulina has a home, Lucy does not; Paulina would like Lucy to join her home, Lucy knows it would never become a home. To accept Paulina's offer and live in her home would be to give herself up, and accept the needs of

a person as above her own. Paulina is not self-aware, she is needy, and she doesn't recognize, to use George Eliot's terms, that others have equivalent centers of self. She does not allow for the fact that Lucy has her own feelings and history, never probing into Lucy's life or even recognizing that there is one. Most notably, she is oblivious to the fact that both women are romantically interested in the same man. Lucy is keenly aware, of course. Some of Lucy's extreme language in the passage quoted above comes, no doubt, from this awareness. It is one thing to watch Dr. John and Paulina fall in love, and even to counsel both Dr. John and Paulina in their courtship, but it would be another thing altogether to work for her, to be her employed companion. Lucy is not willing to be a caretaker under those circumstances. She would rather buy "a strong pair of gloves, [sweep] bedrooms and staircases, and [clean] stoves and locks," and "make shirts and starve" than work for Paulina.

Lucy's response to Paulina's job offer is, in my reading, not a proof of her atomistic independence, but rather, proof of the challenge she faces integrating the desire to be independent with the reliance she has on others, for community and even emotional sustenance. When she says she would rather do all kinds of difficult forms of labor than be in Paulina's employment as companion, she is not asserting her independence from others so much as expressing an exasperating need for others, for employment and survival, as well as an emotional reliance on others through which she can thrill to the disappointments, pleasures, and pains that excite her. In ensuring boundaries and refusing certain kinds of work, Lucy is not engineering happiness or healthy sociality for herself. On the contrary, she is identifying the kinds of abuses she is interested in, and refusing the kinds that would require her to numbly serve those she doesn't respect. As Schaffer

says, “Lucy’s ‘pleasure’ derives, perversely, from controlling her own degradation” (Lucy, 22).

When Lucy is able to derive enjoyment out of the degradations of care, she thrives. But with Paulina, there is no interrelational frisson, no enjoyment in submission, and with the “poor deformed and imbecile pupil, a sort of cretin” entrusted to her during the long vacation, there is even less. The cretin does not have the powers of mind necessary to either command respect, as Mrs. Marchmont did, or provide pleasure, as abusing and being abused by Ginevra does. The cretin is just a body whose needs, including even the most private needs, must be attended to. “I did my best to feed her well and keep her warm, and she only asked for food and sunshine, or when that lacked, fire. Her weak faculties approved of inertia...it was more like being prisoned with some strange tameless animal, than associating with a human being” (180). Lucy suffers deeply in this period of care; her suffering leads to her illness, the revelation of one of her biggest narrative tricks, and her reunion with the Brettons. But it’s worth noting that in this period of near-complete isolation, during which time she is responsible for even the “personal attentions to be rendered which required the nerve of a hospital nurse” (180), Lucy does contrive a thrilling interpersonal relationship of a sort. Lucy imagines herself to be subservient to the ultimate dominator: God. “How I used to pray to Heaven for consolation and support! With what dread force the conviction would grasp me that Fate was my permanent foe, never to be conciliated. I did not, in my heart, arraign the mercy or justice of God for this; I concluded it to be a part of His great plan that some must deeply suffer while they live, and I thrilled in the certainty that of this number, I was one” (180). There’s a joy, a thrill, to this kind of self-pity, and to this kind of abasement before

a master. Lucy's relationship with God gives her what the cretin cannot: the interrelational tensions and thrills she craves and feeds on.

Lucy's employment, and her behaviors and feelings while in those difficult roles of subservience, have caused critics to read her as an individual aiming for greater isolation and as existing in a liberal world of individualism, surveillance, and personal interest and advancement. I read these feelings and behaviors differently: as a source of both pleasure and pain, and as a relational style Lucy cultivates. Amanda Anderson, in *Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (2001), writes that *Villette* "self-consciously takes up questions of detachment in its foregrounding different modes of observation, alienation, and cultivated emotional distance" (46). Crucially, though, Lucy cultivates closeness, connection, and community. If *Villette* were just a novel about alienation and cultivated distance, it would not be nearly as strange a novel as it is. It is precisely in its confusing mixture of distance and closeness, narrative clarity and obscurity, emotional intensity and vagueness that the novel achieves bizarre and appealing shape. Anderson acknowledges this. She claims that "In a sense the novel is an extended record of Lucy's refusal of the limited and sometimes even damaging forms of detachment that manifest themselves around her, even as she aims, with uneven results, to claim a detachment she can call her own" (47). But what Anderson calls "damaging forms of detachment," I call the kinds of relations that Lucy cultivates.

"I played it with relish": Sadomasochism as Performance

The care relations that Lucy relishes are ones that allow her to perform her own degradation, to control her abasement or to abase others in a controlled role play.

Throughout the novel, Lucy discovers and develops her ability to perform, and act out. While Lucy's performance in the classroom, discussed above, is one of her finest, it's not her only performance in the novel. Lucy's more straightforward acting on Madame Beck's fete day serves to underscore how broadly acting figures not just on the stage but in every day life. I have argued in this dissertation that while Mr. Knightley, in *Emma*, is often read as the very archetype of authenticity, Austen shows that he is actually always playing a role: that of the new figure of the English gentleman. In *Villette*, however, Brontë envisions a world in which it is possible to be wholly authentic, but in which authenticity means not Knightley-like good manners, but rather a lack of self-control, a nasty lack of filter, emotional frailty, and a mercurial temperament. The only person in the novel who embodies this Brontëan authenticity is M. Paul. To M. Paul, life is a drama, but he is not acting. When he asks Lucy to perform in the vaudeville, he says, "Listen! The case shall be stated, and you shall then answer me Yes or No; and according to your answer I shall ever after estimate you" (153). He is not in control of his performance of the role of drama queen.

Lucy, however, is eminently in control of her roles, and when she is asked to play the foppish lover competing with a steadfast man for the love of the coquette, played by Ginevra, she masters the role to the point where she is even able to improv, deepening the role into several performances at once. While practicing, locked in the attic and sitting atop a trunk and a box stacked high enough to keep her from the rats, cockroaches, and beetles, Lucy begins finding her way into the role. "Entering into its emptiness, frivolity, and falsehood, with a spirit inspired by scorn and impatience, I took my revenge on this 'fat', by making him as fatuitous as I possibly could" (155). She masters the role by

mobilizing her “scorn and impatience.” Once again, Lucy finds use for her anti-social feelings.

When Lucy is actually on the stage, performing in front of the whole school, the visiting parents, and the assortment of permitted “jeune hommes,” she finds even more feelings to mobilize: curiosity at Ginevra’s “acting *at* some one” (161, italics in the original), jealousy of her attentions, jealousy at the sense that she was acting *at* Dr. John, defensiveness for Dr. John at the budding realization that he is the “sincere lover” that Ginevra was acting indifference to, jealousy at the idea that Dr. John loves Ginevra, and emboldened wickedness at her ability to act the play so well that she can manipulate the character to help her uncover what Ginevra is up to. M. Paul says, between the acts, that “he knew not what possessed us” (161) but the readers can recognize this ability of Lucy’s to read a situation, see more than everyone else can see, and perform accordingly. Her insight into Ginevra’s double-meanings while acting and her reciprocal performance are just like her insight into Dr. John’s identity and her performance of silence in response, or like her insight into M. Paul’s sensitive, artless authenticity and her subsequent sadomasochistic power-playing.

What has emerged in this discussion is a response to care work that relishes the power discrepancies because they produce a frisson of abuse and pleasure. However, you’ll have noticed that these are not scenes that involve consent; M. Paul does not consent to the role he is reduced to by Lucy’s slow, drawn out, sexual withholding, as in the watchguard scene. Lucy’s students don’t consent to being made examples of, to having their articles torn, or to being locked in closets for Lucy’s excitement. So Lucy’s

access to sadism and masochism is, while deeply social and collaborative, also essentially masturbatory.

The scene of sadism or masochism is a scene by definition: it necessitates a mise-en-scene, multiple characters, often props: and it involves role play and performance. And yet, Lucy's chosen partner for sadomasochistic gratification—M. Paul—is uniquely unqualified for these scenes, in part because he is completely and utterly authentic, unable to perform a role, unable to control his angry abuses or his cowed flagellations. Lucy, on the contrary, is a masterful performer as we learn when she performs the role on Madame Beck's fete day of the foppish lover competing with a steadfast man for the love of the coquette, played by Ginevra. She masters the role to the point where she is even able to improv, deepening the role into several performances at once, and playing a sexual game with Ginevra in order to understand who her lovers are, and to perform her multiple attractions to Dr. John and Ginevra.

Brontë's final gift to her readers in her final novel is a final chapter that lends itself to endless fascination and interpretation. Many read M. Paul's death as a re-instantiation of Lucy's loneliness and isolation, as a state of affairs perhaps in some unacknowledged way preferable for her than his return would have been. With him dead at sea, she can retain her independence doubly—as mistress of her own school, and as mistress of her own self, without a husband to limit her freedom. M. Paul gave her freedom by giving her a school, but he engaged her to be his wife. With his death, critics have suggested that the novel redemptively ends with her hard-earned, long-desired freedom. It won't be a surprise that I read the ending differently. Maybe M. Paul's death is necessitated by Lucy's having outgrown him. He was an essential player in her sexual

development, but his inability to perform limits his potential for her. We can only hope that in Lucy's new school, she finds someone—another teacher, a pupil's parent, someone in Paulina and Dr. John's circle—who can match her perversions and take part in her scenes.

M. Paul's obsessive tracking of others' opinions of him, his surveillance, his desperate desire to know where he stands in others' esteem, especially Lucy's, and his symbiotic sadomasochism, whereby he is the perpetrator and recipient of pain, actually results in an ability to relate to Lucy better than anyone else has. He recognizes that she doesn't want isolation: she wants a relationship in which she is not a dependent, in which she dispenses and receives pain, and in which she recognizes the agony of life in her most precious, real relations. She desires relations in which her dependence on others is balanced against an ability to freely play out her emotional range: relations in which she can receive and dispense pain, watch and be watched, control and be controlled. If M. Paul's parting gift to Lucy is a school, we can think of this as the seed of a community as full and complex as Madame Beck's school community. What Lucy will do with this community, what range she will allow for her feelings, and what partners for experimentation she'll find, is the mystery the novel leaves us with.

FOREBODING AS CRITICAL READING PRACTICE:
 OR, READER, YOU WERE RIGHT
 ABOUT WILKIE COLLINS'S *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

"I have a bad feeling about this."
 —*Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, etc.

"Epistemology will demonstrate that we cannot know, cannot be certain of, the future; but we don't believe it. We anticipate, and so we are always wrong."
 —Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*," 322

We've seen that in Austen and Brontë's novels, authenticity and affect are performative, historical, and contextual. Further, we've seen that negative affects are not only natural responses to structurally determined expectations, but they also crucially make things happen and produce pleasure. For Austen, authenticity is seen to be performative, and inhabiting characters is pleasurable, even when it's mischievous or outright wrong. For Brontë, the problem of other minds is especially dangerous for the disenfranchised, including those employed in care relations. But as Lucy Snowe discovers, the negative feelings that emerge out of the treacherous power dynamics of care relations can be productive of pleasure and expand the boundaries of care itself. In this chapter, I turn to sensation fiction, the nineteenth-century genre most overtly concerned with questions of affect (sensations drive plots and reading experiences alike), authenticity (are characters who they say they are?), and ways of knowing (with law, intuition, and communal knowledge competing for authority). Though the affective dimensions of sensation fiction are often described in terms of anxiety, I will attend in this chapter to a feeling related to but different from anxiety: foreboding, or the feeling

you have when you're right about the dangers or disappointments at hand. My attention to foreboding importantly attends to instances when we do know others, and links that knowledge to feelings of foreboding. In so doing, foreboding reveals ways in which feelings, in relying on patterns and contextual information, participate in knowledge-making. But foreboding might do a better job at this than other feelings, like, for example, anxiety broadly understood or fear. As Martha Nussbaum argues in *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (2012), fear and anxiety are self-directed, narcissistic feelings, and rely on the relationship between external patterns (i.e., incidents of terrorism) and internally motivated precautions (i.e., fear for personal safety). Thus, those impacted by fear might potentially disregard facts such as that most incidents of terror in the United States are inflicted not by Muslim extremists but by White Christians, and might, as a result, wind up protesting against the opening of a Muslim cultural center near the World Trade Center site in New York. Foreboding, by contrast, opens up conversations about fears that are rooted in reality and thus, about what kinds of action are appropriate in relation to this knowledge-based feeling structurally organized around observed patterns. For example, it is foreboding, not anxiety, to observe that a pattern of refusals to name terrorism committed by White Americans as such will have damaging and lasting global impacts.

This chapter on sensation fiction thus turns to the genre's ur-text, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, to examine the ways that it distinguishes between foreboding and anxiety, and relates the former to discourses of authenticity and knowledge. Most critics have described this novel as a pressure cooker of anxiety, both for characters and readers. Our bodies and feelings, and those of the central characters, are continually ravaged by

anxiety-provoking twists and turns, horrors, and dangers. And yet, I argue in this chapter that it is worthwhile to consider the differences between anxiety—a generalized feeling that hovers above and exists irrespective of reality—and foreboding—a more specific feeling that rests on foretelling actual danger and holding complex patterns of behaviors against a sense of vulnerability. By differentiating between anxiety and foreboding, I show that the novel is concerned with what it means when fear is authenticated by reality, with what knowledge and authenticity have to do with feelings associated with danger, and with the degree to which feelings and thoughts are overlapped, joint processes.⁴⁰ The foreboding that courses through the novel is so well founded in fact precisely because it is not just Fosco whose inauthenticity is dangerous and disturbing, but it is also, disturbingly, Hartright. When inauthenticity is so pervasive, when it touches the obvious villain as well as the supposed hero, suspicion is the only reasonable response, and foreboding the dominant, evidence-based, useful feeling.

The Woman in White is a gripping novel in part because of all the suspicious acts and behaviors dominating the plot, including drugging, spying, confining, and falsifying. What's so gripping has been spoken of as the production of constant ripples of anxiety, dosed as on a drip to both characters in and readers of the novel. As D.A. Miller points out in "Cage Aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*" (1986), "No reader can identify with unruffled characters like Gilmore or Mrs. Michelson, even when they narrate parts of the story, because every reader is by

⁴⁰ For the relationship between knowledge and the domestication of the seemingly naturally English detective figure, see Caroline Reitz's *Detecting the Nation*. In her account, the detective's authority stems importantly from knowledge, not violence. The use of knowledge in her history informs my focus on knowledge as a component distinguishing anxiety and foreboding.

definition committed to a hermeneutic project that neither of these characters finds necessary or desirable. Instead we identify with nerve-wracked figures...” (110). The sources and implications of the anxiety have been debated hotly⁴¹, but whether anxiety is the best way to describe what’s happening has not. There is a difference between, for example, anxiety that reflects reality by showing conditions in which actual events are distorted, for good reason, beyond recognition, and anxiety that reflects reality by anticipating and diagnosing it accurately. That is not to say that anxiety that distorts reality is less *real*, it’s just that this novel registers that it’s *different*, and this novel is concerned with exact correspondence. In other words, Hartright and Marian aren’t anxious cases, they’re anxious about how corrupt things really are. They are anxious, fearful, terrorized by actual, artful corruption and manipulation. What they experience is foreboding—true anticipation of what is to come. Further, readers who rightly doubt Hartright and Marian, likewise feel foreboding, and they should.

Unlike Collins’s *Moonstone*, for example, in which there are numerous red herrings, such as Roseanna Spearman’s suspicious suicide suggestive of guilt, there are no red herrings in *The Woman in White*. Every suspicion we have turns out to be justified: Jane Catherick’s letter recommending Glyde and explaining their justification for putting her daughter in an insane asylum is just as suspicious a document as we suspected; Fosco’s power over Glyde and domination over his domesticated wife is just as sinister and bodes just as badly as we supposed; the people we supposed to be guilty

⁴¹ Rachel Ablow, in “Good Vibrations: The Sensationalization of Masculinity in *The Woman in White*” gives a useful rundown of what critics have ascribed the novel’s anxiety to: gender (Pykett, D.A. Miller, Trodd, Williams), class boundaries breaking down (Loesberg, Thomas), urbanization and depressive capitalism (Cvetkovich), sanity vs. insanity boundary instability (Kurata, Leavey, Taylor, Shuttleworth), feminization of writing and male writerly identity (Schmitt).

parties are just as guilty as we feared. All this suggests that it's not anxiety that drives readerly pleasure, but on the contrary, it's narrative confirmation. Identifying with, as Miller put it, "the nerve-wracked" also means, significantly, reaping the same pleasures upon being justified. Adjusting our terminology, therefore, from anxiety to foreboding, makes available certain discussions about the authenticity of feelings, the authentication of feelings based on their source, and the appropriateness of certain feelings to their circumstances. Reading *The Woman in White* as a story of foreboding opens up the possibility to identify circumstances when suspicious reading is justified, in both our lives and reading practices.

