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**VISIBLE EFFECTS:  
NARRATIVE SPECTACLE AND AFFECTIVE RESPONSE  
IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NOVEL**

**by**

**TANYA RADFORD**

**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**

**2006**

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## Abstract

Visible Effects:  
Narrative Spectacle and Affective Response  
in the Late Eighteenth–Century Novel

by

Tanya Radford

Advisor: Professor Rachel Brownstein

Eighteenth-century visual culture and literature reflect a struggle between two models of vision and understanding: on one side, an Enlightenment vision dedicated to disembodied objectivity and technical precision; on the other, a sentimental or expressive vision that produces irrational or emotional insight. If the disembodied eye can be seen as an emblem of reason and the goal of the Enlightenment approach to scientific knowledge, the spectatorial and incarnate eye represents an alternative and equally significant emblem of the period's visuality. This dissertation focuses on novels from the late Eighteenth century in which the spectatorial and incarnate eye is the dominant visual mode.

Committed to the depiction of affecting visual encounters, the novels discussed in this study—Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, and the Marquis de Sade's *Justine*—construct their readers as spectators. Employing both narrative storytelling and visual spectacle in the service of representing and transmitting emotional experience, the novels pit visual apprehension against verbal communication. In Walpole's Gothic novel, truth adheres in emotional responses to visual experience, while verbal representations are revealed to be untrustworthy. In the sentimental novels of Sterne and Mackenzie, scenes

of storytelling demonstrate the futility of verbal communication and representation, even as a sufferer's visible distress produces a tearful response in onlookers. In Sade's pornographic novel, Justine's efforts to make her virtue visible—in her sentimental storytelling and strategic use of tears—consistently produce physical libertinism in her audience. In all of the novels, in-text audiences model appropriate spectatorship and demonstrate the desired emotional and somatic responses. Meaning, in the novels, is inseparable from feeling.

In their exploration of irrational and emotional visual experience, the novels of narrative spectacle reject objectivity in favor of the visual apprehension of irrational truth, entertaining the possibility of unmediated expression. As they create the illusion of leaving their own ontological nature behind, so they encourage readers to leave off reading and experience the text as if he were spectator to the incidents.

## Acknowledgments

Over the course of this project, I have changed direction more than once, moved house at least 5 times, and lost touch with more than one of the people near and dear to me.

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neologisms, turned me on to new ideas and sources, and read every chapter with care and respect. At once my most sympathetic and critical readers, you have consistently pushed me into the better draft.

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## **Introduction On Blindness and Sympathetic Insight**

In the 1749 “Lettre sur les Aveugles,” Denis Diderot argues that the blind have a less developed moral sensibility than the sighted, an immaturity that he traces to their inability to be affected by “external demonstrations” or visual encounters. For Diderot, the affective dimension of image reception is constitutive of virtue. Thus, the blind’s inability to see others carries with it a disability for feeling and decreased access to virtue. On this basis Diderot speculates that the reduction of vision produced by looking at objects from a distance (a movement away from clarity and toward blindness) produces a similar effect on the sighted:

Since the blind are affected by none of the external demonstrations that awaken pity and ideas of grief in ourselves...I suspect them of being, in general, unfeeling toward their fellow men. [...] Do we ourselves not cease to feel compassion when distance or the smallness of the object produces the same effect on us as lack of sight does on the blind? Thus do all our virtues depend on our way of apprehending things and on the degree to which external objects affect us! I feel quite sure that were it not for fear of punishment, many people would have fewer qualms at killing a man who was far enough away to appear no larger than a swallow than in butchering a steer with their own hands. And if we feel compassion for a horse in pain though we can crush an ant without a second thought, are these actions not governed by the selfsame principle? (17)

The blind, says Diderot, “perceive matter in a more abstract way than we,” suggesting that a concrete understanding of matter is based in the visual sense, and not, rather

paradoxically, in the tactile. The more blind we become, the less affected we are by the suffering of others, and the more capable of violence or apathy.

This account of the blind as insensitive is of course inaccurate.<sup>1</sup> But it takes part in an enlightenment alignment (a troubled one) of vision with the concrete and of language (or signs) with the abstract which has much broader ramifications than a consideration of the moral nature of the blind. It is this troubled alignment that is also at stake in mid-18<sup>th</sup> century discussions of the sublime and of sympathy, and in particular works like Jeremy Bentham's depiction of the panopticon or Joseph Wright of Derby's pictures of scientific spectacle. Diderot's epistolary ruminations on blindness are part of a larger cultural preoccupation with the connection between vision, virtue, and knowledge. For Diderot, blindness precludes certain kinds of knowledge, especially that associated with social and moral behavior.

There is a long tradition of figuring both knowledge and virtue in relation to blindness and insight. Oedipus' self-blinding is a reminder of the dangers of knowing too much, while Tiresias' blindness facilitates another more accurate kind of vision and knowledge: insight. In very different ways, the Romantics and Surrealists took the vision of the mind's eye quite seriously, rethinking the artist as a seer rather than an observer and courting a kind of blindness. Vision, as the myth of Medusa demonstrates, can itself be dangerous. The monstrous femininity of Medusa petrifies. Women can control men in other ways as well: Medusa finds her obverse in the Sirens, whose voices enthrall and

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<sup>1</sup> Diderot's point, however, about distance and killing has proven quite accurate as war has increasingly moved away from hand-to-hand (or eye-to-eye) combat in favor of aerial bombardment and satellite targeting, a trajectory that seems to lead to the destructive spectacle that Horkheimer and Adorno address in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The March 2003 "Shock and Awe" bombing campaign against the nation of Iraq perfectly evidences both Diderot's and Horkheimer and Adorno's arguments about the instrumentalizing of violence accomplished by a move away from embodied vision into abstract or distanced viewing. The American populace observed that bombing campaign from a doubly distanced perspective—as television audience to a bombardier's mechanized satellite vision.

destroy men, blinding them to all but their insatiable desire. Man is advised to approach the latter with ears stopped up, or be sensually overwhelmed; and he would do well to approach the former reflectively, armed with a shiny shield and a sharp sword. To be blinded, for a man, is to be castrated, powerless. Blindness likewise plays an important role in biblical tales: the blindness of fathers leading to the estrangement of brothers (Jacob and Esau); and the New Testament powers of Christ to restore the blind to sight with his healing touch.

In 1990, Jacques Derrida was invited to organize an exhibition of drawings at the Louvre. Derrida was given “the choice of a discourse and of the drawings that would justify it” by Louvre curators Francoise Viatte and Regis Michel, and with this charge and choice he organized the first in a series of exhibitions called *Parti Pris*, or Taking Sides. Written in relation to the Louvre exhibition of drawings,<sup>2</sup> Derrida’s *Memoirs of the Blind* brings together images and narratives, imaginatively ranging across the many significances of blindness in western culture. The curators’ introduction to Derrida’s “discourse” credits his “reflection” with “go[ing] to the heart of the phenomena of vision, from blindness to evidence,” while describing the overall exhibition as a “game” and a “journey” in which “each one will have found their own light: what one learns here, in the literal as well as the figurative sense, are the ways of *opening eyes*” (vii).

This characterization of the exhibit and its accompanying discourse in the language of enlightenment is itself playfully blind to the central iconography—for in

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<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of the Blind* is not the catalogue of the exhibition, neither is it identical to the texts presented with the drawings in the actual exhibition (though Derrida did write those accompanying texts). It is written after, and represents an expansion of both the visual and verbal representations. That is to say, there are more drawings than appeared on the Louvre’s walls, but even more importantly, there is more discourse. And if in the original exhibition a writer assembled drawings and wrote text to accompany them, in the book it is the pictures that accompany. *Memoirs of the Blind* and the exhibition *Parti Pris* are in a catoptric, or reflective, relationship to one another.

*Memoirs of the Blind* Derrida praises the superiority of writing “without seeing,” an idea that he draws from another of Diderot’s letters, this one to his lover Sophie Volland:

I write without seeing. I came. I wanted to kiss your hand.... This is the first time I have ever written in the dark...not knowing whether I am indeed forming letters. Wherever there will be nothing, read that I love you. (Derrida, as excerpted in *Memoirs* 1)

In the unexcerpted letter, which is reproduced by Derrida much later in the essay, the reason for writing is made more explicit. Diderot has come to see his Sophie, but she is not at home. He explains that he “wanted to kiss your hand and then leave” (Derrida, *Memoirs* 102). In her absence, Diderot is thrown on the resources of writing to express his love and take whatever small part of the “reward” of touch (kissing her hand) he can, by showing her “how much I love you.” Standing in the darkness, “the hope of seeing you for a moment” immobilizing him, Diderot writes in the dark, unsure of the legibility of his words. Moreover, what is most felt is not articulable and can only appear in the empty spaces of “nothing.” Thus the letter seems to say that writing is inadequate to express the writer’s feelings, while all the while rendering a highly affecting verbal representation of that emotion.

If Diderot’s “Lettre sur les Aveugles” argues for a vision that is linked to sensation and insists on the perceptual basis of sensibility by making a case for proximity or for a vision that can touch, Diderot’s letter to Sophie explores writing as consolation for both sight and touch. The letter represents his desire and his visual and physical isolation from the source of that desire. Appending the (excerpted) letter to his *Memoirs*

*of the Blind* as epigram, Derrida points to the power of what is left out of writing—what has been rendered illegible or is essentially ineffable.<sup>3</sup>

Like Diderot the lover, Derrida also finds himself “by accident, and sometimes on the brink of an accident...writing without seeing” (3). While he is driving his car with eyes occupied elsewhere or when—like Diderot—he is “disoriented in the night,” Derrida scribbles “notations—unreadable graffiti.” Unlike that described by Diderot, Derrida’s account of blindness is strongly linked to feeling.

What happens when one writes without seeing? A hand of the blind ventures forth alone or disconnected, in a poorly delimited space; it feels its way, it gropes, it caresses as much as it inscribes, trusting in the memory of signs and supplementing sight. It is as if a lidless eye had opened at the tip of the fingers, as if one eye too many had just grown right next to the nail, a single eye, the eye of a cyclops or one-eyed man. This eye guides the tracing or outline; it is a miner’s lamp at the point of writing, a curious and vigilant substitute, the prosthesis of a seer who is himself invisible. The image of the movement of these letters, of what this finger-eye inscribes, is thus sketched out within me. From the absolute withdrawal of an invisible center or command post, a secret power ensures from a distance a kind of synergy. It coordinates the possibilities of seeing, touching, and moving. And of hearing and understanding, for these are

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<sup>3</sup> Paul de Man’s *Blindness and Insight* notes the presence of absence at the heart of language. “We know that our entire social language is an intricate system of rhetorical devices designed to escape from the direct expression of desires that are, in the fullest sense of the term, unnameable—not because they are ethically shameful (for this would make the problem a very simple one), but because unmediated expression is a philosophical impossibility” (9). “Poetic language,” de Man argues, addresses itself to the “presence of a nothingness” that it names and “never tires of naming it again” (18).

already words of the blind that I draw in this way. One must always remember that the word, the vocable, is heard and understood, the sonorous phenomenon remaining invisible as such. Taking up time rather than space in us, it is addressed not only from the blind to the blind, like a code for the nonseeing, but speaks to us, in truth, all the time of the blindness that constitutes it. Language is spoken, it speaks to itself, which is to say, *from/of blindness*. It always speaks to us *from/of the blindness* that constitutes it. But when, in addition, I write without seeing, during those exceptional experiences I just mentioned, in the night or with my eyes glued elsewhere, a schema already comes to life in my memory. At once virtual, potential, and dynamic, this graphic crosses all the borders separating the senses, its form will come to light like a developed photograph. But for now, at this very moment when I write, I see literally nothing of these letters. (3)

In her reading of this passage, Barbara Maria Stafford dismisses Derrida's essay as a "perverse praise of blindness" that ignores the dynamic relationship between vision and knowledge in order to privilege language (7). And indeed, Derrida does seem to privilege blindness in this and other essays. However, this characterization of Derrida's position turns a blind eye to Derrida's characterization of writing as itself a kind of blind groping—a means of feeling one's way.

Derrida, who admits to an incapacity for drawing, nevertheless describes writing iconographically, sketching a finger with an eye at its tip venturing forth—the "prosthesis of a seer." This touch which recoups the losses of blindness nevertheless points to the

castration—the loss—which renders writing necessary. Derrida reads some of this loss in Diderot’s letter, but in trimming the letter he inscribes some of this loss (his loss) there as well. This loss and this desire that is read where there is nothing is perhaps what Derrida’s essay is about, what it attempts to picture or write.<sup>4</sup> Language must “feel its way” in darkness and, as Diderot’s letter suggests, can sometimes give expression to the feeling behind the writing by pointing to the places where there is nothing. In this formulation, writing expresses desire and feeling in not-writing, or in the visible traces of its muteness.

Muteness complicates Derrida’s account of writing, just as tears complicate his account of blindness. Derrida has promised to address himself to the topic of tears from the essay’s beginning, and it is in the discussion of the eye’s ability to express feeling that Derrida’s praise of blindness is complicated: “By blinding oneself to vision, by veiling one’s own sight—through imploring, for example—one *does* something with one’s eyes, *makes* something of them” (122).<sup>5</sup> In marked contrast to Diderot, blindness does not render the individual unfeeling. The blind, Derrida reminds us, are not deprived of tears. Feeling can produce blindness, and this blindness is good—is uniquely human—because

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4 Stafford, a scholar whose work has focused on the visual practices and technologies of the 18th century, has more recently written a “constructivist manifesto” that argues against the modern denigration of the visual. See *Good Looking*. Stafford sees Derrida’s approach to the visual as dismissive and as part of the structuralist and post-structuralist effort to privilege language at the expense of sight. Such a reading, however, does not sufficiently take account of the end of Derrida’s essay, where he turns to the question of tears.

5 Derrida is represented in Mark Tansey’s painting of French intellectuals pictured amid veils. For Derrida’s discussion of veils, see “The Purveyor of Truth” as well as Derrida’s collaboration with Hélène Cixous in the book, *Voiles*.



“only man knows how to go beyond seeing and knowing, because only he knows how to weep” (126). For Derrida, “tears and not sight are the essence of the eye.”<sup>6</sup>

Now if tears *come to the eyes*, if they *well up in them*, and if they can also veil sight, perhaps they reveal, in the very course of this experience, in this coursing of water, an essence of the eye, of man’s eye, in any case, the eye understood in the anthropo-theological space of the sacred allegory. Deep down, deep down inside, the eye would be destined not to see but to weep. For at the very moment that they veil sight, tears would unveil what is proper to the eye. [...] Even before it illuminates, revelation is the moment of the ‘tears of joy.’ (126)

Derrida’s praise is not so much of blindness as of the eye’s ability to express feeling, to act as a conduit for the entry of emotion into the world rather than merely as a window for the world’s entry into us. And thus Derrida’s association of blindness with feeling is not quite so opposite a position to that taken by Diderot with his association of blindness and lack of feeling. Each is describing the importance of emotional insight, or a sentimental vision that achieves greatest visibility in tears.

I begin this study of visual encounters in late 18<sup>th</sup> century novels with a look at two verbal accounts of blindness and insight in order to draw attention to the dynamic interaction of the seeable and sayable depicted there and that dynamic’s intersection with questions of feeling and knowledge. Diderot’s and Derrida’s writing on the blind—the writing that is produced *from/of the blindness*, to use Derrida’s phrase—plays on and demonstrates the alterity of image and text, and of the visible and the articulable.

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<sup>6</sup> James Elkins’s *Pictures & Tears* is a study of paintings that produce the affective response of tears and a kind of oral history of people who have reported crying in front of a painting. He notes that our age is far less likely to cry in front of a painting than audiences in ages past.

Diderot's letter and Derrida's memoir provide textual depictions of this alterity; they represent a troubling—and productive—cleavage in representation itself: a rupturing, or tear, that is written in relation to feeling, or tears. What Derrida and Diderot depict in their writing on vision is a dual dynamic—of Self and Other and of seeing and feeling—a suturing of image and text, visible and articulable, Self and Other.

The presence of the visual in literature is a disruptive presence, impeding narrative cohesion and progress and often fracturing or fragmenting verbal representation. The study of the visual in narrative, centered in discussions of description or *ekphrasis*, has focused primarily on its effects on narrative structure.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, the visual has been associated with the development of spatial elements and narrative with temporal elements. Attention to spatial elements has the immediate effect of slowing or stopping temporal progression, and thus visual/spatial representation has often been read as anti-narrative—as working against the narrative trajectory.

The study of the visual in literature has tended to focus more on the visual phenomena represented than the visual experience produced: that is to say, it has foregrounded the spectacle and the narrative and largely ignored the spectator and the reader. Moreover, though many critics have noted the importance of the visual in eighteenth-century culture and literature, and though a number of these critics have moved away from broad or “telescoped” discussions of optics to more nuanced and historicized investigations of culturally and historically specific visual practices, very

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<sup>7</sup> Philippe Hamon's “Rhetorical Status of the Descriptive” undertakes a more theoretical approach to the nature and role of description in texts. Hamon's study was published in the 1981 special issue of *Yale French Studies* dedicated to the topic of description. Ernst van Alphen's “The Narrative of Perception and the Perception of Narrative” argues that the formal innovations of the postmodern novel, and particularly its depiction of visual experience and perception, requires the development of new tools of critical analysis. For a discussion of the history of ekphrasis, see Murray Krieger's *Ekphrasis: the Illusion of the Natural Sign* and Jean Hagstrum's *The Sister Arts*.

little work on the role of vision and visual practices within the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel has been done.<sup>8</sup> The realist, naturalist, and modernist novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century have, it seems, proved more hospitable grounds for a discussion of the visual in narrative.

Elaine Scarry's *Dreaming by the Book* (1999), Mieke Bal's *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually* (1997), and Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* (1990) have each undertaken just such an analysis. Scarry uses the techniques of visual art to account for how realist and naturalist novels produce visual effects in narrative. Bal's study of Proust begins with two questions which I take to be foundational to my own interest in the visual: "How can an image be written? And once written, how can it be read?" Bal then employs the technical concepts of art and psychoanalysis in the service of a "visual reading" of Proust that explores the relationship of image to text. Jonathan Crary's study is of particular interest because of its turn from the critical focus on the artist and perception to a consideration of the observer and reception.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, though Crary's study focuses on nineteenth-century literature and culture, it formulates its portrait of 19<sup>th</sup> century ways of looking in opposition to the visual practices of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason, I would like to discuss his book at greater length.

*Techniques of the Observer* represents the most significant attempt to understand "vision and its historical construction" undertaken in relation to literary and cultural history thus far and his description of an empirical history of spectatorship in relation to specific visual technologies is compelling and has received much praise. Crary argues

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8 David Marshall's most recent work—*The Frame of Art*—has turned from a more general consideration of the theatricality of 18th century culture and philosophy to a study of visual experience and theatrical staging in the late Eighteenth-century novel.

9 Both Bal and Scarry focus on the production of image, paying scant attention to the reception of images by an audience.

that “the problem of the observer is the field on which vision in history can be said to materialize, to become itself visible” (5). His analysis of the observer draws on film theory, a field in which the construction and role of the spectator has been a much more central object of analysis.<sup>10</sup> However, *Techniques of the Observer*’s too-neat alignment of technologies of sight with cultural practices of looking ushers in the very universalizing tendency that Crary himself warns against.<sup>11</sup> For Crary, the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s “dominant model” of spectatorship was shaped by the development of optical technologies like the stereoscope and phenakistoscope and, later, photography. The development of these optical technologies produced a “crucial systemic shift” which resulted in “a radical abstraction and reconstruction of optical experience” (5) and produced “a new kind of observer” (9).

A central characteristic of this new spectator is his being endowed with a body. Crary characterizes the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century observer in relation to the camera obscura and in terms of “objectivity” and the “suppression of subjectivity” (9). This objective observer, who passively reflects the visual world, is the perfect foil for the subjectivized and embodied vision that Crary sees in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the binarism between the two ages, hinged on the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is not sustainable once we take a closer look at the kinds of vision and spectatorship depicted in 18<sup>th</sup> century representations. Crary’s description of 18<sup>th</sup> century spectatorship is very much in keeping

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10 The classic study of the spectator in film theory is Christian Metz’s *The Imaginary Signifier*. Feminist film theory expanded Metz’s analysis by situating spectatorship within a discussion of gender dynamics. Critics like Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane, and Carol Clover discuss the role of gender in film, paying especial attention to the horror and pornographic film. The Gothic and pornographic novels likewise reveal a kind of generic fascination with and focus on the girl and her emergent sexuality. Interestingly, in the sentimental novels discussed in Chapter 2, it is the sexuality of the man that is most at issue.

11 Crary’s influential study has been criticized by Mitchell (among others) for its tendency to over-generalize its account of visual practices, especially as Crary himself criticizes synoptic accounts of visual practices. Mitchell makes his remarks about Crary’s work in his *Picture Theory*, see pp. 19-23.

with the picture of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the age of Enlightenment, as an age of rational and unemotional observation of nature. But this is not the 18<sup>th</sup> century's only way of looking.

### **Vision in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Culture and the Novel**

The literature of visual theory has made commonplace the observation that modernity and enlightenment are “intimately caught up with and deeply implicated in the conceptual field of the visual” (de Bolla 65). Martin Jay’s “synoptic survey” of western philosophy’s ocularcentric discourse, David Levin’s work on the hegemony of vision and his subsequent efforts to re-situate discussions of vision in relation to other modes of perception, and W.J.T. Mitchell’s description of iconology and attempt “to picture theory” mark what Mitchell has called a “pictorial turn” in cultural criticism.<sup>12</sup> Their discussions of the visual in philosophy, art, and, to a lesser extent, literature have been at the center of a renewed and vigorous interest in the visual.

The ocularcentrism of 18<sup>th</sup> century culture has been extensively documented in the work of Barbara Maria Stafford, whose *Artful Science* and *Body Criticism* are themselves extraordinary examples of visual reading.<sup>13</sup> As the work of Stafford and other scholars has made quite clear, the visual was an “indispensable modality” for

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12 See Martin Jay’s *Downcast Eyes* (1994); David Levin’s *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (1993), *Sites of Vision* (1999), and *The Philosopher’s Gaze* (1999); and W.J.T. Mitchell’s *Iconology* (1987), *Picture Theory* (1994), and *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005).

13 Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer’s *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* also investigates the connections between visual spectacle and education practiced in the period. Shapin and Schaffer use the term “virtual witnessing” to describe the experience and social significance of scientific demonstrations. Though not focused on visual technologies or education, per se, Robert Altick’s *The Shows of London* has likewise provided important documentation and analysis of visuality in the 18th century.

communication, education, understanding, and sociability in the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> From Diderot's *Encyclopaedie* to the scientific demonstrations so popular in the period, the image was both entertainment and didactic tool. The developments in visual technologies that made it easier to see also provided the means of demonstrating some of science's most astonishing principles. Stafford's more recent work has paid particular attention to the role of the visual in education and she argues that learning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century made greater use of demonstration than of language (or lecture). In very different ways and through different mediums, Rousseau's educational treatise/novel *Emile* and Joseph Wright of Derby's paintings of scientific spectacle evidence and exemplify this claim.

When the 18<sup>th</sup> century turns to the task of describing the public sphere and the individual's relationship to it, both the public sphere and the individual are conceptualized in terms of vision and spectatorship, or through a metaphoric of the eye. Peter de Bolla's work on visuality and David Marshall's discussions of sympathy and theatrical relationships have each, in their own way, addressed the role of spectatorship and spectacle in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Marshall's work on the theatricality of sensibility (generally) and in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (more particularly) describes the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a "world where people face each other as spectators and

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14 Many critics have discussed the visual metaphors that circulate in the Enlightenment, particularly as they ground notions of conceptualization. Peter de Bolla encapsulates this discussion when he describes vision as both a "matter of concern in the Enlightenment" and a crucial grounding metaphor for conceptualization itself. In de Bolla's terms, "vision figures Enlightenment thought" (65). De Bolla has been a key figure in the investigation of visual practices in the Enlightenment and 18th century, publishing with Andrew Ashfield a collection of primary and critical documents on the sublime. Veronica Kelly has traced the link between vision and understanding to the metaphors employed by philosophy, and most particularly, to John Locke: "18th century theories of meaning and identity depend on the century's philosophical belief that sight was the preeminent sense and on the association of vision and cognition in metaphor" (14).

spectacles” (592). De Bolla has likewise characterized the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a period “obsessed with questions concerning spectatorial comportment and behavior” (74).

In his essay “The Visibility of Visuality,” de Bolla argues that “visual culture for the period, as for our period, comprised a specifiable set of objects, activities, structures of consumption, and production of representations for which particular arguments needed to be made and on whose behalf particular policing activities needed to be set in motion” (69). De Bolla also importantly reminds us that while objects of eighteenth-century visual culture articulate or hide various ideological commitments, the notion of high and low culture would have been essentially non-sensical to period commentators since “what was at stake was precisely the formation of something that might in the first place be called ‘culture’” (69). A more fruitful approach, de Bolla argues, is one that traces the tensions between two attitudes to vision in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. On one side, a vision tied to affective response and on the other a vision associated with education and classification: “the regime of the picture versus the regime of the eye” (69-70).<sup>15</sup> Crary’s account of 18<sup>th</sup> century visual practice falls squarely into the “regime of the eye” side of the equation. However, the middle decades of the century represent “an extraordinary experiment in grounding affective vision, or what might also be termed ‘sentimental vision’” (de Bolla 70). The regime of the picture, which practiced an affective way of looking or a sentimental vision falls outside of Crary’s equation, and it is this to which I object. Though the 18<sup>th</sup> century is undoubtedly characterized by objective and taxonomic

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15 Ronald Paulson’s *Emblem and Expression* also points to two distinct visual attitudes—the emblematic and the expressive—which correlate quite closely with de Bolla’s. In his “Scopic Regimes of Modernity,” W.J.T. Mitchell describes “baroque vision” in similar terms to de Bolla’s sentimental vision and Paulson’s expressive vision. Mitchell’s account of baroque vision derives from his discussion of Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s *La Folie du Voir*.

observation, it is no less characterized by a touching, feeling vision, one tied to the physical body and prone more to synthesis than analysis.

Given the extraordinarily visual character of eighteenth-century culture, it is quite remarkable that there are so few explorations of the relationship of image and text in the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel. The extraordinary work of Jean Starobinski, whose discussions of Rousseau and Stendhal have consistently focused on vision and looking, and the recent work of David Marshall on spectatorship and aesthetic experience in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century novel are among the few analyses of this sort. My own inquiry into the 18<sup>th</sup> century novel and visual culture has been formed by the influence of the many scholars I have discussed above. Taking the insights of Starobinski, de Bolla, Crary, and Marshall, I will look at novels from the third quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in which sentimental vision, spectatorship, and visual spectacle are constitutive features. The following chapters represent a study of visuality in perhaps the most visually-charged novels of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Horace Walpole's Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764); the Marquis de Sade's pornographic *Justine* (1791); Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768); and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771). What these four novels share, first and foremost, is a narrative commitment to the representation of affecting visual encounters. Effectively sacrificing plot development, these novels instead turn their attention to the representation of scenes where an audience confronts a spectacle of extreme emotion. Because the depiction of affective visual encounters is formally central, the plot is little more than a vehicle for movement between discrete scenes, rendering the novels episodic, fragmentary, and repetitive. Self-consciously anti-



narrative in their staging of visual experience, the novels construct their readers as spectators.