This pervasive suspicion is, of course, the bread and butter of our nineteenth-century critical inheritance: from the Panopticon, to the police, to the neighborly policing that obviates the need for the police, arguments about totalizing suspicion are nothing new.⁴² This is especially the case in sensation fiction. As Andrew Mangham writes in his Introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction* (2013), "There is something about the sensation novel's methodological skepticism (or, in plainer words, its unwillingness to leave anything undoubted and unquestioned) that led to a powerful ability to question fixed traditions and ideologies in complex and radical ways" (3). What I show, however, is first, that there's a difference between suspicion as a matter-of-course behavior, and suspicion when used for particular cases based on particular information and pattern-recognition. Second, suspicion in the form of foreboding can be thrilling. The feedback loop of authenticating one's foreboding is warranted and pleasurable in this novel.

⁴² See, for example, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, and D.A. Miller's *Novel and the Police*.

This novel's insistence on the justification of fear, on the actual dangers posed to bodies, and on the difference between anxiety and foreboding prompts me to rethink contemporary criticism on surface and depth reading practices. When it comes to Fosco, suspicion turns out to be just, depth turns out to be surface, and care, in particular, turns out to be as misapplied as it seems. There are scant red herrings, false assumptions, or wrong turns. When it comes to Hartright, a lack of suspicion and a trust in the power of love and sympathy are misapplied—surface reading is a mistake.⁴³ What are the critical implications of reading this novel in the terms of the surface and depth debate? What kind of society is being imagined here, and what are the implications for a readership encouraged to be suspicious, on the grounds that suspicion is always grounded? I show in this chapter that, crucially, foreboding opens up a space for actionable suspicion. However, as is the case with reading, which necessarily ends, foreboding, too, can't be an eternal condition. Precisely because foreboding involves accurately discovering, for example, danger, it necessarily can't always be useful. It is grounded on reality, and so must be continually dictated by the evidence available. Because foreboding is externally motivated, it is temporary, and different from, for example, paranoia or anxiety.

Upon reuniting with Marian and the presumed-dead Laura and hearing their stories, Hartright seeks a consultation with Mr. Kyrle to convince him of the truth of Laura's survival and to determine a strategy for demanding justice. Kyrle listens with a "calmly attentive face," and responds with a claim about English practices of credulity that bear striking resemblance to contemporary conversations about surface and depth reading practices.

⁴³ See Ablow for a challenge to the notion that Hartright's ability to identify Laura's true identity stems from sympathy and love.

Let me tell you the result of my experience on that point. When an English jury has to choose between a plain fact, *on* the surface, and a long explanation *under* the surface, it always takes the fact, in preference to the explanation. For example, if Lady Glyde (I call the lady you represent by that name for argument's sake) declares she has slept at a certain house, and it is proved that she has not slept at that house. You explain this circumstance by entering into the state of her mind, and deducing from it a metaphysical conclusion. I don't say the conclusion is wrong—I can only say that the jury will take the fact of her contradicting herself, in preference to any reason for the contradiction that you can offer... In short, there is no case, Mr. Hartright—there is really no case” (452).

Kyrle claims that surface reading just makes sense, and that the straight-forward, plain-sense Englishman will naturally tend toward a surface interpretation of events.

Hartright's challenge in this novel, and it's a steep uphill battle, is to prove to plain-dealing, surface-trusting Englishmen that in this case, the surface *is* the suspicious, that the basic facts about the case are precisely the ones that sound most outrageous and unbelievable.

Kyrle and Hartright's conversation resembles debates in contemporary critical discourse on the degree to which we should be in the practice of looking to reveal what's underneath the surface, whether suspicion is a legitimate critical posture to assume as a matter of course, and whether we are treating texts fairly. In “Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern” (2004), Bruno Latour asked: “While we spent years trying to detect the real prejudices hidden behind the appearance of

objective statements, do we now have to reveal the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the illusion of prejudices?" (227). Rita Felski, in *After Suspicion* (2009), wrote that "the animating spirit of our inquiry is the conviction that appearances deceive and that texts do not willingly surrender their secrets. Instead of being emblazoned in the words on the page, meaning lies beneath or to the side of these words, encrypted in what the literary work cannot or will not say, in its eloquent stuttering and recalcitrant silences... The hermeneutics of suspicion promotes a sensibility that prides itself on its uncompromising wariness and hypervigilance" (28-29). Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best, in their introduction to an issue of *Representations* (2009), propose to "broaden the scope of critique" by exploring the affordances of "surface reading:" "We were trained in symptomatic reading, became attached to the power it gave to the act of interpreting, and find it hard to let go of the belief that texts and their readers have an unconscious" (1). Eve Sedgwick, whose *Epistemology of the Closet* inaugurated Queer Studies and was therefore a touchstone of the kind of symptomatic or suspicious reading that Latour, Felski, Best and Marcus argued against, proved ever flexible and intellectually exploratory, introducing the idea of "reparative reading" as early as 2003. By way of opening "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You," Sedgwick describes a conversation she has with her friend, activist scholar Cindy Patton, about the history of the AIDS epidemic. Patton tells her, "Any of the early steps in its spread could have been either accidental or deliberate ... but I just have trouble getting interested in that" (123). Sedgwick sees in Patton's words a potential response to critique generally: "it suggests the possibility of unpacking, of disentangling from their impacted and overdetermined

and historical relations to each other some of the separate elements of the intellectual baggage that many of us carry around under a label such as ‘the hermeneutics of suspicion’” (124). Instead of asking “Is a particular piece of knowledge true, and how can we know?” Sedgwick suggests that we might instead ask “What does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects?” (124). Rather than fetishize knowledge itself, Sedgwick proposes that we look at how knowledge is performed, affords power, and produces effects. I propose that foreboding is, therefore, a form of reparative reading. It asks what knowledge can do, and in its pattern-seeking, it avoids the constants of paranoia or anxiety.

In this novel, and the Victorian period, there is much to be suspicious about, and indeed, sensation fiction has been a natural home for suspicious and historicist scholarship. Andrew Mangham argues that sensation fiction’s “queering of characters...exposed tensions and injustices at the heart of Victorian idealism” (3), that “the sensation format’s knack of questioning and probing beneath surfaces leads to important representations of class, race, and gender” (4), and that “the form’s obsession with masquerade and questions of identity disrupts the narrative in a way that raises questions about what is considered to be ‘normal,’ and how we recognize it” (4). Pamela K. Gilbert argues, in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* (2011), that sensation fiction, because of how deeply embedded radical revision was into its publication culture, challenges our “now traditional commitment to close reading” (3). Because the serial would often be a very different text than the three-volume edition, which might in turn be

different from the next edition, sensation fiction challenges us to read contextually and historically, a mode we should take beyond the problematic walls of the sensation genre. “Studying popular fiction, because of its focus on immediacy and the site of consumption, has highlighted a broader problem in studying Victorian literature that few scholars have carefully considered in reading Eliot or Tennyson, though they probably should: readings that hinge on particular words in a particular context are likely to be called into question once situated in the broader context of the non-linear, mutating, increasingly rhizomatic structure of Victorian literary, publishing, and consumer culture” (4).

Perhaps even more fundamentally than that, however, is the centrality of secrecy, suspicion, authenticity, and identity to the genre of sensation fiction. In *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (2003), Caroline Levine argues that nineteenth-century novels across genres—from realism to suspense and gothic plots, and from high to low—train readers to suspend judgment and remain in suspense. Sensation fiction does this especially well, she argues, using Collins’s *The Moonstone* as an example. Against D.A. Miller’s claim that, as Levine puts it, “very little is actually mysterious in the novel” (47), she shows that the scientific experiment at the heart of the novel’s resolution demands that readers and characters suspend their judgment. “The delay of the experiment compels us to admit that our beliefs—however much we are attached to them—do not necessarily correspond to the facts of the world” (50). We all have to hold our breaths and see what the experiment yields. This withholding of judgment, I argue, yields maximum pleasure in *The Woman in White* because our hypotheses are ultimately proven right.

Patrick Brantlinger has argued that “in place of the empiricist realism that strives to be objective, direct mimesis, the sensation novel seems to substitute a different measure of reality, based on primal scene psychology, that now reads objective appearances as question marks or clues to mysteries and insists that the truth has been hidden, buried, smuggled away behind appearances” (26). That is to say that whereas realism relies on access to an objectively real world, sensation fiction belies mimesis’s power by showing how much is hidden from view and unknowable. The *Woman in White* complicates this dichotomy by showing that mimesis must accommodate the conflation of the obvious and visible with the hidden and unexpected.

Turning my attention to foreboding, then, allows me to make several interventions at once: it collapses surface and depth, deals in both interiority as well as external reality, and attends to the validity of feelings precisely because they have the power to do this collapsing work, precisely because they move between surface and depth, interior and exterior. Much of affect theory has taken as a central concern what affects *do*, and what, in particular, they do politically. Ann Cvetkovich, writing about feelings in relation to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, wonders “what makes it possible for people to vote for Bush or to assent to war, and how do these political decisions operate within the context of daily lives that are pervaded by a combination of anxiety and numbness? How can we, as intellectuals and activists, acknowledge our own political disappointments and failures in a way that can be enabling? Where might hope be possible?” (1). Cvetkovich clarifies that hope is not meant to function redemptive or pastorally, but rather, “the goal is to depathologize negative feelings so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis” (2). Her book, *Depression: A Public Feeling*

(2012), maps the function and potential of depression on lived experience of contemporary political, personal, national life. Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* looks at the role of negative emotions in political disaffection, and speculates on the “politically ambiguous work” (1) of more minor feelings less associated with “the classical political passions (5). Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, in their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), write that hard as it is to pin down and define affect, it is undeniably a force, something “that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability” (1).

When I started writing this chapter, it was the summer of 2016 and Hillary Clinton’s election to the Presidency of the United States seemed imminent. I returned to the chapter for a round of edits in late-November 2016, while we are instead processing the fact of a Donald Trump Presidency. As a nation, we have been relying on affect theory more than in recent memory to make sense of what has happened. Every day, the news media and my peers alike have been asking the same questions: What does anger do that other feelings can’t, and how can we keep it going? What is the place of hope, if any? What are the differences between public and private depression? What affects are some Americans—white Americans, white female Americans—structurally enabled to inhabit, that others are foreclosed from for reasons that are directly racial, historical, and structural? Who can cry in public, who can show resentment in public, who can smile in public? What does the question, “How’re you feeling?” mean in times like these? Alongside all these questions, I’ve also been turning again, with renewed urgency, to my

distinction between anxiety and foreboding. What was the role of foreboding in these past few months running up to the election? Who had it, and what difference would it have made if more of us had had it? What action does foreboding enable that anxiety, its closest sibling, forecloses? Critical attention to foreboding seems more important than ever, as we look ahead to the known unknown of racism, misogyny, xenophobia, and to attacks on the very institutions that enable the free flow of information, information we rely on to accurately forebode. Further, when our nation's president mocks emotion as hysterical, or faked for show, it serves us to think about the forms emotion takes, to clarify the ways that emotion and knowledge work together, and make things happen.

Performances of Authenticity: Just Reading Under the Surface

In this novel of foreboding, the tension derives from the conflict between truth, critique, and investigation on the one hand, and artfulness, deceit, and performance on the other. Characters masquerade as authentic, and obtain control through that deception. Being found out, interrogated, or critiqued would reveal inauthenticity, and damage or dismantle power and control. In this strange circus act of a novel, there are two competing ringmasters, both of whom perform authenticity and obtain control from that performance: the obese light-footed man and the aspirational drawing master. Together, they control the actions and narratives of the manly woman, the identical women, and the man so full of hot air he goes up in flames. Fosco's performance is marked by a flamboyance so extreme, it appears the very stuff of authenticity. Hartright, meanwhile, plays a middle-class Knightley—upright, strong, not at all flamboyant—but unlike Knightley, his performance is not just of respectable gentleman, but also of reliable

editor, calling things as he wants them, and stitching together a narrative that has no checks or balances while masquerading as courtroom truth.⁴⁴ In addition to performing, Fosco and Hartright both direct performances: Fosco with manipulation and chemistry, Hartright with editorial control and the coaching of Laura's post-asylum and identity theft performance.

Fosco is able to control everything, even his shocking, "odious corpulence" (220). In fact, Fosco's threat derives from the control he exercises over his performance of complete authenticity, such that he passes as a unique oddball who can't help being the way he is. He charismatically presents as so "extraordinary" and with such a "marked peculiarity" (221) that it seems he couldn't possibly be purposefully performing his idiosyncrasy. He cultivates a persona, with his "cockatoo, two canary birds, and a whole family of white mice," his extravagantly chivalrous relations with his wife, and his ostentatious outfits, such as his "broad straw hat...with a violet colored ribbon round it" paired with a "blue blouse, with profuse white fancy-work over the bosom...with a broad fancy belt" over "nankeen trousers, displaying more white fancy-work over the ankles, and purple morocco slippers" (230). Unlike Knightley's performance of authenticity, where his performance becomes so tied to authenticity that the performance becomes invisible, Fosco's supposed authenticity derives from his deeply performative, glaring, strange flamboyance. Fosco is authentically a performative counterfeit.

Fosco doesn't trick Laura who dislikes him right away. She reads beneath the surface of his flamboyance, suspicious of his over-the-top chivalry, whether with herself

⁴⁴ See Rachel Ablow's "Good Vibrations: The Sensationalization of Masculinity in 'The Woman in White'" and Ayelet Ben-Yishai's chapter on *The Woman in White* in *Common Precedents: The Presentness of the Past in Victorian Law and Fiction*.

or with her husband. Fosco charms Marian against her better judgment, but the charm doesn't last long, as she learns to be suspicious, and to read into his surface. One thing Marian wonders early in the novel, for example, is how he achieved such mastery over his wife. Marian writes in her journal:

As Eleanor Fairlie (aged seven-and-thirty), she was always talking pretentious nonsense, and always worrying the unfortunate men with every small exaction which a vain and foolish woman can impose on long-suffering male humanity. As Madame Fosco (aged three-and-forty), she sits for hours together without saying a word, frozen up in the strangest manner in herself... On the few occasions when her cold blue eyes are off her work, they are generally turned on her husband, with the look of mute submissive inquiry which we are all familiar with in the eyes of a faithful dog.... How far she is really reformed or deteriorated in her secret self, is another question.... And is the magician who has wrought this wonderful transformation—the foreign husband who has tamed this once wayward Englishwoman till her own relations hardly know her again—the Count himself? This in two words: He looks like a man who could tame anything. (218-219).

Marian considers multiple interpretations here. She notes that Madame Fosco has become stupefied, and lives in fear. Perhaps this is because he is a terrifying person, nowhere near as chivalric when they are behind closed doors. Perhaps his charisma is a form of magic. Perhaps the magic is money: Fosco has inspired her to silence and collaboration by inducting her into the rites of his conspiracy to reclaim money. Or perhaps the description

of Fosco as a “magician” sarcastically refers to the magic of chemistry—this is perhaps reading too suspiciously, but perhaps Marian is speculating that Fosco controls his wife through the magic of sedatives, easy to do with the bon-bons he is forever feeding her. In any event, Fosco’s charisma and persona is compelling and dangerous precisely because of his masterful performance of authenticity.

One of Fosco’s most effective disguises is flattery: many of his tricks rely on fawning performances, often to the domestic workers he or Glyde employ. Fosco’s cook in St. John’s Wood, Hester Pinhorn, reports in her narrative, solicited by Hartright, that “he [Fosco] was not a bad master: he had a monstrous civil tongue of his own; and a jolly, easy, coaxing way with him. I liked him a deal better than my mistress” (410). Mrs. Michelson, the housekeeper at Blackwater Park, has far greater exposure and is far more effusive in her approval of his “moral character” (369). In a climactic period in the plot at Blackwater Park, after Fosco catches Laura in contact with Anne Catherick, Fanny, Laura’s maid, is abruptly fired and Laura locked in her room, Marian writes letters to the family lawyer’s partner, Mr. Kyrle, and to their uncle, Mr. Fairlie. These letters are to be brought to their recipients by the recently dismissed Fanny. As Marian slips out of the house to deliver the letters to Fanny, she checks to see where Fosco is and finds an unexpected scene. “[I] saw, to my surprise, that he [Fosco] was exhibiting the docility of the birds, in his most engagingly polite manner, to the housekeeper. He must have specially invited her to see them—for she would never have thought of going into the library of her own accord. The man’s slightest actions had a purpose of some kind at the bottom of every one of them. What could be his purpose here?” (314). In her testimony of the time of Marian’s illness and Laura’s departure from Blackwater Park, Mrs. Michelson

mentions this episode in the context of her admiration of Fosco's kindness: "He had the manners of a true nobleman—he was considerate towards every one. Even the young person (Fanny by name) who attended on Lady Glyde was not beneath his notice. When she was sent away by Sir Percival, his lordship (showing me his sweet little birds at the time) was most kindly anxious to know what had become of her, where she was to go the day she left Blackwater Park, and so on. It is in such little delicate attentions that the advantages of aristocratic birth always show themselves. I make no apology for introducing these particulars—they are brought forward in justice to his lordship, whose character, I have reason to know, is viewed rather harshly in certain quarters" (367). Fosco, of course, is pumping Mrs. Michelson for information about Fanny, sure that she will be delivering letters on behalf of Marian and Laura. His masterful performance of kindness and flattery enables his deceptions and maneuvers, and he finds easy targets in those not often flattered.

By comparison, Sir Percival Glyde is authentically a brute, able to present himself and his suit successfully by performing a Knightley-esque gentlemanliness to Marian and Laura, but underneath that single, simple layer of performance lies a fairly two-dimensional bully. While performing, he is controlled, well-mannered, and unobjectionable. Once safely married to Laura and back in Blackwater Park, he drops the no-longer-necessary act, as Marian notes: "My sole motive for distrusting his honesty, sprang from the change which I had observed in his language and his manners at Blackwater Park, a change which convinced me that he had been acting a part throughout the whole period of his probation at Limmeridge House. His elaborate delicacy; his ceremonious politeness, which harmonized so agreeably with Mr. Gilmore's old-

fashioned notions; his modesty with Laura, his candour with me, his moderation with Mr. Fairlie—all these were the artifices of a mean, cunning, and brutal man, who had dropped his disguise when his practiced duplicity had gained its end...” (255).

Sir Percival can control his character to a degree, but he does have tic, a connected series of somatic release hatches that he can't control: his nervous cough, his restless and bouncing leg, and his temper. Even when he is playing the part of humble, courteous suitor, the anxiety driving his efforts breaks through his controlled act. It comes through often, including at the moment when he expects to hear whether Laura will decline to marry him. “There was suppressed anxiety and agitation in every line of his face. The dry, sharp cough, which teases him at most times, seemed to be troubling him more incessantly than ever” (169). After hearing that she declines his offer to decline his offer, he is relieved but still unsure where he stands, and Marian observes “one of his feet, softly, quietly, incessantly beating on the carpet under the table” (169). He is able to mask his bad temper in that probationary period, but when he is safely married to his source of income, his temper is quick and lacks control. It is up to Fosco to quiet him and enable him to achieve his pecuniary goals—Fosco is a kind of prosthesis to Sir Percival, who, once he had achieved his marriage, doesn't have the control or energy to keep up his act, though there is much work still to be done. Sir Percival's acting suggests that underneath the character, there's another, true character: underneath the well-mannered gentleman is a true self: a brooding, nasty, boring man who is interesting enough to have a family scandal but not interesting enough to have more complexly layered selves. He is boringly knowable—once you peel back the single layer, his authentic self is exposed and it's pathetic and simple.

Hartright is in many ways the most complicated performer of the lot. The nature of Hartright's interest in Laura has surprisingly not been much-questioned in recent criticism, and yet even a lightly suspicious reading of the novel begs the questions: Is his ability to recognize Laura a true sign of his love, a wishful fantasy made real, a vehicle for the continuation of his aspirations, or an invention that he forcibly manifests as a reality? Is he a true middle-class gentleman with the bad luck to fall in love where he doesn't belong, and the ambition to doggedly first absent himself and then, sensing danger, serve truth and save the day? Or is he an aspirational climber, as manipulative as Fosco, though without the liveliness, flamboyance, and specialized chemical knowledge? As Rachel Ablow writes, "For the most part, they [recent critics of Collins's novel] have understood *The Woman in White* to revolve around Walter's development from a youth, nervously susceptible to the sensations of his body, into a self-disciplined and reliable adult member of society" (157). And yet, as Ablow shows, his intentions and motivations are never quite clear, nor is his veracity. While most readers believe that it is Hartright's sympathy with Laura, incubated over a long period of tested love, that enables him to recognize her, it isn't actually clear that she is Laura, and even if she is, it isn't clear that sympathy and love serve as his compass. As Ben-Yishai shows, the novel itself as written and edited by Hartright is a vast manipulation of past and present tense, designed to establish his legitimacy as landed English gentleman. He makes himself appear to have always been right, and therefore to have always been legitimate in the communal sense of having achieved "a long-awaited and well-deserved *return* to his rightful place" (148).

Hartright has a habit of deciding when he will speak for or on behalf of others, adjusting or rewriting their narratives for some conflation of his and our purposes. After

declaring to both Marian and Laura his desire to marry and protect Laura and receiving an affirmative response from both, Hartright writes, “My position is defined; my motives are acknowledged. The story of Marian and the story of Laura must come next. I shall relate both narratives, not in the words (often interrupted, often inevitably confused) of the speakers themselves, but in the words of the brief, plain, studiously simple abstract which I committed to writing for my own guidance, and for the guidance of my legal advisor. So the tangled web will be most speedily and most intelligibly unrolled” (422). Having entrusted Marian to provide her narrative in the past (whether or how it was edited we can never know) Hartright decides that at this critical juncture in the story, it would be best if he took over all narrative responsibilities.

It is no secret that Hartright stands to gain from a living Laura. After being drugged, pronounced dead, given a false identity, and made to live in an asylum for two and a half months, Laura is weak, easy prey one might say. And indeed, since Laura emerges from her ordeal with no memory of her past life, Hartright trains Laura, teaching her her lines, directing her in a performance of his dear Laura. This is perhaps an overly paranoid reading of Hartright and of *The Woman in White*, but does not the novel teach us that our feelings are best described as foreboding, not anxiety: in other words, that we’re right, and that our suspicions are not just a generalized, paranoid dread? We were right: Fosco is a dangerous creep, he is interfering with the mail, he is following and lurking, his wife is listening in, Hartright is being followed, and on and on. So who’s to say that a suspicious reading of Hartright is not in order?

Of course, questions of authenticity are not simply modes of reading character, they are also written into the very plot and control the action: this is a novel about the

actual theft of two identities, not simply the theoretical effects of the inauthenticity of self. Lady Glyde and Anne Catherick's identities are actually called into question, and the effects of this are more acute than they are for any of the men previously discussed and interrogated in terms of authenticity. The two women are manipulated and their identities are crossed and effectively erased, whether by death or by trauma. Inauthenticity is a vehicle for power, and can be wielded as a weapon, but there is such a thing as authenticity. One of the biggest threats of inauthenticity is precisely that it calls *everything* into suspicion. If Fosco can be chivalric on the surface but scheming and dangerous underneath, and worse, if Hartright can be heroic on the surface but potentially self-serving underneath, then we would be justified in thinking there is no authenticity at all. And yet, the novel leaves little room for doubt about whether Lady Glyde is indeed the destroyed woman who emerges from the asylum. Fosco's narrative confirms it, and to assume Hartright simply wrote it and entered it into the narrative record would be to question all things in an extreme skeptical mode akin to Hume's theoretical speculations about whether we should sit down with certainty that the chair beneath us will catch our weight simply because it did so last time. It is precisely this overlay between the authenticity of the men and of Anne/Laura that shows us how suspicious and just reading practice might be merged: There are some things that are just (the identity of Laura/Anne) and there are some things about which one needs to be suspicious, and about which foreboding is well-placed. Foreboding relies on knowledge. In order to be equipped with verifiable suspicions—in order to experience foreboding—one needs to be able to recognize and compare patterns, one needs to have a relationship with history, one needs to be paying attention.

Care Without an Ethics of Care

Throughout this dissertation, one of the central sites of relationality and sources of negative emotions is care precisely because of the heightened stakes, in care relations, of the unknowability of others. In *Villette*, we saw an articulation of ethics of care that not only accounted for, but encouraged the coexistence of uncaring feelings and care work. In the next chapter, we will see a character whose unwillingness to provide maternal care challenges the very creed of sympathy that many take to be the backbone of Eliot's project, but which I show to be the subject of her continually evolving skeptical critique. The provision of care begs the question of authenticity: is care given for caring reasons? If not, can the care be trusted? In this novel, hardly a scene or a plot-point goes by that doesn't revolve around care, but care in this novel is always compromised at best, dangerous at worst. Further, in *The Woman in White*, it is characters on both sides of the plot's conflict providing this damaging care. Attending to the care dynamics allows us to see how much is at stake in relation to foreboding. Talia Schaffer writes: "Ethics of care asserts that human relations should be understood as interdependent exchanges of caregiving and care-receiving, rather than the monadic persona of classic liberal thought, often equated with *Homo economicus*, the rational subject of economic theory who makes decisions to further his own interest" (160). What this novel demonstrates is that caregiving can be performed by uncaring actors, but that there's a difference between Lucy Snowe, who cares with feelings inappropriate to care, but who is not distracted by attempts to further her own interest, and the Foscos, who take on caregiving roles exclusively in order to further their own interests. The difference is not that care is

provided without feeling, or with feelings inappropriate to care; the difference is that care is provided with an underlying self-interest. When self-interest is the driving motivator of behavior, foreboding is not only possible, but necessary.

There is a second but related difference: in *The Woman in White*, care is provided in secret, small, closed off spaces with no oversight. In *Villette*, Lucy's particular, affectively complex mode of caring is neutralized in part because she is always in a community with multiple assigned care givers. It is not dangerous for her to teach or be a *bonne* even though she enjoys abusing others and being abused in part *because* of the surveillance, direct or indirect, of Madame Beck or, more broadly, of a community. So not only is a care a form of interrelatedness in *Villette*, it is also an activity necessarily done in physical proximity with other members of the care community. In *The Woman in White*, all the care dispensed is done, necessarily, to achieve the ends of the actors, in secret, in sealed off and even secret spaces.

As in the case of Lucy Snowe, circumstances have not been kind to Madame Fosco. After an opinionated youth, she marries against her family's wishes, is summarily cast off and disinherited, and spends her days "sit[ting] speechless in corners" rolling cigarettes for her husband, "clad," as Marian describes, "in quiet black or gray gowns, made high round the throat—dresses that she would have laughed at, or screamed at, as the whim of the moment inclined her, in her maiden days" (218). Unlike Lucy, she is in a position to give bad care to precisely the people she feels wronged by, and has the opportunity to right perceived wrongs through this bad care. She is not acting through an ethics of care but rather through an individualist self-interest.

Fosco, too, often puts himself in a position to provide care, but of course, this is because it gives him opportunity to, at best, monitor progress and develop plans accordingly, and at worst, dispense drugs to affect desired outcomes. He describes his relationship with Sir Percival Glyde in terms of their shared material embarrassments and needs. “The bond of friendship which united Percival and myself, was strengthened, on this occasion, by a touching similarity in the pecuniary position, on his side and mine. We both wanted money. Immense necessity! Universal want!” (614). It is precisely on the strength of his and Glyde’s interests that Fosco intervenes in the care of others, and the novel’s plot is determined by Fosco’s efforts to resolve his pecuniary position by controlling or accelerating others’ need for care. His plan, according to his confession, occurs to him at the very moment of his observing the illness and need of Anne Catherick: “The details of the grand scheme, which had suggested themselves in outline only, up to that period, occurred to me, in all their masterly combination, at the sight of the sleeping face. At the same time, my heart, always accessible to tender influences, dissolved in tears at the spectacle of suffering before me. I instantly set myself to impart relief. In other words, I provided the necessary stimulant for strengthening Anne Catherick to perform the journey to London” (617). The sight of a person in need of nursing inspires the “grand scheme” to see to his economic interests, and the emotion he trumpets at seeing her suffering is simply his requirement that she remain alive a little longer, so that she can plausibly die while being identified as Lady Glyde—something that would necessitate Lady Glyde’s being in London. The feelings others interpret as Fosco’s sincere concern and anxiety for suffering patients is, again and again, the anxiety he feels for his own scheme.

The one almost-exception is Fosco's response to Marian's suffering. The novel is pretty convincing on Fosco's feelings for Marian. As Fosco puts it, "At sixty I worshipped her with the volcanic ardor of eighteen. All the gold of my rich nature was poured hopelessly at her feet. My wife—poor angel!—my wife who adores me, got nothing but the shillings and the pennies" (615). Fosco insists that he did nothing to further Marian's illness; she became ill the night she spent out in the rain, listening to Fosco in conversation with Glyde, concocting his plot, and developed delirious fever and ultimately typhus all on her own. This is one of two things we have suspicion of Fosco for that can't ever be proved: we suspect he meddled with Marian's health, but he claims he didn't. (The other is our suspicion that he sedates his wife with medicinal bon-bons, though it is just as likely that he simply dominates her into submission, or even that no domination is needed and that she is motivated to work submissively alongside her husband in the pursuit of recovered fortune.) Our inability to know whether Fosco meddled in Marian's health, coupled with our certainty that he admires, to put it euphemistically, "the poetry of motion, as embodied in her walk" (618), leaves a little mystery here in the case of Marian and Fosco—appropriate perhaps because it is the only love match worth our attention, the only one with spark and characters vivid enough to stimulate our imaginations.

And what of Hartright's care? Does it stem from an ethics of care or is it, too, ultimately an extension of his aspirations and interests? Upon discovering Laura and Marian at Laura's supposed grave, Hartright discovers that Laura is essentially a wiped hard drive, containing nothing other than a vague sense of safety and trust around Marian and Hartright: "She, who now remembered so little of the trouble and terror of a later

time, remembered those words, and laid her poor head innocently and trustingly on the bosom of the man who had spoken them” (422). He goes on, telling us what her reduced state inspired in him:

Yes! the time had come. From thousands on thousands of miles away—through forest and wilderness, where companions stronger than I had fallen by my side, through peril of death thrice renewed, and thrice escaped, the Hand that leads men on the dark road to the future had led me to meet that time. Forlorn and disowned, sorely tried and sadly changed—her beauty faded, her mind clouded—robbed of her station in the world, of her place among living creatures—the devotion I had promised, the devotion of my whole heart and soul and strength, might be laid blamelessly now at those dear feet. In the right of her calamity, in the right of her friendlessness, she was mine at last! Mine to support, to protect, to cherish, to restore. Mine to love and honour as father and brother both. Mine to vindicate through all risks and all sacrifices—through the hopeless struggle against Rank and Power, through the long fight with armed deceit and fortified Success, through the waste of my reputation, through the loss of my friends, through the hazard of my life. (422)

Her weakness is narrated in terms of his journey, his role, and the hazards of his life. As Rachel Ablow argues, “at least part of the popularity of and relative critical respect accorded to Collins’s novel derives from the fantasy of male, middle-class identity that it offers—a fantasy that, unlike those offered in later sensation novels, revolves around the power of the middle-class man to define himself in highly profitable yet ideologically

unproblematic ways. Walter's power to improve his class position [relies on] convincing others of his sympathetic relationship with his wife" (160). In fact, Hartright's relation with his wife is far from sympathetic, and in fact significantly impedes his care for her.

One of the paradoxes of Hartright and Marian's care for Laura is that by walking on eggshells around her "weakened, shaken faculties" (443), they drive her deeper into a passive, incapacitated state. Earlier in the novel, Laura proved that she is capable of bearing up and toughening up under hardships: during the long ordeal of her engagement to Glyde, she is in many respects the stronger sister. And this is a novel that values hardy women, and has high expectations for their hardiness and capacity. Along with Fosco, we admire Marian above all else, precisely because she's mannish, a proto-James Bond with a mustache and Victorian dress. But rather than give Laura an opportunity to face her "troubled and terrible past" and potentially recover her memory, they worry about "the risk of turning her mind" upon it, and instead treat her like a child or like someone incapable of returning to her previous capacities. "We helped her mind slowly by this simple means; we took her out between us to walk, on fine days, in a quiet old City square, near at hand, where there was nothing to confuse or alarm her; we spared a few pounds from the fund at the banker's to get her wine, and the delicate strengthening food that she required; we amused her in the evenings with children's games at cards, with scrap-books full of prints which I borrowed from the engraver who employed me—by these and other trifling attentions like them, we composed her and steadied her..." (444).

One way they compose and steady her is by returning her to the practice of drawing, and later, when she is agitated because she wants to contribute to the household income, telling her that her drawings are being sold. "Marian took them from me and hid

them carefully; and I set aside a little weekly tribute from my earnings, to be offered to her as the price paid by strangers for the poor, faint, valueless sketches, of which I was the only purchaser. It was hard sometimes to maintain our innocent deception, when she proudly brought out her purse to contribute her share towards the expenses, and wondered, with serious interest, whether I or she had earned the most that week” (490). Does this overabundance of care, and the treatment of Laura like a child unlikely to fully recover, detrimentally affect her recovery? Is it a performance of adequate and good care? Or does it lull her into remaining weak and unrecovered?

To answer these questions, a study of Marian’s care is essential, as she is so often in partnership with Hartright, and in a caring relation to Laura. Both Laura and Marian do everything in their power to maintain the hierarchical dynamics of the caring relationship they are in. We first meet Marian with Hartright, and Marian apologizes for Laura’s absence: she is unwell but will greet him as soon as she’s able. Laura is often depicted as the weaker, less practical, less able of the two sisters. Marian liaises between her and Mr. Fairlie, and between her and Hartright. There is one sustained period, when Laura is steeling herself to accept Glyde’s proposal of marriage, when she is the stronger and more willful of the two sisters, and Marian doesn’t like it. Marian walks into a room and finds Laura “walking up and down in great impatience,” and writes: “There was too much color in her cheeks, too much energy in her manner, too much firmness in her voice” (164). She doesn’t like seeing Laura assert herself, or access her own powers of will, and sees this energetic flash of resolve as a danger, not only to Laura, but to her role as care giver.