### **Narrative/Spectacle**

Literature, as Mieke Bal observes, “is a verbal art...[and] the visual domain can only be present within it by means of different subterfuges” (3). Though each of the novels that I discuss in this dissertation seems to have prompted illustrations that later became appended to the texts, they were all originally published without pictures. It is without pictures that I will read them.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the presence of pictures would weaken the effects of this particular study, since it seeks to understand the kind of vision required of readers in novels that have no pictures but are nevertheless composed of visual experiences. A look at the work of Bal, Crary, Starobinski, and Scarry very quickly reveals that the kind of vision required of readers changes from age to age, genre to genre, and even novel to novel. Though there are important differences in the nature of visual experience depicted in the four works discussed in subsequent chapters, they share certain features that make them more like each other and less like other 18<sup>th</sup> century novels. In part, what brings them together is their excess: to an excessive attention to the visual that ruptures narrative cohesion; and to emotional excess and the body that renders them gross and carnal. The novels also share a commitment to making their readers feel, and their aesthetic success hinges on their physical and emotional effects on their audience. Constructing their reading audience as visual audience, as spectators, the

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<sup>16</sup> Though the novels were originally published without illustration commissioned by the author, most of them were later published with accompanying illustrations, many of which were drawn by leading visual artists of the time—Hogarth’s depiction of scenes in *Sterne springs* immediately to mind.

novels are narratives of spectacle in which the alterity of image and word is deployed in the service of creating emotional, and even physical, effects.

The novels share a number of key formal features which intersect with their commitment to the representation of affective visual experience. They are interested in and formed around a consideration of the affective dimensions of image reception. Formally, the novels are structured around two *stagings*: the staging of affective visual encounters between a spectator and an object; and the staging of affective verbal encounters between a listener or reader and a storyteller. The two kinds of affective encounters are not rigorously segregated from one another. Sometimes they converge in a single staging, and a visual encounter becomes also a verbal encounter—or vice versa—when the object begins to speak and narrate a tale or when the tale is interrupted for a scene of intense emotional display. For this reason, I will refer to both kinds of spectacle with the same term: *narrative spectacle*.

To talk about narrative spectacle is to speak of the tension between the visual and the verbal (image and word) and the visual and the narrative (space and time). The two aspects of narrative spectacle—one centered in the visual, the other in the verbal—manipulate the reader and create affective tension by producing a rupturing effect in representation. The first is the depiction of a visual encounter that produces muteness. A character witnesses something terrifying and is struck dumb, for example. The second is the depiction of a verbal encounter that produces frustration. A character endeavors to tell a tale to an audience, but is interrupted at some key moment, leaving the audience hanging. I have found the two operating very much in tandem as symbiotic formal strategies in the novel of narrative spectacle.

The first narrative spectacle is the visual figuration of a body caught in the grip of extreme emotion. In Walpole's Gothic, it is the frozen depiction of terror; in the sentimental novels of Sterne and Mackenzie, it is the depiction of suffering; and in Sade's pornographic novels, it is the depiction of a body wracked with pleasure or pain. The object at the focal point of the spectacle is, in some way, unspeakable: it often does not appear or is described in a few strokes or lines (to use the pictorial language of Sterne). Thus the object of the spectacle is not made present, or visible, to the reader by means of description or ekphrasis. The spectacle is made palpable by other means: the description of its effects on spectators within the narrative.

What is ultimately depicted in the narrative spectacle is not so much the object as the audience's perception of that object. It is thus in the relationship between audience and object that narrative spectacle emerges. The visual apprehension of extreme emotion produces, or is marked by, muteness—both the object and its audience are rendered mute. The body at the focal point of spectacle is rendered into object, rendered mute and rendered flesh. The meaning of that emotionally overwhelmed body is inseparable from its effects on the bodies of those who view it. The emotion that is unspeakable is nevertheless communicable to the flesh—contagious. In representing an emotional and bodily communication, the narrative spectacle represents an experience of something like transcendent communication. The novels depict scenes in which meaning is inseparable from affective response: emotional truths or experiences pass between discrete bodies without the intervention of language—or despite the inaccuracies and infelicities of verbal communication. The spectacle is not legible and is not read by its spectators; it is experienced, or perceived—felt. Here it is the representing of the unrepresentable (which

is visible only in its effects).<sup>17</sup> The narrative spectacle undertakes the communication of emotional experience between a sufferer and an audience, and suggests that this communication happens outside language. Something that is essentially unspeakable is communicated.

Narrative spectacle develops a language of sensation and explores the effects of sensation on the bodies of spectators. The communication of emotion is transacted through a language of gesture, one developed in relation to the theater and exploited in painting and literature. Paula Backscheider's study of early modern drama and theatrical power, *Spectacular Politics*, remarks the increasing importance of pantomime in the theater, pointing out that "pantomime had by the last quarter of the eighteenth century blended with great tragic acting" (176). The blending of the conventions of pantomimic and tragic acting was spearheaded by actor David Garrick, whose portrayal of strong passions went beyond voice modulation and facial expressiveness to physical gesture and what Backscheider describes as "strong body language."

Garrick is widely credited with changing the stage by reforming acting method. Before Garrick's emphasis on the communication of emotion through gestures, the emphasis in drama had been on declamation. Early modern commentaries like Charles Le Brun's *Expressions des passions* (translated into English in 1734) and Aaron Hill's *Essay on the Art of Acting* (1753) argued that passions were written on the body in expressions and gestures. Garrick's style was praised for bringing the passion to the eyes even "before [he] spoke a syllable."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> I take this phrase from David Hume who says of sympathy that it is "visible only in its effects."

<sup>18</sup> From Aaron Hill's letter to Garrick, quoted in John Mullan's *Sentiment and Sociability*, p. 16.

Two contemporary testimonies to the power of Garrick's stage presence regard his gestures of emotion as both highly affecting and supremely natural. The physics professor Georg Christoph Lichtenberg saw Garrick in the role of Hamlet while on a visit to London. Lichtenberg describes, in especial detail, the physical movements and facial expressions of the actor and argues that Garrick "takes care that every gesture shall tell, even to a deaf spectator, of the earnestness and weight of the accompanying words" (38-40). In Book 16 of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Tom and his companion Partridge also see Garrick in the role of Hamlet. Partridge, who is represented as a rather naïve spectator, is at first skeptical about the appearance of the ghost, but as the scene between the ghost and Hamlet unfolds, he falls "into so violent a Trembling, that his Knees knocked against each other" (657). During the whole of the scene, Partridge sits "with his Eyes fixed partly on the Ghost, and partly on Hamlet, and with his Mouth open" with "the same Passions which succeeded each other in Hamlet, succeeding likewise in him" (658). The extraordinary effects of the scene on Partridge are explained by Partridge himself in relation to the scene's extraordinary realism, and the making-believable of the ghost by its natural effects on Hamlet. Partridge, however, names the King, and not Hamlet, as the role with the best actor because Partridge continues to subscribe to a now out-moded notion of what acting is. While the King declaims, Garrick's performance appears so natural as to be not acting:

'He the best player!' cries Partridge, with a contemptuous Sneer, 'Why I could act as well as he myself. I am sure if I had seen a Ghost, I should have looked in the very same Manner, and done just as he did. And then, to be sure, in that Scene, as you called it, between him and his Mother,

where you told me he acted so fine, why, Lord help me, any Man, that is, any good Man, that had such a Mother, would have done exactly the same. I know you are only joking with me; but, indeed, Madam, though I was never at a Play in *London*, yet I have seen acting before in the Country; and the King for my Money; he speaks all his Words distinctly; half as loud again as the other. –Any Body may see he is an Actor. (659-60)

Lichtenberg describes the same scene with special attention to the particular gestures of the actor with the appearance of the ghost:

...Garrick turns suddenly about, at the same instant starting with trembling knees two or three steps backward; his hat falls off; his arms, especially the left, are extended straight out, the left hand as high as his head, the right arm is more bent, and the hand lower, the fingers are spread far apart; and the mouth open; thus he stands, one foot far advanced before the other, in a graceful attitude, as if petrified, supported by his friends, who, from having seen the apparition before, are less unprepared for it. (38-9)

Lichtenberg's description of Garrick's knees trembling has its counterpart in Partridge's knocking knees, suggesting that the gestures of the actor not only capture an emotional state perfectly but also could have the effect of reproducing the passion in the audience. Lichtenberg remarks Garrick's performance in this scene was profoundly affecting: "so expressive of horror is his mien that a shudder seized me again and again even before he began to speak" (39). The language of gesture developed on the stage becomes a central means of communicating in the visual field more generally. Whether in the theater or in the streets, spectators associated physical gestures with emotional states.

John Mullan's *Sentiment and Sociability* describes the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an age of sensibility and of gestures of sensibility, in which the body had more power to represent inward states than language. When Mullan turns from a consideration of the theater to novels, he argues that here too, the expressiveness of the body is pivotal:

In novels, the articulacy of sentiment is produced via a special kind of inward attention: a concern with feeling as articulated by the body—by its postures and gestures, its involuntary palpitations and collapses. Here sensibility is both private and public, and here, transcending the influences of speech, the novelist finds an eloquence which promises the true communication of feelings. (16)

The body's expressiveness and the spectator's receptiveness are not always presented as natural, however. Indeed, in Sterne and Mackenzie's sentimental novels, the faked gesture of emotion and the inability to feel the pain of others are matters of central concern. And Sade's Justine finds that her audience's receptiveness to her virtuous tears and tale of suffering generates perversity rather than sympathy. Sensibility is a structured perception, and the novels discussed in the chapters that follow seek to intervene in that structuration in different ways. Verbal encounters show language to be an ineffective means of communication because of the mutability of verbal representation itself. The affecting visual encounter shows readers how to look, making them good spectators by modeling good and bad spectatorship.

The presence of an internal audience is a central feature linking the four novels. The carnal spectacle of a body caught in the grip of intense emotion is represented to a narrative audience whose affective response models the desired effects for the reading

audience. The looking required of characters and readers is not that of empirical vision with its techniques of objective observation (that described by Crary) but a sentimental vision: a looking that is feeling; a looking that is touching; a looking that is itself a form of communication in the absence of sign. The novels place issues of sensation, intensity, and affect at center stage. They take up questions of meaning and signification as a problem, and thus the visual and verbal encounters depicted produce narrative fragmentation and hermeneutic ambiguity and frustration. The fragmentation and indeterminacy characterizing the narratives—and that scholars have pointed to as evidence of either their aesthetic failure or their pre-figuration of the postmodern—needs to be traced back to the dynamic of narrative and spectacle from which they emerge. In the chapters that follow, I will look to the places where word and image engage in dialogue or turn a blind eye to each other and will see in these places a meditation about the nature of meaning and being and the dissolution of both.

If staging emotionally upsetting visual encounters serves the purpose of helping readers behave as spectators to the unspeakable, the staging of arresting verbal encounters seems to render reading and interpretation a matter of difficulty and frustration. The novel of narrative spectacle often *stages* narrative production, depicting a storytelling moment by arranging a narrator and an audience into a scene. The presence of both the source of story (the physical presence of the narrator and his physical gestures of emotion) and the presence of an audience (and that audience's depicted response) produces immediacy and emotional intensity. A counterpart to the narrative spectacle of a body caught in the grip of emotion, the narrative spectacle of storytelling demonstrates the affective power of personal testimony. Both spectacles, however, take shape around



the rupturing presence of silence, or as Diderot puts it in his letter to Sophie, the signifying presence of “where there is *nothing*.”

Stories embedded within the novels are often comically stymied, fragmented, or simply unreadable. Though the story often begins by promising its audience some universal truth about existence or being, this promised truth is silenced by interferences from the narrative in which the story is embedded. A storyteller is interrupted through the interjection of frame narrative elements or rendered mute by his own emotional excess. The suspension of the story frustrates the audience’s desire for narrative closure. Promised a story of rare power, one that demonstrates some universal lesson, the reader is thrown back on the resources of vision and imagination when the storyteller ceases speaking. Just as the presence of the visual in narrative is a rupturing presence, so the presence of storytelling within the narrative is represented as ruptured.

In a number of cases, the physical presence of story in the form of a found manuscript serves as further testament to the fragility of verbal communication. In Sterne and Mackenzie, for example, story is rendered material, as manuscript, and shown to be subject to loss and decay. Once rendered as objects, stories can be rendered illegible or mute. The effect for readers is a suspension in the visual moment, whether in the visual image of a storyteller emoting or of a text that is visible but inscrutable. The emotional connection between audience and storyteller is broken, producing frustration, while the transcendent understanding that has been promised remains shrouded in silence. Language, the novels seem to say, is finally undependable as a means of communication, while the body’s expression of emotion is presented as immediately perceivable. The

instability of texts, their physical vulnerability to dissolution, in turn suggests something about the human condition.

In the essay “The Storyteller” Walter Benjamin points to the “authority” of death as the “very source of the story” (94). The man at the end of his own life’s story—the dying man—is looked to by the living as having some insight into the nature of life. The central difference between the story and the novel is the offering up of insight or the sharing of counsel. For Benjamin, the “nature of every real story” is that “it contains, openly or covertly, something useful” (86) while by contrast, “what draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about” (101).

In the novels of narrative spectacle, story is embedded in novel. While the stories often begin by advertising the very counsel that Benjamin regards as constitutive of that narrative genre, they seem inevitably to fail to provide counsel, giving way instead to the concerns of the novel in which they are embedded. The novel is disrupted for the story, but then the story is in turn disrupted by the novel. Clarity and insight are precluded by the silencing of the storyteller. The audience is thus exhorted to visualize, to feel, and to act (as a means of expressing their own emotional state).

The audience’s frustration at the fragmentation or foreshortening of the affecting verbal encounter is mirrored in the reader’s experience of reading the novel. Throughout the dissertation, the reported response of contemporary readers and the paratextual advice offered to readers by the novelists will be an object of scrutiny. Readers testify to the affective power of the novels, describing their tears and their terror. The writers of the novels often appeal to their readers, advising or exhorting their audience about interpretive strategies and readerly response. The prefaces and asides to the reader,

however, can be difficult to separate from the fiction itself. Often offered by some fictional representative of the author, they seem more like fictional devices than metafictional devices. The paratextual material is finally another stratagem in the novel's efforts to manipulate the emotional responses of its audience—to make its audience feel. To this end, the novels use metafictional devices to subvert or pervert the reader's interpretational paradigms, making feeling, not meaning the goal of reading. The interference with interpretation, the narrative's production of frustration and courting of misinterpretation, is a central means of transforming readers into spectators.

At the moment when language is inadequate and impossible, the moment of excess where the mind is overwhelmed and the body registers all effects, the visual and emotional achieve optimal effect. Terror, disgust, sorrow, and raw desire are moments of ineffability—of the open but empty mouth—and in these moments: enlightenment, understanding, the epiphany. The story cannot represent the universal truth of human experience, but the eye can transmit it to the body where it can be felt. The details of bodily excess are of particular interest in the novel of narrative spectacle: the spectacle of a body in the grip of intense emotion, figured in the Gothic's mute or screaming terror, pornography's portrayal of orgasm, or the sentimental's use of weeping. These excesses produce ecstasy or an emotional transcendence, usually figured in the inarticulate: cries, screams, swearing, and sobs, but also silence or loss of consciousness. The ecstatic, inarticulate body marks the moment of language's failure, and the contagion of emotional conditions between a sufferer and his spectators reveals the existence of a different bond between individuals. The novels implicitly argue that to feel is to know.

**Chapter 1**  
**“Evidence beyond a thousand parchments”:**  
**Narrative Spectacle in *The Castle of Otranto***

—*Vanae/ Fingentur Species, tamen ut Pes,*  
*& Caput uni/ Reddantur formae*—

“—idle fancies shall be shaped, like a sick man’s dream, so that neither  
head nor foot can be assigned to a single shape—”<sup>1</sup>

The second edition of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) made three significant changes to the original edition, none of them changes to the text of the novel itself. The first was a supplementary preface—a second preface—that revealed the novel’s contemporary authorship and situated the narrative in relation to a British tradition. The second was a sonnet addressed to Lady Mary Coke which, signed with the letters H.W., effectively announced Walpole’s authorship. The third addition was the epigraph with which I begin.

Adapted from Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, the epigraph is a strange fragment of a work that has been described as “the *locus classicus* of the neo-classical rule of probability.”<sup>2</sup> Horace’s dismissal of the supernatural and grotesque is lost in this particular fragment, transforming his indictment of works of fancy into something that looks rather more like an endorsement or even a prescription. W.S. Lewis has observed that Walpole’s

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1 Adaptation of lines 7-9 of Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, translated by W.S. Lewis.

2 See E.J. Clery’s introduction to the Oxford Classics edition of the novel, p. 116, n3. James William Johnson’s “What Was Neo-Classicism?” describes the features of neo-classical aesthetics as a consistent set of rules while also taking account of the diversity of neo-classical writers. In his introduction to *Horace Made New*, Charles Martindale notes that “Horace is commonly regarded as a ‘classic’ writer (in several senses of that highly charged term), as an apostle of Reason, moderation, common sense, balance, good taste, as the poet of the middle way, of ordinary decencies, as the praiser of friendship, country retirement, privacy, simplicity...” (2). Horace was put to distinctly ideological purposes by readers and writers of the 18th century and the Renaissance before that. The history of Horace’s reception, Martindale argues, “assumes great hermeneutical importance” (1).

adaptation of the epigraph effectively reverses the meaning of the passage as it appears in the *Ars Poetica*. At the same time, the incorporation of Horace enacts the neo-classical habit of returning to and imitating antiquity's great authors, appropriating Horace to authorize both tradition and novelty, as Dryden had done a century earlier when he "used Horace to work out a code and a vocabulary of literary criticism which would sustain, advertise and analyse the new creative achievement of Restoration England" (Hammond 130).

Taken from its context, but iconographically pointing to the giant figure of Horace, the epigraph lands in the center of Walpole's title page rather like an oversize helmet with a "proportionable quantity of black feathers." Itself intrinsically strange and fragmented, the epigraph is a curious appearance that raises questions of propriety, proportion, and probability. In its new context, the epigraph is rendered as inscrutable as the prophecy that makes its appearance in the first paragraph of the novel and as strange and vaguely ridiculous as the helmet that appears in the second paragraph. Prophecy, helmet, and epigraph alike attain their effect of surreal inscrutability through reference to the body made strange and excessive: the body in pieces and with ends indistinguishable; the body grown out of proportion. As semiotic objects each produces problems of interpretation.

Robert Mack's 1992 introduction to Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto and Hieroglyphic Tales* begins with two related judgments that are nearly universal in critical discussions of the first Gothic novel: *Otranto*, Mack says, was "arguably the most influential novel written in England in the latter half of the eighteenth century" and *Otranto* "was not an immediate critical success" (xi). As Mack points out, this critical

disaffection for the work was not shared by the common readers, as the evidence of three editions in just over a year testifies.<sup>3</sup>

Walpole's Gothic novel spawned generations of grotesquely horrifying narrative progeny. Most of the hallmark features of the Gothic are present in the parent. Its offspring have since made up a significant portion of the literary market, and by the 1980s critical interest in the Gothic as a genre effected a radical reevaluation of the major works. *Otranto* itself has never been out of print since its publication. Nevertheless, Walpole's novel is almost universally regarded by critics as a failure: as an immature form, as ill-conceived experiment, as too heavy-handed to produce the appropriate emotional effects, or as not sufficiently well crafted to attain the status of "literature."<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, this critical disapprobation for the work seems to circulate around the very issues raised by the fragment of *Ars Poetica*: issues of propriety, proportion, and probability.

Prefacing a reading of *The Castle of Otranto* with a discussion of the paratextual documents and reception is by no means original. Critics have consistently found paratextual materials such as the two prefaces and Walpole's personal letters crucial to their reading of the novel. Though prefaces and other paratextual materials generally

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<sup>3</sup> Each edition represented a printing of 500 copies. I take the figure from K.K. Mehrotra who also notes that "still better evidence of its popularity is afforded by its publication as a serial in the *Universal Magazine* in April 1765" (22-23). According to Kenneth Clark's *The Gothic Revival*, the first imprinting was sold in just 3 months. A complete bibliographic study can be found in A.T. Hazen's *A Bibliography of Horace Walpole*.

<sup>4</sup> The same criticism has been lodged against the Gothic more generally. Elizabeth Napier's *The Failure of the Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form*, for example, argues that the Gothic is a shallow or superficial form that remains focused on surface detail. Robert Kiely has investigated the ways that the Gothic becomes an allegory for "the whole concept of individual identity" exposing "human personality as essentially unstable, inconsistent" (41). For Kiely, instability and inconsistency become features of the form itself: "Gothic fiction was not only about confusion, it was written from confusion" (116). More recently, David H. Richter's *The Progress of Romance* has argued that Walpole's novel initiated a central incoherence in the form by separating the figures of hero and villain, a flaw that Richter regards as the source of the whole genre's incoherence and fragmentation.

fulfill the function of explanation and contextualization, or exegesis, Walpole's prefaces and letters instead offer more diegesis, or story. In tracing the effects of the two prefaces and various letters on critical interpretation of the novel, I will argue that the paratextual materials produced by Walpole effectively undermine analysis and advocate instead for a reading practice of *affective observation*, or emotional looking.

While Walpole's prefaces and letters tell stories about the source and meaning of the novel, the novel's opening sequence suppresses storytelling in favor of a dynamic theatrical model of visual spectacle and affective observation, staging the tension between the visual and the verbal. In the first order of visual experience, a character is witness to a supernatural phenomenon and is overwhelmed with terror at what he has seen. This terrified spectator in turn becomes a second order visual experience for an audience who can see the man's terror but cannot see the source of it. The audience is immediately struck with a similar emotional response, even in the absence of the supernatural phenomenon. The one who has seen cannot speak, or cannot speak coherently. The audience observing him cannot see what he has seen, or cannot see clearly; and so the audience's desire to understand the source of his terror is frustrated. The emotional situation of the eye-witness is nevertheless communicated to his audience as they view his distressed body.

If visual encounters impede verbal communication, verbal encounters—or scenes of storytelling—are comically stymied in Walpole's novel. Characters reporting visual encounters endeavor to tell their tales but are continually interrupted by their auditors or by the recurrence of their terror. Witnesses find it impossible to express what they have seen or to put their emotional situation into words. Silence punctuates their reports in the

form of dashes and fragmented sentences, making what they have witnessed emerge as something essentially unspeakable. While visual apprehension is immediate and complete, verbal expression is shown to be partial and inadequate.

Anchored by a close reading of the opening and concluding sequences, my discussion of the novel in the second part of this chapter will trace the interaction of the visual and verbal and the resulting collapse of the semiotic. Manfred, who struggles to control the meaning of the supernatural objects materializing in his house, will ultimately fail in his efforts to escape the fate that has been prophesied. Forced to confess the guilty secrets of his fathers as the novel comes to a close, Manfred finally accepts the horror of the visually manifest as “evidence beyond a thousand parchments” (114). Thus *Otranto*'s tragic conclusion announces the primacy of the visual and of affective response.

Because my reading of *The Castle of Otranto* focuses on the novel's solicitation of affective response, the first section of the chapter undertakes an extensive consideration of the paratextual materials associated with the novel. Walpole's deployment of various prefaces and explanatory letters might best be understood as a series of contradictory, though not mutually exclusive, genesis narratives. Though the prefaces and letters written by Walpole have proven unreliable and internally contradictory, and though Walpole himself seems to have been no more committed to one explanation of his creation than another, critics nevertheless seem irresistibly drawn to these documents, often constructing their readings of the novel around their readings of the paratextual materials. In this first section of the chapter, a brief diegetic account of these deployments will be followed by an analysis of the paratextual materials and their



use by critics. I will argue in this first section that the paratextual materials subvert rather than support interpretation, making feeling, not meaning, the goal of reading.

### **A Story about Telling and Reading Stories**

In 1764, Horace Walpole—a youngish and somewhat propertied gentleman inclined to old castles, wild gardens, and *chinoiserie*—wrote a story that he regarded as a tale quite different from the sorts of stories commonly told in those days. Not knowing how it might be looked upon, Walpole decided to publish under a name other than his own. Thus, having already written a story about one man’s confrontation with supernatural forces and destructive secrets from the past, Walpole devised a second story that would conceal his authorship by having one William Marshal, Gent., describe the discovery and translation of the first story. The second story explained where the first came from, more or less. I say more or less because there is also the matter of the “original” writer of the tale, one Onuphrio Muralto of St. Nicholas’ church at Otranto, who committed the story to parchment sometime around 1529. The story as Muralto recorded it was centered, as Marshal tells it, on events that happened much earlier: sometime during the Crusades. But it is entirely possible, or so Marshal suggests, that the story is based on popular legend and as such has many disseminators but no writer—that it is a writer-less text. Nevertheless, Marshal declares himself confident that “the groundwork of the story is founded on truth” and that the events are “undoubtedly laid in some real castle” (8).

In December of 1764, Walpole published his story prefaced with another story that would doubly hide his identity within the figures of Marshal and Muralto. The story

was tremendously successful with the public which seems to have encouraged Walpole to admit authorship in the second edition by rejecting the first preface as a mere fiction. To that end, he wrote a new preface—one that once again undertook the story of *Otranto*'s genesis. This time, Walpole argued that the story had come from Shakespeare. This new account contradicts both the original “Marshal” preface and another story that Walpole told just a month earlier. In a letter to William Cole, Walpole revealed that the idea for *Otranto* had come to him in a dream and that he had written like a demon for weeks afterward until the story was completed.<sup>5</sup> The story that Walpole told Cole was unlikely to have circulated in the general public of readers, but is now included in the introductory material of most editions and plays a significant role in some critical readings of the novel. In each of the prefaces and in the letter to Cole, Walpole accounts for his novel by telling a story. And in each case, the story has the immediate effect of attenuating the connection between Walpole and the novel.

Several critics have noted that Onuphrio Muralto is a hieroglyph for Walpole's own name, and thus the medieval scribe named in the first preface is a figure for Walpole himself. The figure of the translator and literary antiquarian William Marshal is of course another figure for Walpole, who shared these pursuits.<sup>6</sup> With the publication of the second edition, the two writers (Muralto and Marshal) are exposed as “borrowed

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5 The timing of these documents is as follows: the novel is published pseudonymously on 24 December 1764; the second edition is published under Walpole's signature on 11 April 1765; and the Cole letter which reports the novel's genesis in a dream was written on 9 March 1765. See A.T. Hazen, *A Bibliography of Horace Walpole*.

6 In the “borrowed personage” of Marshal, Walpole presents the text as one written by a priest who, though he does not himself believe in the supernatural, uses the story to combat the reformation then underway.

personage[s]” for Walpole and the first preface becomes a kind of drama in which Walpole has played all the parts.<sup>7</sup>

Many critics have discussed the playful interaction of the prefaces as a means of investigating the psychological implications of the author’s relation to his novel or of the novel’s relation to earlier narrative traditions. Though ambiguous, even disingenuous, the prefaces are employed as keys to interpreting the novel that they precede. Taken together, however, the paratextual material is primarily productive of ambiguity and interpretive difficulty. My own discussion of the prefaces and letters most commonly cited in critical readings will emphasize their diegetic effects over their exegetic function: in the prefaces and various letters, Walpole tells stories about his novel and these stories make the meaning of the novel harder to tell.