When Laura returns from her honeymoon, shaken but resolved to be longsuffering and submissive, her power in relation to Marian remains in effect: she has crossed over into a realm of experience unavailable to Marian, and she is choosing not to share any of her new information with Marian. “I would tell you everything, darling, about myself [...] if my confidences could only end there. But they could not—they would lead me into confidences about my husband, too; and now I am married, I think I had better avoid them, for this sake, and for your sake, and for mine. I don’t say that they would distress you, or distress me—I wouldn’t have you think that for the world” (214). Laura is choosing to withhold information, there is a set of relations that binds her, and she tries to explain her loyalties and rationale to Marian, and in the process, emphasizes that Marian is left out of a domain of experience, and makes excuses for keeping her in the dark. Marian, as an unmarried woman, couldn’t understand, Laura suggests. And as a married woman, Laura has responsibilities toward her husband that she must uphold, even as they necessarily exclude Marian. The process of Laura’s marriage—from strength during the drawn out acceptance phase to strength upon returning from the honeymoon—demotes Marian, and obviates her caretaking responsibilities.

Luckily for Marian, whose whole existence is defined by tending to Laura, Laura is so accustomed to needing Marian that the habits of weakness and neediness remain. While Laura is giving the speech quoted above, telling Marian that she will exclude her from certain information and insinuating that she knows things Marian will never know, she is also described by Marian as “nervously buckling and unbuckling the ribbon around my waist” (214). Any person who has ever provided care for someone who eventually outgrows certain needs knows the joy of being touched, cuddled, or treated in a way that

harkens back to the period of complete dependence. Laura deepens this experience for Marian when she tells her she'll always need her. "'Oh, Marian!' she said, suddenly seating herself on a footstool at my knees, and looking up earnestly in my face, 'promise you will never marry, and leave me. It is selfish to say so, but you are much better off as a single woman—unless—unless you are very fond of your husband—but you won't be very fond of anyone but me, will you?'" (215). Laura's neediness and reliance on Marian is no doubt gratifying to Marian, especially in this phase of Laura's newfound independence. It is also, of course, selfish, as Laura herself notes, and manipulative. Care relations change over time, as the cared-for and care giver have changing needs and circumstances. But even as circumstances change for Marian and Laura, neither wants to shift with the circumstances. Both latch on to the care dynamic, and reassert it, especially when it is insecure.

It is this mutually insisted-upon, insecure attachment to their care dynamic that inspires Marian's collaboration with Hartright in treating Laura like a child. For Marian, Laura's altered state is a return to the child-like period before Laura's maturity through marriage to Glyde. Laura's will and knowledge has been obliterated, and she is again an innocent creature utterly dependent on Marian's care. Laura's insistence that Marian not marry and leave her is repeated, but this time, without the selfish manipulation. Marian prefers Laura's marriage to Hartright to her marriage to Glyde in large part because there is room for her to be completely in the know, more so than even Laura herself. It enables her to participate in a lion's share of her maintenance and care. And it is in some ways a marriage for herself, too, as she and Hartright are in a partnership dedicated to the care of their quasi-daughter.

Foreboding and Cognitive Impairment: Collapsing Surface and Depth from Both Directions

So, we've seen that foreboding is an appropriate and even productive state in this novel. We've seen that care relations can be particularly dangerous ones, and that foreboding has a special use in these contexts. We've seen that it's possible to first have the intellectual ability to accurately forebode and then sink to passive inability, as Laura becomes a blank slate, without knowledge, and reliant on others for the most basic of care. Importantly, then, surface and depth are collapsed in two radically different cases in this novel: in the case of foreboding, and in the case of what I'll call stupidity in the most neutral sense possible. In the case of foreboding, there is a truth that is met by a person intelligent enough to read patterns against historical precedent. In the case of stupidity, there is no ability to read patterns or history, and so surface and depth are the same: they are meaningless. After Laura's traumatic incarceration in the asylum reduces her to a state of cognitive impairment, there is no difference between what is on her surface and what is below it: both are equally devoid of content. Foreboding requires the accurate reading of patterns, the comparative analysis of historical precedent, and the cognitive and experimental aptitude for holding multiple possibilities in mind at once. The kind of cognitive disability Laura experiences, which entails loss of knowledge, memory, and history, makes foreboding impossible. Knowledge is the hinge here: having it in spades or not at all leads to this collapse of surface and depth, or of suspicion and just interpretation practices. This brings us back to Sedgwick's provocation that instead of pursuing the hermeneutics of suspicion ("This was a time when speculation was

ubiquitous about whether the virus had been deliberately engineered or spread, whether HIV represented a plot or experiment by the U.S. military that had gotten out of control, or perhaps was behaving exactly as it was meant to” (123)) we instead think about what knowledge *does*.

In this novel, foreboding and knowledge are in a constant feedback loop: knowledge produces foreboding, which leads to action to acquire more knowledge that can function as proof. Foreboding stems from knowledge and points toward knowledge. The knowledge discovered through the foreboding process (Fosco’s confession, the discovered copy of the marriage registry, various overheard conversations) does a lot: it enables Hartright and Laura to marry and breed an heir to Limmeridge. It also, however, causes Marian to fall ill. Foreboding leads her to spy on Fosco and Glyde, and spying leads to knowledge that affirms her suspicions. Yet, this distressing knowledge, obtained in dangerous circumstances, in rain and cold, yields grave sickness, fever, and a loss of the very control she needs most. Lack of knowledge also has a range of effects. Think of Laura, who is made simple and happy by her lack of knowledge and her lost ability to forebode. Or think of her uncle, willfully walled off from knowledge and uninterested in foreboding. Laura is taken care of, but she is also robbed of the ability to forebode, and lives at the mercy of her sister and husband, both of whom have an interest in keeping her in her near-infantile state of dependence. Foreboding is not a ticket to the ball, then: it doesn’t guarantee success. Instead, it might lead to collapse and illness. But it might also lead to something else, something better.

Foreboding and knowledge *do* a lot in this novel. But what about after the novel? Whereas characters and readers follow a near-exact path, foreboding and then

discovering knowledge in a tidy, self-congratulatory cycle, the novel ends with a choice and a divergence: the characters cease to forebode—Marian, Hartright, and Laura inhabit a picture-perfect domesticity of happiness and contentment, with everyone in the role they most wanted to assume indefinitely. But does the reader cease to forebode? This is a choice, and it's one that, because of the novel form, which both ends, and is built on invention, can't sustain foreboding: you can't be satisfied that what you forebode is accurate, and you can't forebode any longer for people who aren't people, and whose lives don't extend beyond the last page. As readers, we have to decide whether to be suspicious when we can no longer ever learn whether our suspicions are true. We can be suspicious at the end of the novel, but we can no longer forebode. Ben-Yishai argues that the reader, by the end of the novel, is worn out. "By the novel's end the reader, longing for some form of order and stability, is ready to embrace Walter's frame story of restoration, rather than look closely at its disruption. Walter's legitimation, in this explanation, can be attributed to the reader's exhaustion from sensation; at this point she is willing to accept any framework that promises continuity and respite from tribulation" (157). Maybe so for some readers, but maybe other readers, readers who have seen the relationship between surface and depth, are less sure of Walter's legitimacy. But what does this state entail?

In much the same way that Sedgwick and others warned against paranoid reading's place as a required methodology for critical practice, we can use this end-point for foreboding as a warning against *always* foreboding. Sedgwick writes: "How are we to understand paranoia in such a way as to situate it as one epistemological practice among other, alternative ones? . . . In [Melanie] Klein, I find particularly congenial her use of the

concept of *positions*—the schizoid/paranoid position, the depressive position—as opposed to, for example, normatively ordered *stages*, stable *structures*, or diagnostic *personality types*. . . . The flexible to-and-fro movement implicit in Kleinian *positions* will be useful for my discussion of paranoid and reparative critical *practices*, not as theoretical ideologies (and certainly not as stable personality types of critics), but as changing and heterogeneous relational stances” (128). Foreboding can’t be sustained indefinitely, and shouldn’t be: it is a position, a practice, and like any other, it is only temporarily useful and, further, inhabitable only according to other, shifting and relational contextual circumstances. But what foreboding offers is not to be overlooked. It enables a point of contact for affects and actions, it ties cognitive and affective processes, and it respects the historical, structural, and contextual. It also attends to the way that cultures, institutions, and affective expectations shift: as we saw with *Emma*’s Knightley, the authentic gentleman is a construction, a new breed of man for a particular moment in history. Foreboding, too, in its insistence on mapping evidence against new evidence, feeling against proof, suspicion against knowledge, is by its very nature a contextual feeling, especially useful in particular moments of history or experience. Foreboding allows us to trust our suspicions, while at the same time, seeming them as rooted in evidence and dependent on verification.

ACKNOWLEDGING OTHERS:

GEORGE ELIOT'S "EXTENSION OF OUR SYMPATHIES," REVISITED

"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, susceptible. As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature."
—Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 3.3.1.7

"One will thus never really know with whom one is dealing."
—Rousseau, *First Discourse*

"It seems somehow appropriate—whatever the scientific equivalent of poetic justice may be—that the first animal to be successfully cloned was a sheep. Sheep, after all, are not famous for their idiosyncrasy, for the uniqueness of their characters. We had assumed that sheep were virtually clones of each other, and now we have also been reminded that they are inevitably—all but two of them—genetically different."
—Adam Phillips, "Sameness is All"

So far in this dissertation, we have seen Austen's interest in the ways that authentic selves are constructed and shaped by performance and historical context; we've seen Brontë's Lucy Snowe derive deep and complex gratification from her role as unknowable cipher; and we've seen Collins explore the nature of feelings that correspond with knowledge. Throughout, I've found mainly bad or troubled relations, ones that are more complex given their foundation on the grounds of epistemological uncertainty. Focusing on the trickier, nastier byproducts of relationality, we have hardly touched that fundamental feature of epistemological discussions: sympathy. In this final chapter, we

turn finally to sympathy, and to its High Priestess: George Eliot. In so doing, however, I show that even the ur-advocate of sympathy, and especially sympathy through and in art, is in fact deeply critical of both sympathy's potential and its effects. It is no great surprise to say that Eliot is concerned with sympathy and its difficulties, or with, as George Levine puts it in "*Daniel Deronda: A New Epistemology*" (2010), "the crisis of Western epistemology" that is "the mind's incapacity to get outside itself" (52). To discover "that [another] had an equivalent center of self," as Dorothea does about Casaubon, is one of the most important discoveries an Eliot character can make across all of her novels. And yet, more often than not, it is the limitations, assumptions, and hierarchical connotations of sympathy that Eliot investigates.

These epistemological questions as they relate to discourses of sympathy take us back, once again to the moral sentimentalists. As we saw in Chapter One on Austen, for Hume, morality stems from feelings and the passions. You naturally have access to morality because you feel something -- approbation, disapprobation, pleasure, pain—which translates directly to moral response. The problem, however, is that these feelings are more active and reliable when initiated in proximity, with people you can see and know. The very problem with sympathy, the reason why he considered it insufficient to form a stable basis for ethical behavior, is the fact that our sympathy is activated more strongly and more regularly for those who are nearest to us—our family—and that it becomes weaker in concentric circles outward from there. It "gives the preference to ourselves and friends, above strangers" (3.2.2.11). As a corrective, Hume imagined a system of justice that "fix[es] on some *steady* and *general* points of view" (3.3.1.15, italics in the original) that take into account the general good of mankind. Because we are

always in flux in situation and feeling and proximities to others, we learn to adopt a general point of view according to which we correct our feelings. This privileging of feelings is central for understanding Eliot, as is the challenge of closeness and proximity. Also vital, however, is Adam Smith's insistence that we can't actually know the other's feelings or feel them ourselves: we are always ourselves, simply imagining what the other is feeling. In watching a hardened criminal hanging for a crime, we might feel shame and desolation, for example, but we can't believe that the person hanging to death is feeling shame or any of our "nice" feelings.

Just as some of the earliest and most cited theorizers of sympathy had extreme doubts about the value and uses of sympathy, so, too, did Eliot. In fact, she added to them. In addition to Hume's anxieties about sympathy's functionality for those far away, Eliot also doubts the power of sympathy for those nearby, and notes again and again in her fiction the failure of sympathy in the family context, or more broadly, in cases of familiarity. And going farther than Smith, Eliot not only contends that sympathy entails imagination and acknowledgment of otherness, she also shows that this is a project of domination, involving troubling hierarchies of knowledge and control about and over the other. In other words, if the crisis of epistemology is that we can't know the other, the emergency response, for Eliot, is not to exercise the moral muscle in the hopes of overcoming the deficiency and seeing into the hearts and minds of others, but rather to learn to trouble that very ideal. As she observes in her final novel, sympathy is not only sometimes impossible, it is also potentially dangerous, leading to inaction or domination.

Critics often see as too static what I see as a body of work that displays a mind that is constantly thinking dialectically and reassessing what it previously hypothesized

about interpersonal relations and ethical obligations. In this chapter, I trouble the idea that Eliot's thinking on sympathy is stable throughout her career. I look at the shifts in her thinking, and attend to the tension between sympathy and negative affects. Her essay on Wilhelm Riehl's ethnography of the history and class structure of his native Germany, "The Natural History of German Life," published in the *Westminster Review* on the eve of her novel-writing career, for example, is often taken as a manifesto for Eliot's lasting credo on sympathy. In this essay, Eliot makes the famous claim that "[t]he greatest claim we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies" (Essays, 110). A few lines down, in the same essay, Eliot expands on her claim that art enlarges sympathy. "Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People" (Essays, 110). In this essay, Eliot argues that through art, through novels for example, the reader will virtually experience other people and conditions, and will see and understand more of their fellow men. If depictions of peasants are reductive, as Eliot argues they are in her essay occasioned by what she argues is Riehl's non-reductive approach, and depict ruddy cheeks and simple happiness, then consumers of that art will have the wrong impression. If depictions of peasants, on the other hand, are more true to life, more sympathetic, then they will depict peasants as they really are: as moral or immoral, happy or unhappy, healthy or unhealthy as any other lot. Reading is therefore a charged moral activity: through it, one is granted more opportunities to know the other. This is, as I will show, Eliot's thinking at the time of writing *The Mill on the Floss*.

But what if in spite of every effort, one can't come to an understanding of the other? This is what Eliot takes on in *Romola*, and furthers in her later career novels. Her claims in the Riehl essay remain important to understanding the stakes for Eliot in writing fiction, but I show that the ethical problems she is concerned with, by the time she writes *Romola*, have shifted slightly. Rather than rectify the available novelistic representation of others in order to expand her readers' sympathy through increased knowledge and identification, I argue that her concern is with the impossibility of knowing the other. The ethical dilemmas that Eliot is writing against are no longer "[h]ow little the real characteristics of the working classes are known to those who are outside them..." (Essays, 108) but, rather, that the real characteristics of anyone, even the self, can remain unknown no matter how much effort one expends in trying to obtain that knowledge. In *Daniel Deronda*, these questions remain ever-present, but added to them are ethically charged questions about the very subject-position of the sympathizer. What does it mean to write about the ruddy-cheeked peasant, even if the project is meant to humanize them? How might an over-developed sympathy lead to misery or, worse, inertia and inaction? And how might a surfeit of knowledge produce bad relations? Eliot articulated some of her most known concerns about sympathy in *Middlemarch*: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity." In *Daniel Deronda*, the consequences are not just personal—overstimulation and overextension through excessive sympathy—they are political, and reflect the dangers of knowledge to interpersonal and political contexts.

In her early fiction, readers and characters alike are intended to arrive at knowledge of the other, and if they don't, they suffer morally or otherwise. *Adam Bede*, Eliot's first novel, provides near its end a confession, and therefore knowledge, of something we already knew to be true: Hetty was responsible for her baby's death. Along with Dinah, we have compassion for Hetty even in advance of her confession, but that compassion is then validated by her shattered (and shattering) narrative, delivered to Dinah in her cell. We never have to be in suspense: we know enough about Hetty to know what likely happened, and we are right. Along with Dinah, through our privileged position as readers of omniscient third person narration, we have come to know her, and so our ethical response to her is primed. We understand her, we have guesses as to what might have happened given her moral weakness and heartbreak, and we later find out we are right. Feeling deeply for and about the other to the point of intimate knowledge of that other is hard work, but it can be done, as it is by Dinah, and by us, the reader. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator encourages our sympathy by providing knowledge about all the characters and their thoughts and feelings. Tom doesn't stop to think how Maggie might feel, to disastrous effects, but if he had tried he *could* have. Further, though he doesn't make the effort with Maggie, we make the effort with him, following him to school and leaving Maggie behind for a while in order that we should know and understand him and therefore sympathize with him in spite of his failings. *Silas Marner*, which Eliot wrote while also writing *Romola*, is a very different type of novel than Eliot's others, hovering on the boundary between realism and fairy tale. Because of its allegorical nature, the novel offers more structural symbolism than depth of character (with the partial exception of Godfrey Cass who comes closest to having an inner

struggle, meager as it is). The questions the novel presents are not ones of sympathy for individuals so much as ones about why the world works the way that it does: Why is everything beautiful (Eppie coming into Silas's life) colored by a sinister backdrop (her adoption is the product of moral failings, drug addiction, and theft)? Why does tragedy follow certain people? The novel unsettles and upsets the real world in this way, asking disturbing questions not of the extent to which we can know others, but about the extent to which the world responds to us, and even the extent to which it is real. (The novel ends with the ontological rather than the epistemological: does Lantern Yard exist?) The novel leaves much unsettled, and it is perhaps this willingness to end with unresolved doubt that helps Eliot back into the writing of *Romola*, and into a novel about maintaining and even cultivating doubt. In *Romola*, there are things you can't know about other people no matter how hard you try, presenting a significant ethical dilemma. What are one's duties toward those we don't know or understand, especially when they themselves waver in their ethical behavior or elicit an urgent demand for sympathy? While it may seem perverse to skip *Middlemarch* in a chapter about Eliot, sympathy, and negative affects, moving ahead to *Daniel Deronda* allows me to think more explicitly about power and domination.

I. *The Mill on the Floss* and "the great fundamental fact of blood"

The chapter that describes Mrs. Tulliver contemplating the loss of all her household goods is titled, mockingly, "Mrs. Tulliver's Teraphim, or Household Gods." With the bailiff downstairs and the linens about to be sold, Mrs. Tulliver is reduced to a

pathetic state. At the news of their bankruptcy, her first move is to go and line up her ladles and sugar tongs, finger the monogram on her linens, and weep before her idols. She is a materialist, the narrator is telling us. She cares about her possessions more than she cares about her husband, who is lying unconscious a few rooms away. Many readers of the novel stop there, seeing this as a thoroughly derisive portrait of Mrs. Tulliver, who was previously shown obsessing over her sister Pullet's cap, fussing over her daughter's unruly hair, and vigorously but ridiculously defending her china with the "small gold sprig all over 'em" (204). The scene in which Mrs. Tulliver weeps over her household goods, or gods, is funny the way Mr. Pullet's constant sucking of candies is funny, or the way Mrs. Glegg's fusty gowns are funny. But it would be a mistake not see the extent to which we are also being invited to sympathize with Mrs. Tulliver. "To think of these cloths as I spun myself," (203) she says mournfully when her children appear at the door, and silly as it is to cry over tablecloths when her family is suddenly facing abject poverty, her response is touchingly human. For Mrs. Tulliver, her handiwork is the physical manifestation of her values and of the time she spent emotionally preparing for a new life with a virtual stranger for a husband, albeit a stranger she supposedly chose. Each one represents hours of work and reminds her of the time when, as a young woman, she imagined what her marriage and her adult life would be like. Now that imagined future has come to nothing, indeed because of that virtual stranger who became a husband. To have to give them up, especially the ones with initials or "Elizabeth Dodson," her full maiden name, inscribed on them, is devastating and humiliating, and we watch ultimately with sympathy.

This scene of sympathy is representative for the novel: even in cases where sympathy requires overcoming some preconceived notion—in this case, overcoming the sense that Mrs. Tulliver is ridiculous—it is eminently manageable. This is true for Tom Tulliver, too, who, as Karen Bourrier has argued in *The Measure of Manliness: Disability and Masculinity in the Mid-Victorian Novel* (2015), is difficult to sympathize with in part because he represents “a critique of and commentary on the Tom Brown and Tom Thurnall types of the muscular Christian and schoolboy novels of the 1850s” (79). His strength and capacity as a self-made man sets him apart from Maggie, as well as from Philip Wakem, both more closely identified with giving and receiving sympathy.⁴⁵ But, especially through free indirect discourse, the narrator extends sympathy even toward Tom, for example, in the climactic scene in the Red Deeps when Tom, having discovered the nature of Maggie and Philip’s relationship, marches Maggie into the Red Deeps to tell Philip that they can never see one another again. Tom hurls insults at both Maggie and Philip, mocking Philip’s physical disability by laughing at the very idea of his being a lover, and telling Maggie that she is a traitor to the family whose feelings for Philip are disgusting and disgraceful.

Tom has never been colder or more conceited, which is saying a lot, and the chapter ends with our sympathy squarely on Maggie’s side. Through free indirect discourse we are even in her head, with front row seats to her emotions as she rages about Tom and even confesses to herself a distressing sense of relief at her forced separation from Philip. We have never felt closer to Maggie, or sensed that she was more alone and

⁴⁵ See Forest Pyle’s “A Novel Sympathy: The Imagination of Community in George Eliot.” Pyle argues that Maggie and Tom’s irreconcilable differences are an incompatibility of genres (he is a character in an epic while she is in a romance) (16).

in need of our sympathy. And so it is especially painful and significant that the very next chapter, and the next thing to happen in the novel, though the narrator tells us that three weeks have elapsed, should be Tom's success in making enough money to pay back all the family's debts. In other words, immediately after being told that she has been dishonoring her father and is a disgrace to the family, Maggie has to watch Tom loyally serving his family, as do we.

Adding insult to injury, Mr. Tulliver, Maggie's ally and supporter within the nuclear family, speaks ill of Philip Wakem, though of course without knowing anything about Maggie's relationship with him. "Tom, my lad [...] I'll tell 'em it's you as got the best part o' the money. They'll see I'm honest at last, and ha' got an honest son. Ah! Wakem 'ud be fine and glad to have a son like mine—a fine straight fellow—I'stead o' that poor crooked creatur!" (352). After this outburst, the narrator says, "Tom never lived to taste another moment so delicious as that; and Maggie couldn't help forgetting her own grievances. Tom *was* good..." (352). It is Maggie's voice that is buried in this third person narration—it is Maggie who thinks to herself that "Tom *was* good." Maggie is feeling charitable. She has entered into his happiness and feels it with him, just as we entered into her head for a moment and felt with her that maybe Tom *is* good.

The narrator regularly puts us in this difficult position of having to sympathize with Tom. We follow him to school, not Maggie, effectively schooling *us*, the reader, into caring for Tom as well as for Maggie. We regularly witness Maggie's small delinquencies, as when she forgets to feed the rabbits who die as a result, and we sympathize with Tom's indignation. But we also understand and sympathize with Maggie's feelings. The narrator always makes sure that it's six of one, half a dozen of the

other. When she tells Tom, after the family goes bankrupt and he has to leave school to begin making money, that it's too bad she didn't learn bookkeeping because she could then have taught it to him, Tom becomes enraged. He tells Maggie: "*You teach! Yes, I daresay [...] You are always setting yourself above me and everyone else [...] You think you know better than anyone, but you're almost always wrong*" (234). Twice, in the third person narration that surrounds this dialogue, the narrator describes Tom's anger as "just": first, he is described as frowning in the way he always does when he is about to be "justifiably severe" and then again, when the outburst is over, the narrator gives background to Tom's emotional state: "Poor Tom! He had just come from being lectured and made to feel his inferiority: the reaction of his strong, self-asserting nature must take place somehow; and here was a case in which he could justly show himself dominant" (234). This repetition is confusing. Is there a shade of free indirect discourse here, or is this strictly the narrator's voice? If the former, then Tom thinks he is just in his anger but we can think, along with the narrator, that he isn't. But, if the narrator shares Tom's sense of justice, then are we supposed to condone Tom's outburst? In the famous chapter in *Adam Bede* in which Eliot gives us a gloss on her theory of realism and sympathy, she tells us that we have to learn to sympathize with even ugly or stupid people. In this novel more than in any of her previous, the characters are stupider and uglier, and her experiment in sympathetic realism is furthered. The sympathy is harder, but therefore even more essential.

Free indirect discourse, by blurring the distinction between narrator and character in a way that resembles the work of sympathy, carries us along this process quite often in this novel, but sometimes it can be very hard to know whether free indirect discourse is

being deployed, as in the case above. Free indirect discourse requires close reading to notice it happening, but even close reading will sometimes not solve the mystery of whose words are being voiced. It is this built-in instability that Eliot is drawing our attention to with her occasionally ambiguous free indirect discourse. She is reminding us of the mediation inherent in free indirect discourse, and in sympathy more generally. As a model for sympathy, free indirect discourse is an extremely subtle narrative technique. It teaches us that entering into another's thoughts might be possible—the narrator is able to do it, at least, some characters are sometimes able to do it, and as readers we are able to do it. It also teaches us that it requires close reading—carelessness and inattention will not reveal much about character and human nature in real life, either. It also teaches us that we have to be extremely careful in our thinking about sympathy. Sometimes we suppose we have entered into another's mind and know what they think, but sometimes, as in free indirect discourse, we can't tell, we might be mistaken, we might be trespassing, or we might not be able to distinguish between our mind and another's.

In spite of this challenge, sympathy in *The Mill on the Floss* is possible, even if difficult. Maggie has the capacity to be exemplary in this regard (though she more often fails). She anticipates that Tom should be told of her father's fall (both literal and symbolic) before arriving back home and asks permission to go to him at school to break the news. Philip, disabled himself, anticipates that Tom will be anxious about his recovery after an accident and, with great insight into what must be Tom's most pressing thought, asks the doctor whether he will be lame and then relays the good news to the anxious patient. But when sympathy fails, as it often does in this novel, the novel form

itself becomes a vehicle for readerly sympathy that surpasses the capacity of her characters. True to her review of Riehl, it is the role of *The Mill on the Floss* to expand the sympathies, and Eliot achieves this often through free indirect discourse.⁴⁶

Eliot uses free indirect discourse to model the sympathy that is absent in family-life, to offer her readers an alternative to kinship networks that fail and family relations that disappoint, and to let her readers connect to fictional others who are perhaps more real than those in one's actual household. And in this work, Eliot emphasizes that sympathy is most often absent or unperformed in one's closest relations and with those whom we share the most, especially one's family. Tom and Maggie have similar experiences growing up. They share the same jam-puffs, they have the same parents, they love the same river. And yet, their feelings couldn't be further from similar. Similarity is not sympathy.⁴⁷ This important lesson about sympathy is one that Eliot frames in the context of family, because family gives her the appropriate model for constructing unsympathetic similarity. The Dodsons, for example, assume that since they are all similar, they must all agree and feel the same way about things. They are described as an inflexible unit, sure of their superiority and united in their tastes early in the novel:

⁴⁶ See Raymond Williams's "The Knowable Community in George Eliot's Novels" for a critique of the sufficiency of community and sympathy through narrative. Williams interrogates the paradox between the ethical and aesthetic projects in Eliot's sympathy. In this chapter, I attend to how this shifts for Eliot, rather than viewing "Eliot's community" as static.

⁴⁷ See Audrey Jaffe's *Scenes of Sympathy* for more on the role of identification in the Victorian scene of sympathy. Jaffe argues that sympathy in the nineteenth century is a class-oriented process of reestablishing one's difference from the downtrodden, poor, or pitiable.

There were particular ways of doing everything in that family: particular ways of bleaching the linen, of making the cowslip wine, curing the hams, and keeping the bottled gooseberries; so that no daughter of that house could be indifferent to the privilege of having been born a Dodson, rather than a Gibson or a Watson. Funerals were always conducted with peculiar propriety in the Dodson family: the hat-bands were never of a blue shade, the gloves never split at the thumb, everybody was a mourner who ought to be, and there were always scarfs for the bearers. When one of the family was in trouble or sickness, all the rest went to visit the unfortunate member, usually at the same time, and did not shrink from uttering the most disagreeable truths that correct family feeling dictated; if the illness or trouble was the sufferer's own fault, it was not in the practice of the Dodson family to shrink from saying so. In short, there was in this family a peculiar tradition as to what was the right thing in household management and social demeanor, and the only bitter circumstance attending this superiority was a painful inability to approve the condiments or the conduct of families ungoverned by the Dodson tradition (43-44).

Their unity as a group, as signified above by the irony often used in narration about the Dodsons, is often less than they would like it to be. While they often bring up their cohesion and similarity, it is repeatedly in the context of a complaint about the failure of their similarity to produce the appropriate agreement on some seemingly important matter. Mrs. Glegg, the sister most dogmatically observant of the Dodson principles,

remarks, upon arriving at Mrs. Tulliver's house punctually only to discover that she is the first:

“I don't know what ails sister Pullet," she continued. "It used to be the way in our family for one to be as early as another,—I'm sure it was so in my poor father's time,—and not for one sister to sit half an hour before the others came. But if the ways o' the family are altered, it sha'n't be *my* fault; *I'll* never be the one to come into a house when all the rest are going away. I wonder *at* sister Deane,—she used to be more like me. But if you'll take my advice, Bessy, you'll put the dinner forrard a bit, sooner than put it back, because folks are late as ought to ha' known better” (54, italics in the original).

Regularly, Mrs. Glegg brings up the Dodson ways when they are not being properly observed. She is not the only one. All the sisters agree, for example, that it is a shame that the children turned out to be so unlike the Dodsons, and too much like the Tullivers. They simply cannot understand why, or accept the fact that, their similarity of experience, their shared credo, their identity as Dodsons, does not always or even usually result in fellow feeling. And in fact, the sisters, when all is said and done, do not enjoy one another's company. As Talia Schaffer writes in *Romance's Rival*, and which we can extrapolate to refer to the tensions between kinship networks and nuclear families generally: “Where other Victorian novels show cousins as people who share memories, kindnesses, and mutual respect, the world of *The Mill on the Floss* forecasts a future of independent nuclear-family financial rivals, squabbling over who begs, borrows, or owes money to whom. They are not unified but rather operate like species competing to survive... This is

a tragedy, of course, for Eliot, the great advocate of networks. [Suzanne] Graver argues that Eliot wants to remake the network through art and abstract thought; be that as it may, Eliot writes the end of a tradition in which it can be made through marriage” (194-5). It can’t be made through marriage, or, indeed, any close relations.

Despite their similarities as members of the same family, and indeed, often because of their shared upbringing, Tom is unable to understand Maggie. Throughout, Tom’s attitude toward Maggie is marked by an unwillingness to attend to her difference. He assumes she has the same values that he does, including his adherence to the family goal of wreaking revenge on the Wakems. They both love and revere their father. Why, then, doesn’t Maggie revile Philip? Tom doesn’t even bother to formulate this question, assuming that she should revile him and her failure is a failure of family feeling, and of ethics more broadly. Tom, who never thought about the family at all before his father’s fall, except to feel that “a proud sense of family respectability was part of the very air Tom had been born and brought up in” (189), thinks of himself post-fall as the family redeemer. Maggie’s multiple and contradictory needs have no reality to him—he neither attempt to know them or understand them. In their childhood, Maggie has no reality for him, except insofar as her actions might affect him. She comes into view for him mostly when she has done something wrong—eaten the bigger half of their split splice of cake, or killed his rabbit. She only exists when she acts on his world, and thus she is never considered as a separate person.

Troublingly, though he has never made an effort to know her, or see what passions motivate her, he has the capacity to be right about her, and passes a judgment on her that is true. After she has come back from her almost-elopement with Stephen, Tom says, “I

loathe your character and your conduct. You struggled with your feelings, you say. Yes! *I* have had feelings to struggle with; but I conquered them. I have had a harder life than you have had; but I have found *my* comfort in doing my duty” (485). As harsh as it is, Tom is, to right: this novel values duty and Maggie has abandoned hers. But in another sense, he is unbelievable: what feelings has he had that needed conquering? What passions does Tom have to rival Maggie’s? His struggles have included his humiliation and boredom while working in his Uncle Deane’s warehouse, and perhaps also his muted partiality for his cousin, Lucy Deane, but having followed both Maggie and Tom’s consciousness, we know that this similarity of suffering is not likeness, and that it prohibits rather than encourages sympathy.

Eliot’s ethical project to enlarge the sympathies of her readers sometimes rubs up against the aesthetic requirements of creating a novel. Troublingly, Adam Bede has to lose Hetty in order to learn about pain and experience sympathy. Hetty is sacrificed, and the reader is troubled by the exchange. Relatedly, Philip enters a “new life,” an “enlarged life,” in which he has learned to love Maggie more than he knew how to before, but the ethical process is bound up, ominously, in an aesthetic one. He writes to her, in his famous letter absolving her of guilt: “You have raised a dim unrest into a vivid consciousness. The new life I have found in caring for your joy and sorrow more than for what is directly my own, has transformed the spirit of rebellious murmuring into that willing endurance which is the birth of strong sympathy. I think nothing but such complete and intense love could have initiated me into that enlarged life which grows by appropriating the life of others; for before, I was always dragged back from it by ever-

present painful self-consciousness. I even think sometimes this gift of transferred life which has come to me in loving you, may be a new power to me” (503). As Maggie is figured as a gift to him, sympathy is bound up with appropriation. Audrey Jaffe writes in *Scenes of Sympathy* that “in Victorian fiction [sympathy] is always about the construction of social and cultural identities, about the individual’s subject relation to the group” (23). In *The Mill on the Floss*, sympathy does more to alter an individual’s sense of self than their understanding of the subject of sympathy. Philip is impacted in ways that won’t affect his relationship to Maggie. Sympathy is for him, not her, and this relates to the aesthetic nature that his sympathy takes. As was the case with Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, the project of ethical imagination is tinged complicatedly with aesthetic production.