### **The First Preface, or, the Antiquarian’s Tale**

Walpole’s original preface to *Otranto* presented the novel as a found manuscript, though it is unclear whether the work was widely accepted as such. While E.J. Clery has argued that the text was widely regarded as an antique story, David H. Richter has challenged her view, pointing to the lack of evidence that Walpole intended “to impose a fraud on the public” (189, n 25). The preface is crafted to support the identification of the text as an antiquarian find, offering details about the manuscript’s provenance and physical appearance and using historical specifics from the narrative to place it historically and geographically in time while at the same time maintaining the mystery surrounding the story’s first composition. The inconsistencies in these details, however,

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<sup>7</sup> The first preface and Cole letter raise interesting questions about identity, questions that would become increasingly important to the Gothic genre in the motif of the Doppelgänger. In the first preface, Walpole plays a fictional game of me/not-me that, when exposed in the second preface, contributes to a reading of the work as a psychological portrait of its author. For a study of the double in literature, see Otto Rank’s *The Double: a Psychoanalytic Study*.

would have alerted some readers to the sham. The dates cited in Marshal's preface—on the one hand the Crusades and on the other the reign of the Arragonian kings—are, as Richter notes, "self-evidently in conflict" (189, n. 3). These inconsistencies have an interesting resonance when placed next to the strange and abbreviated epigraph from Horace: the historical details, like the literary fragment, raise questions of probability, propriety, and textual distortion.

In addition to using historical and fabricated physical detail to authenticate the text, the putative translator, William Marshal, Gent., buttresses *Otranto's* authenticity by pointing to his own age's likely complaints against the tale. The "ancient errors and superstitions" depicted in the narrative were no doubt penned by "an artful priest" as a means of challenging the reformers of that age who worked to "dispel the empire of superstition." The modern reader, Marshal maintains, will quickly see how "such a work as the following would enslave a hundred vulgar minds beyond half the books of controversy that have been written from the days of Luther to the present hour" (3-4). Ingratiating himself to the modern audience by alluding to their enlightened superiority, Marshal offers the tale as both history lesson and quaint entertainment. In a ruder age of superstition and "belief in every kind of prodigy," Marshal continues, an author had some obligation to represent the age as it was: "he was not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them" (4). The author is thus aligned with the modern enlightened reader, and, perhaps more to the point, with the enlightened antiquarian Marshal himself, who has provided the tale as a faithful portrait of a dead age.

In effect, Marshal's preface to the tale provides the audience with aesthetic distance. The literature they are about to read, he argues, is in some respects unseemly and unenlightened, but these features are a product of their age and are thus of historical and intellectual interest. Marshal argues that if the modern audience will only "allow the possibility of the facts," that is to say, accept the fantastic elements of the narrative by suspending their modern disbelief, they will find that "all the actors comport themselves as persons would do in their situation" (6). Moreover, Marshal defends the moral value of the text, pointing to "the piety that reigns throughout, the lessons of virtue that are inculcated, and the rigid purity of the sentiments [which] exempt this work from the censure to which romances are but too liable" (7). Marshal's defense of the text on antiquarian grounds excuses the unseemly as a product of a barbarous age while at the same time noting the virtues and sentiments that are at the heart of the text's modern interest. Where the tale offends, it is barbarous; where the tale delights, it is modern. The aesthetic distance provided allows the reader to both be affected by the work and to disavow being affected by the work.

Having made both the historian's and moralist's case for the value of reading the supernatural story, Marshal offers the reader advice about the practice of reading the antique work. The "author's principle engine," he says, is "terror" but the contrast of terror with pity throughout is meant to keep the reader in "a constant vicissitude of interesting passions" (6). Thus, to get some sense of the original power of the work, the reader is advised to read emotionally, allowing the work's "principle engine" to drive response. Marshal himself admits to a prejudicial affection for the tale, but offers it only as "entertainment."

The linking of the story's effects to the eighteenth-century discourse of passions placed the "ancient tale" in dialogue with contemporary debates about taste, virtue, and affect. Concerns about the pernicious effects of reading are, in Marshal's preface, described as the very purpose and motivation of a work like *Otranto*, written to "enslave the minds" of the superstitious. Modern readers, however, will find themselves immune to the pernicious effects of the work while nevertheless drawing pleasure from the "interesting passions" produced by reading the text. Readers are thus presented with a dangerously affecting story, but assured by the preface that its power to produce "error and superstition" has long since faded, while its lessons of virtue and piety remain quite effective.

Walpole published his novel in a period of tremendous popular interest in literary antiquities, thus taking advantage of an established and eager readership. Some of the most popular of these antiquities were, like Walpole's novel, forgeries or hoaxes.<sup>8</sup> James Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760) and especially his Ossian poems were particularly successful literary hoaxes, with ardent supporters and skeptical critics traveling the outer edges of Scotland in search of evidence to support or expose the authenticity of the manuscripts.<sup>9</sup> The appeal of ancient poetry (in this case, genuinely translated) seems to reach its apex with Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765). Percy's "Dedication" to the work argues that the "rude songs of ancient minstrels" are

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8 For a discussion of the impact of these literary fakes, see E.J. Clery's *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, especially Chapter 3: "The Advantages of History," pp. 53-67. For a more general discussion of the Gothic revival see Kenneth Clark's *The Gothic Revival*. For a discussion of *Otranto*'s concern with counterfeiting, see Jerrold Hogle's "The Ghost of the Counterfeit in the Genesis of the Gothic" or his "The Gothic Ghost as Counterfeit and its Haunting of Romanticism."

9 Dr. Johnson's acerbic doubts led him through Scotland and his *Journey to the Western Islands* (1775) recounts that trip alongside his criticisms.

aesthetically valuable, particularly “as effusions of nature, showing the first efforts of ancient genius, and exhibiting the customs and opinions of remote ages.”<sup>10</sup> By the time that Walpole published his Gothic novel, “critical discourse was actively working to produce the taste and demand for literary antiquities among the reading public, and helping to overcome enlightenment objections to the representation of the marvellous” (Clery 55). Bishop Hurd’s *Letters of Chivalry and Romance* (1762) upset neo-classical standards by describing the Grecian as barbaric and the Gothic as the appropriate form for poetry. Hurd’s discussion of the Gothic made the case that its exuberance of style was perfectly in line with its own set of aesthetic principles and rules, while at the same time arguing that the Gothic style was more conducive to the exercise of the imagination. As an apologist for the Gothic style in literature, Hurd performed a service not unlike that performed by Walpole’s “translator” Marshal. According to Clery, Hurd’s description of the Gothic romance as “a social allegory” offered a lens through which the modern enlightened reader could view and understand the un-modern work.

In arguing for the internal logic and continuity of the Gothic, Hurd had made the Gothic palatable to the modern taste. Thus, well before *The Castle of Otranto*, the sensibilities associated with what was becoming known as the Gothic style leaned heavily on the relationship of the past to the present.<sup>11</sup> Modern critics have tended to read the

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10 Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. Quoted in Fred Botting, “In Gothic Darkly: Herotopia, History, Culture.”

11 Ronald Spector reminds us that the rise of Gothic fiction needs to be contextualized within the creation of the aesthetic that shaped the genre: developments in architecture, gardening, and painting all paved the way for the literary Gothic: “Along with Gothic churches, college buildings, and local examples that either remained from earlier times or continued to be created, the works of these major architects and designers [Nicholas Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh] gave a sense of respectability to the Gothic and allowed it to challenge the prevailing taste for the Palladian chasteness of classical art and to inspire the imaginations of a Horace Walpole and a William Beckford” (7). The influence of French novelists such as the Abbé Prevost and Baculard d’Arnaud should not be forgotten either. Spector points out that the French had a

Gothic's turn to the past as either a retreat from present realities (escapism) or as a means of commenting upon or revolting against a debased present (allegory). Walpole's work has been read through both lenses. Correlative to the reading of the Gothic as escapist is the judgment that it is light and trifling. When Walpole's work is subjected to such a view, his literary endeavors are often paired to his architectural ones, and Strawberry Hill with its papier-mâché crenellations becomes a figure for his entire aesthetic practice. When critics read the Gothic as allegory, it is portrayed as a culturally revolutionary force, or what Richter has called "a coded response" to the social and political struggles of the age. The effect of either of these approaches is the simultaneous recognition of the importance of Walpole's novel and dismissal of its aesthetic craft.

### **The Second Preface, or, the Critical Manifesto**

The popularity of *The Castle of Otranto* persuaded Walpole that the public, like himself, was disenchanted with the "strict adherence to common life" and "cold reason" of the contemporary novel and longed for the return of fancy and imagination. The republication of the novel with a new preface thus became an opportunity to own up. In the process, Walpole took on the literary establishment by appealing to the mammoth figure of Shakespeare and misappropriating the neo-classical legacy of Horace.

The second preface begins with an apology but has all the features of a manifesto. In it, Walpole makes a claim for his work not only as a contribution to the British novel form, but also as the rightful heir of Shakespeare. "[D]iffidence of his own abilities, and the novelty of the attempt," he claims, led him to the "disguise" of offering his work

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word for the novels of the religious Gothic, they called them *darnauderie*, after d'Arnaud. In the English context, Edward Young's "Night Thoughts" (1742-45) and Thomas Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" (1750) provided something like mood to the Gothic and were influential literary precursors of Walpole.



“under the borrowed personage of a translator” (7). In the second paragraph of his preface, surely the most quoted lines ever penned by Walpole, he explains his aesthetic intentions:

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. But if in the latter species Nature has cramped imagination, she did but take her revenge, having been totally excluded from old romances. The actions, sentiments, conversations, of the heroes and heroines of ancient days were as unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion.

The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds. Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; in short, to make them think, speak and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions. (7-8)

Walpole uses the preface to make a claim for his novel as a new hybrid form that, in combining the best features of the ancient romance and the modern, resolves the problems of both. Effectively, Walpole makes the claim that the new romance has overcorrected the ancient and offers his romance as more of a middle way. But he goes

even further than this: he compares the features of his new romance to the great British master, Shakespeare, and stakes a claim for himself as the natural or true heir of that great British tradition, which *had* mixed the comic with the serious to increase effects and which *had* introduced the fantastic with imaginatively exciting results.<sup>12</sup> In this way, the genesis story Walpole tells in this second preface is equally a tale of antiquarian recovery: one that describes the return of the past and the present's confrontation with the forms of the past. Shakespeare becomes a figure for this, just as Alfonso becomes a figure for it in the novel.<sup>13</sup>

Walpole's initial concerns about publishing under his own name were not unfounded, despite the novel's success. Reviewers willing to forgive the unseemly in a work of translation could not "extend [the same] to the singularity of a false taste in a cultivated period of learning. It is, indeed, more than strange, that an Author, of a refined and polished genius, should be an advocate for re-establishing the barbarous superstitions of Gothic devilism."<sup>14</sup> This commentary in the *Monthly Review* withdrew an earlier positive review of *Otranto*; and interestingly, the reviewer here aligns Walpole with the figure of Muralto, assigning to Walpole the same motivations for writing the tale that the first preface assigns to the canon.

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12 Bishop Hurd had also placed Shakespeare at the center of the British Gothic tradition. For a discussion of Shakespearean allusion and reference in *Otranto*, see Kristina Bedford's "'This Castle Hath a Pleasant Seat': Shakespearean Allusion in The Castle of Otranto."

13 In his *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form*, George Haggerty reads the novel in relation to the second preface as an allegory of literary history. For Haggerty, the castle can be read as part of an "imagery of constrictive form" which becomes a figure for literary history and the limitations of neo-classical form. Manfred, as a figure from the "modern romance" is a usurper in the house of British literature and is eventually dispossessed.

14 *Monthly Review* 32 (May 1765): 394. Quoted in Spector, p. 10.

E.J. Clery has argued that though interesting and delightful as a *historical* document, *Otranto* as a modern work operated on critics in much the same way that the supernatural regularly functions in novels: as a sudden and shocking appearance that renders its audience mute. Clery interprets the two prefaces as an invitation to read “the fiction of *Otranto*’s medieval origins as a satire on the prejudices and anxieties of modern literary criticism” (69). The supernatural elements of the novel had been acceptable precisely because they belonged to a ruder age, and critics who accepted them as such essentially followed the suggestion of the first edition’s “translator,” William Marshal, who argued just such a position. But once Marshal and, more importantly, Muralto are revealed to be Walpole, Clery argues, the work must be rejected: “...a nation guided by reason, in an age of reason, will not produce modern literary works which could be mistaken for the products of the age of superstition; if such a work does appear, it must not be countenanced” (55). The second preface’s announcement of the novel as a modern work exposed a contradiction in what Clery calls the historicist’s critical code. *Otranto* could pretty readily be understood as an allegorical commentary on property relations, and Clery argues that “this is the interpretation which the practice of historicist criticism at the time licensed but could not, for the sake of its own validity, carry out” (69). As example of this interpretive practice, Clery points to Thomas Spence, who in 1782 proposed “a materialist interpretation” of the giant and witch legends so popular in chap-books. Spence argued that giants represented the landed aristocracy and that the tales “must certainly have been invented for a Satire against Landlords” (qtd. in Clery 69). Clery then presents the reading that seems to be licensed by both the novel and the critical practices of the age, and speculates on the reasons why “no contemporary

reader...took up the challenge to decode Walpole's ghostly giant, as Spence did the chap-book giants":

As long as superstition is taken to be the cultural index of a primitive society, and its absence defines modernity, modern supernatural fiction is unthinkable, let alone unreadable. When the unthinkable occurs in the form of *The Castle of Otranto* there is no language of interpretation available to deal with it. (69)

For Clery, the second preface essentially renders the novel nonsensical and unthinkable, announcing itself as abject, as the unspeakable "not-me" of the modern novel.<sup>15</sup>

The critical backlash that Clery traces in her discussion of the publication history of *Otranto* represents more than pique at Walpole's hoax: the second preface flew in the face of the critical tradition itself. Gothic had come to signify the barbaric, the superstitious, the medieval and the supernatural. Walpole's Gothic represented everything that the neo-classical aesthetic abhorred: wild and primal instead of ordered and civilized, irrational and superstitious instead of reasoned and virtuous, and perhaps worst of all, Catholic. The Gothic was, in short, the abject of Enlightenment aesthetic categories, defined and ordered by neo-classical taste and rules. Pursuing a similar line, Fred Botting comments that "the rejection of feudal barbarity, superstition and tyranny was necessary to a culture defining itself in diametrically opposed terms: its progress, civilization and maturity depended on the distance it established between the values of the present and the past" (4).

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<sup>15</sup> Julia Kristeva's *The Powers of Horror* defines the abject in relation to the collapse of difference between self and other and the resulting collapse of meaning. The abject is that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4).

The publication of the second preface effectively eliminated the aesthetic distance provided by time, a distance proffered by the first preface. For Clery, critical response to the republication suggests that once the shield of literal antiquarianism was removed and the text was presented as a modern work, it became abject: “Otranto and other pioneering Gothic romances tended to generate anxiety and provoke denunciation from the critics because they implied that there must be something awry in the contemporary social order itself” (Introduction xxv). Even more interesting, from my point of view, is Clery’s characterization of the effects on the critical audience. Clery argues that its publication as a modern novel rendered critics mute: “there is no language of interpretation available to deal with it.”

If Walpole’s first preface had offered guidance to readers who would of necessity find themselves unfamiliar with the narrative machinery, the second preface gives little advice to readers about how to proceed. If *Otranto* is not a relic of the past and based on historical events, then what is the value of reading such a text? Having first proffered the tale as a historical curiosity, Walpole withdraws this account in his second preface and locates the novel in a *dramatic* literary tradition, appealing to tradition to justify what is by all appearances an untraditional novel. Walpole claims to have made the situations more extraordinary, but nevertheless to have conducted his “drama according to the rules of probability.” That is to say, he places himself squarely within the neo-classical standards articulated in the *Ars Poetica*, even as he creates a novel in which oversized hands and feet made unaccountable appearances on the stair. The second preface exposes the first preface as a fiction. But the second preface is also internally incoherent, presenting the novel as at once thoroughly rooted in tradition and entirely novel. The

second preface offers the audience a new story about the provenance of *Otranto*, but in presenting the story as absolutely new and also part of a long tradition, Walpole creates new difficulties for his readers.

### **The Cole Letter, or, *Otranto* as Dream Vision**

If the second preface offered an account of *Otranto*'s genesis in the writer's thinking about literary history and tradition, Walpole's personal correspondence contains a quite different account of its genesis in fantasy. In March 1765, just a month before the republication of *Otranto*, Walpole wrote a letter to his friend William Cole in which he describes the genesis of the novel in a dream:

I waked one morning in the beginning of last June from a dream, of which all I could recover was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost banister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew on my hands and I grew fond of it – add that I was very glad to think of anything rather than politics – in short I was so engrossed with my tale, which I completed in less than two months, that one evening I wrote from the time I had drunk my tea, about six o'clock, till half an hour after one in the morning, when my hand and fingers were so weary, that I could not hold the pen to finish the sentence, but left Matilda and Isabella talking, in the middle of a paragraph.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence, ed. W.S. Lewis, I. 88 (letter to William Cole, 9 March 1765), quoted in E.J. Clery's introduction to the Oxford edition, p. vii.

Walpole's biographer, Timothy Mowl, has argued that this account of the novel's genesis in a dream is just another fiction, a lie conceived partly as reaction to Walpole's outing as an effeminate homosexual by William Guthrie in 1764.<sup>17</sup> Mowl doubts, on the basis of Walpole's other letters, that the novel was written in the period he describes here, and suspects instead that it was written during the emotionally volatile and productive period just after Guthrie launched his attack on Walpole.

Whether Mowl is correct in his suppositions is impossible to determine, but the suggestion that *Otranto* is a novel about Walpole's personal life has been taken up by more than one critic. In these readings, the dream narrative and the Conway affair provide an interpretive key to the text. The giant form of Alfonso becomes a figure for either Walpole's father or for the sense of threat Walpole felt as his sexuality was paraded and ridiculed on the public stage. Alternatively, the letter is cited as support for the claim that the novel represents a retreat from the present, and particularly the political present, to a fanciful past. Whether the dream letter as "key" reveals political allegory, autobiographical trauma, or oedipal drama these critical interpretations implicitly make the argument that the novel *means something*. And of course it would be rather perverse of a reader or a writer to argue that a novel did *not* mean something. But one of the things

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17 See Timothy Mowl's *Horace Walpole: The Great Outsider* (London: Murray, 1996). I was led to the biography by David Porter's discussion of the letter in his "From Chinese to Goth: Walpole and the Gothic Repudiation of Chinoiserie." My characterization of Mowl's argument paraphrases Porter's. Guthrie's attack on Walpole was part of the political and personal scuffling around the Conway affair. Henry Seymour Conway, Walpole's cousin and a rising star in politics, was dismissed from his military and civil positions for voting against the Government on the issue of court privilege. The political struggle was part of a larger debate about the Government's use of General Warrants to suppress free speech, a struggle that Walpole had been passionately involved in. Conway, Clery suggests in her introduction to *Otranto*, had been encouraged to take his stand against government abuse of power by Walpole, who then felt guilt at the destruction of Conway's career. Guthrie's remarks were prompted by Walpole's impassioned defense of his cousin Conway in the press.

that is most fascinating about the Cole letter is the way it seems to undermine interpretive approaches and argue that the novel is not really about anything; it just happened.

Devendra Varma's classic study *The Gothic Flame* (1957) remarks that *Otranto's* dream qualities and use of pre-conscious images placed alongside the Cole letter's description of a kind of automatic writing aligns the first Gothic novel with the project of the Surrealists of the early twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> Like the Surrealists, Walpole lays his emphasis in the Cole letter on the *process*: his proceeding without purpose or clear meaning; his sensation that the novel "grew on his hands" rather than through planning or manipulation. The writer is led on by irrational forces of intuition and proceeds by a synthetic process of making connections to a disjointed vision.

What the Cole letter accomplishes as a preface to or commentary on *Otranto* is a surrealist evacuation of interpretation. For the Surrealist, the exquisite corpse is not *about*, and it does not require interpretation. The exquisite corpse creates unexpected connections and in doing so stimulates the imagination and perhaps, though irrational connections, suggests the play of the subconscious mind. Walpole's dream letter is an account of the novel that describes its genesis in the realm of the irrational—from a dream, but not from a writer since the writer was merely a scribe. And once again, this account aligns Walpole with Muraltto, for Muraltto is also described as merely the hand that recorded the tale.

The dream raises issues of self-alienation, of the integrity of the self, and of the reliability of the senses. Augustine famously wondered whether the waking self is responsible for its dreams, and this is a question that we are still not entirely equipped to

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<sup>18</sup> The Surrealists had themselves claimed Walpole as a forbear, in much the same way that Walpole had claimed Shakespeare.



answer. Perhaps this is the reason that the dream has continued to be such an important element of the Gothic. If dreams are from outside then they represent an unauthorized voice that takes possession of us, representing the possibility of ventriloquism, or loss of control over the self. While the Surrealists pursued this state of psychic automatism as a means of tapping into the imaginatively free realm of the subconscious, the Gothic has most often regarded automatism as terrible: take, for example, the nightmare vision depicted in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*.

For an Enlightenment philosophy committed to reason, progress, and virtue, dreams were a matter of some concern. Susan L. Manning has argued that the discussion of dreams, first in Enlightenment philosophers (most particularly in the Scottish Enlightenment figures) and then later in novelists, amounts to an interrogation of the role of the "not-me" in Enlightenment thought. Before the Enlightenment, dreams were regarded as the work of demons. According to Manning, this view, though challenged, influenced ideas about dreams articulated in medical and philosophical treatises of the period. In the hands of Enlightenment thinkers, the demonological became the pathological. Dreams, along with irrationality, sinfulness, sexuality, and madness, were the disordered and disowned parts of the self—the un-enlightened elements of the self that continued to haunt the enlightened present. Critics, like Mowl, who read the Cole letter as the psychic key to *Otranto* seem to regard dreams in much the same light, seeing in that account of a dream and the story that emerged from it the disordered and disowned parts of Walpole's self.

Walpole, however, seems to have taken a different attitude toward dreams, finding them comforting.

Visions, you know, have always been my pasture; and so far from growing old enough to quarrel with their emptiness, I almost think there is no wisdom comparable to that of exchanging what is called the realities of life for dreams. Old castles, old pictures, old histories and the babble of old people make one live back into centuries that cannot disappoint one. One holds fast and surely what is past. The dead have exhausted their power of deceiving—one can trust Catherine of Medicis now.<sup>19</sup>

Dreams, in this formulation, offer solace and stability—even mastery, as the dead lose their powers to disappoint or deceive. And if the enlighteners had worried about the tendency of dream vision to corrupt reality and even normal vision's susceptibility to deception, Walpole here describes the visionary in relation to the past and the past in relation to security. While this might be read as a conservative vision, as a longing for a lost feudal order,<sup>20</sup> it is more immediately a declaration of Walpole's taste. Not a matter of analysis, but of perception and intuition, Walpole's taste is based in the play of the imagination. *The Castle of Otranto* ought therefore to be seen as an important component of Walpole's promotion of a different aesthetic—one that could stand alongside his endeavors as an antiquarian, his architectural experiments at Strawberry Hill, and his approach to horticulture.<sup>21</sup>

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19 Letter to George Montagu, 5 Jan 1766. Quoted in Edith Birkhead, p. 18.

20 This is the reading of the role of the past that Maggie Kilgour propounds in her *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*.

21 For a discussion that links Walpole's literary pursuits to his architectural ones, see Lee Morrissey's "To invent in art and folly": Postmodernism and Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*." Morrissey reads *The Castle of Otranto* as the literary equivalent of a folly.

In a letter to another close correspondent, Madame du Deffand, Walpole wrote that he had not written *Otranto* for his own age, which “wants only *cold reason*.” The fiction of the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century emphasized what Walpole called a “strict adherence to common life,” tending to set its action in in the contemporary present.<sup>22</sup> Ronald Spector has described the Gothic as a rejection of didacticism and verisimilitude in the emerging novel form:

The traditional novel itself had developed along realistic lines, its seriousness determined by its fidelity to experience and its ostensible purpose instructive. From its beginning the Gothic had been designed in opposition to the ordinariness of such conventional fictional worlds....

Unlike the novel, which attempted to bring order out of human experience, the Gothic subverted the existing order by unleashing human passions, by probing man’s unconscious desires, by exposing the sadistic and masochistic impulses that men commonly seek to suppress. (9)<sup>23</sup>

In keeping with Horace’s injunction to probability and the Johnsonian doctrine of the didactic purpose of fiction, the narrative tradition of the eighteenth century was rejecting the marvelous for verisimilitude. For Johnson, the novel’s adherence to probability reflects the modern audience’s enlightened rationalism, but it also safeguards against the

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22 Richter’s *Progress of Romance* notes that the novel’s location in contemporary settings had been a formal feature of prose fiction since the Tudor age.

23 Spector’s description of the “traditional novel” and its “conventional” practices is part of a more general critical tendency to anachronistically characterize the 18th century novel as a form committed to realism. This tendency reflects the continuing influence of Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* which described the emergence of the novel in relation to a commitment to formal realism. Michael McKeon’s *The Origins of the English Novel* complicates this approach somewhat. This characterization of the novel of course ignores the fantastic and irrational novels of writers like Delariviere Manley and Eliza Haywood. As Walpole’s thinking about his “Gothic Story” makes clear, the nature of the “novel”—the word is itself an anachronism—was a matter for debate.

imaginative excesses of the impressionable reader by offering exemplary models of virtue. Novels ought to “arise from general converse and accurate observation of the living world” and “serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life.”<sup>24</sup>

Walpole seems inclined to characterize his own contribution to the novel as a playful redirection of a form he saw as already stale and “exhausted.” In a letter to a French correspondent describing the success of *Otranto*, Walpole again presents his novel—“a narrative of the most improbable and absurd adventures!”—as an attempt to “blend the wonderful of old stories with the natural of modern novels.” “The world is apt to wear out any plan whatever,” Walpole argues, and barring a couple extraordinary examples, he finds the “natural” to be exhausted as a species. “I thought the *nodus* was become *dignus vindice*, and that a god, or at least a ghost, was absolutely necessary to frighten us out of too much sense.”<sup>25</sup>

George Haggerty’s *Fact and Fancy in the Gothic Novel* adopts Walpole’s view and challenges the critical characterization of *Otranto* as failed experiment, describing the first Gothic as an assertion of the need for “formal liberation.”

What really takes place is a process of formal insurgency, a rejection of the conventional demands of novel form, first within the gloomy confines of the Gothic novel, causing disruptions and inconsistency, and later as a liberated and liberating alternative to the conventional novel. Gothic fiction, in other words, plays out a formal drama which is itself Gothic in its implications. (3)

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24 From Johnson’s Rambler no. 4 published in the Norton Anthology of English Literature, volume 1C, p. 2713.

25 Letter to Monsieur Elie de Beaumont, 18 March 1765. From The Letters of Horace Walpole, volume 3, letter 244, p. 381.

Couched in the language of revolution, Haggerty's appraisal of Walpole's literary efforts places it in relation to a "formal drama" being played out in Gothic fiction. Haggerty's story of the novel's genesis is a classical play with Gothic "implications." For Haggerty, Walpole's experimental narrative attempted to "give dream a fictional form" and in so doing encountered a "disjunction between the novel form and the Gothic material" (3). Taking Walpole's description of the novel's genesis in dream apparently at face value, Haggerty argues that Walpole's dream could not emerge within the "natural of modern novels," making formal innovation—or revolutionary insurgency—necessary:

By introducing into the novel material that emerges so specifically from private fantasy—he cites his own dreams as his source of inspiration—Walpole brought into focus both the seeming limitations of the novel form as it emerged in the eighteenth century and the terms under which those limitations were to be overcome. For the imagery of a nightmare is at odds with the emerging concept of novelistic realism; verisimilitude will not immediately admit of the magical appearance of superhuman forms; the subjective nature of a dream seems at odds with the objective and social terms of novelistic discourse; the unstructured nature of a dream contradicts the durational and structural demands of a novel; and the terrifying aspect of a nightmare is mediated or may even be rendered ridiculous by the novel's matter-of-fact quality. (379-80)

For Haggerty, Walpole's was a "vision of reality less obviously empirical" (380), one that was effectively unspeakable in the forms employed by contemporary novels. Though she does not employ the language of revolution, Catherine Belsey has likewise

emphasized Walpole's formal innovation, describing *Otranto* as "a textual fantasy which refuses the differences—the exclusiveness—imposed by the constraints of the emerging novel form" (72). Belsey points to a disjunction between the discourse of subjective impression and the discourse of empirical observation that dramatizes the "radical otherness of the symbolic order" and has the effect of withholding mastery from the reader by suspending them between the two discourses.<sup>26</sup>

In describing his reaction to the "natural" of the modern novel, Walpole articulates his own narrative concerns as primarily affective: the need for a good scare to break up what had become stale. His pursuit of the affective concerns of his story anticipates what Haggerty has called the "literary implications" of a shift in sensibility that "animated much of the writing of the period" (380). For both Haggerty and Ronald Spector, Walpole's introduction of the emotionally excessive and visionary constitute and require a generic revolution.

In the 1767 letter to Madame du Deffand which describes the creation of the novel, Walpole characterizes his novel in a similar light and speculates on its future importance:

...I have given reins to my imagination til I became on fire with the visions and feelings which it excited. I have composed it in defiance of rules, of critics, and of philosophers; and it seems to me just so much the better for that very reason. I am even persuaded, that sometime hereafter,

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26 Though she discusses Walpole's novel only in passing, Belsey's observations about *Otranto* within the context of a discussion of Romanticism and the subjectivity of Lacanian psychoanalysis are quite suggestive, particularly as her discussion centers around questions of meaning and mastery. In Lacan's formulation, the phallus anchors meaning or signification and arrests the slide of the signified. Though she does not trace the disjunction of the subjective and the empirical in *Otranto*, her comments strike me as very useful in thinking about that novel's engagement with subjectivity and knowledge.

when taste shall resume the place which philosophy now occupies, my  
poor *Castle* will find admirers!<sup>27</sup>

In this version of the genesis story, Walpole perhaps takes the role of Satan, insisting for the first time on his own active rebellion. An element of the automatic writing from the Cole letter's story about the dream remains in the image of Walpole giving over the reins of his imagination. But if the genesis-in-dream story had raised the spectre of automatism and suggested that the story was the product of irrational and mysterious forces, this genesis story emphasizes the affective response of the author to the "visions and feelings" of his own imaginative roving. It directly connects emotion and vision to the imagination, positing them as the content of the novel while describing the rendering of this content as an act of subversion.

The commentary in the *Monthly Review* may perhaps register the effects of that rendering: for if the vision was unspeakable in the "natural" mode, it was also effectively unreadable from within the neo-classical aesthetic of that mode. If the republication of *Otranto* produces a crisis, as both Clery and Haggerty seem to argue, it stems not from some change in the novel but from the disjunctions and interpretive difficulties created by the paratextual materials. The critic from the *Monthly Review* who anchors Clery's reading of the novel's reception may or may not be an expression of a wider critical disaffection and discombobulation. Of far greater interest, in my estimation, is what that critical review suggests about critical practice.

The *Monthly Review*'s commentary throws into relief a more general problem: the critical reliance on materials external to the novel. For readers, and perhaps especially for critics, the paratextual is a necessary supplement that cannot be ignored, even when it is

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<sup>27</sup> Letter to Madame du Deffand, 13 March 1767. Quoted in Varma, p. 56

exposed as a mere fiction. The prefaces themselves speak to concerns of reading and literature, but taken together they render critics hostile and mute...much like Manfred when he is faced with the helmet. For later critics, myself included, the paratextual material—the prefaces and pieces of Walpole’s letters most particularly—are at least as important to an interpretation of the novel as the text of the novel itself, but a stable interpretation requires the emphasis of one set of materials and the discounting of another set. Thus, the Surrealists and psychoanalytic critics lean heavily on the letter describing the novel’s genesis in a dream, the critics who argue that the novel marks a break from the strictures of the neo-classical style apply greatest pressure on the second preface, and the Marxist and historical critic interested in reading the novel as an allegory of economic or power relationships looks to the first preface or Walpole’s letters about the Conway affair.

*The Castle of Otranto* was a story that Horace Walpole could not stop telling stories about, but the very nature of the stories he tells suggests that interpretation of verbal clues is less important than the emotions raised in the curious reader. The prefaces raise the question of why the novel was written but answer the question through a series of fictions—one fiction displacing, though never entirely, the last.

### **Gothic Spectacle: A Visual Encounter with the Unspeakable**

The reader who has perused the writer’s remarks prefacing the novel has already seen that hermeneutic concerns are secondary to affective response in the Gothic story. The prefaces to the novel ultimately do more to subvert than support clear interpretation and have the effect of frustrating the reader’s interpretive practice. Interpretation



represents an effort to control meaning. In the paratextual materials associated with the novel, however, meaning proliferates, producing a frenzy of possibilities. Within the novel, the reader is again encouraged to employ the practice of affective observation, a practice modeled for him as the narrative begins. Manfred's efforts to control meaning—to provide explanations and derive interpretations that support his agenda—are consistently refuted by the supernatural. Interpretation is exposed as a lying occupation, and one counterproductive of meaning or truth.

If Walpole could not stop telling stories about his Gothic novel, characters within *The Castle of Otranto* are continually frustrated in their efforts to tell. The novel opens with a scene in which an eye-witness to an unspeakably horrible event presents himself to an audience, but in his terror cannot say what he has seen. Throughout the novel, characters who have witnessed supernatural events are incapable of coherent speech, and though they struggle to communicate the experience, their fragmented reports are punctuated by dashes and stuttering outbursts of emotion. Partial and inadequate or rhetorically manipulative, verbal expression impedes understanding and provokes frustration. While verbal communication is represented as difficult and frustrating, the visual is immediately perceivable. What is seen is essentially unspeakable, but what is worth knowing is contained there. Like the sentimental and pornographic novels discussed in upcoming chapters, Walpole's Gothic novel employs both visual spectacle and storytelling, juxtaposing visual and verbal in a meditation on meaning, feeling, and interpretation.

Though the supernatural in the novel is generally associated with visual phenomena like the helmet and sword, it is not confined to the realm of the seen. A

number of the visual phenomena have verbal components. The giant sword that Frederic delivers to the court, for example, is inscribed with a divine message. The inscription is visible only until Frederic reads it; on removing the sword from its burial site, the scabbard slides up to cover the writing on the blade. The verbal phenomenon of most central interest in the novel is of course the prophecy suspended over the house of Otranto. The prophecy, though widely known, is unwritten. The absence or invisibility of the material writing of these verbal phenomena stands in contrast to a material document like Alfonso's will, which has for generations supported the family's claim to Otranto. The accessibility of documents like the will, however, does not guarantee their authenticity. The true story of Alfonso's death, so long withheld from public view, will finally be forced from Manfred in the concluding scene of the novel, a scene of storytelling directly preceded by the climactic scene of visual spectacle—the destruction of the castle and the ascension of Alfonso. Manfred's confession of secret knowledge (his only true inheritance) will invalidate the written document substantiating Manfred's ancestral claim to Otranto. As the true history emerges, Alfonso's will is exposed as a fake.

The prophecy that dictates the fate of Manfred's house is at once ridiculous and an accurate account of what is to come. Though it appears otherwise at the outset of the narrative, the prophecy is not figurative and does not require interpretation. The appearance of the helmet, the sword, and the various giant body parts are the realization or coming-into-being of the prophecy. With the arrival of the helmet, Alfonso the rightful owner begins his return, piece by giant piece. The visual phenomena—supernatural objects and apparitions—are at once portents of the approaching catastrophe and

empirical enactments of the prophecy, effectively collapsing the semiotic distinction between signifier and signified. This collapse commences at the outset of the novel with the sudden and destructive arrival of a supernatural object. It is completed as the novel closes around the spectacular collapse of the castle of Otranto.

My reading of *The Castle of Otranto* will focus on scenes that dramatically enact the tension between the seeable and the sayable. The dynamic interaction of visual spectacle and verbal storytelling intersects throughout the novel with questions of feeling and knowledge. What is real? and What is true? are questions that are ultimately resolved in favor of the visual and the emotional: the horror of what has been seen is, by the end of the novel, established as “evidence beyond a thousand parchments.”

In the opening scene of *The Castle of Otranto*, an audience of friends and servants awaits the appearance of a young man named Conrad. They wait in the chapel, for it is young Conrad’s wedding day—not coincidentally, it is also the boy’s birthday.<sup>28</sup> Manfred, Lord of Otranto and father of the groom, is impatient for the ceremony that will settle a long-standing dispute about his claim to the lands and title of Otranto by joining the son of his house to the daughter of the rival claimant. The prolonged absence of this claimant (by way of the Crusades) suggests that his claim has been closed by his death; nevertheless, Manfred is eager to solidify his hold on the property by linking the two houses and by securing an heir for Conrad. Manfred’s efforts to secure his estate for future generations is doomed to failure. His son Conrad’s fate has already found him in

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28 Combining birth, marriage, and death, the opening scene exploits various figures of liminal experience. Maggie Kilgour’s reading of the novel, one which juxtaposes the “disintegration of Manfred’s story” with the “re-membering” of Alfonso (19), sees this aspect of the opening scene as “introducing at the genre’s very inception the problem of constructing continuous narrative sequence” (18).

the courtyard; and it is there that Manfred will soon see the first manifestation of his own impending fate.

A servant, sent to fetch Conrad, returns “breathless, in a frantic manner, his eyes staring, and foaming at the mouth” (18). Unable to speak, the man simply points to the courtyard. His demeanor impresses the matrimonial audience which is “struck with terror and amazement” (18). The man’s pointing finger directs their visual attention to the threshold, effectively communicating the message that some significant event has transpired just outside their view. The evident terror of the servant and the mute gesture of his pointing suggest that what he has seen is unspeakable. It is not just that what lies out of view must be seen to be believed; what awaits the audience just outside the door is so inexpressibly shocking that it defies verbal representation—and cannot be narrated as a tale.

The theatrical gesture of the servant halts the impending wedding ceremony, itself a public event both staged and theatrical. A spectacle dramatizing the performative language of the vow, the wedding is a threshold event marking a transition of both social and sexual significance. This spectacle of the performative powers of language is interrupted, however, by a visual spectacle of muteness. The spectacle of muteness in turn prepares the reader (and the other wedding guests) for the sight that awaits them outside the chapel’s doors: the grotesque spectacle of a body’s confrontation with the supernatural.

In its first entry into the novel, the Gothic spectacle appears only in its effects on its first spectator. The spectacle outside in the courtyard enters the scene as the expression of abject terror written on the body of the servant. Presented to the audience of

wedding guests, the speechless servant becomes a spectacle of the experience of terror that frames the sublime spectacle that has induced his terror. This second order visual experience, a theatrical spectacle of an audience viewing the experience of emotional distress, frames the first order visual experience with the supernatural, modeling the desired affective response and pointing the audience in the right direction. The servant is presented to the audience of wedding guests in a state of speechless terror and his appearance produces an identical response in them. “[S]truck with terror and amazement” by his appearance, the audience is infected with his emotional state. Not only do they recognize his state of mind, they begin to share it. The wedding audience’s affective response in turn models the desired affective response for the reading audience.

In this the first Gothic novel, the most central of its features is launched in the first two paragraphs. What is most terrible and shocking in the Gothic novel is that which cannot be seen—that which happens just out of our view. The reader’s experience of Gothic sublimity is thus often mediated through a character-witness to the sublime. When the servant bursts into the chapel foaming at the mouth and visibly in the grip of terror, his “staring” eyes and speechless mouth function in precisely the same way as the close-up on the widened eyes and open, scream-less mouth of the modern horror film’s maiden under threat.<sup>29</sup> The expression of terror in other people is more affecting than the object

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29 The film equivalent to this mute spectator’s response is the “reaction shot.” In *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, Carol Clover aptly describes the horror film as “about eyes watching horror” (184). Eyes are visually and thematically prevalent in the horror film: from the close-up shots of eyes to the occlusion of and constant threat to vision. For Clover, one of the functions of the eye in horror film has to do with its softness—its vulnerability to penetration and infiltration. The eye’s “sensitive surface” is often shown in close-up where it registers affective reception: in the widening eye, the dilating pupil, or the tears that form and begin to slip out. But eyes are also endangered in the horror film—often done violence to. Clover argues that the violence inflicted on eyes is a figure for the more subtle violence being done to vision by the images of violence it encounters. The horror film, like the Gothic narrative it calls parent, teases its audience and creates anticipation by blocking or obscuring vision. If we cannot see clearly, then clearly

or event of terror itself. Terror is made palpable to both internal and external audiences not in their visual apprehension of a sublime object or situation, but in their visual apprehension of a body terrified.

Walpole's novel produces its sublime effects in part by employing the machinery of the theater: opening with a scene of public spectacle, developing the narrative episodically around static scenes and enclosed spaces, and manipulating internal audiences to condition external audience response. The plot of the novel follows the conventions and structures of tragic form, a fact that both of Walpole's prefaces to the novel note. Coral Ann Howells has argued that the Gothic's affective strategies depend on its audience's familiarity with the theatre and its conventions.<sup>30</sup> Theatre had developed a "language of gesture" to convey emotional states: just as costume could identify character types, facial expressions and physical gestures correlated to particular emotions.<sup>31</sup> The Gothic novel relies on the recognizability of these gestural signs. Howells observes that "Gothic techniques are essentially visual in their emphasis on dramatic gesture and action and in their pictorial effects, giving the reader an experience comparable to that of a spectator in the theatre" (16).

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something terrible lurks just out of our view. We are enticed to move closer and get a better look. Looking, as Clover points out, is the thing that we cannot resist doing, but looking is also understood as dangerous.

30 William Patrick Day's study of the influence of classical drama on the Gothic should also be noted. Day's *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy* investigates the theatrical qualities of the genre, and in particular its deployment of the features of classical drama. As with Greek drama, Day argues, Manfred will do everything in his power to control his fate, but instead his actions will bring down the judgment of an "ancient prophecy" on his house. The undermining of meaningful action which is so central to classical tragedy quickly becomes a staple of Gothic fiction. As Day remarks, "the Gothic protagonist achieves only the illusion of meaningful action, for every movement is in fact the same movement: a downward spiral to destruction" (44).

31 For a discussion of the influence of the actor David Garrick and treatises on the physical representation of emotional states see the "Introduction" to the dissertation.

Principally and formally a visual narrative that pursues sensationalism, the Gothic's "most spectacular effects are achieved through the language of the visual and a re-creation of the event of seeing or looking" (Martin, "Rise," 103). The use of theatrical conventions represents one means of conveying or re-creating visual experience in writing. Rebecca Martin's analysis of looking in *The Castle of Otranto* traces the "convergence of lines of sight on a single point of fascination" and she argues that Walpole's novel and the Gothic more generally "objectify a scene of intense suffering by framing it and setting it apart from the surrounding narrative" (Dissertation 24). For Martin, Gothic spectacle "makes pain and suffering visible" to its audience, manipulating perspective and audience identification to produce suspense and readerly pleasure at the victimization of characters. Pain and suffering are made visible and palpable to readers through the mediation of internal spectators. Thus the theatricalization of the novel, achieved through the presence of an internal audience, is central to the transmission of Gothic effects.

The appeal to the reader's body—the narrative's solicitation of carnal effects—makes the Gothic a sensational and excessive genre, one that transacts its business through visual encounters with suffering or terrified bodies. The aim is terror and the measure of that terror is physical: tightness in the throat, gooseflesh, the widening or clenching shut of the eyes. The sensational and excessive character of the Gothic novel is produced through its representation of bodies and the bodily: whether in its presentation of a body caught in the grip of intense emotion or of bodies that have been rendered horrible. Women are not only more sensitive spectators; they are also highly affecting visual spectacles. The terror registered by Walpole's principal female characters is central

to the creation of affective response in readers.<sup>32</sup> Though Hippolita and the two princesses are not spectators to most of the supernatural apparitions (a notable exception being Hippolita's presence when blood drips from the nose of Alfonso's statue), they register the most extreme effects of those visual encounters, acting as "instructive mirrors" for the Gothic audience.<sup>33</sup>

Although women will register the emotional excesses of the novel, Gothic women (and particularly Gothic heroines) are generally incapable of expressing their emotions verbally. Their suffering is visible, but essentially ineffable.<sup>34</sup> In the Gothic novel, women represent the limit case of affective vision: terrified, they close their eyes or fall into unconsciousness. As in the novel of sensibility more generally, female characters

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32 The body of the female is as important outside the novel as it is inside. Readers of the Gothic, a number of critics have pointed out, are coded female. David Richter's discussion of the readers of the Gothic argues that Scott creates the historical novel in order to recreate the romance in a masculine form, licensing a male readership to enjoy the romance. Richter describes a shift in the "response of readers to literature" that the Gothic novel "sits astride." Agreeing with Q.D. Leavis, Richter claims that "the implied reader of the Gothic novel is a somewhat different being than the implied reader of (say) Fielding and Smollett, and that the Gothic demands for its full effects—effects not only of terror but of sublimity—a less skeptical or self-contained mind-set and a more empathetic attitude than does comic realism" (117). Richter characterizes the shift as "away from reading for pleasure and instruction" toward aisthesis, or toward reading "for imaginative play and escape" (119). For discussions of gender and readership in the 18th century novel, see Clifford Siskind's *The Work of Writing*, Janet Todd's *Sensibility*, and Helene Moglen's *The Trauma of Gender*.

Just as women are seen to have the most reactive gaze, they are also regarded as having the most susceptible minds. Concerns about the social role of reading effects in the period made the Gothic a "debated genre." Maggie Kilgour describes the period's anxiety about the perversion of readers by excessively affecting texts: "It was feared that readers of fictions, seduced by the enticing charms of an illusory world, would lose either their grip on or their taste for reality" (7). Contemporary critics warned that the pleasures of the imagination found in novels might unfit readers for the real world because of their tendency "to debauch the mind, and throw an insipid kind of uniformity over the moderate and rational prospects of life" (qtd. in Kilgour 7).

33 The term is Clover's, who regards this mirroring effect as "one of the defining features of the genre." The important look in the horror film, Clover argues, is not the sadistic, penetrating look, it is the vulnerable emotional look. "It is the reactive gaze that has pride of place in the scopic regime of horror: both within the diegesis—as the look that sees the truth—and outside it, in the theater—as the look that is assaulted from the screen" (203).

34 Women fulfill a similar function in the sentimental and pornographic novels discussed in chapters 2 and 3. David Denby has characterized sentimentalism as "intimately persuaded of the ineffability of sentiment, of the impossibility of exhausting through language the full depth of emotion as it is felt experientially" (83).



overcome with emotion find themselves physically overpowered as well: they faint, fall ill, even go mad. In her discussion of the role of feeling in the Gothic novel, Coral Ann Howells connects the feeling nature of the Gothic lady to the cult of sensibility: in both, “[t]he relation between sensibility and insensibility is alarmingly close, and it is no accident that the cult of sensibility merges with a cult of debility in its most extreme manifestations at the end of the eighteenth century” (9). Helene Moglen has characterized the Gothic heroine as being “dependent for knowledge on the sensibility by which she was defined” (8), adding that in later Gothic novels the heroine must learn “to reject the evidence of her feelings” (8). When the terrified servant rushes into the chapel and mutely gestures to the courtyard, Conrad’s mother Hippolita is more deeply affected—she immediately swoons. Her flight from consciousness has a number of effects: her distressed body becomes a new spectacle for the audience and her unconsciousness prevents both her and the princesses from seeing the spectacle in the courtyard. The three ladies will continue to play this role in the novel, registering the distress that the apparitions produce as well as the distress produced by the actions of Manfred.

The emotional effects of Walpole’s novel are not communicated by the narration of the terrifying experience. Neither are they conveyed through the description of the productive source of terror. Instead, the audience’s experience of Gothic sublimity is created through the description of the terrified and inarticulate body and that body’s affective power over other bodies. In effect, the opening scene of *Otranto* is a spectacle of audience communication, modeling the desired response for its readers. First, the response is displayed to and adopted by one audience, and then that audience models a response for its audience: the reader. This communication of emotional effects between

audiences happens in the absence of speech. The servant, in his terror, is mute, and the wedding guests are in turn rendered mute.

The visible terror of one spectator produces the terror of the rest of the audience. Moreover, the audience's inability to see the source of the other spectator's terror, and that spectator's inability to speak it, awakens a sense of threat from the unknown and stimulates the imagination. This is very much in keeping with Edmund Burke's account of the sublime in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Published seven years before Walpole's novel, the *Enquiry* rigorously distinguishes the sublime from conceptions of the beautiful and lays particular emphasis on terror.

Pain and terror at a remove from the self produce delight—a situation Burke accounts for by pointing to the operation of sympathy. In the *Enquiry*, sympathy, which Burke describes as “a sort of substitution” through which we “enter into the concerns of others” (91), is the mechanism that allows individuals to experience the delightful terror of another individual's pain or even death. It is through sympathy that “poetry, painting, and other affecting arts transfuse their passions from one breast to another” (91). The observation of a natural experience of pain and terror can be replaced with a verbal representation of that experience and produce even greater effects, Burke says. But almost paradoxically, the verbal representation of the sublime takes shape in obscurity and uncertainty as it seeks to represent the unrepresentable. While neo-classic art had valued clarity and precision in its pursuit of universal truths, Burke's account of the sublime dismissed clarity and embraced a suggestive opacity and disorder: “It is one thing to make an image clear, and another to make it affecting to the imagination” (II: 4).

A key aspect of Burke's conception of sublimity is its short-circuiting of connections between representation, interpretation, and understanding.

Poised between the clarity of neo-classicism on the one hand and the Romantic emphasis on feeling, imagination, and original genius on the other, eighteenth-century discussions of the sublime are especially remarkable for their diversity. Boileau's translation of the pseudo-longinian treatise *Peri Hupsous* has been described by Samuel Monk as a watershed event, one which provokes a shift in literary ambitions that ultimately yields the Romantics.<sup>35</sup> Burke represents a key moment in this shift. Effectively synthesizing various earlier approaches, Burke's empirical investigation of the sublime in the *Enquiry* produced an account that was easily comprehensible and suited to the age's "increasingly sensational tastes" (Monk 99). Monk's classic study of the sublime summarizes Burke's account in the following terms:

In experiencing the sublime, the imagination seeks to represent what it is powerless to represent.... This effort and this inevitable failure of the imagination are the source of the emotions that accompany the sublime, which achieves its effect by the opposition between the object and our faculties of knowledge. (7)

The open mouth of speechless terror and the scream equally reflect the Gothic's interest in unrepresentable experience and the terrors associated with those things that are perceivable but essentially unspeakable.<sup>36</sup> The servant's experience exemplifies what

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<sup>35</sup> *Peri Hupsous* had been available in both English and Latin editions prior to Boileau's translation which appeared in 1674. Monk argues that Boileau's translation, and more importantly, his introduction to the translation, marked a "turning point of Longinus's reputation in England and France" (21).

<sup>36</sup> Linda Williams has investigated a similar phenomenon in film. Williams links the women's melodrama, the horror film, and the pornographic film in terms of their exploration of limit experiences and the

David Morris has described as Gothic sublimity's "strained relation to language." Morris, who argues that Walpole's Gothic novel represents "a vision which refuses to console us with fictions of a knowable world" (313), sees Walpole's deployment of the sublime as "explor[ing] a terror of the unspeakable, of the inconceivable, of the unnameable" (312).<sup>37</sup>

The opening sequence of Walpole's novel figures the sublime experience as visually affective, emotionally excessive, and outside the powers of verbal representation. Unlike the rest of the audience, Manfred's response to the spectacle suggests a failure of sympathetic response and is the first indication that Manfred is hiding something. Manfred, "less apprehensive than enraged," is neither astonished nor struck dumb by the servant's display. Unaffected by the expression of terror or its spreading effects in the wedding audience, Manfred speaks. Manfred's relationship to verbal representation will be a matter of central concern throughout the narrative.

Manfred responds to the spectacle of sublime terror with questions that attempt to account for the origin and meaning of the servant's terror. Manfred's bellowed questions eventually nudge the servant from his stupor. He cries out "Oh! The helmet! The helmet!" while from the courtyard comes a "confused noise of shrieks, horror, and surprise" (18). Manfred, now alarmed, goes to the courtyard, where:

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intersection of the visible and the ineffable. Like the present study, Williams brings the three sensational genres together and notes their shared interest in bodily and emotional excess.

<sup>37</sup> Despite the importance of obscurity in Burke's account of the sublime, Morris regards the Gothic novel, beginning with Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, as "an implicit critique of Burke" (302). Walpole employs exaggeration and repetition, strategies long associated with the sublime style, as "principles of narrative structure" (302). But where Burke had "founded his theory of the sublime on an irreconcilable split between terror and love," Morris maintains that Gothic sublimity is "located at the very origin of desire" and "demonstrates the possibilities of terror in opening the mind to its own hidden and irrational powers" (306). Incest, a common preoccupation of the Gothic, is central to Morris' analysis of Walpole's Gothic sublimity which he argues is best understood in relation to Freud's essay on "The Uncanny."

The first thing that struck Manfred's eyes, was a group of his servants, endeavouring to raise something, that appeared to him a mountain of sable plumes. He gazed, without believing his sight. 'What are ye doing?' cried Manfred, wrathfully; 'where is my son?' A volley of voices replied, 'Oh, my Lord! the prince! the prince! the helmet! the helmet!' Shocked with these lamentable sounds, and dreading he knew not what, he advanced hastily; but, what a sight for a father's eyes! He beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, a hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers. (18-19)

As the wedding guests move to the courtyard and encounter the source of the servant's terror, the narrator shifts the focus to Manfred. It is through Manfred's eyes that the reader first encounters the helmet. This shift in perspective is of interest because it effectively retains the level of mediation between the reader and the supernatural source of terror. In the opening sequence, the reader of the novel has been associated with the audience of guests. That internal audience acts as mirror for the external audience, reflecting the desired affective response. Once that internal audience moves into direct visual contact with the source of the servant's terror, the narrative again mediates the reader's view of the object by moving out of the audience's perspective during the initial description of the apparition and then back into it in order to recreate the theatrical dynamic of an audience looking on a single character's response.

Although the sight of the servant's terror has not affected Manfred, the sight of the helmet and the "lamentable sounds" made by those present produce shock and dread.

The sight of his son, “dashed to pieces” by the enormous helmet with its sable plumes produces in Manfred at least one of the effects felt by the servant before him: he is rendered, however momentarily, mute.