Eliot turns from writing non-fiction to fiction in part because it is through the aesthetic project that she feels she will be most able to further the ethical one. When the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* says, “it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie,” what he (the narrator is gendered male, it seems, in this as in many Eliot novels) means is that through literature, we can come to *feel* for others that we otherwise wouldn’t be interested in even considering. Through the aesthetic work we come to know others, which is the fulfillment of the ethical work. But, though the ethical and aesthetic are ideally partners, they are often in conflict.

As Karen Bourrier has shown, Philip is an artist, as well as a sensitive, deformed outsider. Philip, like his author, is involved in his final letter in an aesthetic as well as an ethical project, and this similarity leaves Eliot with a guarded, but still optimistic sense of the power of sympathy: by writing for others and inviting their readership, some form of

sympathy is extended; on the other hand, it isn't imagined as being possible between characters. In *Mill*, reading provides complete knowledge, even though it's not available in life. Eliot's later fiction takes on this disturbing discrepancy, addressing the gap between the illusion of full knowledge that can be made possible in fiction and the various illusions about knowledge or the lack of knowledge that plagues us in life.

II. Knowledge and Acknowledgment in *Romola*: "Her soul cried out for some explanation"

If *Mill* reflects faith in sympathy but registers some doubts about its difficulty as well as its potential for appropriation and aestheticization, *Romola* reveals a deeper skepticism about the conditions necessary for sympathy, and of sympathy itself. In *Romola*, the novel that marks the middle of her career, and prepares her for her final novels, which are read as manifestos of sympathy, Eliot takes as one of her main characters a real, historical figure: Girolamo Savonarola, the fifteenth-century Florentine Dominican friar famous for his bonfires of the vanities, charismatic leadership, prophesies, and, finally, his confession, under torture, of falsehood. Despite years of poring through the archives, reading all of Savonarola's writing, sending George Henry Lewes to archives she couldn't access as a woman, returning to Italy and its libraries and monasteries, immersing herself in the culture and language, and even visiting Savonarola's cell at San

Marco, Eliot is unable to come to a conclusion about Savonarola's inner state;⁴⁸ even after hours of close reading and rereading, the reader doesn't know what to make of the conflicting relationship between prophecy and realism,⁴⁹ or between Savonarola's confession and his character as previously revealed through narrative; and the eponymous Romola herself, despite having an intimate relationship with Savonarola spanning years, does not know what to make of him. And yet, finally, Romola *does* respond to him ethically, and she does come to experience a form of sympathy. In reading his confession and witnessing his execution with her emotional and critical skills working in tandem, Romola comes to an ethical response that remains, crucially, rooted in ambiguity.

By *Romola*, then, Eliot suggests that sympathy must be rooted in ambiguity, and that it involves recognition that knowledge is inconclusive coupled with what George Levine has called, writing about *Daniel Deronda*, "disciplined intensity of feeling." Levine writes, "It is only in *Daniel Deronda* that George Eliot risks challenging the ideal of rational and detached objectivity with her deep-seated belief that knowledge is always implicated in and sustained by feeling. Objectivity for her [in *Daniel Deronda*] is possible not through elimination of the self and feeling but through a disciplined intensity of feeling" (69). While Levine sees Eliot's challenge to "rational and detached objectivity" only in *Daniel Deronda*, I find it pronounced in *Romola*, too, and see this challenge as essential to understanding Eliot's evolving views on sympathy. In *Romola*, Eliot not only critiques the ideal of dispassionate "rational and detached objectivity" on

⁴⁸ For details on George Eliot's research and preparations while writing *Romola*, see Gordon S. Haight (343–66) and Nancy Henry (129–30). For insight and background on Eliot's use of sources, see Felicia Bonaparte's *The Triptych and the Cross*.

⁴⁹ Felicia Bonaparte argues that the novel is not a work of realism but, rather, a symbolic novel (15) or, as she also argues, a poem (5).

its own without feeling, but also interrogates objectivity, calling into question her own previous thinking on sympathy as being produced in response to knowledge derived by training careful attention on an other. But rather than stopping at this skeptical impasse, Eliot hypothesizes a way through her skepticism, radically revising her earlier positions on sympathy, imagining it instead as a way of acknowledging an other rather than knowing him or her. This shift from knowledge-based to acknowledgment-based sympathy is most visible in her treatment of Savonarola.

Eliot's claims in her early Riehl essay remain important to understanding the stakes for Eliot in writing fiction, but the ethical problems she is concerned with, by the time she writes *Romola*, have shifted. Rather than rectify the available novelistic representation of others in order to expand her readers' sympathy through increased knowledge and identification, she asks questions about instances—common as they are—when it is impossible to know the other. The ethical dilemmas that Eliot is writing against are no longer “[h]ow little the real characteristics of the working classes are known to those who are outside them . . .” (260) but, rather, that the real characteristics of anyone, even the self, can remain unknown no matter how much effort one expends in trying to obtain that knowledge.

By setting the novel deep in the past, and centering it on the experiences of a real, historical, and unknowable figure, Eliot asks questions about what to do when others are ultimately unknowable—when knowledge is not enough. In the face of this chasm, Eliot suggests that sympathy is arrived at by honestly facing the limits of one's knowledge and holding that up against one's own “disciplined intensity of feeling.” In what follows, I will borrow from Stanley Cavell and call this humbled merging of feeling and knowledge

“acknowledgment.” In Cavell’s essay “Knowing and Acknowledging” (1976), he articulates a way of proceeding ethically in spite of our skeptical inheritance, arguing that acknowledgment goes beyond knowledge. Whereas knowledge suggests certainty (I know you’re in pain), acknowledgment entails a response even in the absence of certainty (I acknowledge that you’re in pain even if I can’t know it). Cavell gives the following example, using the plain language he inherits from ordinary language philosophy and that helps him overcome the logical positivism he found stifling. “From my acknowledging that I am late it follows that I know I’m late (which is what my words say); but from my knowing I am late, it does not follow that I acknowledge I’m late—otherwise human relationships would be altogether different than they are” (257). Later in the same essay, Cavell ups the ethical ante:

I might say here that the reason ‘I know you are in pain’ is not an expression of certainty is that it is a response to this exhibiting; it is an expression of *sympathy*. (‘I know what you’re going through’; ‘I’ve done all I can’; ‘The serum is being flown in by special plane.’) But why is sympathy expressed in this way? Because your suffering makes a *claim* upon me. It is not enough that I *know* (am certain) that you suffer—I must do or reveal something (whatever can be done). In a word, I must *acknowledge* it, otherwise I do not know what ‘(your or his) being in pain’ means” (263; emphasis in the original).

Cavell overcomes the impasse of skepticism by arguing that to know is not the point and so it doesn’t matter that it’s impossible. Instead, acknowledgment is the adequate and appropriate ethical response given our skeptical condition, and acknowledgment requires

that something *happen*. When the limits of knowledge are mingled with the “disciplined intensity of feeling,” a person can be said to acknowledge the other, thereby *doing* something to or for that person.⁵⁰

In the novel’s last scenes, Romola does not know what Savonarola feels, and yet she acknowledges his pain. That is all she can do given his impending execution and her inability to actually hold knowledge of his inner state. Rather than depicting what I’ll call knowledge-based sympathy, as Eliot had in her earlier novels, in *Romola*, she articulates what I call acknowledgment-based sympathy: a sympathy that recognizes the skeptical position, and that requires instead a response that derives from studied critical detachment and “disciplined intensity of feeling.” When Romola, watching Savonarola’s execution, comes to feel what he is feeling, she is displaying acknowledgment, not knowledge. This process is largely not explained by the narrator, and as readers, we are tasked with going through the process alongside her. We are asked to acknowledge that Romola’s identification is itself acknowledgment-based, which is to say that we as readers have to enter into an ethical position that necessitates our own moving forward in spite of skepticism.

For Savonarola, obligation and rebellion take religious and political form.⁵¹ Savonarola is a religious reformer with grand and controversial plans for Florence. He

⁵⁰ See Patchen Markell’s useful gloss: “What matters in our relation to another, Cavell suggests, is not knowing something special about him, or knowing him (his pain, pleasure, humanity, character, or very being) in a way that could evade doubt once and for all. What matters, instead, is *what we do* in the presence of the other, how we respond to or act in the light of what we *do* know. *That* is acknowledgement, or its failure....” (*Bound by Recognition*, italics in the original).

reports prophecies, rebels against the Pope, preaches against the humanistic leadership of the Medici family and the vulgar, materialistic excesses that their leadership promotes, and becomes ever more deeply embroiled in the political maneuvering and intrigue of the period. His charisma and persuasive rhetoric touches Romola and many Florentines deeply, but as the novel progresses, two questions emerge, both the result of an inability to know the other: First, to what extent is Savonarola's religious and political zeal honestly felt and reported, or to what extent is it trumped up for ends that, good as they might be, are corrupting? And second, to what extent is his downfall the result of his presuming to know the other—whether it be God, the Pope, the people of Florence, or the political actors of Florence, including the devious Tito—but getting it wrong? Both Romola and Savonarola are unable to determine what the appropriate ethical action is in any of their given contexts, in large part because they are unable to penetrate others' minds, others on whom they depend but whose reliability is unknowable.

This is the main question that Eliot works through in the writing of this maturing novel, which functions as a hinge between her earlier and later works: What obligations do we have to others in light of the fact that our ignorance about them can be insurmountable? While most critics writing about *Romola* focus on Tito, I will focus

⁵¹ Gender is, of course, a major factor in the potential scope of one's obligations. Romola and Tito are both the children of un-ideal fathers (or father figures), and for both, rebellion is held up as an option, but unsurprisingly only the man, not the woman, resists paternal authority. Romola and Savonarola both consider rebellion from obligation, but Romola's obligations are largely interpersonal whereas Savonarola's larger sphere of influence and therefore obligations could only be possible for a man. See Homans (189–222) for more on gender expectations and restraints in the Renaissance and Victorian periods. See David (177–96) on Romola as a female intellectual, Paxton (143–49) on Romola as a feminist heroine, Beer (123) on Eliot's female heroines as saints, and Gilbert and Gubar on Eliot's female characters, including Romola, trapped between “angelic passivity or Satanic revenge” (495).

largely on Romola's attempts to understand Savonarola in an effort to decipher Eliot's reckoning with this question and its complex set of possible answers. This is a particularly fruitful dynamic for several interrelated reasons. Savonarola is a real, historical person *and yet* (or *and so*) it is impossible to know for sure what he was thinking, what he was up to, and what to think of him, because unlike a fictional character, there are answers that go beyond the text. Understanding Savonarola, for us readers, is akin to Eliot's process of reading about Savonarola in her research, which is again akin to Romola's process of coming to know Savonarola. All of us have the same problem: we can't know, and yet we are asked to think ethically about him and determine the degree to which he is morally culpable.

The problem that both Savonarola and Romola face—of knowing “where the sacredness of obedience ended, and where the sacredness of rebellion began” (474)—is connected to the epistemological problems the novel confronts. All but Eliot's last novel are historical novels, but *Romola* is set in a much more distant (and foreign) past, and one effect of this historical distancing is that the epistemological problems are connected to historical ones. This novel compellingly presents the problem of the archive as an epistemological problem. Savonarola, a historical figure shrouded in mystery, and about whom scholars and historians have taken radically different positions, is examined by Eliot, her narrator, and her eponymous heroine, but the mystery remains: Is he the real thing, a religious and social reformer whose aims are pure and whose prophetic capacity is authentic, or is he a fraud, as hungry for power in post-Medici Florence as Romola's husband, Tito (or the articulator of his creed and minor character in the novel, Machiavelli)? Eliot's research for this book went beyond her process for any other. Lewes

wrote in a letter to John Blackwood, her publisher (though not, ultimately, for this novel), that Eliot was “buried in old quartos and vellum bound literature which I would rather *not* read; but she extracts nutriment, no doubt” (*Letters* 3: 430; quoted in Haight, 350).

Haight’s biography is full of references in this period to Eliot’s growing despair at her ability to understand Savonarola. In another letter to Blackwood, Lewes writes, “Polly is still deep in her researches. Your presence will I hope act like a stimulus to her to make her begin. At present she remains immovable in the conviction that she *can’t* write the romance because she has not knowledge enough” (*Letters* 3: 473–74; quoted in Haight, 353). Of course, Eliot *does* write the novel, but not with any conclusive knowledge about Savonarola’s inner state. Cultivating this willingness to experience uncertainty, which Eliot passes on to both Romola and her readers, is central to the novel’s aims.

This cultivation of uncertainty is related to what Amanda Anderson has argued is a dominant Victorian habit of mind. In *The Powers of Distance*, Anderson claims that Eliot’s valuing of Riehl’s “inductive method” is representative of a larger Victorian interest: “Eliot’s essay serves as an illuminating example of what I argue is a prevalent Victorian preoccupation with distinctly modern practices of detachment, a preoccupation characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty about what the significance and consequences of such practices might be” (3). She argues that writers of the period—she considers Eliot, Brontë, Dickens, Wilde, Mill, and Arnold—“explore in a sustained way what it means to cultivate a distanced relation toward one’s self, one’s community, or those objects one chooses to study or represent” (4). Anderson does not only study the habit or interest in detachment of the Victorian period, though that is certainly largely her aim, but also argues that it is an ideal, “the aspiration to a distanced view” (6). In so

doing, she addresses the provocative nature of this claim in a critical age deeply suspicious of any “claims to objectivity or reflective reason” (7), but responds, with Mill, that any responsible perspective has to be first made distant and tested.

Anderson claims that Eliot is deeply ambivalent about the importance of distance and detachment, which is in conflict with her “valuing of rootedness” (14) but which is so essential for observing and knowing others as they really are. This ambivalence directly relates to Eliot’s complicated thinking on sympathy. Anderson writes that Eliot’s “endorsement of Riehl’s procedure of pedestrian observation, coupled with her calls for disinterestedness and sympathy, is an example of what Christopher Herbert has identified as the conflicted postures of ethnographic subjectivity, which begin to appear in the nineteenth century and continue to inform the development of anthropology in the twentieth century. Such conflicted postures attempt to mediate between sympathetic immersion and detached analysis and judgment” (15). In this article, and by looking at Eliot’s working through of these questions in *Romola*, I argue that sympathy itself *becomes* an exercise in detachment: Eliot shifts from depicting sympathy as an “immersion” in an other’s experience to depicting sympathy as an activity that requires and thrives on distance.

Anderson and George Levine both train their attention on *Daniel Deronda*, arguing that it is a novel that brings into focus their various ideas about detachment and sympathy. While Anderson says that Eliot, in *Daniel Deronda*, showcases modern critical detachment, Levine argues, on the contrary, that in *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot challenges the ideal of rational detached objectivity and puts faith, instead, in feelings. In my reading of sympathy, detachment and feeling are jointly deployed in responding ethically to the

subject of sympathy. It is not a choice between detachment and immersion, but rather, the combination of detachment and “disciplined intensity of feeling,” which allows the retention of one’s difference from the other. In *Romola*, Eliot investigates this relation between critical detachment and “disciplined intensity of feeling” and finds a space for a more refined and ethical sympathy.

There have been many sensitive critics of Victorian sympathy in recent years that have examined assumptions about sympathy, such as that it is based on immersive identification, or what I’ll call knowledge-based sympathy. These critics have focused on the dangers of identification: namely that it negates the other’s reality and otherness. Rebecca N. Mitchell makes the case, in *Victorian Lessons in Empathy and Difference*, that identification is solipsistic and possessive. She argues powerfully that sympathy is possible only when isolation and difference are recognized; sympathy can grow through the maintenance, not the reduction, of alterity. Rae Greiner has argued, along similar lines, that a lack of knowledge, not omniscience, aids sympathy. She writes: “It was crucial for [Adam] Smith, and later for the realists, that sympathy not secure the sort of intimacy we now associate with empathy. . . . Sympathy as the realist novelist understood it involves a belief that our sympathy depends on an awareness that the other *is* other: not me, not my photographic image” (419). Cara Weber, in “‘The Continuity of Married Companionship’: Marriage, Sympathy, and the Self in *Middlemarch*,” shows that by *Middlemarch*, Eliot is interested in critiquing identificatory sympathy on two counts: it negates otherness and assumes static identity. I endorse this reading, but argue that this critique begins earlier.