The horror of the spectacle, the ignorance of all around how this misfortune had happened, and, above all, the tremendous phenomenon before him, took away the prince’s speech. Yet his silence lasted longer than even grief could occasion. He fixed his eyes on what he wished in vain to believe a vision; and seemed less attentive to his loss, than buried in meditation on the stupendous object that had occasioned it. He touched, he examined, the fatal casque; nor could even the bleeding mangled remains of the young prince, divert the eyes of Manfred from the portent before him. All, who had known his partial fondness for young Conrad, were as much surprised at their prince’s insensibility, as thunderstruck themselves at the miracle of the helmet. (19)

Manfred’s response to the spectacle of Conrad’s horrible death is astonishment, but not terror. He is shocked by what he sees, but remains emotionally unmoved. He looks upon the helmet, sees that it is real, confirms this reality empirically, and yet cannot make sense of it because despite its availability to sense verification, it defies logic. The narrator remarks the other spectators’ surprise at Manfred’s “insensibility”—his failure to emote or be touched by the spectacle. These remarks direct the eye from the helmet to Manfred himself, much as the pointing finger has pointed us toward the still invisible source of the servant’s terror. Having first been the eyes through which the spectacle was seen, Manfred now becomes the object of the audience’s gaze as he looks upon the

helmet and his son's body. The audience finds itself looking at someone who is looking, and thus the sublime spectacle, though now physically present, again appears through its effects on a lone spectator. The shift in perspective reiterates the notion that an audience is more affected by its encounter with the expression of emotion than by its experience of the source of that emotion.

Manfred's silence reflects more dread than grief or terror. While the "vulgar spectators" are "thunderstruck" at this "miracle," Manfred is "buried in meditation" on the object that the narrative identifies as a "portent." Manfred, however, will reject the helmet as a portent, refusing to acknowledge its significance. Despite his refusal, Manfred's dread suggests that he understands the meaning of the "stupendous object." While the audience's terror is characterized by a fear of the incomprehensible but nevertheless present, his dread is a "shrinking apprehension" of a future event.<sup>38</sup> Manfred's dread is occasioned by his fear of the prophecy's fulfillment and by the knowledge which he desires to keep hidden or repressed.

While Conrad's corpse is taken to the castle and the lady Hippolita is revived, Manfred remains mute, "gazing on the ominous casque" (29). Manfred's fixed gaze, the narrator suggests, is an attempt to dispel an illusion; he wishes "in vain to believe [the helmet] a vision." Visions, whether a product of the supernatural or of imagination, are a form of false perception. Because the appearance of the helmet is not reasonable, it must be a vision; and yet Manfred's empirical investigation of the situation can only confirm that the helmet is real. Manfred's fixed gaze cannot dispel the vision—his eyes are not

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38 I derive my definition of dread from the Oxford English Dictionary, compact edition, 1971.

making a mistake. Moreover, the other spectators share his vision and he verifies the accuracy of one sense with another: he reaches out and touches the helmet.

When Manfred finally speaks, he speaks of empirical reality not of subjective impression, tending “solely to inquiries” about the object before him. Manfred’s questions to the other spectators unleash a flurry of “senseless guesses” that the narrator declares are “as absurd and improbable as the catastrophe itself was unprecedented” (30). And yet the senseless guess, the one that is both absurd and improbable is certain to be better founded than any sensible theory. Where does a giant helmet with a “proportionable quantity of black feathers” come from, on the sudden? It is a ridiculous question, to which there can only be a senseless answer.

Theodore’s answer, one based on his own empirical observations, enrages Manfred. A stranger to the village, Theodore remarks the similarity of the helmet to that worn by a statue in the town square. Agreeing, several villagers quickly investigate and report that the helmet that once sat atop the head of Alfonso’s statue is missing. Manfred, who in his rage is prevented from “poignarding” the young stranger by the intervention of the other spectators, accuses Theodore of killing Conrad, arrests him, and after removing the mangled body of Conrad, has Theodore imprisoned beneath the helmet. In assigning blame for the event to a human agent, however, Manfred acts unreasonably. The helmet is one hundred times larger than it was formerly and made not of stone but of metal: its transportation and dilation in size can’t be reasonably explained by attribution to a single human agent. The appearance of the helmet is, to the contrary, both irrational and supernatural—it is, as the passage that describes it announces, a portent. Its appearance initiates the coming to pass of the ancient prophecy: “that the Castle and Lordship of



Otranto should pass from the present family whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it” (17).<sup>39</sup>

Manfred is the sole observer who seems to comprehend the meaning of the helmet’s appearance, and yet he closes his eyes to this meaning by staring at the helmet and touching it and generally willing it to be less real than it obviously is. What Manfred brings to bear on this and other apparitions in the novel are strategies of empirical inquiry and rational skepticism. But in Walpole’s Gothic novel, the portentous apparitions can be neither rationally explained nor empirically disputed. They represent the literal coming to pass of the prophecy and their meaning is inseparable from their effect. With the appearance of the helmet, Alfonso begins his piece by piece return to the castle. Once assembled or re-membered, he will indeed prove to be “grown too large to inhabit it.”

The helmet is a portent, and as such emblematic, but the helmet is also something more than a portent since it does not foretell so much as begin the coming to pass of a thing foretold. The helmet does not so much signify as constitute the irruption of the prophecy into empirical reality. Though speechless, the servant communicates something to his audience: he communicates his emotional state and he communicates it by visual infection—through their affective observation of him. The meaning of the portentous appearance of the helmet is inseparable from its emotional effects.

Manfred rejects the supernatural appearances in the novel by trying to produce explanations for them, nevertheless recognizing the irrationality of these explanations.

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39 The first part of the prophecy is revealed on the first page of the novel; the second part—that Ricardo’s heirs should maintain ownership “as long as issue-male from Ricardo’s loins should remain to enjoy it”—is revealed only at the close of the novel with Manfred’s confession. (114) The prophecy is revealed to Ricardo in a dream and passed, we assume, from father to son.

Spoken in a moment of excessive passion in order to forestall other interpretations of the situation, Manfred's accusation against Theodore is one such explanation.

The mob, who wanted some object within the scope of their capacities on whom they might discharge their bewildered reasonings, caught the words from the mouth of their lord, and re-echoed, Ay, ay, 'tis he, 'tis he: he has stolen the helmet from good Alfonso's tomb, and dashed out the brains of our young prince with it:—never reflecting how enormous the disproportion was between the marble helmet that had been in the church, and that of steel before their eyes; nor how impossible it was for a youth, seemingly not twenty, to wield a piece of armour of so prodigious a weight. (21)

When Manfred accuses Theodore of the murder of Conrad, and the “generality” gathered seem willing to believe this explanation, the “folly” of these people brings “Manfred to himself.” When he then resorts to the argument that Theodore must be a “necromancer,” Manfred purposely proposes an explanation in which he himself has no belief. He fabricates one supernatural explanation in order to avoid the other more obvious and viable supernatural explanation, a strategy that he will continue to deploy. In so doing, he will attempt to control the meaning of the visual phenomena. But the very nature of the portentous spectacles will make every explanation ridiculous and force him to adopt irrational and implausible positions.

What Manfred learns in the course of the novel is not just that his actions cannot prevent his fate from coming to pass. Neither is it just that his actions will actually fulfill the prophecy when he kills his own daughter and thereby extinguishes his line. Manfred

is also forced to accept the coming into physical being of the prophecy and the ineluctable coming into visibility of the knowledge he has kept from public view. The prophecy, though strange and inscrutable, is not figurative. And because there is nothing figurative about the verbal prophecy, it does not require and cannot sustain interpretation or analysis. Rhetorically and logically manipulative, Manfred's acts of interpretation and explanation obscure rather than reveal the truth.

Insofar as the helmet and the other enormous pieces that appear in the castle are portents, they are signifiers; and yet insofar as they are real, empirically verifiable phenomena, they are the prophecy's signified. Though the helmet is linked to the prophecy (and represents the beginning of the coming to pass of the prophecy), the helmet's function is primarily aesthetic or, to incorporate Ronald Paulson's notion, *expressive*. Paulson's *Emblem and Expression*, which investigates the aesthetic and semiotic implications of the 18<sup>th</sup> century garden, draws a distinction between the "emblematic" and the "expressive." For Paulson, the emblematic garden is legible while the expressive garden employs an aesthetic of "immediate impressions."<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the expressive represents a "regression into the primitivism prior to language, or a leap forward to the ineffable beyond language" (52). The helmet, in its creation of subjective and immediate impression, or affective response, is expressive rather than emblematic: visible and affecting, its meaning is inseparable from its effects. The helmet is a portent and yet it is comprehensible only emotionally: its effects are aesthetic. The strange connection of the helmet to an aesthetic object—the sculpture of Alfonso—confounds the relationship between aesthetic representation (or art) and the real. The helmet that once

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40 Discussing Paulson's categories in his "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," W.J.T. Mitchell notes that in the face of the expressive, words fail.

sat atop St. Nicholas' head is missing, but the helmet that has crashed into the courtyard and crushed the heir of Otranto is metal and decorated with feathers. Thus the helmet is at once representational—what Maggie Kilgour describes as a “grotesquely literal synecdoche” for Alfonso and/or the prophecy—and a real (if oversized and therefore surreal) helmet.

Manfred confronts the portentous spectacles with the tools of empirical investigation and rational skepticism. He asks questions, he touches, and he doubts. His actions, however, can only confirm their physical existence. Moreover, the continued physical presence of the helmet and the sword vouchsafe the reality of all of the supernatural phenomena. The marvelous cannot be rationally explained or empirically disproven.

Manfred's rationalism is really just rationalization and is revealed to be illusory and false. Manfred's attempts to explain the irrational yield more irrationality: a situation that the constant presence of subaltern “simpleton[s]” renders comic. Reason and language are, through the character of Manfred, linked to rhetoric and the misrepresentation of the facts. Manfred does not seek to uncover the truth of what is happening through reason; he seeks to repress it.

Manfred's response to the supernatural stands in marked contrast to that of Hippolita and the ladies, who though they do not seem to know the secret that threatens their house, nevertheless feel the approach of disaster. The Gothic heroine tends to think emotionally, following her intuition. Hippolita and Matilda do not know Manfred's secret, but they feel it. Matilda spends hours gazing at the portrait of Alfonso and feels that her fate is somehow linked to the image, though she does not know why. She tells

her servant Bianca that she knows that the “adoration with which [she] looks at that picture is uncommon” (41). Hippolita has charged Matilda with praying at the grave of Alfonso, a charge she has assiduously attended since she was a child. Once Theodore appears on the scene, Matilda becomes emotionally connected to him even before she consciously recognizes his similarity to the man at whose feet she has for so long worshipped and prayed. It is at the foot of Alfonso’s grave that Matilda will meet, without understanding, her fate—just as her father, Manfred, brings down his own fate through the “blindness of [his] rage.”<sup>41</sup> The ladies follow their intuition; theirs is a knowing that is connected to emotional looking or a seeing that is feeling. Intuition represents an alternative to rational judgment in *Otranto*, and intuition finally provides a better picture of what is happening. The ladies’ intuitional mode of thinking proves to be a more effective mode, yielding a better account of the reality they are faced with.

If the Gothic heroine is the passive victim who intuits and communicates the emotional affect of the novel, the Gothic hero’s desire for mastery makes him the victim of his own impassioned actions. Both are overwhelmed with feeling; but while she passively accepts what fate seems to decree, his emotional response is masked by rational skepticism or translated into destructive action. Manfred’s rage blinds him to the emotional effects of the sublime and to the reality around him. William Patrick Day has described Manfred’s character as archetypal: “Manfred’s image of himself as an individual and as a ruler is tied to the masculine archetype’s will to power. The sadism of

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41 In an action that precipitates the narrative’s climactic conclusion, Manfred mistakes Matilda for Isabella and kills his daughter in a fit of blind rage and jealousy. His vision, occluded by excessive passion and his misinterpretation of an eye-witness report, fails him. In later Gothic novels, this visual impairment will become a feature of what Rosemary Jackson calls the uncanny fantastic, where characters project psychic anxiety onto the world and see only figments of their imagination. See Jackson, *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*. Todorov’s *The Fantastic* is the classic study of this literary genre.

the male protagonist is revealed, not simply as an accident of the Gothic spectacle, but rather as intrinsic to the masculine conception of identity, which defines the self by its ability to impose its will upon those around it” (94). Manfred is a character who finds himself in a typical tragic situation: attempting to consolidate his power and status, Manfred uses his family as an instrument of his will and emblem of his own identity.

What Manfred desires—a viable heir to continue his line and secure his estate—is not unreasonable. With the exception of his final murderous action, the way that Manfred asserts his will is largely a matter of verbal representation. Manfred exercises his will through argument and persuasion. His original plan to wed Isabella to Conrad rests on his persuasion of her family that the match would be in her interest. After Conrad’s death, Manfred tries to convince Isabella that she should marry him, while he works to persuade all of the other characters, from Hippolita to Matilda to Father Jerome to Frederic, that they should accede to and assist his desire to marry Isabella and thereby secure his property in Otranto. His labors are largely successful: he negotiates a deal with Frederic whereby the houses will be joined by each marrying the other’s daughter; and, by employing “every insinuating and plausible argument” (99), he persuades Hippolita to accept their annulment.

The supernatural apparitions, however, consistently thwart his efforts. The arrival of the helmet destroys Manfred’s original plan; the feathers on the helmet rustle threateningly in response to his subsequent address to Isabella; the skeletal remains of the hermit redirect Frederic to a virtuous path; and three drops of blood fall from the nose of Alfonso’s statue as Manfred makes a last-ditch effort to persuade Father Jerome and Hippolita to assist his new plan. In each case, the supernatural event parries Manfred’s

efforts at persuasion by terrifying his audience into intellectual incapacity. The effects of Manfred's persuasive abilities are counteracted by the sublime effects of the supernatural.

Manfred's quest for mastery will inevitably give way to loss and death because he cannot dictate the meaning of the "portents." Though Manfred will attempt to disconnect the visual and physical manifestations from the prophecy, he will finally be forced to confess the secret he and his ancestors have withheld from public view, invalidating his own claim to Otranto and completing the work of the prophecy. The prophecy will be made visible and tangible; the story that has so long been kept from view will be forced from Manfred; and the written document that has for generations propped up his family's false claims to status and property will be exposed as fake.

The concluding sequence of the novel, like the opening sequence, develops around a dynamic of the seeable and sayable. Manfred's attempt to solicit information from Isabella's servant Bianca is compromised by their mutual misapprehension of each other's meaning, frustrating his desire to interpret and control the relationships between other characters. Frederic's resolve to marry Matilda is challenged first by Bianca's eyewitness account of supernatural occurrences in the castle and then, more effectively, by his own observation of a supernatural phenomenon. Confronted with the cowed skeleton of the Joppa hermit, Frederic is reminded of his duties and the "behest of heaven" he has seen engraved on the sword. The experience turns Frederic from his less-than-virtuous path by counteracting the persuasive influence of Manfred and Frederic's own powerful desire for Matilda. When Hippolita discovers the prostrate Frederic and asks for an explanation of his state, he can only express his terror and sadness in a "face bedewed with tears" (107). Questioned by Hippolita, Frederic replies—"I cannot speak"—and runs

from the room. Frederic, who has sought out Hippolita in order to persuade her to support Manfred's plan, is redirected by what he sees to silence.

Frederic's visual encounter with the supernatural finds a counterpart in Manfred's transition from visual impairment to enlightenment. Blinded by jealousy and rage, and laboring under false "conjectures," Manfred mistakes Matilda for Isabella and fatally stabs her. Her sentimental effusions and Manfred's tragic realization open the curtain on a visual spectacle of emotional excess: Matilda slowly and pathetically expires as Manfred beats his breast while the other characters, helpless and tearful, look on. As the party transports the dying Matilda to the castle, the arrival and subsequent prostration of Hippolita repeats her performance in the opening scene of the novel. The sentimental tableau culminates as Matilda draws her parents together and clasps their hands in her own over her heart. Manfred, the narrator tells us, is "unable to speak" (110). Like Frederic, Manfred is deprived of speech by the emotionally overwhelming sight. Manfred's muteness, grief, and horror correct his response in the opening scene and mark the hero's tragic recognition.

The sentimental spectacle of Matilda's gesture of reconciliation with her parents prepares the way for the final spectacle of supernatural power and the final fulfillment of the prophecy. As Matilda's body is carried into the courtyard, Manfred, who has been led away from the scene, returns "anxious once more to behold his daughter" (112). The moon shines down upon the party assembled in the courtyard and Manfred "read[s] in the countenances of the unhappy company the event he dreaded" (112). Seeing but refusing to accept the meaning of what he sees, Manfred once again resorts to the interrogative: he cries in "wild confusion," "What! is she dead?" At the same instant a clap of thunder



shakes “the castle to its foundations; the earth rock[s], and the clank of more than mortal armour [is] heard behind” (112). As Theodore and Jerome rush into the courtyard, the walls of the castle are thrown down and “the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins” (112). The vision speaks to those gathered, saying “Behold in Theodore, the true heir of Alfonso!” and then ascends to heaven accompanied by another loud clap of thunder and greeted by the form of Saint Nicholas. Like Manfred’s emotional muteness, the vision’s proclamation returns us to the themes of the opening sequence. As the narrative begins, a spectacle of the performative powers of language is interrupted by the arrival of the helmet. Here, Alfonso’s proclamation and ascension are a spectacle of the performative powers of the visual: “Behold in Theodore, the true heir of Alfonso!” Alfonso’s enjoinder to look points to what is already visually manifest—Theodore’s physical likeness to Alfonso.

Confronted with the miracle, Manfred finally gives up any attempt to explain the situation or understand how Theodore can be the true heir, and instead offers his own confession as atonement. The climactic visual spectacle is followed by a concluding scene of storytelling, as each of the characters finally expresses what he has known and kept hidden. Manfred reveals his ancestor’s crime and the full prophecy; Jerome reveals his own history and its intersection with Alfonso’s. The stories that have been hidden from view are revealed. The truth, however, has been visible all along: Theodore’s resemblance to the portrait of Alfonso and the “mark of a bloody arrow” (57) inscribed on his shoulder have already announced the return of Alfonso’s line. While Manfred has attempted to “draw a veil over [his] ancestor’s crimes” (113), visual signs have

throughout the narrative thrown that veil aside and offered characters a glimpse of the truth.

In Walpole's Gothic novel, the tension between verbal and visual maps onto the tension between reason and emotion. Both tensions are resolved when knowledge is revealed as a feature of visual and emotional experience and not of verbal or rational effort. The veracity of the verbal and written, already troubled by association with false reasoning, rhetoric, and lies, is indicted by the evidence of the eyes. Manfred's efforts to control the meaning of the supernatural events become an exercise in rhetoric of the most manipulative kind as his interpretations obscure rather than support the understanding of others. Truth adheres in subjective impression and affective response to visual perception.

Visual experiences disrupt verbal ability in the novel and parry Manfred's efforts to control meaning through rhetoric. Rhetoric, which deploys false feeling in its effort to persuade or seduce, is contrasted to intuition and true feeling, which are involuntary and ineffable. Manfred's passions (anger and jealousy primarily) blind him to reality, as his final murderous action demonstrates. Knowledge of the truth is associated not with reason but with the epiphanic or intuitional. The prophecy cannot finally be understood—it can only be seen and felt. Purposefully ambiguous, it does not bear analysis or interpretation. By contrast, the meaning of the portentous visual phenomena is delivered in the moment spectators make eye contact...and again when the terrified spectators are seen by others. In both the figure of the helmet and the cipher of the prophecy we have the collapse of the semiotic. The verbal prophecy resists interpretation; it is transparent as a signifier. The helmet's meaning is inseparable from its effects. Knowledge, in *The*

*Castle of Otranto*, is equated with feeling even as vision becomes indistinguishable from the visionary.

As with the sentimental and pornographic novels treated in upcoming chapters, Walpole's Gothic novel draws the reader's awareness to the activity of looking and the effects of looking. Though storytelling is necessary, the novel offers the argument that sight is at the center of the most important communication. Understanding in Walpole's novel is based in sensuous perception and can only be apprehended through an emotional eye. The prefaces and other paratextual material associated with the novel encourage the reader to approach the text from the perspective of the emotional eye, subverting rather than supporting the reader's hermeneutic practice and making reading a matter of affective response. The narrative's conclusion reiterates that lesson with the defeat and silencing of Manfred. Alfonso's injunction to "behold" the truth announces the primacy of the visual and of affective response.

If later Gothic novels, and most notably those of Radcliffe, conclude with a reasonable explanation for the supposedly supernatural phenomena that appeared in the course of the narrative, Walpole's novel instead dismisses rational explanation and concludes with a visual spectacle of supernatural power and destruction. The thing destroyed is the titular subject of the narrative itself, and thus the final spectacle becomes a figure for the futility of interpretation and the power of affective visual experience. *The Castle of Otranto* concludes with the spectacular destruction of the castle of Otranto.

## Chapter Two Sentimental Vision: or, the Emotional Optics of Men of Feeling

Near the end of Laurence Sterne's novel *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, Yorick discovers a page of handwritten text that has served as napkin under his morning pat of butter. The page, written in "the old French of Rabelais's time," tells the tale of a notary who, on an evening walk occasioned by a domestic dispute, finds himself ambling past the door of a dying man just when he requires a notary. The man, destitute, wishes to record not his dying bequests, but the "history of [him]self" which he intends to leave as a "legacy to the world" (129). He promises the notary (and the reader) a sentimental tale that "will rouse up every affection in nature – it will kill the humane, and touch the heart of cruelty herself with pity—" (129). The notary's hand-written record of the man's "legacy to the world" ends here leaving Yorick and the reader hanging.

Yorick, who has labored the whole day to translate the page into English, asks La Fleur to recover the rest of the document. The servant, having wrapped the other two pages of the text around a bouquet of flowers he has given to a pretty maid, is confident of retrieving the tale for his master. But both La Fleur and Yorick are disappointed when they discover that the "perfidious" maid has "given his *gage d'amour* to one of the Count's footmen – the footman to a young sempstress – and the sempstress to a fidler, with [the] fragment at the end of it..." (130). The two men are "mortified" by the discovery.

La Fleur is mortified because the discovery evidences his maid's perfidy as well as her small regard for the tokens of his affection. The flowers, meant to signify his singular passion for a single lady, have circulated as the tokens of others' affections: the

lady has taken the currency of La Fleur's passion and spent it elsewhere. But the maid's action is no more perfidious than Yorick and La Fleur's own earlier recycling of a token of love. In the sequence entitled "The Letter," La Fleur helps the stymied Yorick to write a love letter based on the sentiments expressed in a note the servant has in his pocket. Written by "a drummer in his regiment to a corporal's wife," the letter, he feels, is sure to suit the occasion. La Fleur has quite a stack of letters cached in "a dirty little pocket book," and the scene suggests that he carries and uses them much like cash. Like the flowers, the drummer's letter goes beyond its intended recipient and circulates as a currency of desire, signifying not the passionate regard of one heart but of many or, more to the point, of *any*.

The flowers and the letter have a natural tendency to circulate precisely because they are *tokens* of affection. As signs with a particular purpose but a general meaning, they are readily reusable. One need only change the addressee to redirect the sentiment they represent. The re-use of the flowers mortifies La Fleur partly because it destroys the sentimental value of the gift and his gesture. Sentimental value depends not on circulation and exchangeability but on hoarding and uniqueness. The token of affection becomes an object of sentimental value when it is invested with a sentimental narrative and taken out of circulation. The re-use of the flowers thus mortifies La Fleur in multiple senses of the word: it has a "killing" effect on his passion for the lady and on his own sense of self-worth. At the same time, La Fleur's hoarding of letters not his own makes ironic his response to the perfidious maid; and Yorick's inability to make his pen produce is rendered comic as he is saved by his amorously successful, but clearly perfidious, servant.

While La Fleur is mortified by the loss of *les fleurs*, Yorick is mortified by the loss of the pages and the frustration of his readerly anticipation. Having been promised a tale of rare sentimental effect, indeed, one that has the power to “kill the humane, and touch the heart of cruelty herself with pity” (129), Yorick’s readerly desires are killed in the cradle when he cannot read on. Presented with the sentimental spectacle of a man tortured with emotion and on the point of death, Yorick is denied the narrative that will effect his sympathetic identification with the man’s plight. He cannot put himself into the man’s place without reading the man’s tale, but the manuscript, which is all that physically remains of the man, has been rendered mute by its fragmentation.

The episode of the Rabelaisian fragment is a microcosmic portrait of the sentimental narrative and its relationship to its readers. Yorick’s experience with the Rabelaisian fragment represents the sentimental reader’s desire to observe and understand the distress of others while enacting a reader’s confrontation with the mutability of texts. At issue in this episode is the production of sociability—in the affective power of literature and its attendant dangers, in the production of objects of sentimental as opposed to economic value, and in the association of knowledge with moments of emotional excess and sympathetic identification. The episode also brings together many of the recurring motifs and narrative strategies of the late sentimental novel. In the two novels that this chapter will treat, narratives are shown to have a tendency to interruption, loss, and decay. The disintegration of the narratives is both thematic and formal. Their production of ambiguities and their use of what one critic has called an aesthetic of the *non-finito*, or the incomplete, reflects the increasing importance of the reader or spectator

in aesthetic theory and practice in the period.<sup>1</sup> Like the Gothic and pornographic novels treated in surrounding chapters, sentimental narratives elicit the participation of their readers by eliciting emotional and physiological response. The sentimental narrative's objective is the affective response of its readers: sympathetic emotion and tears.

In the recurrent motif of the fragmented or misdirected text, however, we see the sentimental novel's skepticism about its ability to achieve that objective. Fragmentation is employed as a means of stimulating the imagination and encouraging the reader to fill in what is missing, soliciting visualization in the absence of direct vision. Yorick's experience with the Rabelaisian fragment, however, depicts the frustration of the reader's desire for communion and the failure of the sentimental text. The sentimental novel entertains the possibility of transcendent communication between individuals by way of visual encounters but it has to represent this experience of emotional insight by way of writing. Like Diderot's letter to his lover Sophie, the sentimental text attempts to represent what is in some way unrepresentable through the rupturing presence of silence, or "where there is nothing." But this puts the sentimental novel in the ironic situation of denigrating its own representational mode.

Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768) and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) were greeted by a public Janet Todd describes as "hungry for sentimental scenes and emotionally prepared to receive them" (3). Published at the apex of what Todd calls the "high period of sensibility," *A Sentimental Journey* and *The Man of Feeling* brought their audience, men and women

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<sup>1</sup> See Elizabeth W. Harries's essay "Sterne's Novels: Gathering up the Fragments" for a discussion of the role of the fragment and the incomplete in Sterne generally.

alike, to tears and “rapture.” General accounts of the sentimental novel, like that undertaken by Todd, often position Sterne and Mackenzie within a dual shift: from didacticism to excess, and from rising popularity to decline. While earlier sentimental novels had attempted to model behavior and etiquette, in the 1770s the sentimental novel largely abandoned this didactic effort and focused on the display of emotions. After the publication of these two works, the sentimental novel falls into decline. Maureen Harkin seems to lay responsibility for the decline of the genre at the feet of Mackenzie, whose efforts to “confer a pedigree” on the much disparaged sentimental novel and a degree of “dignity on the ideology of sentiment” had the simultaneous effect of “consigning it to a lost past” (329). Time has been kinder to Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* than to other sentimental novels. Critics have widely credited the equivocation and verbal playfulness of Sterne’s novel with preventing its falling out of circulation.