I argue that by the time Eliot comes to write *Romola*, she has the same objections to knowledge-based sympathy that these critics have, and is thinking again about the role of distance and detachment in art and its ability to enlarge sympathy. If sympathy is not enlarged through hard-earned knowledge of the other, then how? As David Kurnick points out in “Abstraction and the Subject of Novel Reading,” *Romola* is a novel *about* reading. It is a book full of scholars and about scholarship, its protagonist is regularly pictured reading or aiding the study of others, and it is the product of Eliot’s own deep reading. By looking at how Eliot depicts Romola’s reading, and thinking about Eliot’s reading, we can get a better understanding of what Eliot thinks is left if we take knowledge of the other out of the sympathetic experience and replace it with detachment and disciplined feeling, or acknowledgment.

Caroline Levine, writing about *Romola* in *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense*, writes that the novel represents two alternative models of reading and being in the world: first, the rationalist model by which suspicions are tested against reality, and second, the prophetic model by which dreams and desires are believed to be meaningful or real. “Perhaps rather than choosing between the two—as critics in the past have done—we might imagine that George Eliot mobilizes both the rationality of the test and the nonrationality of the dream *as alternative modes of representing the world*. Indeed, I propose to read the novel as an interrogation of two conflicting ways of reading the real—one the realist experiment, the other the antirealist model of prophecy. *Romola* is a narrative that asks how and whether we might establish one as more valid than the other” (139, italics in the original). My reading runs parallel to Levine’s. I argue that Eliot is asking us to hold multiple possibilities in mind without necessarily choosing between

them: regarding the truth of prophecy, we are asked to believe *both* that Savonarola's prophecy has some element of meaningful but not religious truth, *and* that his and Fra Lucca's prophecies and dreams actually *did* have prophetic truth; regarding Savonarola's motives and truthfulness, that Savonarola truly believed he was receiving prophecy directly from God, *and* that he only hoped that his thoughts were corroborated by God; regarding his political ambitions, that Savonarola believed his religious duties were in line with his political goals *and* that there was an element of realpolitik knowingly involved. On the one hand, Savonarola represents a mythological, symbolic character with access to a higher truth in a way that draws on Feuerbach's idea, an extremely influential one for Eliot, that even without God, religious ideas are mythically and symbolically meaningful. On the other hand, Savonarola represents a gritty, disheartening realism, and his downfall is the product of a psychologically realistic egoism. This uncertainty frustrates the reader's desire for closure, and suggests instead that closure or resolution is essentially illusory. All possibilities regarding Savonarola—the reality or unreality of his prophecy, the righteousness of his intentions, and the extent of his honesty—are kept open, and we readers must allow for several, conflicting versions of Savonarola's interior states, without ever settling on a single narrative. Like Levine and Kurnick, I argue that this is as much a challenge for Romola as it is for the reader, and that this novel is as much about the interrelation of the characters as it is about the relation between the reader and the text.⁵²

⁵² Rebecca Mitchell argues, in *Victorian Lessons in Empathy and Difference*, that the lessons of alterity are posed for characters, but not for readers. Readers, she argues, have access to knowledge about the characters, and so aren't tested in the same way the characters are, or the same way that we all are in our lives. I agree, but maintain that in *Romola*, Eliot makes it impossible for even the reader to know Savonarola.

The novel's penultimate chapter (not including the "Epilogue") provides the best example of this challenge to keep multiple possibilities in suspension indefinitely. The chapter addresses Savonarola's written confession, extracted under torture, by discussing the various responses to the confession experienced or exhibited by various kinds of readers, including Romola. Her reading experience is held up against the reading experience of other reader-types, including "the more devout followers of Savonarola" (575), "Other friends of Savonarola, who were less ardent partisans" (576), and "Men of ordinary morality" (577), also described as "shrewd men" (577). All of these types are described as having distinct reading experiences and responses, all with regard to their way of relating the text to their own experience outside the text. The "shrewd men," for example, weigh their understanding of how "the seductions of a public career" (577) might have altered Savonarola over time, while the "more devout followers" attribute anything damning, anything that doesn't read like the Savonarola they hold in their minds, to "the falsifying pen of Ser Ceccone, that notary of evil repute" (575). Each succeeding reader-type responds differently and with a combination of reasoned attention to the text and preconceived opinion regarding the text and its subject. As readers of these various readers' responses, we get to experience all of them, and we see the reason (as well as the failures in reason) behind each one.

The materiality of the reading experience is central, and is insisted upon several times over the course of the chapter. The confession is described repeatedly as a printed, circulating object: "the document," "there were copies accidentally mislaid," "a second edition," "the printed document," "the printed confessions" (575–78). Romola is described as a close reader: partaking in "long meditations over that printed document,"

“read[ing] this evidence again and again” (575), and reading so carefully as to discover that “many sentences bore the stamp of bungling fabrication” but that on the other hand, “the fact that these sentences were in striking opposition, not only to the character of Savonarola, but also to the general tone of the confessions, strengthened the impression that the rest of the text represented in the main what had really fallen from his lips” (578). “One memorable passage” (578) is quoted at length and then analyzed by both Romola and the narrator. Our text document—the novel—couldn’t be more insistent: this is a written document of personal experience that, like a novel, can be read and reread, analyzed down to the level of the sentence or word, and examined for all possible meanings.

It is through Romola’s reading experience that we, as readers of the novel, experience the various readers’ experiences of the confession and the confession itself. She is described as reading the confession over and over again, comparing her memory and experience of Savonarola to his supposed words of confession. “Romola, who began to despair of ever speaking with Fra Girolamo, read this evidence again and again, desiring to judge it by some clearer light than the contradictory impressions that were taking the form of assertions in the mouths of both partisans and enemies” (575). This is near the start of the chapter, and the “contradictory impressions” are what make up the next part of the chapter, until the narrator reports, “Romola’s ears were filled in this way with the suggestions of a faith still ardent under its wounds, and the suggestions of worldly discernment, judging these things according to a very moderate standard of what is possible to human nature. She could be satisfied with neither” (577). Romola takes in all the narratives and contradictory impressions, and by holding them in her mind simultaneously, she reaches the conclusion that they are

unsatisfactory. She sees neither from the perspective of an ardent adherent nor that of a cynical bystander; instead, she attempts to articulate for herself an alternative that is true to her experience of Savonarola. Romola is enacting the sort of detachment Anderson describes: she stands apart, reads and rereads, and remains critical of the ready-made positions before her, preferring to hold them in her mind simultaneously and skeptically rather than attaching herself to one of the narratives. But this critical distance is coupled with years of feelings that stem from her deep attachment. “She brought to her long meditations over that printed document many painful observations, registered more or less consciously through the years of her discipleship, which whispered a presentiment that Savonarola’s retraction of his prophetic claims was not merely a spasmodic effort to escape from torture. But, on the other hand, her soul cried out for some explanation of his lapses which would make it still possible for her to believe that the main striving of his life had been pure and grand” (577). She brings to this moment knowledge of his past, his character, and their relationship, an understanding that this knowledge is not enough, and, crucially, her feelings. “Her soul cries out” for more information, “for some explanation,” because in spite of her “years of discipleship,” she can’t know what he was thinking, what was coerced and what was honest confession, and yet she does feel pain and a soul-crying need. So she speculates, trying out different hypotheses:

And *perhaps* this confession, even when it described a doubleness that was conscious and deliberate, really implied no more than that wavering of belief concerning his own impressions and motives which most human beings who have not a stupid inflexibility of self-confidence must be liable to under a marked change of external conditions. In a life where the experience was so tumultuously mixed as it must have been in the Prate’s,

what a *possibility* was opened for a change of self-judgment, when, instead of eyes that venerated and knees that knelt, instead of a great work on its way to accomplishment, and in its prosperity stamping the agent as a chosen instrument, there came the hooting and the spitting and the curses of the crowd; and then the hard faces of enemies made judges; and then the horrible torture, and with the torture the irrepressible cry, ‘It is true, what you would have me say: let me go: do not torture me again: yes, yes, I am guilty. O God! Thy stroke has reached me!’” (579–80; emphasis added)

I emphasize the language of hypothesis in this passage because what Romola does here and in the previous passages is extraordinary: she works through a set of possibilities that is at once based on critical distance *and* based on her heightened feelings, and remains, all the while, undecided. The arc of her long exploration of hypotheses ends with one that proposes that Savonarola is guilty of weakness, rather than craven falsehood. This hypothesis is easier, emotionally, to accept than if he had been as Machiavellian as Tito, and harder to accept than if he was simply tortured into submission. It is also more likely, given what she has the ability and access to know, and it is so vivid to Romola that she even imagines the scene and his cry. What comes next is a shift from consideration and testing to something that resembles knowledge-based sympathy. Romola seems to imagine her way into Savonarola’s experience, contradicting her earlier sense that she couldn’t know what he is thinking or feeling. “As Romola thought of the anguish that must have followed the confession . . . that anguish seemed to be pressing on her own heart and urging the slow bitter tears” (580). His anguish

becomes her anguish. Through a strangely doubled moment of free indirect discourse, we hear through her feelings what he himself is feeling: “Every vulgar self-ignorant person in Florence was glibly pronouncing on this man's demerits, while *he* was knowing a depth of sorrow which can only be known to the soul that has loved and sought the most perfect thing, and beholds itself fallen” (580, italics in the original). Her mind is shown thinking what *his* mind is thinking. Through some process of critical detachment and emotional perception, Romola has enacted at least hypothetical identification. This identification is heightened in the next chapter, when Romola hears that Savonarola retracted his confession and hopes that he will speak the truth at his execution, when he has nothing left to fear. She hopes for more evidence and for truth untarnished by his or her hopes.

The execution scene, for which she is seated beside Jacopo Nardi, the actual historian whose account of Savonarola influenced Eliot so greatly in her writing of the very novel we are reading,⁵³ points in multiple ways to the inability, even to the scene of death, to know the other or hear a true confession. The narration repeatedly focuses on the clothing of the condemned and the way in which outward signs influence interpretation. Savonarola comes out in his Dominican robe but is stripped to his undergarments, and thus appears more guilty and ruined to the onlookers who are open to seeing him as a disgraced heretic. This is the basis of Romola’s problem—that the outward and inward do not correspond—and the reason that she has come to the

⁵³ Daniel Malachuck, in “*Romola* and Victorian Liberalism,” claims that Pasqual Villari is one of three main sources that informed Eliot in her writing of *Romola* (the others being Lewes and Thomas Trollope) and that Villari was greatly influenced by Nardi himself. Importantly, each of these influences had radically different impressions of Savonarola’s honesty and intentions.

execution hoping to hear from Savonarola's own mouth his inward truth. But he doesn't speak, and counterintuitively, this prompts, for Romola, more identification: "But in the same moment expectation died, and she only saw what he was seeing—torches waving to kindle the fuel beneath his dead body, faces glaring with a yet worse light; she only heard what *he* was hearing—gross jests, taunts, curses" (584, italics in the original). At the moment she realizes that she can't know what he thinks or what his motives were, she identifies with him so strongly that she sees and hears along with him, and even imagines him, bizarrely, as already dead and yet still aware of the flames kindling for his consumption. This scene, which directly draws on Adam Smith's depiction of the brother on the rack, and on Smith's thought experiment about identification with the dead, is, crucially, identification, but it is identification *without* knowledge. Identification, in *Romola*, has shifted from something based on actual knowledge of the other, to something that happens in spite of a lack of knowledge. Indeed, it is the very fact that Romola remains "filled . . . with dismayed uncertainty" (582) that makes her identification so poignant.

So what does it mean that Eliot is exploring an identification that can happen outside of knowledge of the other, and is in fact enhanced by that lack of knowledge, and what does it mean that identification is still relied upon and held up as an appropriate ethical response in spite of this lack of knowledge? Is Romola's move toward identification in spite of knowledge condoned by the narrative? It will help to look at the relationship the novel sets up repeatedly between knowledge and feeling, and the weight it gives to feeling as a mode of or aid to knowledge. Romola's evolution over the course of the novel has prepared her for letting both feeling and knowledge come together to inform

her view of the world and of others. Early in the novel, when she is still under her father's roof, she is regularly told that she is too feminine and emotional to be a rational scholar like himself. Bardo tells Tito, a complete stranger at that point in the novel, "I constantly marvel at the capriciousness of my daughter's memory, which grasps certain objects with tenacity, and lets fall all those minutiae whereon depends accuracy . . ." (64). The novel proves Bardo doubly wrong: Romola *is* eminently reasonable, and Bardo's inability to interrogate his feelings about what duties others owe him is likely the cause of his work's ultimate failure (an especially ironic failure given its humanistic nature). The sharp distinction Bardo makes between reason and feeling is belied by Romola's more persuasive form of thinking and feeling in the novel.

Tito and Savonarola also blame Romola for letting her feelings get in the way of her reason. When Savonarola first stops Romola from running away, he tells her she is consulting her feelings rather than the actual fact of her duty. He is right, of course, that she is being guided by feeling, but he is too patriarchal and dominating in this moment to be fully persuasive, and furthermore, there is a great deal of reason behind her desire to run away. Tito *has* failed her and revealed himself to be a false person. And she *does* have intellectually driven plans for her future that can't be seen as entirely emotionally motivated, and that in fact stem from her humanistic, rational upbringing. "She did not know that any Florentine woman had ever done exactly what she was going to do: unhappy wives often took refuge with their friends, or in the cloister, she knew, but both those courses were impossible to her; she had invented a lot for herself—to go to the most learned woman in the world, Cassandra Fedele, at Venice, and ask her how an instructed woman could support herself in a lonely life there" (327). But Savonarola

condescends, commanding her to return home and not to run away (“Ask your conscience, my daughter. You have no vocation such as your brother had [to run away from familial duties]. You are a wife” [365]) and when Romola’s “mind rose in stronger rebellion with every sentence” (360) the reader not only understands but rises in rebellion along with her. The discerning reader will see that Savonarola errs, like Bardo, in his inability to appropriately bring together feeling and reason, and to note the strength of its combination when he encounters it. Tito, not to be left out of the male chorus of scolds, rarely speaks openly enough to Romola to actually articulate his condescension, but on those rare occasions when he does, he chides Romola for being too swayed by feeling to understand the reasons behind his actions. “My Romola,” he says, oozing contempt, “You are so constituted as to have certain strong impressions inaccessible to reason” (418).

While these male authority figures repeatedly make claims of this kind, casting aside the value and use of feelings, they are full of feelings themselves. Bardo and Tito share a propensity for self-love and a quickness to feel wronged and blame others. In other words, they have feelings, just not ones that tend outward to others. Savonarola, by contrast, has an excess of feelings, but is unwilling to consider them as meriting attention in others. When he intercepts Romola’s attempt to run away from Florence and Tito, he claims to know enough about her situation to be able to judge it, not only disregarding her feelings but “car[ing] for her apart from any personal feelings” (361). “I know enough, my daughter: my mind has been so far illuminated concerning you, that I know enough.” “Whereas Romola’s mind was still torn by conflict,” (366) Savonarola is assured and decisive—the difference between them is that Romola attends to both her

feelings and her understanding, while Savonarola is too assured of what he claims to know.

In another scene, after returning to Florence and struggling to understand how to feel about her uncle and Tito's involvement in Florentine politics, the narrator describes Romola as engaged in "thought" as regularly as she is described as "feeling" (449), and then says, "After all has been said that can be said about the widening influence of ideas, it remains true that they would hardly be such strong agents unless they were taken in a solvent of feeling" (449–50).⁵⁴ Knowledge and feeling are linked in this novel—knowledge works best when mingled with feeling, or even when discovered through feeling.⁵⁵

John Cross wrote that George Eliot, speaking of *Romola*, "told me she could put her finger on it as marking a well-defined transition in her life." She told him: "I began [*Romola*] a young woman—I finished it an old woman" (Cross 2: 255). In the writing of *Romola*, the questions Eliot asks about sympathy shift from what they were in her previous novels. Rather than asking, "What should we do to better understand and identify with the other?" she asks a harder, more cynical question: "Given that we can't know the other, how should we proceed?" In *Romola*, sympathy is no longer explored as a process of identification derived from knowledge of the other. Instead, it requires a

⁵⁴ Bonaparte's argument that the novel is best read as a symbolic poem is based, in part, on her use of Eliot's claim, in "Notes on Form in Art," that poetry "begins when passion weds thought by finding expression in an image" (4).

⁵⁵ Isobel Armstrong credits Eliot's depiction of the primacy and complexity of emotions to her deep engagement with Spinoza, while Hina Nazar credits Eliot's depiction of sympathy as a combination of feeling and insight, emotion and reason with her deep engagement with Feuerbach.

“disciplined intensity of feeling,” a willingness to acknowledge what one doesn’t or can’t ever know, and a commitment to respond ethically in spite of that skeptical impasse.

III. “I was living myriad lives in one:” *Daniel Deronda* and the Dangers of Sympathy

In *Mill* sympathy is shown to be possible for readers who have the capacity for complete knowledge, but is shown to be unlikely between characters, especially characters who theoretically should be more able to identify. Likeness does not lead to sympathy, we found, but the full knowledge of readership does. In *Romola*, not even the reader was treated to anything approaching full knowledge, and so the challenge of sympathy became figured within the context of acknowledgment: in spite of or perhaps even because of the inability to know anything for certain, we respond. In *Daniel Deronda*, these ideas become even more complex, as Eliot returns to a knowledge-based, identificatory sympathy that has damaging impacts on the performer and subject of sympathy.