The success of these two novels in the 1770s had effects on their writers: both became strongly linked in the public imagination to their heroes. Sterne often signed himself as Yorick in letters and published his sermons under that name.<sup>2</sup> Mackenzie was, throughout his life, known as Edinburgh’s Man of Feeling. The writers not only allowed but encouraged this most basic readerly confusion of the relationship of fiction to the real. The reports of contemporary readers, which will appear in my discussions of each text, emphasize the aesthetic and affective aspects of the novels, testifying to their ability to move readers and to make them cry. The more recent critical readership has focused its attention on the social ramifications of the novels, and has often argued that the two authors intended their novels as critiques—if not *parodies*—of the sentimental narrative

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<sup>2</sup> Yorick is of course making a re-appearance in *A Sentimental Journey*, having already achieved a degree of popularity as a character in the earlier *Tristram Shandy*.



and its weak, ineffectual heroes. It is partly to address the division between the popular and the critical readership that I begin my readings of these two sentimental novels by considering the testimony of readers.

In both novels, virtue becomes embroiled in questions of surface and depth and in problems of visibility. The sentimental narrative and the sentimental response are governed first by what is seen. Readers of the sentimental are presented with descriptions of virtue in distress and asked to show their response in their eyes, with tears. The reader, like the hero, is treated to a series of spectacles of extreme emotion, the sight of which moves them and more particularly, brings them to tears. The sentimental novel's pursuit of emotional connection to others (or sociability) is treated differently by the two novels. While for Mackenzie's hero, the physical body and physical vision are revealed as impediments to sentimental identification, Sterne's Yorick is a sensationalist who pursues bodily and emotional stimulation in order to feel himself alive and embodied. Yorick flees death for the sensations of life, while Harley desires stasis and is inclined to a more sedentary existence. Harley's visual apprehension of the sentiments of others has the effect of gradually eroding his vivacity or mortifying his flesh.

The sentimental novel constructs its readers as spectators of the suffering of others. Both travel narratives, Sterne and Mackenzie's novels depict a peripatetic man of feeling's receptiveness to the emotions of others and his ability to express his own sentiments. In Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, a young country gentleman of refined feeling and failing fortune sets out for London where he will see a modern world in which sentiment and virtue have little value. In Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, a rather older man travels to the continent in search of

emotionally intense experiences that will stave off social and physical mortification. Both novels create problems of interpretation for readers and critics: they are novels that both epitomize and caricature an age's fascination with spectacle and emotional excess. While Mackenzie's eponymous emoter sinks beneath the weight of his emotions, weeping himself—eventually—to an early grave, Sterne's Yorick is constantly and comically frustrated by the interruption of his emotional expression.

**Seeing Feeling and Frustrating Reading: the Visual/Verbal Dynamic in Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy***

Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* was tremendously popular with late 18<sup>th</sup> century readers—more popular in its time than *Tristram Shandy*, which has become the better known novel in our own time. This popularity is visible in both the flurry of editions printed one after another and in the strange theatrics of its readers. The novel unleashed a generation of sentimental travelers who retraced Yorick's journey through the continent. In Germany, societies formed around the figure of Sterne's mendicant monk Lorenzo and members engaged in ceremonial exchanges of snuff boxes. If the numerous editions and digest reprintings point to the extensive circulation of Sterne's narrative, the examples cited above evidence another form of circulation: the physical re-enactment of Yorick's sentimental encounters by readers. John Mullan has observed that the sentimental text produces the “articulacy of sentiment...via a special kind of inward attention: a concern with feeling as articulated by the body—by its postures and gestures, its involuntary palpitations and collapses” (16). In the Lorenzo societies and the sentimentalized Grand Tour we see the evidence of Yorick's circulation within and effects upon the world of

fashionable comportment. This, however, is only part of the story. For if Sterne's readership can be described as large, it cannot so readily be characterized as sympathetic. While the behaviors of readers who aped Yorick's style attest to the novel's sentimental influence, the written testimony of other readers heaps as much disapprobation as praise on the book.

Readers often did, and still do, disagree about whether the book is good or bad. Horace Walpole recommended, if somewhat equivocally, the work to friend Thomas Gray: "I think you will enjoy Sterne's sentimental travels, which though often tiresome, are exceedingly good-natured and picturesque."<sup>3</sup> Vicesimus Knox, at the end of the century, credited Sterne's "power of shaking the nerves" and "affecting the mind in the most lively manner in a few words, and with the most perfect simplicity of language." Knox warned, however, of Sterne's potentially pernicious effects on readers: "That softness, that affected and excessive sympathy at first sight, that sentimental affection, which is but *lust in disguise*, have been the ruin of thousands of our countrymen and countrywomen, who fancied that while they were breaking the laws of God and man, they were actuated by the fine feelings of *sentimental affection*. How much are divorces multiplied since Sterne appeared!" Anna Seward, on the other hand, defended Sterne's sentimentalism and lauded his "penetration which seems to have an hundred eyes with which to look into the human heart." Strangely, Samuel Richardson and John Cleland, two very different writers, agreed as readers that Sterne was indecent, but harmless.

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<sup>3</sup> Walpole famously reviled *Tristram Shandy*.

Richardson maintained that his work was “too gross to be inflaming” while Cleland described it as “bawdy” but “too plain.... It gives no sensations.”<sup>4</sup>

The question of the book’s aesthetic success (whether it’s good), is quickly tangled with the question of the book’s effects on the reader’s body and the social body. Even here, however, readers disagree. While Knox declares the book (morally) bad because it is entirely too good at creating responses in its readers, Cleland declares the book bad (as pornography) because it fails to create response, or sensations. For both of these writers, what makes the novel bad is Sterne’s tendency to equivocation. Knox’s moral criticism argues that the novel’s very effective sensationalism—its ability to “ruin” readers—lies in its equivocation between moral sentiments and carnal sensation. Cleland, famous for writing one of the century’s most sensational novels, objects on these same grounds, arguing that the sensational effects of the novel are impeded by Sterne’s equivocation.<sup>5</sup>

In his book-length consideration of Sterne’s reception and reputation from which many of these comments are drawn, Alan B. Howes remarks that “the presence of so many diverse elements in Sterne often gave rise to misinterpretations of his work, for few readers, during his own time or later, saw the interrelationship of the different parts” (176). This characterization of the situation as a problem of *mis*interpretations presumes a correct or standard reading of the work. Modern critics, however, have increasingly

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4 Walpole, Knox, Seward, Richardson, and Cleland are all quoted in Alan B. Howes’s *Yorick and the Critics* (pp. 41, 75, 77, and 32, respectively). Howes’s book provides an invaluable study of the public and critical reception of Sterne from publication through the Victorian age.

5 Despite its promise to eschew ambiguous language in favor of descriptive clarity and complete confession, and despite opening with the heroine’s promise not to hide the “stark, naked truth” with so much as a “strip of gauze wrapper” (3), Cleland’s own pornographic *Fanny Hill* nevertheless employs the very ambiguous strategies of veiled language it promises to avoid.

emphasized the purposeful ambiguity of Sterne's text, an ambiguity which begins at the level of language (innuendo) and extends to the level of form.<sup>6</sup> From my perspective, Howes's explanation seems inadequate not because it suggests a single right way to read Sterne's work, but because it fails to pay sufficient attention to the emotions (or sensations) of the readers and their commentary about the aesthetic effects of the work. Many of the responses that Howes and other critics cite address the aesthetic, not the hermeneutic, discussing how Sterne's novels make the reader *feel*, not what they seem to mean. William Makepeace Thackeray, for example, describes feeling as though Sterne is watching his face for an expression—an experience that he does not particularly like.<sup>7</sup> To understand the experience of readers as a history of misinterpretations is to ignore both the testimony of those readers, which lays great emphasis on emotional response, and the writer's purposeful construction of a fragmented (and interpretively difficult or frustrating) narrative.

Drawing connections between the various parts of the narrative is, moreover, only part of the difficulty facing readers, for Sterne's narrative use of fragmentation includes the incorporation of fragments (found manuscripts and interpolated tales) as well as a grammatical habit of fragmentation (making much use of the dash and ellipsis). What is produced by all this fragmentation into disjointed parts is precisely equivocation: the

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6 Melvyn New's collection of Sterne criticism is itself structured around Sterne's ambiguity. New organizes the 18 essays contained in *Critical Essays on Laurence Sterne* into categories he calls "Four Faces of Sterne" and quickly reminds readers that although he doesn't know how many faces Sterne has, "surely it is more than four" (New, "Introduction: Four Faces of Laurence Sterne" 1). New's essay in the collection, "Sterne and the Narrative of Determinateness," argues that Sterne's narrative develops through apposition: simultaneously entertaining two contradictory positions.

7 Thackeray: "He is always looking in my face, watching his effect, uncertain whether I think him an impostor or not; posture-making, coaxing, and imploring me. 'See what sensibility I have – own now that I'm very clever – do cry now, you can't resist this.'" From *The English Humorists*, Everyman's Library (London, 1912) 233-234, quoted in Dussinger, 175.

narrative makes things *hard to tell*, frustrating the efforts of even the most careful reader. Indeed, the narrative repeatedly calls attention to the difficulties facing the reader. As in *Tristram Shandy*, the narrator sometimes speaks directly to the reader and her frustrations; and although Yorick does not order the reader to retrace her progress through earlier chapters, he occasionally apologizes for unnecessary details and partial truths or solicits the reader's sympathetic judgment of his behavior.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, the narrator attempts to parlay the reader's emotional experience of frustration and disconnection into sympathetic connection with his own plight. Thus the fragmented nature of Yorick's narrative has the effect of putting readers into Yorick's place: they are, like him, frustrated in their pursuit of emotional connection to others.

Collections like *The Beauties of Sterne* further fragmented the novel, extracting isolated episodes and presenting them as sentimental tableaux.<sup>9</sup> The popularity of these collections of sentimental episodes and the antics of the Lorenzo clubs suggest that the power of Sterne's novel lay in the individual episode as sentimental spectacle. By extracting particularly affecting episodes from the equivocating narrative that joined them, collections like *The Beauties of Sterne* essentially digested the novel for its readers, separating the pleasures of the sentimental encounter from the frustrations that seem inevitably to follow each episode.

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<sup>8</sup> Virginia Woolf regarded "Sterne's concern for our good opinion of his heart" as the novel's "chief fault." From Woolf's introduction to the 1928 Oxford Press edition, quoted in Descargues, 247.

<sup>9</sup> *The Beauties of Sterne: Containing all his pathetic Tales, his humourous Descriptions, his most distinguished Observations on Life, and a copious selection from his Sermons.* (London: J. Sharpe), 1810. An earlier American edition (1789, Philadelphia: W. Spotswood) added to this already lengthy subtitle the following: "Selected for the heart of sensibility." For a discussion of anthologies in relation to the development of the novel, see Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*.

Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* is a novel constructed of fragments and episodes, but the novel seems to operate according to a logic inimical to that of the episodes. While the individual episode constructs the reader as spectator of a sentimental visual encounter, the narrative that surrounds the episode tends to call the reader's attention back to herself as a reader.<sup>10</sup> And while the visual encounter at the center of the episode describes an individual's experience of ineffable suffering viewed by a spectator, the broader connecting narrative continually returns to the difficulties of communication. Within the discrete episode, the experience of a sufferer is communicated to an audience despite the essential ineffability of that experience. In the framing narrative, however, understanding and connecting with others is represented as impossible, not least by the necessary interruption of the episode for the continuation of the broader narrative. The novel's narrative line is characterized by interruptions and truncations, while the episodes explore the possibility of an emotionally transcendent connection between discrete individuals. Thus, the interpretive difficulty of the text that Howes points us to must be linked to the text's *interest* in and creation of interpretive difficulty: Sterne's narrative investigates verbal representation's failure to communicate meaning. Throughout *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne calls attention to the mutability and undependability of linguistic representation. The text's engagement with hermeneutic difficulty throws the reader onto the resources of her imagination (to fill in the blanks left by fragmentation) and into the isolated episodes in which the visual encounter is ascendant. By frustrating the reader's desire to understand with the introduction of the equivocal, Sterne directs his audience to the resources of spectatorship and affective response—from the hermeneutic

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10 As in *Tristram Shandy*, the narrator of *A Sentimental Journey* (Yorick) refers to his reader as "Madam."

to the aesthetic. The comic reversals and interruptions of Yorick's spectatorship serve as relief and intensification of the emotional intensity of these sentimental episodes, and evidence the comparative inadequacy of verbal communication and representation.

While the individual episodes produce an experience of stasis as the hero and reader pause to view a sentimental spectacle, the overarching (travel) narrative presses the hero and reader to continue down the road. Yorick undertakes his sentimental journey as a means of spying on the hearts of others. His spying, however, is not an attempt to gather intelligence about the land or the French, as the police suspect, nor is it, as the Count de B\*\*\* surmises, to "spy the nakedness" of French ladies. Yorick's declared purpose is, rather, to "spy the *nakedness* of their hearts, and through the different disguises of customs, climates, and religion, find out what is good in them to fashion my own by" (108). His is a mission to see through the superficial and external and it reflects a desire for a more dependable and accurate understanding of others. Yorick's spying is sentimental vision in the service of understanding and self-knowledge. Spying the denuded hearts of others will help Yorick to improve his own: determining (seeing clearly) the characters of others will assist him in determining (shaping) his own character. An exercise in self-fashioning and the aesthetic pleasures of careful observation, Yorick's journey is a new take on a fashionable cultural practice, the Grand Tour.

Yorick, like others before him, travels to the continent to have a look at the world and fill the gaps in his understanding of human nature. He disembarks without plan or itinerary, carrying only a spare shirt and the intention to observe others. The sightseeing of the sentimental traveler eschews architectural spectacle and art salon for the spectacle



of emotional excess. That the sentimental traveler's mode of sightseeing could be misinterpreted as either political espionage or perverse voyeurism is pointed out to Yorick and the reader by the winking Count de B\*\*\*. Following through on the Count's insinuating remarks, a number of critics have discussed the gender and class ramifications of Yorick's "spying." Yorick embarks for France after an embarrassing verbal encounter with his servant in which his knowledge of others is effectively questioned and Yorick himself is silenced. The sentimental gentleman's preoccupation with the difficulty of seeing and determining character suggests a cultural anxiety. In their readings of the sentimental novel, and particularly of *A Sentimental Journey*, a number of critics including Judith Frank and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have discussed this central concern in relation to changing class configurations.<sup>11</sup>

For Yorick, seeing feeling is a means of extending his understanding of human nature and combatting his own isolation. One of the most serious hurdles in the road of the sentimental traveler is thus the occlusion of his vision, whether by hobbyhorsical prejudice or fear of making eye-contact. The mementos Yorick collects in his travels are intense emotional experiences of strictly sentimental value, memories of the people he has seen and come to know by feeling with and for them. Yorick's affective desire to connect with and know others is constantly frustrated: by his failure to look; by physical

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<sup>11</sup> Sedgwick argues that Yorick's sentimentalism, and more particularly the androgyny that stems from his sentimentalism, is ideologically engaged to "express and assuage the specific homosocial anxieties of the male middle-class intellectual" (72). These anxieties take shape around Yorick's relationship to servants, especially La Fleur. The overall shape of the narrative would seem to support this view: beginning with a deflating conversation between Yorick and his servant, the novel ends when Yorick's hand encounters the rear-end of another servant. Taking a closer look at the issues raised by Sedgwick, Judith Frank argues that Yorick's desire is "a typically sexualized version of the sentimental traveler's project: the spying of the hearts of others in the service of bourgeois self-improvement and self-empowerment" (97). Both critics ultimately link Yorick's tourism to imperialism: while Sedgwick calls Yorick's project "imperialism with a baby face" (67), Frank characterizes Yorick as "diligently acquisitive" and "a virtual imperialist of sensibility" (120). For more general discussions of the class ramifications of the sentimental novel, see Chris Jones' *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* and Robert Markley's "Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne, and the Theatrics of Performance."

disability, loss, and decay; and by missed connections, interrupted interludes, and mortifying self-consciousness.

Though he desires emotional coitus, the metaphor governing his interactions with others is *coitus interruptus*. We see Yorick get no further than hand-holding in his travels; but this failure to achieve coitus is not the source of Yorick's frustration. The sentimental traveler seeks encounters productive of intense physical and emotional feeling that will end the individual's isolation and combat the body's decay and the malady of self-consciousness—or mortification. Yorick's search is for intense experiences that will make him feel really alive. Fleeing the *memento mori* that his own name recalls, Yorick seeks *memento vitae*. But just as Yorick's quest will be frustrated by self-consciousness, inattention, and the vagaries of life on the road, the reader's desire for connections and clarity will be likewise frustrated by narrative interruptions, confusing embeddings, and sudden mortifying endings.

Yorick's first sentimental encounter on landing in France is a spectacular failure. The first person he meets is the mendicant monk Lorenzo, whom Yorick treats rudely, refusing him alms and wittily defending his refusal at the expense of the monk's dignity. The monk's presentation of visual cues and sentimental gestures is trumped in the episode by Yorick's hobbyhorsical predetermination against the Franciscan: "The moment I cast my eyes upon him, I was predetermined not to give him a single sous; and accordingly I put my purse into my pocket – buttoned it up – set myself a little more upon my centre, and advanced up gravely to him..." (29). The monk lays a hand upon his heart and "introduce[s] himself with the little story of the wants of his convent, and the

poverty of his order” (30), but Yorick remains unmoved by either the “deprecation...of his look and figure” or the “grace” with which he makes the appeal. Yorick first points out that there are “many *great claims*” on the “stock” of “charity of the world,” more than can be met. The monk, “glanc[ing]” quickly and significantly down at the “sleeve of his tunic,” draws Yorick’s eye to his “coarse habit” and makes him feel “the full force of the appeal.” Yorick, having already determined against the man, acknowledges the appeal but insists that “we distinguish” between those who “eat the bread of their own labor” and those “who eat the bread of other people’s” (30-31).

The mendicant monk solicits both coin and sympathy, but the visible signs of poverty and distress in the monk have no effect on Yorick. Despite the tattered habit, the monk’s suffering does not prompt either sympathy or benevolence. Instead of tears or coin, Yorick dispenses only verbal ridicule. This is true despite the general mood of generosity and contentment that a good meal and bottle of wine has produced in the sentimental traveler. Yorick has just finished comparing his own sense of generosity to the apparently grasping nature of the French monarch: over dinner he has been considering the unjust and ungenerous French policy of the *Droits d’aubaine*, which decrees the “effects of strangers” who die in France to be the property of the King. At the end of his meal and his consideration of the matter, Yorick declares that were he King, it would be the perfect time for a poor orphan to beg the effects of a dead father. It is at this point, with Yorick having “scarce uttered the words,” that the monk approaches.

Although Yorick is literally standing with his hand upon his purse, looking for someone to accept his charity, he refuses the monk’s appeal. Indeed, Yorick charges the monk with

diverting funds from the truly distressed and perversely points to the many suffering poor he has left without succor in his own country as an excuse for his lack of charity.

A number of critics have read Yorick's treatment of the monk alongside his ruminations about power and property in his fantasy about the King. Sedgwick characterizes Yorick's preferred style as "dilative" and traces his failure in this episode to "puritannical, nationalistic, constricted sentiments [which] represent a repressed Yorick of whom the manifest, expressive Yorick is deeply ashamed" (75). For Sedgwick, and for John Dussinger as well, Yorick's unsympathetic response to the monk has everything to do with another father—the King of France. Having only just arrived, Yorick is immediately "arrested there—not by the King of France, but by a fantasy about the King of France" (Sedgwick 74). In his meal-time fantasy, Yorick makes the usurping power of the King into narrative, casting himself first as helpless, then as reproaching, and finally as more generous and "transcendent."<sup>12</sup> For Dussinger, the fantasy enacts a "defensive tactic toward authority" (183). Yorick's "transference from perception to illusion" is part of what Dussinger calls his "ontological insecurity," an insecurity that conditions all his relationships and which seems to form a companion to the "double awareness" that characterizes the reader's experience. Just as Yorick is uncomfortably aware of himself as spectator and spectacle, the reader is subjected to doubt about the meaning of things and their susceptibility to bawdy interpretations. Sedgwick characterizes Yorick's insecurity as "homosocial anxiety." For both critics, currency and sexuality are key components in Yorick's attempts to resolve his insecurity, attempts that operate in the exchanges between vision and imagination.

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<sup>12</sup> The word is Sedgwick's.

The fruits of this exchange are already visible in Yorick's reminiscent description, where Yorick's unsympathetic treatment of the monk is recorded alongside his reconsideration of the meeting and his mortification at his behavior. Though the good character of the supplicant monk makes no impression on Yorick at the moment of the encounter, his subsequent reflection on the episode, as each detail "croud[s] back into [his] imagination," leaves him "discontented" with himself (32). He has looked upon the monk without seeing him in any other capacity than as a representative of the Catholic church. Yorick's intentions of encountering others with an expansive openness and generosity have been defeated by his hobbyhorsical religious prejudices. Not finding it possible to exonerate himself from the charge of being unfeeling, Yorick hopes to "learn better manners" as he goes along. If in the dinner-time fantasy about the powers of the King the imagination helps to resolve Yorick's ontological insecurity, the imagination also becomes a means of restoring clear perception. In each case, Yorick regards himself as a character in a scene.

Sedgwick and Dussinger call attention to the role of the imagination in shoring up Yorick's sense of himself. His anxieties about his situation are resolved in the production of self-aggrandizing fantasy. The Lorenzo episode also demonstrates, however, the way that the imagination becomes the site of critical self-judgment (as opposed to self-aggrandizing fantasy). By replaying the scene in his imagination, Yorick transforms himself into a character on a stage, one whose actions and thoughts he can isolate, evaluate, and imagine learning from. As a spectator to his own behavior, Yorick evaluates the feeling with which he has played his part.<sup>13</sup> In this case, his witty

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13 Yorick's use of the imagination to make himself into a spectator of his own actions approaches Adam Smith's description of an ideal spectator in *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments*. For Adam Smith,

repudiation and failure to look with feeling upon the figure of the monk leaves Yorick “discontented” with himself and his performance.

Yorick’s mortification at his unfeeling behavior compels him to seek isolation and invisibility. Mocking himself, he quips that this mood of discontentment puts him into the right frame of mind to negotiate a “bargain.” Travel requires equipage...and he is in the market for a chaise. On walking into the coach-yard he is immediately taken with a *Desobligeant* parked in the far corner of the court. Unlike the monk, the *Desobligeant* “hit[s his] fancy at first sight” (32). He gets in and, “finding it in tolerable harmony with [his] feelings,” decides to call for the master of the hotel to complete the purchase. Disobliged with himself for his ungenerous response to the monk, Yorick chooses transport that fits his mood: an enclosed carriage that carries only one person, isolating him from any further communication with other travelers. He seems to determine at the outset of negotiations that he will fail to buy the chaise at a fair price, reasserting his preferred “dilative” style by, once again, opening his purse wide. The negotiations are postponed, however, when he observes the monk in conversation with an attractive lady he has noticed earlier, and he closes the door of the chaise, “determined to write [his] journey” (33). The activity of the writing sets the chaise into motion, mimicking either

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compassion and sympathy are produced only when the spectator can be both himself—impartial spectator to another’s situation—and the other who suffers. Achieving sympathetic identification requires that we make theater of the other’s suffering, casting ourselves in the leading role and in the position of judging audience. “The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment” (12). For Smith, as for the other British Moralists, sympathy operates through the imagination. However, in Smith’s unique formulation of sympathy the imagination performs a series of visual substitutions rather than identifications: we must imagine ourselves into the place of others, and then imagine ourselves under the observation of yet others. By looking at his behavior from the point of view of an ideal spectator, Yorick sees that his own behavior cannot be sympathized with. For a discussion of sympathy in connection to Smith and the British Moralists, see Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*, Philip Mercer, *Sympathy and Ethics*, Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion*, John Sheriff, *The Good Natured Man*, and David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy and “Adam Smith and the Theatricality of Moral Sentiments.”*

travel or sexual play, and calls the attention of the people milling in the yard to the Desobligeant, making Yorick's petty isolation of himself a spectacle for public perusal.

Yorick's preference for the Desobligeant suggests that he is starting his journey on the wrong foot. Both of the determinations made at first sight have been made, not in haste, but without feeling and have had the effect of isolating him from his fellow man. Likewise, his decision to begin the writing of his journey while closeted in the Desobligeant will give outside spectators only the semblance of travel and passion in the rocking of the chaise and will occlude his own ability to see. The preface he writes there is dry and pseudo-scientific, withdrawing him from the economy of sentiment he describes in it. He begins his preface by pointing to nature's circumscription of man's discontent through the creation of the "boundaries and fences" of regional differences in language, custom and habit, and by "laying him under almost insuperable obligations to work out his ease" (33). Man might as well "sustain his sufferings at home" for it is here that nature has "provided him with the most suitable objects to partake of his happiness, and bear a part of that burden which, in all countries and ages, has ever been too heavy for one pair of shoulders" (33). He concludes that people face so many natural "impediments in communicating our sensations out of our own sphere, as often amount to a total impossibility" (33). The argument serves the immediate purpose of justifying and explaining his sense of isolation. Yorick's choice of an enclosed carriage for one, however, can only exacerbate this problem.

Yorick is essentially caught between two impulses. The first, a categorizing impulse of taxonomy, is represented by the preface written in the Desobligeant and the prejudicial treatment of the Franciscan. By reducing the "whole circle of travellers" to a

few categorial “heads,” Yorick offers both himself and his reader the possibility of “determin[ing] his own place and rank in the catalogue” and thereby taking “one step towards knowing himself” (35). But although this self-knowledge might resolve the individual’s ontological insecurity, it comes at the cost of self-isolation. As a sentimental traveler, Yorick defines his own journey’s purpose in relation to forging difficult connections and overcoming the “impediments in communicating our sensations.” This second impulse to connection cultivates an affective response that levels “place and rank” through intense feeling and that operates through the observation of other hearts. Where the cataloguing impulse works to construct boundaries between types and classes (analysis), the sentimental or sympathetic impulse throws down boundaries and forges emotional connections between people (synthesis).<sup>14</sup> While the taxonomic pursues the disembodied and objective observation of the scientist, the sentimental approach risks self-exposure in its pursuit of emotional looking.

Both means of looking require imagination: the preface written in the *Desobligeant* is written with curtains drawn and thus in the absence of direct perception, while sentimental vision requires the imagination to look past mere surface features and gestures for the emotional situation beneath. But Yorick’s experience in the *Desobligeant* ultimately suggests that the cataloguing impulse requires both blindness and isolation and produces a self-aggrandizing fantasy of the self that is ultimately without either feeling or true knowledge. That the taxonomic approach is written, and written from a position of

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<sup>14</sup> Sedgwick, Frank, and Dussinger would likely argue that this distinction between the sentimental and the taxonomic impulse does not finally hold in the novel and that sentimental insight is finally shown to be a self-empowering fantasy that visually fixes and catalogs others in order that Yorick can himself remain outside the gaze of others. Catherine Gallagher’s argument also seems to run counter to my more optimistic description of sentimentalism. For all of these critics, sentimentalism is an act of appropriation. I don’t disagree with this appraisal, but I want to investigate the sentimental novel’s entertainment of the possibility of transcendent communication between individuals by way of visual encounters and its concurrent representation of verbal communication as flawed and incommunicative.



blindness, should not be overlooked. Yorick's failure to act with feeling in his encounter with the monk results from the occlusion of his sentimental vision by hobbyhorsical prejudice and his preference for verbal witticism. His retreat to the Desobligeant to write the opening account of his travels repeats the error. While the taxonomic relies on verbal representation produced in isolation and blindness, the sentimental approach is visual, sensual, and in Sedgwick's characterization, "dilative."

Though Yorick's concern for his appearance (his self-consciousness and mortification over his treatment of the monk) leads him to a preference for isolation and invisibility, his passion for a woman will encourage him to reject the isolation of the Desobligeant. It is the presence of a lady, and his immediate infatuation with her, that allows him finally to resume his dilative style. Women stimulate his passions, and this sensual awareness in turn makes Yorick more compassionate and open. Yorick is "firmly persuaded, that if ever I do a mean action, it must be in some interval betwixt one passion and another: whilst this interregnum lasts, I always perceive my heart locked up – I can scarce find in it, to give Misery a sixpence; and therefore I always get out of it as fast as I can and the moment I am rekindled, I am all generosity and good will again" (57). Sensual passion becomes a stimulant of the imagination that increases the sentimental traveler's receptiveness to the feelings of others, easing the difficulties associated with communicating sensations. Yorick's passion for a lady ends the *interregnum* and makes him a king...perhaps that same generous king that he imagined himself to be in the moments before the monk made his appearance.

In effect, Yorick's final choice of coach rejects the taxonomic principles governing the preface written in the Desobligeant and contributes to the kind of narrative

that does get written—a fragmented narrative that moves forward through random or chance connections and that is constructed through juxtapositions and syntheses that transcend the boundaries of time and space. Instead of logical (time-driven) progression, the novel pursues sentimental connections forged by emotionally arresting sights, stimulating physical encounters, and the juxtaposition of intense experiences in memory.

The unfolding of the narrative around the monk, Madame de L\*\*\*, and the Desobligeant exemplifies this narrative construction through juxtapositional fragmentation and narrative spectacle. It is a narrative construction that makes reading a rather difficult process, and one that encourages readers to approach the text impressionistically and visually. Yorick's flirtation with the lady in the coach yard will be interrupted by a proleptic account of the monk's death and Yorick's visit to the monk's grave. Then the interruption or prolepsis will close and return the narrative to the point of departure—Yorick and Madame de L\*\*\* holding hands at the door of the remise. The interruption of the handholding by the tale is initiated in the arrival of the monk. Yorick takes the opportunity to apologize to the man in front of the lady, offering the monk his snuff box as a token of reconciliation, a gesture that John Dussinger has treated psychoanalytically.<sup>15</sup> In a typically careful and aesthetically precise description, Yorick hands his snuff box to the monk with one hand while taking the monk's with the other. The problem that this creates for the reader (at least this one) is that after the proleptic account of the monk's history and death, Yorick brings us back to the main narrative with the following remark: "I had never quitted the lady's hand all this time..." (45). But

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<sup>15</sup> Dussinger points out in his reading of the scene that Yorick's snuff box was a gift from Eliza. He also regards the snuff box as a "fetish for the female body; and like many other material objects in Yorick's vision – the desobligeante [sic], money, gloves, the purse, the birdcage, the sword, and the final curtain – it acquires erotic importance as a substitute for the sexual object and when the normal sexual aim has to be deferred for one reason or another" (192).

Yorick is here mistaken; he has of necessity quitted the lady's hand in order to exchange snuff boxes. The narrative regularly uses gestures like hand-holding and pulse-taking to literally keep the reader in touch with the central narrative during a digression, but here that connection is broken to facilitate another gesture of connection.

The interruption of Yorick and the lady's hand-holding with the monk's sentimental tale and a sentimental tableau of Yorick's tears over the man's unkempt grave becomes emblematic: while Yorick is driven by a desire to connect, the narrative path is littered with interruptions, embeddings, and sudden truncations that impede both the orderly journey and the forging of connections. Yorick's grasp on the lady's hand will fail, not only because he must reach out both hands for the exchange of snuff boxes, but because he will be inexorably drawn to a mortifying self-awareness of his own sentimental gestures as aesthetically posed.

Self-consciousness stymies sentimental connection, and the mortification that attends self-consciousness causes Yorick to avoid eye-contact with others. In avoiding eye-contact, however, Yorick occludes his vision and reverts from direct perception to fantasy. These fantasies in turn draw Yorick's attention back to himself, re-engaging the cycle of self-consciousness and mortification. Yorick undertakes his travels to look into the hearts of others so that he can better fashion his own. But Yorick doesn't always look very closely at the people he meets. When Yorick first meets Madame de L\*\*\*, he is too ashamed to look her in the eye. As he walks beside her across the courtyard, his "Fancy" sets about drawing it, and models her features after the head of a goddess. When he does eventually look at her face, he describes its features not at all, but instead describes why he finds it "interesting."

I fancied it wore the characters of a widowed look, and in that state of its declension, which had passed the two first paroxysms of sorrow, and was quietly beginning to reconcile itself to its loss – but a thousand other distresses might have traced the same lines; I wished to know what they had been – and was ready to inquire. [...] —In a word, I felt benevolence for her....” (41)

The “declension” of the “lines” writ in the lady’s face tells Yorick that she is sorrowful and he extrapolates from this that she is a widow (which of course means that she is available).<sup>16</sup> But despite Yorick’s interest and the lady’s availability and clear willingness, Yorick fails to connect with Madame de L\*\*\*. His immediate plans to share a coach with her are foiled by the arrival of her brother, and her request that Yorick visit to hear her sad story remains unanswered. Yorick quite intentionally fails to visit the lady, thereby frustrating his own desires and his readers’ desire to hear her story as well. But although Yorick neglects to go see her, the lady nevertheless makes a number of appearances in the subsequent narrative, both in the flesh and as part of Yorick’s fantasies. The visitation she has proposed occurs in the latter realm. Yorick *imagines* attending the lady in Brussels and the “moral delight” that “sharing in the sickening incidents of a tale of misery told to me by such a sufferer” could inspire. To “see her weep” and to attempt, unsuccessfully, to “dry up the fountain of her tears” as he sits patiently beside her through the night will be, he imagines, “an exquisite sensation” (66). Although Yorick claims there is “nothing wrong in the sentiment,” his fantasy of their

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16 There is, of course, no reason for the reader to believe any of this...Yorick’s only evidence for the lady’s widowhood is the “declension.” That she has a sad tale to relate is revealed by the lady herself, although the reader’s desire to hear it is frustrated by Yorick’s failure to meet her again.

meeting makes him reproach himself in “the bitterest and most reprobate of expressions” (66).

In part, Yorick’s harsh self-judgment is a recognition of his tendency to derive the wrong kind of pleasure from his fantasies of intense feeling and connection. The imagined meeting uses the lady like a strumpet (as Smelfungus has used the Venus of Medici) and suggests that his spectatorship of others is perverse. John Dussinger’s psychoanalytical reading of the novel argues that Yorick’s travels are a kind of flight from reality. Yorick proceeds in his intellectual journey by translating painful perceptions into fantasies. For Dussinger, “this escapist movement away from direct perception into fantasy is emphatic in the narrative structure. [...] His ‘short hand’ method of reading gestures while walking through the streets of the city is a habitual ‘translation’ of direct perception into pleasing images for the self” (181). The illusions and fantasies that Yorick produces fulfill his desire for knowledge and connection by retreating from objective reality. Thus Yorick’s journey of self-discovery and self-fashioning is transacted within the exchanges between vision and imagination. For Dussinger, “Yorick’s pursuit of the naked heart is fundamentally an experiment with vision” (177).

Yorick’s flight from objective reality into fantasy offers comfort for the absence of a more physically transcendent connection, but it prevents that other connection as well. Yorick must risk the unsympathetic regard of others if he is to exercise his own sentimental vision. Physical connection offers a more direct means of establishing sentimental connection to others, but Yorick’s experience with the various women in the novel suggests that self-consciousness impedes even this physical connection. Taking Madame de L\*\*\*’s hand, Yorick’s passion is communicated through the “pulsations of

the arteries along [his] fingers pressing across hers” (42). Later, in the scene with the Grisset, Yorick also takes a lady’s hand, this time to test her pulse. But in both cases, physical connection is ultimately untenable or unsatisfying. The Grisset’s husband walks in on the pair, and although he is clearly unmoved by his wife’s entertaining another man, his presence destroys the moment, leaving Yorick mortified and aware of himself in the eyes of others. At the door of the chaise, Yorick becomes similarly self-conscious as he holds the hand of Madame de L\*\*\*. The intensity of the emotional moment is shattered as he begins to imagine what she is thinking about him. Though physical contact offers the possibility of sharing feeling, self-consciousness seems inevitably to destroy the emotional connection that accompanies the physical one. Self-consciousness has a doubly mortifying effect: it is socially debilitating and it destroys the immediacy and passion between Yorick and his ladies.

Sedgwick’s early work on Sterne drew critical attention to the role of gender in the sentimental novel’s engagement with power and sexuality. Women, in Sedgwick’s account, become “just the right lubricant for an adjustment of differentials of power...” (76). As many critics have noted, even when the virtuous distressed are not actually women, they are feminized by their position of powerlessness, making gender a key component of any investigation of the sentimental. What Sedgwick’s analysis of the sentimental novel adds, however, is an articulation of the ways that gender relationships are used to address class relationships, and her analysis has had a clear impact on the ways in which subsequent critics approached the sentimental novel. Yorick’s sentimental travels are inextricably bound up in the mortification he experiences at the hands of a servant; and his relationship to others, and most importantly to his servant(s), “is

articulated through various forms of the conquest and exchange of women” (69).<sup>17</sup> This exchange, however, does not necessarily leave Yorick on top.

Yorick’s self-feminization, or androgyny, and his narratively expedient use of tears are deployed as a means of adjusting his relationship to his audience through a sentimental appeal to the reader’s sympathy: “I burst into a flood of tears—but I am as weak as a woman; and I beg the world not to smile, but pity me” (45). Yorick’s admission that he is “weak as a woman” is essentially sentimental posturing. Feminizing himself, Yorick makes a sentimental spectacle of himself in order to dictate the terms of his audience’s response. He directs his readers to regard him as they must any distressed spectacle—with sympathy rather than disapprobation. Occasioned by a visit to the now-deceased monk’s grave, Yorick’s tears signify his successful sentimental identification with the Franciscan. However, a number of critics have pointed out that Yorick can identify with the monk and the lady “only when the presence of both persons in the real world is securely negated” (Dussinger 192). Yorick’s most moving experiences happen not while he is spectator to a sentimental tableau, but when he creates or reproduces them in his imagination and in complete solitude. Likewise, Yorick can feel most secure in the gaze of others when he has established the terms of that visual encounter himself. Yorick packages himself as a sentimental object for the reader just as he packages the monk as a sentimental object.

The monk’s sentimentalization is complete once the monk is safely stored as narrative in the snuff box. Yorick “guard[s] this box” because it reminds him of the monk’s sentimental history and “help[s his] mind on to something better” (44). In

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17 As John Dussinger’s analysis makes clear, this exchange can also operate in the exchange of fetish objects between men.

Catherine Gallagher's terms, the dead monk's story becomes a nobody's story, but only until Yorick invests that narrative as the value of the snuff box. At that point, the monk's story can be pocketed by Yorick for his own. Gallagher's analysis of the sentimental in *Nobody's Story* offers a model for thinking about how the sentimental experiences of others are acquired by men of feeling. Like Sedgwick and Frank, Gallagher lays particular emphasis on the connection between sentiments and property.<sup>18</sup>

What none of these critics have noted, however, is the way in which the sentimental object is invested with a narrative that remains *unwritten*. The value of a sentimental object lies precisely in its lack of value to others and in the owner's knowledge of a story that remains unrecorded and unknown. The snuff-box is a visual object, the mere sight of which reminds Yorick of all of the feelings and knowledge he has accumulated in his sentimental encounter with the monk. The box contains and represents the emotional knowledge Yorick has gained as well as the complexities of the monk's own experiences and character. If manuscript fragments reveal verbal representation's tendency to loss and decay, the sentimental object is a visual representation that immediately communicates the fullness of its meaning at first glance. Yorick's tears as he retrieves the snuff-box from his pocket demonstrate this immediacy of emotional communication. Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* will exploit this sentimentalization of objects as a means of escaping Sterne's equivocation and perfecting the sentimental by rendering both the man of feeling and his written history as sentimental objects that achieve unmediated significance.

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18 Gallagher centers her discussion of sympathy in Hume, who remarks: "I cannot feel an emotion without it becoming in some sense my own" (qtd. in Gallagher 171). Mercer interprets Hume's account of sympathy differently, characterizing sympathy as an "imaginative realization of another's feelings" (9, emphasis mine).



In the preface written in the *Desobligeant* and in the snuff-box we see two of Yorick's attempts to figure sentimental experience in physical form. The preface is a verbal representation of Yorick's observations; the snuff-box is a visual and material reminder of Yorick's connection to the monk. While the preface has no affective power, the snuff-box is an object of tremendous affective power—not only for Yorick, but for readers like the Lorenzo society members as well. In the case of the latter, the meaning of Yorick's snuff-box can be re-invested in the theatrical exchange and performed over and over again.

Objects seem to be a particularly effective means of recording sentimental experience. Though the objects themselves remain mute, they remind or prompt an emotional effusion in the possessor. Written accounts of emotional encounters, however, do not seem capable of communicating the sentimental experience. To investigate this discrepancy, I'd like to turn to an examination of an episode that demonstrates the inarticulacy that characterizes extreme emotional states. The dead ass episode investigates the articulacy of deeply felt emotion through both visual and verbal encounter. An episode rife with both frustration and deeply felt sympathy, Yorick's encounter with the dead ass and its owner presents an argument about effective communication and "eloquence in distress."

On the road to Nampont, Yorick and La Fleur's journey is arrested when they find a dead donkey blocking the road. A very amusing scene follows in which La Fleur loses his horse and Yorick explains the difference between three expressions of frustration: "Peste!" "Diable!" and "—But here my heart is wrung with pity and fellow-feeling, when I reflect what miseries must have been their lot, and how bitterly so refined a people must

have smarted, to have forced them upon the use of it—” (62). Yorick includes the last expression, an expletive, as expletive-deleted. He also launches into highly sentimentalized language in order to describe the “miseries” felt by a people who would resort to such a word. Of course the reader can only guess at the word while Yorick waxes sentimental. Afterward, Yorick encourages the reader to continue guessing by pointing out that it is just this word that La Fleur chooses to express his frustration at the bolting of his horse: “—and then, you may imagine, if you please, with what word he closed the whole affair” (62).

Yorick’s equivocation about the expletive encourages the reader to guess at what has been censored and to fill in the blank. Thus the narrator’s equivocation prods the reader’s imagination into activity. The scene on the road to Nampont—in which the dead ass is present as obstruction but not yet sentimentally *felt*—is part of the overarching narrative. Taking place on the road, *en route* to the next sentimental episode, the scene comically depicts the frustrations of communicating strong emotion. La Fleur’s emotional state, expressed in the expletive that has been deleted, cannot be communicated verbally. Instead, the reader is stirred to a similar state of frustration by the enjoinder to imagine the expletive that could adequately communicate such frustration. The scene prepares the reader for the sentimental encounter that waits around the bend.

Once the pair reach Nampont, they encounter the owner of the dead ass and are treated to a sentimental spectacle in which the ass’s dead form is recalled for purposes of sentiment rather than experienced as frustrating blockage to their way. The owner’s sorrowful apostrophe to the dead animal has drawn a crowd of spectators. Yorick

describes the scene very precisely and the slow pace of that description stands in marked contrast to the quick movement of his witty commentary on the indecent words that erupt in situations of “eloquence in distress”:

The mourner was sitting upon a stone bench at the door, with the ass’s pannel and its bridle on one side, which he took up from time to time – then laid them down – looked at them, and shook his head. He then took his crust of bread out of his wallet again, as if to eat it; held it some time in his hand – then laid it upon the bit of his ass’s bridle – looked wistfully at the little arrangement he had made – and then gave a sigh. (62-63)

In this visual encounter between a sufferer and his audience, the emotional state is communicated through physical gestures and the visual composition of the scene.

Yorick’s descriptive tableau of the peasant’s sorrow arrests the reader before a scene of suffering and solicits affective response by showing the signs of deep emotion. The irrational gesture of the bread laid on the bridle and the sigh that closes the description are affective gestures that communicate emotion and solicit reply. The description of the mournful peasant is typical of the use of tableau in the sentimental narrative. After presenting a visual tableau in which physical gestures and the visual composition of elements communicate mood, the episode then augments the effects of the visual encounter with the relation of a short sentimental narrative that relates the history of the sufferer. What follows the description of the sad spectacle and the relation of his sad tale, however, is the return of the comic and the use of equivocal language. Yorick makes his own apostrophe to the man and his mule: “Did we love each other, as this poor soul but loved his ass—’twoud be something.—” (64). Then, Yorick’s coach

takes off precipitately at a gallop, throwing him out of his sentimental mood and into a state of frustration.

Yorick's extensive rumination about expostulations and expletives makes it difficult to read his concluding sentimental remark, especially as the behavior of his own equine companion renders the scene ridiculous and makes Yorick behave rather like an ass himself. The imbrication of the sentimental and the bawdy that we see in this episode abounds in Sterne's narrative; his playful use of puns and dashes, blushes and over-stretched gloves produce a general equivocation that makes the novel and Yorick's character difficult to determine and the novel difficult to interpret. It is this equivocation to which Vicesimus Knox refers when he warns of the novel's pernicious effects on "countrymen and countrywomen." The text creates a readerly self-consciousness that runs alongside the writerly one, a state that John Dussinger has called "double awareness."

The dead ass is at once a frustrating blockage to Yorick's and the narrative's path and a sentimental object worth stopping over, and thus represents just one example of the way the novel holds elements in tension. Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* is a travel narrative in which the forward progression of the narrative along the road is secondary and is frequently interrupted for the episodes encountered along that road. Yorick's first encounter with the ass calls attention to this tension between the narrative and the episodes that it links. It also reveals the importance of other human agents, with their affecting physical displays and their explanatory sentimental narratives: the ass ceases being a comic roadblock and becomes a sentimental object once it is seen to be mourned by a person. The peasant transforms the donkey's pannel into a sentimental object that

stands in for the dead animal and carries the meaning and experience of the peasant's feelings. Yorick's spectatorship of the man's grief, expressed in relation to the sentimental object, is sentimentally moving in a way that the dead animal itself is not.

Though the various episodes suggest that deeply felt emotion is readily communicated between the person who feels it and the person who watches, Yorick is constantly frustrated in his efforts at sympathetic feelings by various interruptions or by self-consciousness which prevent him from coming into full possession of the emotional experiences he views. And this is perhaps the very center of Yorick's problem—he finds that despite his best efforts he cannot feel with the intensity that he observes in others and craves himself. In the episode entitled "The Captive" Yorick attempts to rouse himself to the state of emotional excess which characterizes the sentimental spectacle by imagining his own sentimental tableau.

Yorick fears arrest through most of his travels, and quite rightly since he is traveling without a passport in a time of war. At the beginning of Part II, he learns that the police have been making inquiries about him. Anxious, but unwilling to let his servant see it, Yorick steps out into the courtyard. En route, he is arrested by the sound of a child-like voice crying "I can't get out—I can't get out" (96). Yorick discovers that the cry comes from a caged starling. He tries to free the bird from its cage, fails in this endeavor, and then flashes back to his cavalier reasonings on the subject of confinement to the Bastille. The emotions raised by the starling, despite its "mechanical voice," "pursue" Yorick back to his room where he sits and imagines the suffering of a captive:

—I took a single captive, and having first shut him up in his dungeon, I then looked through the twilight of his grated door to take his picture.

I beheld his body half wasted away with long expectation and confinement, and felt what kind of sickness of the heart it was which arises from hope deferred. Upon looking nearer I saw him pale and feverish: in thirty years the western breeze had not once fanned his blood – he had seen no sun, no moon in all that time – nor had the voice of friend or kinsman breathed through his lattice – his children—

—But here my heart began to bleed – and I was forced to go on with another part of the portrait. (97-98)

Yorick's envisioning of a sentimental tableau of suffering theatricalizes his anxiety about being himself confined. The tableau essentially gives shape to his anxieties, allowing him to displace them onto another person and consider them as a spectator. Although Yorick is upset by the caged bird and its plaintive cries, he must return to the isolation of his room and launch a complicated fiction of a nameless captive (who is finally a figure for himself) in order to produce a satisfying emotional response.

The emotional satisfaction produced by envisioning the scene comes at the cost of making a captive and making him suffer. Yorick has kept his worries about the Paris police to himself, fearing to "torture" his servant. But when Yorick retires to his room to wallow in his anxiety and to give shape to it through the narrative spectacle of the captive, he does so by torturing his sentimental victim. Having placed him in a darkened cell and observed his miseries, Yorick then proceeds to increase the suffering of the captive in order to deepen the sentimental effects of the scene. "As I darkened the little light he had, he lifted up a hopeless eye towards the door, then cast it down, shook his head, and went on with his work of affliction" (98). The captive rattles his chains and

sighs heavily; Yorick then sees “the iron enter his soul,” a sight that makes him burst into tears, ending his ability to “sustain the picture of confinement which [his] fancy had drawn” (98).

The tears that end Yorick’s ability to observe the captive’s suffering are the object of the sentimental novel’s use of narrative spectacle. As Yorick looks upon intense emotion and sympathetically identifies with the plight of the sufferer, he begins to feel the intensity of emotion himself and then gives physical expression of his successful sympathetic identification in his tears. Yorick’s encounter with the caged starling has been insufficient to move him to tears, partly because the scene is as mechanical and unnatural as the starling’s voice itself. Yorick cannot see through to the emotionally overwrought heart of the starling because its plaintive call is mere mimicry.<sup>19</sup> The character of the captive, however, allows Yorick to stage a scene of suffering and participate in that suffering by *seeing* the very moment that a man’s heart turns to iron.<sup>20</sup> This epistemological impossibility of seeing the denuded heart of others has been Yorick’s quest in the narrative, but here he achieves it only in the realm of fantasy, and only as an expression of his own feelings of anxiety and frustration.

The captive episode can be seen as a self-reflexive commentary. The sentimental novel is a text whose purpose is to shock the reader into emotional response. Like the Rabelaisian fragment, it promises to deeply affect its readers, even to kill them. But as the Marquis de Sade will point out about Richardson’s treatment of Clarissa, the novel does

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19 Judith Frank’s discussion of the starling emphasizes the bird’s connection to issues of class and power. The bird has been taught its refrain by a servant, and the bird subsequently circulates through the classes as it moves from owner to owner.

20 Frank links this passage to a description in *Tristram Shandy* in which the heart is described as a transparent window.

this by subjecting its characters to torture. Yorick's experiment with the captive produces the desired results: he feels the man's distress deeply and emotes accordingly. But Yorick's experiment is perverse and unfeeling in its pursuit of affective response—an observation which has been readily associated with Sade's work though not so often with that of the writers of sentiment.

The body is the necessary intermediary in the sentimental encounter; it is the place where visual signs are written and read. In both of the novels treated in this chapter, the body is in danger of dissolution and decay, as are manuscripts and other verbal representations. The sentimental novel, itself a verbal representation, is formally and thematically tied to death as it attempts to represent experiences that are unspeakable, inarticulable conditions. As the episodes of the *Captive* and of the Rabelaisian fragment evidence, both the sentimental story (the verbal) and the sentimental body (the visual) are subject to loss and decay and liable to misinterpretation, ambiguity, and frustration of communication.

Though Sterne and Mackenzie are both interested in the mutability of written communication and of human existence, they approach the theme differently. Indeed, Mackenzie's text attempts to correct the excesses of *A Sentimental Journey* by eliminating equivocation. Yorick combats mutability and mortification with sensuality. Intense feeling, whether of the sentimental or sexual kind, forges a connection between mind and body and between the self and others. R.F. Brissenden has observed that in Yorick Sterne presents a moral sensibility in which benevolence and sexual passion share a common source. The trajectory of Yorick's experience is away from social and physical mortification and toward the (impossible) goal of connection and communion. The



bawdier aspects of sensualism both help and hinder Yorick's pursuit of communion. Sexual attraction makes Yorick more open to others, but the mortification associated with sexual fantasy closes him off. In Mackenzie, the solution to the problem of sympathy and the equivocation of sentimental representation is the mortification of the body. Harley's is a trajectory toward the body's dissolution. Loss and decay in Mackenzie are visual testimony to the irretrievability of the past—a past to which the Man of Feeling has already been consigned when the narrative begins.

In Sterne the fragment becomes a figure for the incompleteness of human knowledge. Yorick's desire to gain and communicate sentimental understanding is frustrated by his hobbyhorsicalness and the difficulty of synthesis. R.F. Brissenden has argued that "Sterne begins by assuming, indeed insisting, that it is impossible to fully systematize life, or even to completely understand it" (122). This is nowhere more visible than in Yorick's abortive attempt at writing a preface to his travels. The preface written in the *Desobligeant* exposes language's tendency to obscure relationships as well as the dangers of false coherence. As Elizabeth Harries has observed, "words tend to separate the characters in Sterne's novels, while gestures and glances unite them" (41). The Rabelaisian fragment, however, suggests something slightly different. While the preface ultimately parodies attempts at systematized knowledge, the Rabelaisian fragment promises and then withholds the truth about the human condition. In doing so, the Rabelaisian fragment both represents and reproduces the desire to connect and understand. The fragment entices, stimulating the imagination even if it doesn't quite deliver the goods.

The difficulty for readers in distinguishing between the pathetic and the ironic or bawdy is precisely what bothered Henry Mackenzie about Sterne's novel. Although there seems to be a general agreement that Mackenzie drew (at least) inspiration from Sterne's wildly successful novel, Mackenzie himself made a point of denying the influence, even going so far as to claim he had written his *Man of Feeling* before Sterne's novel was published, and certainly before he had read Sterne's book.<sup>21</sup> In his capacity as both reader and writer, Mackenzie was dismayed by Sterne's levity. If his own venture into the sentimental novel was intended ironically, as both Mackenzie himself and critic Maureen Harkin maintain, the irony is achieved not through the comic or bawdy but through an intensification of the novel's *pathos*. Harley exposes the dangers of sentimentalism by crying himself into an early grave, and his experience acts as a warning to other people of tender heart. For Mackenzie, Sterne's comedy lacked wit and taste: "Sterne often wants the dignity of wit. I do not speak of his licentiousness, but he often is on the very verge of buffoonery, which is the bathos of wit, and the fool's coat is half upon him." But this is not to say that Mackenzie's novel is parody: there is nothing funny about Mackenzie's approach to the sentimental...at least until Lady Stuart's friends begin to giggle.

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21 This denial of influence is fairly untenable given the many similarities of content and form between the two. For a more extensive consideration of Mackenzie's attitude toward Sterne, see Harkin p. 338 n10.

### Sentimental Value and its Visible Trace in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*

*I remember so well its first publication, my mother and sisters crying over it, dwelling upon it with rapture! And when I read it, as I was a girl of fourteen not yet versed in sentiment, I had a secret dread I should not cry enough to gain the credit of proper sensibility.*

—Lady Louisa Stuart in a letter to Sir Walter Scott<sup>22</sup>

Regarded by period readers as what one critic has called a “touchstone...even a litmus test of its readers’ sensibility,” *The Man of Feeling* was, like Sterne’s novel, extraordinarily popular, as the over 40 editions published in the first decade evidence. Lady Stuart’s expectation of herself as a prospective reader of the text attests to the affective power of the novel on its readership. Lady Stuart is therefore surprised to find some years later that on a re-reading of the text, her response has quite changed: “I am afraid I perceived a sad change in it, or myself, which was worse, and the effect altogether failed. Nobody cried, and at some of the passages, the touches that I used to think so exquisite—oh dear! They laughed.”