Sympathy, Eliot posits, is a problem of endless alternatives. The novel opens with an epigraph of Eliot's own writing on the essentially imaginary, creative nature of the concept of a beginning. The number one is a useful concept, she writes, but is also essentially meaningless. “Science” doesn’t have a beginning. At least “[Science's] less accurate grandmother Poetry has always been understood to start in the middle.” Before the start of any story, number, or claim, there are an infinitesimal number of things that could, and do, contribute to that whole. This radical inclusiveness, however, is staggering and suspending: if there’s no beginning, how can anyone ever begin anything? This is

the problem that Daniel Deronda faces. There are too many factors for Daniel, too many potential directions and possibilities. His diffuse sympathy is too diffuse. He is too open, too willing to be swayed, too interested in everything, and too unable to settle on anything. There is, problematically for Eliot, no authentic Daniel.

Andrew Miller has written about the Victorian obsession with and fear of weakness of will, a condition often associated with too much sympathy, too strong a capacity to consider and take on other perspectives. Although Victorians idealized sympathy and its moral function, they were also terrified that understanding an alternative perspective, though ethically useful, might be destructive of one's sense of self and of one's vigor.⁵⁶ Miller quotes Henry Sidgwick⁵⁷, writing in 1869: “We are growing year by year more introspective and self-conscious: the current philosophy leads us to a close, patient, and impartial observation and analysis of our mental processes... We see that there are many sides to many questions: the opinions we hold we hold if not more loosely, at least more at arm’s length: we can imagine how they appear to others, and can conceive ourselves not holding them. We are losing faith and confidence: if we are not failing in hope, our hopes at least are becoming more indefinite; and we are gaining in impartiality and comprehensiveness of sympathy” (Sidgwick, “Poems and Prose,” 363-364, qtd in Miller, 57). Miller continues that while “the Victorian discourse about sympathy was famously idealizing, seeing it indeed as the spring of moral behavior—as in Eliot’s early and now famous remarks about that greatest benefit we owe to the artist,

⁵⁶ See also Neil Hertz’s *George Eliot’s Pulse*. In “Recognizing Casaubon,” Hertz argues that Eliot’s writing is consumed with anxiety about the egotism inherent in writing: “Writing, like the self-doubling of narcissism, is disturbing not simply because it may seem ‘self-centered,’ but because it is both that and self-dispersing at once” (25).

⁵⁷ Andrew Miller notes, amusingly and importantly, that Sidgwick was Eliot’s “friend and tennis partner” (69).

whether painter, poet, or novelist.... But writers soon came to realize that, in enlarging moral reflection, this wide-ranging, cosmopolitan form of sympathy could hamstring the very impulses it was to motivate” (60). Miller shows that alongside the idealization of sympathy existed an equivalent fear about its potential for diminishing “vigor.”

“Sidgwick perceives that the very mechanism designed to launch moral reflection can disable its motivations. And, in the next decade, John Morley would speak of an ‘elegant Pyrrhonism,’ a ‘light-hearted neutrality’ according to which people ‘look on collections of mutually hostile opinions with the same kind of curiosity which they bestow on a collection of mutually hostile beasts in a menagerie’ dead to the ‘duty of conclusiveness’ (Morley, *On Compromise*, 130, qtd in Miller, 60).

It is not news to argue that Daniel is too interested in everyone and everything, that his sympathy is too diffuse, and that he is weak-willed in just the way Victorians were afraid of. He refuses to settle on an imaginary beginning and work forward from there. A classic moment that showcases Daniel's too diffuse sympathy is the scene in which he floats on the river “using his oars little, satisfied to go with the tide and be taken back by it” (188). Eliot's novels are full of river scenes, and of people either drowning in them or failing to drown in them, of people floating aimlessly down them or moving purposefully along their currents. Here is another version of that theme, and this time it is to show how Daniel just lets the world carry him, never taking an active role, never exerting his will. Daniel is aware of his aimlessness, and is aware of Sir Hugo's frustration with it, and the chapter opens with a description of Daniel's continued state of aimlessness.

On a fine evening near the end of July, Deronda was rowing himself on the Thames. It was already a year or more since he had come back to England, with the understanding that his education was finished, and that he was somehow to take his place in English society; but though in deference to Sir Hugo's wish, and to fence off idleness, he had begun to read law, this apparent decision had been without other result than to deepen the roots of indecision....He had a boat of his own at Putney and whenever Sir Hugo did not want him, it was his chief holiday to row past sunset and come in again with the stars. Not that he was in a sentimental stage; but he was in another sort of contemplative mood perhaps more common in the young men of our day—that of questioning whether it were worth while to take part in the battle of the world: I mean, of course, the young men in whom the unproductive labour of questioning is sustained by three or five percent on capital which somebody else has battled for (185).

It's been more than a year that Daniel has been floating along in this aimless way through life. He can't settle on anything except to settle that he definitely can't settle on anything. He is one of those modern young men, and it is important to note that this is the only novel Eliot wrote set in the present rather than in the recent or distant past, who is unable to “take part in the battle of the world.” He is too understanding of all people and ideas, a position idealized in the discourse of the ethics of perspectival sympathy but dangerous even on ethical grounds in that it precludes one from making decisions about right and wrong. If your sympathy is too diffuse, as Daniel's is, might one come to sympathize with

people like Tom Tulliver, as we did in *Mill*, or with a murderer, as we do with Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*. Sympathy can take one out of one's culture in that it can preclude action and participation. Sympathy can take one out of one's culture, too, in that it can lead to sympathy with any and all people and positions. But in order to be of the world and act in it, "men need the make-believe of a beginning." Daniel is good at a fully sympathetic, perspective-less existence, but he cannot settle on a place to begin. Floating along aimlessly on the river, he is in his element.

He chose a spot in the bend of the river just opposite Kew Gardens, where he had a great breadth of water before him reflecting the glory of the sky, while he himself was in shadow. He lay with his hands behind his head propped on a level with the boat's edge, so that he could see all around him, but could not be seen by any one at a few yards' distance; and for a long while he never turned his eyes from the view right in front of him. He was forgetting everything else in a half-speculative, half-involuntary identification of himself with the objects he was looking at, thinking how far it might be possible habitually to shift his centre till his own personality would be no less outside him than the landscape (189).

Daniel is concerned here with effacing himself—putting himself in the shadow, hiding himself in the boat so that he can see out but others can't see in to him, and most importantly, and complicatedly, experimenting with shifting his center of self as far as possible outside himself. Echoing the language of *Middlemarch*, in which Dorothea discovers, on her honeymoon in Rome, that her husband has "an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference" (211). Daniel

doesn't need to be taught that there are equivalent centers of self. He knows it, and is interested in seeing how far he can enter into those centers.

This is problematic, though, for several reasons. The first I've already touched on—it precludes one from actively engaging with the world, and potentially stunts one's ethical capacity to know right from wrong, and to make lines in the sand, effectively choosing a beginning and going from there, rather than always starting in the middle and going back, creating reasons, and imagining justifications. Another danger is that, in placing oneself in the unseen shadows while communing with other centers of self, one assumes a position of power, an imperious distance that can be destructive and shattering of those other selves one is so willing to imagine. Take, for instance, the opening scene of the novel, in which Daniel's gaze interrupts Gwendolen's gambling and seems to have some magical negative effect on her winning streak. He watches from a distance, judging her beauty and her gambling. From Gwendolen's perspective, this feels like an appraisal of her whole worth. “But in the course of that survey her eyes met Deronda's, and instead of averting them as she would have desired to do, she was unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested—how long? The darting sense that he was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of different quality from the human dross around her, that he felt himself in a region outside and above her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order, roused a tingling resentment which stretched the moment with conflict” (10). Gwendolen is not wrong. He is looking down on her, he is judging her, he does see himself as infinitely superior to the scene before him, a scene which, in his mind, might serve to justify Rousseau “in maintaining that art and science had done a poor service to mankind” (9). His limitless gaze and his ability to see into people has the

capacity slide into judgmental attitudes, imperiousness, and a power-dynamic that places him in unsound relations to others.

The uneven power dynamic between Daniel and Gwendolen is central to their relationship, and after a phase of rebellion, it is actually invited by Gwendolen, who desires his imperious gaze because it makes her feel known by someone, and because she seems to masochistically want to be punished for her deeds by someone who knows all. The form of sympathy that entails full knowledge of and insight into the other is, it seems, a sympathy that dovetails with domination and power. To know fully and to feel fully for the other is also to have power over that other. This feeling of power and domination is uncomfortable when it comes to Gwendolen, the most fully realized and sympathetic character in the novel. It is also uncomfortable when it arises with Mirah, the least realized character in the novel and the one readers often struggle to fully care for. Daniel is aware of his power over Mirah and makes an effort to refrain from ever exerting his influence over her during the period before he knows his own heritage. He knows how much she idealizes him, and how indebted to him she feels, and tries to steer clear as much as possible. He is afraid to ask her to sing, for example, because he knows she will do anything he asks, but doesn't want to make her unhappy by being coerced to perform for him.⁵⁸ Given this extremely self-aware knowledge of his power over Mirah, the scene of his marriage proposal seems especially disturbing. Upon discovering that he is Jewish, and then upon being told by Hans that Mirah loves him, Daniel wastes no time. What this means, though, is that he proposes to her at exactly the moment when she is

⁵⁸ Mordecai's Biblical sister-daughter-cousin-figure, Esther, was the Queen who was chosen based on her willingness to perform for her husband, King Ahasueros, unlike his previous wife, Vashti, who refused. Mordecai's sister in *Daniel Deronda*, Mirah, has a vexed relationship with performing for others.

most abjectly positioned before him. Her father, Lapidoth, who had stolen her from her mother and brother, forced her to sing for profit, and even attempted to marry her off for profit, has returned to the scene and has been grudgingly allowed to stay with Mirah and Ezra. The scene that culminates in the proposal begins with her father stealing Daniel's ring that was given to him by Sir Hugo but which had actually belonged to his real father. Daniel had placed it on the small side table while sitting with Ezra and Lapidoth had seen the opportunity for easy money and taken it. Mirah, already deeply ashamed of her father, realizes immediately upon hearing that Daniel can't find his ring that it must have been her father, and this instance of shame relating to her father is even greater than all the others because this time her father has done something disgraceful directly to the person she loves and feels indebted to.

She watched him and said, 'It is not there?—you put it on the table,' with a penetrating voice that would not let him feign to have found it in his pocket; and immediately she rushed out of the room. Deronda followed her—she was gone into the sitting-room below to look for her father—she opened the door of the bedroom to see if he was there—she looked where his hat usually hung—she turned with her hands clasped tight and her lips pale, gazing despairingly out of the window. Then she looked up at Deronda who had not dared to speak to her in her white agitation. She looked up at him, unable to utter a word—the look seemed a tacit acceptance of the humiliation she felt in his presence. But he, taking her clasped hands between both his, said, in a tone of reverent adoration—'Mirah, let me think that he is my father as well as yours...' (791-2).

She looks at him with a look of abject shame, representative of the humiliation she, in some sense, always feels in his presence. Seeing that, understanding it, knowing her to be in white agitation, he takes her hands and asks her to consider her shame to be his shame, too, and her father his father, too. It is at once a deeply equalizing gesture that allows them to share the pain and shame equally, and a deeply disturbing scene in which she is asked for her hand in marriage at precisely the moment in which she has been brought lowest in her own estimation of herself in regard to her beloved.

So sympathy has the capacity to create some strange, disturbing power dynamics. It also has the tendency to efface the self, causing a potential weakness of will and an inability to participate in the world. It also has the capacity to efface the other. This is most fully realized in Daniel's complete sympathy with Ezra, which Ezra means to quite literally efface Ezra's memory. Daniel takes on his legacy, takes on his sister to be his own (the relationship between Daniel and Mirah is never erotic—it is a familial marriage, one that allows both to be comfortable with a sibling-like bond in memory of, in Mirah's case, a real sibling bond, and in Daniel's case, a homo-social bond)—he essentially takes his whole identity, transmuting from the apathetic Christian English gentleman to the Jewish, idealistic, scholarly, and fanatical figure that Ezra once was. Immediately upon discovering that he was right, and that Daniel is a Jew, Ezra exclaims:

It has begun already—the marriage of our souls. It waits but the passing away of this body, and then they who are betrothed shall unite in a stricter bond, and what is mine shall be thine. Call nothing mine that I have written, Daniel, for though our Masters delivered rightly that everything should be quoted in the name of him that said it—and their rule is good—

yet it does not exclude the willing marriage which melts soul into soul...
(751).

Daniel smilingly declines this proposal of Ezra's, that the two lose their identities so entirely in the other that their names and identities become meaningless. The English gentleman in him insists on credit where credit is due. But, this is a true melding of identities, a marriage of souls (again, it is Ezra and Daniel who are really marrying here, not Mirah and Daniel). But though Daniel feels a blush of discomfort with all of Ezra's enthusiastic speeches about the two of them being one, Ezra gets the last words in the novel. He takes a hand each of Daniel's and Mirah's and says, "Death is coming to me as the divine kiss which is both parting and reunion—which takes me from your bodily eyes and gives me full presence in your soul. Where thou goest, Daniel, I shall go. Is it not begun? Have I not breathed my soul into you? We shall live together" (811). Ezra is not just with him as a memory after death. Their marriage of souls, from two into one, is work that has already begun. He has already breathed his soul into Daniel's, and Daniel, with his ideal receptiveness which we saw at work especially as he floated along the Thames and practiced moving his own center of self to the centers of self he found around him, has received Ezra, has been given his identity. It is a literal, complete sympathy. And it is disturbing. Eliot makes this transfer both beautiful and dark, ideal and disturbing, realistic and mythical.

Daniel's hyper-active sympathy is what keeps him from doing anything for much of the novel. A consummate reader-figure, he is committed to narrative and can't *do* anything until he knows his own story, until he meets with his mother and attains the self-knowledge that eluded him throughout his parent-less, past-less life. His commitment to

narrative, the narratives of others as well as his own, takes us back to where we started with *Mill*. In *Mill*, the reader has all the knowledge whereas the characters don't have enough. The readers can sympathize but the characters can't, even in instances where they do have enough knowledge, but don't have the will to consider the other. In *Daniel Deronda*, Daniel is now in the position of the reader. He sits back and reads his own life story, as well as the life stories of the others. At the start of Eliot's career, reading was a vehicle for sympathy which was in turn an ethical tool one could import back into life. Here, Eliot shows how reading, or reading others, can inhibit the ethical work of life.

In closing, I'd like to turn to the person who does act but who doesn't care: the Princess Leonora Halm Eberstein. Like Henry Crawford, *Deronda*'s mother is an actor who takes on many roles, but does not extend that sympathetic rigor to her life or its real characters. *Deronda*, on first seeing her, is chiefly aware that "her face [was] so mobile that the next moment she might look like a different person" (624). Explaining her lack of interest in assuming the role of "mother," she says, "I was living myriad lives in one" (626). She has no interest in living for another, or extending sympathy to her father, husband, or son. But before we write her off as an unwilling sympathizer in a George Eliot novel, and therefore unqualified to receive high ethical marks, we should consider what it means in this particular Eliot novel to act—both generally and in terms of performance.

In Eliot's novels, we've seen families whose closeness and kinship is not conducive to sympathy. We've seen sisters and mothers whose sympathy fails. We've seen husbands whose sympathy, so active and imperious, becomes abusive. Finding

herself in a web of interconnection, and demanded to marry and procreate, the Princess responds by refusing. As in so many of Eliot's characters, duty and passion are at odds for her. Unlike her son, Deronda, whose life conspires to join his passion and duty, hers doesn't, and can't. Unlike Lucy Snowe, who has no other options other than to provide care professionally, the Princess is able to find a way out, and takes it. She does not have to find outlets for her negative feelings as Lucy does—instead, she refuses care altogether, and performs her feelings not to others imposed on her, but on the stage. Her domineering, demanding father wishes she had been a son, and instead, turns her into an object made to produce a Jewish son. She refuses this model of relational transmission, choosing instead of the performance of dutiful daughter, wife, and mother, that of professional performance on the stage—a life in which she can perform multiple roles, not just the small, circumscribed one she is assigned.

That readers have so thoroughly rejected the Princess and, further, read her as rejected by her author is a failure of sympathy—one that Eliot expects and, rather than settle, leaves charged. This is pressure point of sympathy which, like the ethics of care, demands particular relations with particular others, or what Andrew Miller calls second person relations. Leonora's unwillingness to provide maternal care, or any kind of care, is a response to the relational institutions in which she is born and expected to behave. Our willingness to sympathize with Leonora, or our unwillingness, is a radical test of our sympathy, and of our openness to negative affects in the nineteenth century. Along with Henry Crawford earlier in the century, however, I see the authors of these badly behaving actors as being deeply invested in their responses to and against affective expectations, including expectations for sympathy.

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