Lady Stuart’s letter communicates a sense of loss; she perceives some “sad change” in the novel or in herself, but certainly in the audience whose response suggests a new and unfortunate immunity to the novel’s sentimental effects. The tearful response that once credited a “proper sensibility” is now replaced with silent puzzlement or, worse, outright laughter. The most obvious explanation of the failure of “effect” is the passing away of a tired fad. The sentimental novel has had its day, as has the age of sensibility. But for Lady Stuart it is also a “sad” change, one marking the loss or decay of her capacity to feel. Clearly wanting to credit Mackenzie’s novel for its sentimental effects and value, she worries whether the change has perhaps happened in herself, whether she

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<sup>22</sup> Letter to Sir Walter Scott, 4 September 1826, in *The Private Letter-Books of Sir Walter Scott*, 273, quoted in Harkin 319.

has become hard-hearted and without sentiment. Is her new temptation to laugh at the novel evidence of impropriety on her part, even of unfeeling perversity? Lady Stuart's letter raises the very question that plagues the sentimental novelist and the moral philosopher alike: whether the effects of sympathy are the visible signs of man's *natural* sociability or whether sympathy is nothing more than the aesthetic posturing of audience to spectacle. If, as Lady Stuart worries, the "sad change" in the novel's effect is not in the work but in her own heart, and everyone else's as well, then either she and the world have become hard-hearted or the effect of the sentimental novel and sensibility in general were never natural affection but rather the empty gestures of affectation.

Janet Todd has described the trajectory of the sentimental novel as proceeding from an effort to educate its readership in sensibility and fellow feeling to an exhibition of emotional effects and gestures. Maureen Harkin has added to this characterization the comment that the novels at the end of this trajectory demonstrate sympathy's "tendency to produce an aesthetic pleasure rather than an ethical practice" (319). Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* and Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* are novels perched at the apex of the sentimental novel's trajectory, after which the genre's affectiveness and popularity go into a steep decline. Time has been kinder to Sterne's sentimental novel than to Mackenzie's which largely fell out of publication and was increasingly reviled by critics. The equivocation and playfulness of Sterne's novel, of which Mackenzie disapproved, seem to have preserved that novel's place in literary history.

Mackenzie's novel has long been read unsympathetically by critics as a failed or flawed novel and as the terminus to the sentimental novel's efficacy, since the hero's sentimental qualities are overshadowed by the "less attractive qualities" (Zimmerman

287) of a character who “cannot grow up and find an active place in society” (Starr 501). Many readings have seen the novel as a failed attempt to found a new basis for ethics.<sup>23</sup> Maureen Harkin’s work on Mackenzie has attempted to counter this view by re-characterizing the novel as a *self-conscious* exercise in the strategies of the sentimental novel and as an *interrogation* of the role of fiction in constructing community and “social standards.” Paying particular attention to the ways in which the narrative and narrator look askance at Harley’s sensibility, Harkin argues that Mackenzie’s novel was meant not as summa of the sentimental genre but as critique. In its “dramatization of the powerlessness of texts to reform readers” Mackenzie’s novel responds to the period’s concern over “novels’ potential for social disruption” (319). This reading of *The Man of Feeling* presents, in Harkin’s view, a “more complex picture” of Mackenzie and of sentimental fiction. Mackenzie’s failure to produce community ties from shared sentimental experience reveals the “limits of sympathy to reinforce communality” (319). Thus for Harkin, it is not the novel that fails, but sympathy. Sympathy is shown to produce “aesthetic pleasure rather than ethical practice” and the novel *performs* its own inability to reform, and the end of its own social utility.

Harkin’s essay is a response to recent studies<sup>24</sup> of Scottish writers Hume, Smith, and Mackenzie that emphasize their interest in “sociability” or the constitution of community ties. In these studies, Smith’s account of sympathy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is described as a counterforce to the “atomizing tendencies” of a market

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23 This stance toward Mackenzie can be seen in John Mullan’s *Sentiment and Sociability* and Richard Dwyer’s *Virtuous Discourse*.

24 The readings Harkin objects to are those forwarded in Nicholas Phillipson’s “Adam Smith as Civic Moralist,” Richard Dwyer’s *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, and John Mullan’s *Sentiment and Sociability* and “The Language of Sentiment: Hume, Smith and Henry Mackenzie.”

economy and Mackenzie's novels represent a mature sentimental fiction's development of a code of ethics founded on the *natural* faculty of sympathy or sensibility (318). In Harkin's view, the critical argument that Smith's account of moral sentiments is a counterforce to his observations about the new commercialism ignores Smith's *own* doubts about sympathy's ability to counterbalance or counteract the atomizing and desensitizing effects of that commercialism. Likewise, Harkin argues, critics point to Mackenzie's failure to provide a successful model for ethical behavior in the figure of Harley, but they have themselves failed to note Mackenzie's own recognition of the unfitness of the Man of Feeling for life in the commercial age: "In demonstrating Harley's failures, Mackenzie highlights the inadequacies of sensibility as a basis for social practice" (321). For Harkin, Harley's story—his decline and death—represent the "passing of a way of life" (322). Harley as "fragile relic of a nobler past" (327) represents a commentary on the novel's inability to provide a replacement for the defunct feudal system of ethics.

Interestingly, the "profit" that Harkin draws from her more sympathetic reading of Mackenzie is precisely a reading that emphasizes ethical practice over aesthetic pleasure. For Harkin, the novel's failure of effect is beside the point since the novel always regarded sympathy as affectation. Lady Stuart's worry that the change in the effect of the novel might be a change in herself is here borne out. Her youthful rapture and tears were never natural expressions of natural sentiments and neither were they exercises in an ethical practice. Indeed, they are even exposed as an interpretive failure. The reaction of "proper sentiment" that Lady Stuart worries about displaying is here exposed as a cultural practice and expression of aesthetic pleasure. Lady Stuart simply failed to see it.

What Harkin's reading cannot account for, however, is the effects that the novel originally had on its readers (like young Lady Stuart) and on its writer as well. If Harley's story somehow makes the writer into a Ghost, it has a no-less transformative effect on Mackenzie himself. Mackenzie allowed himself (as did Sterne) to be confused with his Man of Feeling, and, as Harkin notes, he carried that "sobriquet...until the end of his life" (320). Edinburgh's Man of Feeling was Mackenzie himself. But this fact, and the testimony of Lady Stuart, create a problem for Harkin's more sympathetic reading of the novel. Mackenzie's "sobriquet" represents an example of precisely the kind of affectation that the novel, in Harkin's reading, is exposing. And Lady Stuart's testimony reminds us that the original readership did not see the novel as a critique at all.

Harkin's reading is different from the critical approaches she questions primarily in her interpretation of the novel's failure. All of the critics seem to regard the novel as a spectacle—as a freakish novel that no longer speaks to the modern reader, or most critics. Critics are, after all, by and large unsympathetic readers. Harkin, however, is more critical of the novel's readers than of the novel itself. While unsympathetic critics regard the novel as a failed venture, Harkin sympathetically reads the novel's failure as the author's intended effect. In reading the novel this way, Harkin gets herself into a strange critical bind but also demonstrates her own unique ability to see the novel for what it is. Her reading of Mackenzie's intentional critique of both the novel and sympathy requires a sympathetic reading of the novel's failure as its *intended* effect. Mackenzie never meant to make his reader cry. Therefore, the critics who tout Mackenzie's failure are as guilty of misreading as weeping readers like the young Lady Stuart. The novel has been almost

universally misunderstood and misread. Critics and readers alike have failed, Harkin implicitly argues, to see through to Mackenzie's heart.

In her compelling discussion of the novel's thematic use of loss, Harkin characterizes Mackenzie's novel as a "valediction" to the genre and as a "coda to the discourse on the power of novelists to intervene in the social sphere" (319). Literature cannot "instill" virtue or sympathy in the audience; it can only affect that reader that already has this "inclination." As Mackenzie said in a letter, "my Friends Harley and Atkins...speak to those who can understand them" (qtd. in Harkin 336). Harkin's approach both exposes this relationship between text and reader and represents an example of it. Harkin's essay suggests, as essays so often do suggest, that her reading has seen the truth about the novel for the first time. Her essay both presents a valuable and interesting reading of the text and demonstrates or performs anew the readerly desire for stories to "speak" to *us*. But this desire to have our uniqueness vouchsafed by our unique and uniquely accurate interpretations is frustrated by this novel which sought, first and foremost, to make its readers *feel*. For Lady Stuart, the desire to demonstrate her feeling nature is finally exposed as conformism to the whims of fashion—she cries when everyone cries, and she laughs when everyone laughs. For Harkin, the desire to correct the misinterpretations of Mackenzie's text and redeem him from the charge of failure is frustrated by the sheer volume of readers who have got it wrong. Her appeal to Mackenzie's own essayistic attempts to correct his readers is compromised by Mackenzie's habit of playing the Man of Feeling in front of his contemporary audience of fans and readers, encouraging the very misreading that Harkin labors to expose. In its



positing of interpretive failure, Harkin's approach suggests that Mackenzie has nevertheless failed in his effort to banish the ambiguity and equivocation of Sterne.

*The Man of Feeling* is a narrative without a great deal of plot. Indeed, an oft-remarked feature of the sentimental novel is its episodic structure, a feature that is made particularly visible in Sterne and Mackenzie through the visual representation of narrative interruption: not only are the novels riddled with dashes and ellipses but the narratives that appear within the novels are described as decayed and incomplete. Harkin links the narrative preoccupation with "loss and degeneration" with the novel's critique of the "decadence" and "relentless coarsening" of manners produced by modern commercialism (324). My own reading of Mackenzie's sentimental novel pays less attention to aspects of social commentary than to the novel's creation of affective response in the dynamic of visual and verbal encounters. Thus, my first revision of Harkin's approach is a re-application of the theme of loss in relation to the narrative structure.

In Mackenzie's novel, the narrative motif of loss and decay paradoxically becomes the major source of narrative cohesion and progress, essentially replacing plot cohesion with a narrative obsession with coming apart. But like many other sentimental novels, including the companion text of this chapter, Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, *The Man of Feeling* is a travel narrative and the itinerary provides some narrative structure as well. The travels that Harley undertakes in the novel are in pursuit of profit, but are ultimately unprofitable, contributing once again to the narrative motif of loss. On the advice of friends, Harley sets out from his country home to secure the lease of a neighboring property and thereby increase his income. Having already failed to win the

affections of a rich, aged cousin, and having seen her pass away without leaving him a farthing, Harley seeks to secure the patronage of a powerful baronet. He is unsuccessful; but this failure is not the focus of the narrative. Indeed, Harley's failure to gain access to the baronet is incidental in the narrative. Harley is "impatient" and "indifferent" to his friends' exhortations about the happiness available to those "whose fortunes enabled them to command all the luxuries of life" (10). His failure is thus to be expected, and the plot that takes shape from his pointless journey is accordingly weak and wandering. Plot is itself, finally, incidental to the real focus of the narrative—the incidents our Man of Feeling will encounter along the way.

Harley's encounters with various sentimental types—the beggar, the ruined woman, the maiden driven mad by love's loss, etc.—will interrupt the narrative progress for sentimentally effusive episodes which generally combine visual and verbal elements. Harley first sees the sentimental "type" arranged in a tableau and then he is audience to their tale of suffering. As with Sterne, Mackenzie's sentimental novel demonstrates a concern with seeing and determining character and with expressing that understanding in affective response. Harley sees, hears, and cries. The acuity of Harley's sentimental vision, however, is questioned as is his ability to evaluate the veracity of sentimental stories. But the Man of Feeling's mistakes are ultimately beside the point. Mackenzie's response to the equivocation of Sterne's sentimental novel is to produce a narrative in which the equivocal is securely located in the world rather than in the sentimental gentleman's response. In Mackenzie's novel, the most important sentimental spectacle and the object of greatest sentimental value is the Man of Feeling himself.

The first incident Harley encounters on his ill-fated journey in pursuit of profit involves a fortune-telling beggar. Having got no further than the first hill overlooking his land, Harley discovers a stone in his shoe, sits to remove it, and observes a bare-foot beggar approaching on the road. His sympathy for the beggar is facilitated by the stone, whose bite reminds him that a beggar who has lost his shoes must experience his pain and worse. Harley's sympathetic identification with a beggar's distress inspires benevolence, and he draws a coin from his purse even before the beggar makes his approach. The beggar offers to tell Harley's fortune for the coin, but Harley is more interested in the man's personal history and how he came to his "trade." He learns that the beggar, who "dealt once in telling truth" has been forced to the trade of fortune-telling because he has "found that people don't care to give alms without some security for their money; a wooden leg or a withered arm is a sort of draught upon heaven for those who chuse to have their money placed to account there" (21). So instead of narrating his own misfortunes, the beggar "began to prophesy happiness to others," finding that "folks will listen when the tale is their own" (21).

In this first episode, a model for future episodes is established. A visual encounter which inspires immediate affective response is then complemented by a verbal encounter. Harley's response to the visual spectacle of the man's poverty and need is immediate and produces both a "first sight" understanding of the man's situation and a determination of his own response. The accompanying verbal explanation of the man's situation is therefore an unnecessary supplement, and is provided for the reader's understanding of the situation, not the Man of Feeling's. The episode will solicit the affective response of the reader not through the presentation of the beggar's distress, but through the

presentation of the sentimental spectacle of Harley's *visual apprehension* of the beggar's distress.

The beggar's story reveals that most spectators find neither the visual spectacle of his poverty nor the verbal explanation of it moving. Thus, his offer to tell the fortune of those he sentimentally solicits exposes the self-interest of modern folks. If in Sterne the visual encounter produces muteness and the verbal encounter produces frustration, in Mackenzie the visual produces a mute and immediate sympathetic understanding while the verbal is exposed as either meaningless or as calculated and false.

The beggar episode performs a critique of the loss of social connections and sympathetic response. The failed sense of responsibility of the rich for the poor, socially practiced through their benevolence and visibly represented in the "alms" of a coin or a tear, has been replaced with payment for services rendered. It is a transaction very much in keeping with the age's new commercialism and the beggar demonstrates his adaptability by developing a product for exchange. The beggar himself conceptualizes the benevolence of others as a commercial transaction: an investment in their own character that requires some sort of visible receipt—a "withered arm" or a "wooden leg." No longer affected by histories of distress, people now need either a clear visual sign of suffering (an obvious disfigurement) or a story that predicts their own future happiness or profit. In either case, the alms disbursed represent an investment in the *giver's* future happiness while testifying to the *giver's* present fortune. The shoeless beggar's distress is not sufficiently visible (and thus not sufficiently distressing) to attest to the good fortune of the average almsgiver, so the beggar must deliver an account of that fortune to collect his alm.

Harley is quite different: his “first sight” of the beggar’s bare feet makes him realize his own relative fortune and simultaneously has him reaching for his purse. Before he has heard the beggar’s tale, he has already “destined sixpence for him” (20). Harley’s unselfish benevolence to the beggar demonstrates his capacity for sympathy—he has a big and open heart, one that responds immediately to visible signs of distress, however minute. But the episode also suggests that Harley’s sympathetic vision may be flawed in its reliance on surface appearance. The man explains to Harley that he was “brought to idleness by degrees”: “first I could not work, and it went against my stomach to work ever after” (13). The “sturdy beggar” is, and always has been, a “bit of a wag” who lived for “mirth.” He is, in short, a stereotypically unworthy charity case—a lazy bum. Having “destined” sixpence for the man, Harley draws a shilling from his pocket even as “Virtue bade him consider on whom he was going to bestow it” (14).

The beggar episode evidences both Harley’s capacity for sympathy and the loss of that capacity for sympathetic connection in others of his class. The novel’s nostalgia for a lost way of life and a lost bond between individuals and, more importantly, between classes, is described by Harkin as a nostalgia for a “benevolent semi-feudalism” where those with good fortune care for society’s unfortunates.<sup>25</sup> The replacement of social bonds with self-absorption and commercial relationships obviates the responsibility of the rich for the poor in their community, replacing it with pay for services rendered. The beggar’s history demonstrates that this shift also encourages cunning and dissembling in

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25 That the system whose passing is mourned is feudal is perhaps best evidenced by Harley’s interactions with Edwards, a tenant farmer who has spent his life working the lands of Harley’s father. Harley’s sense of responsibility for the aged, destitute, and bereaved man and his grandchildren increases his own financial distress while doing little to alleviate that of Edwards. Harkin’s essay devotes considerable attention to the class ramifications of Mackenzie’s novel.

the poor. Unable to elicit alms with his true story of distress, the beggar resorts to the fabrication of stories (fortune-telling, or as he calls it a “lying” profession). Unlike the sentimental stories that touched and moved people, connecting them to the situation of another and perhaps motivating them to intervene, fortune-telling interests its listener by spinning a tale in which the listener himself is the hero. Fortune-telling isolates, exalting the customer in and through representations of his good fortune.

Harley’s journey to London, motivated by a need to shore up his own failing fortune, will end unprofitably precisely because he cannot focus on his own situation, or project his own future fortune. Moreover his first sight determinations of character and deeply sympathetic nature will, in London, make him easy prey for sharpers and fakes, men whose affectations will further damage his fortune.<sup>26</sup> In town, Harley mistakes the outward signs of class—dress and deportment—for class and even character, a mistake with far graver implications than his benevolence toward the “sturdy beggar.”

In the encounter between Harley and the beggar, we see an exploration of different forms of insight: one centered in the visual faculty and the other in the verbal faculty of storytelling. Harley’s first sight determinations are a kind of sympathetic insight into the situation of others based on visual signs. The beggar’s insight is visible in the innovations he has made in beggarly solicitation. Intuiting what others desire, the beggar tells his audience what they want to hear. Mackenzie must surely be drawing here on Sterne’s representation of the Paris beggar, who mysteriously manages to overcome people’s immediate refusal of aid and garner generous alms. Yorick discovers after some inquiry into the situation that the beggar increases his take by pandering to their sense of

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<sup>26</sup> The city/country dynamic which is so clearly at issue in Mackenzie’s novel is treated generally in the classic study by Raymond Williams.

self-worth: Yorick leaves Paris in an attempt to escape the “beggarly system” of flattery that he realizes he has himself adopted. In Mackenzie’s take on the beggar type, the beggar’s insight into other people’s desires seems to be more accurate than Harley’s insight into others’ suffering.

The Man of Feeling’s lack of success in London is traceable to his manner of looking at things, or what the narrator indulgently describes as his “optical system”:

The optics of some minds are in so unlucky a perspective, as to throw a certain shade on every picture that is presented to them; while those of others (of which number was Harley) like the mirrors of the ladies, have a wonderful effect in bettering their complexions. (25)

Harley’s “optics” are the equivalent of rose-colored glasses: like the “mirrors of ladies,” his optics improve the image he encounters by reflecting back what he wants to see. Optimism is the optical principle and first sight determination is the practice of Harley’s sentimental vision. Harley regards signs and gestures as transparent. But in Mackenzie’s novel, things don’t always mean what they appear to mean. As the “gauger” episode demonstrates, appearances can deceive and class can be counterfeited. Even the sentimental gesture can be faked. Harley is duped by a pair of men who stage an encounter between a beggar and a benevolent gentleman who finds himself temporarily strapped for disburseable alms. Having been bankrolled in his benevolence by Harley, the gentleman then lures our Man of Feeling into a card game where he is fleeced of the rest of his cash. Benevolence is, by its very nature, an unprofitable venture, but Harley’s optics exacerbate the costs of benevolence—here, to his ruin.

Harley's practice of reading gestures for substance makes him an easy prey for sharpers and fakes; it also makes him a gentleman whose qualities are more than affectation or display. Harley is himself incapable of calculation or affectation, and as such vulnerable to treachery in others.<sup>27</sup> But this vulnerability evidences his lack of calculation and affectation. He is fooled precisely because his own gestures are transparent. At the end of the gauger episode Harley remarks, "calculat[ing] the chances of deception is too tedious a business for the life of man" (53). His refusal to calculate the deception of others and his refusal to use calculation in securing his own fortune mean that he will end his journey unprofitably, even as it reveals his benevolent optimism. Harley returns home—financially, emotionally, and physically distressed himself. Here, the continuing demands on his financial and emotional benevolence reduce him, quite literally, to ruin.

Harley's narrative does not fare much better than Harley himself. The editor's "Introduction" is a framing device that relates how a manuscript narrative of Harley's journey came into his hands torn, disordered, and incomplete. While on a hunting expedition, the editor and his companion—a curate—encounter a "venerable pile" as they search for their lost prey. Their dog, the editor maintains, is not to be blamed for that loss, for "he's an excellent dog, though I have lost his pedigree" (3). Forgetting, for the moment, their game, the two men move from lost pedigree and prey to the history of the site. The curate, a relatively new resident of the area, has learned quite a lot about the "whimsical sort of man" who once owned the property on which they stand. In fact, the

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<sup>27</sup> Harley is far more vulnerable in town than he is at home, where as Harkin and others have pointed out, he is more familiar with the meaning of outward signs and less likely to encounter poseurs.



curate has come into possession of a manuscript that records the man's history. The tale is of little interest to the curate, who is a "strenuous logician." Intrigued by the curate's description of the manuscript's provenance—its abandonment by a mysterious man known in the parish only as "the Ghost"—the Editor begs to see it and then wonders at its ruined state. Not by coincidence, the curate carries the manuscript history in his pocket: finding no entertainment in its pages, he has found it excellent for use as wadding in his gun. Like Harley himself, the manuscript has been ill-used by the world, but the Editor prevents the complete loss of his history by publishing the scattered fragments, just as "the Ghost" has preserved Harley's character by writing the manuscript itself.<sup>28</sup>

But each of these recoveries inscribes as much loss as redemption: the manuscript describes the loss of Harley while the Editor's addition of an introduction primarily accounts for the loss of substantial parts of the manuscript. Each of the narratives that make up Mackenzie's novel—the editor's framing narrative, the "Ghost's" manuscript narrative, and the embedded narratives of secondary characters within that manuscript—are stories whose progress might best be described through metaphors of decay. The losses that Harley sustains on his unprofitable journey will produce physical and emotional decay leading to death; writing the tale of Harley's loss will produce physical and emotional decay that makes a "Ghost" of the manuscript writer; and the Editor's introduction will account for the physical decay of the manuscript. The narrative motifs of loss and decay will also be inscribed (through excision) in the structure of the novel itself: not only in the fragmentation of the narrative (due to loss of manuscript pages), but also in the death or fading away of characters. Silton's passing is mourned in the first

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28 The "Editor's Introduction" is essentially a false introduction to the novel, one which tells the story of the damaged manuscript's discovery by the editor and its subsequent publication. The introduction operates as a framing narrative for the "found manuscript."

chapter and Harley dies at narrative's end. Those who publish Harley's history remain unnamed in the narrative: the Editor is known only in his functional relation to the manuscript's publication; and the Ghost, who has had the most direct contact with Harley and has recorded his tale in the manuscript, has himself been made less substantial by the process, and has now disappeared without trace. As Harley's tale passes through various anonymous hands, as his tale is disseminated, saved, and then left in trust to others, it becomes more and more an heirloom: delicate, valuable because scarce and sentimental, an anomaly from the past.<sup>29</sup>

Only the interest of a sympathetic reader saves Harley's tale from complete destruction. The Curate—whose readerly interests could be described as purely rational and calculating—models an inappropriate and unsympathetic reading practice, one that is ultimately destructive. His only use for Harley's sentimental tale, after all, is as wadding in his gun. The Editor, however, recognizes the value of the manuscript despite the damage already done to it and is “a good deal affected with some trifling passages in it” (5). Nevertheless, he does not pay the tale the tribute of tears he would have offered “had the name of a Marmontel, or a Richardson, been on the title-page” because “one is ashamed to be pleased with the works of one knows not whom” (5). The framing narrative of the Editor's discovery of the manuscript raises, right at the outset, issues of reading and value. The manuscript's provenance adds to its mystery and perhaps intensifies its sentimental effects, but detracts from its aesthetic value: unsigned and

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29 The sentimental novel, beginning with Richardson, often presented itself as “true history” in the form of real manuscripts unearthed after the events had concluded. Harkin notes that, “more or less customary in sentimental fiction, the discovered text also serves as guarantee of truth and authenticity...” (333). Harkin adds that in a less conventional sense, the found manuscript (and particularly those in Sterne and Mackenzie) highlights “the uncertainties of transmission” and “the merely physical nature of texts, their corresponding vulnerability to neglect, and the chance nature of their transmission” (333).

incomplete, its value is subjective and fleeting and unlikely to be appreciated by the average reader.

The novel's obsessive consideration of decay and loss allows Mackenzie to dispense with narrative obligations to continuity: all gaps and anomalies in the narrative are explained by loss of manuscript text. Decay and loss thus characterize the narrative itself, structuring it in basic ways while resonating thematically.<sup>30</sup> The discovery of the manuscript, and of its partial loss, introduces the manuscript itself. Then, the manuscript narrative begins with a conversation, joined by the reader *in medias res*, about rust:

"There is some rust about every man at the beginning" (7). This sentence is, of course, a false beginning to the novel, the true beginning being the editor's explanation of the story's provenance and partial destruction, including the loss of the manuscript's first ten chapters. The beginning that is left begins with rust. Rust, however, may not be the ruin of a man, says venerable Ben Silton: "let them rub it off by travel" (3). But the narrator ("the Ghost") enters the conversation with the worry that "in the velocity of the modern tour" metal and rust alike might be "lost in the progress" (4). Silton quickly agrees with this argument, adding that rust might usefully be regarded as "an encrustation, which nature has given for purposes of the greatest wisdom," and ought, for this reason, to be maintained. Harley, the novel's eponymous Man of Feeling, here enters the discussion

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30 The narrative's use as gun-wadding by the curate explains the loss of sections of the text. It also draws attention to what Everett Zimmerman has called the "material medium" of the text. For Zimmerman, this emphasis on the medium and the disintegration of that medium "implies the tenuousness of the hold of Harley on posterity" (290). The novel is a ruin of fragments, lost segments, and buried foundations. In Zimmerman's reading, the narrative's fragmentation serves to represent both "the instability of self" and "the entropic tendency in narrative" (290). Zimmerman's reading of the novel provides one explanation for Lady Stuart's experience: the novel itself recognizes the tenuous hold that Harley has over his audience's heart. Harley's story, like Harley himself and Ben Silton before him, will finally be "lost and forgotten" to all but those who carry it (him) in their hearts or who can discern his value—as Harkin argues.

and the novel to advance the metaphor, arguing that “like certain precious fossils, there may be hid under it gems of the purest brilliancy” (4).

The assertion that “there is some rust about every man at the beginning” is a rather perverse use of metaphor. Rust is formed on the exterior of metals as they decay with exposure to environmental forces; as such, rust is not a feature of the thing “at the beginning.” Rust represents decay, and its presence, moreover, does not protect what lies underneath. On the contrary, rust continues its process of decay, eroding the integrity of the metal beneath and eventually destroying the object entirely. Rust is the visible trace of approaching invisibility.

The conversation about rust, however, becomes the occasion for a critique—not of visibility, but of the Grand Tour, or sightseeing, and perhaps by extension of Sterne’s sentimental novel. While travel may serve to knock the rust from gentlemen, the “velocity of the modern tour” does little to improve the mettle of the traveler. Careening through the continent, the traveler may lose rust through activity, but is unlikely to build character. Harley and Siltou decide, over their conversation’s own slow journey, that rust is not, in fact, a substance to be sloughed off at all. On the contrary, rust is refigured as protective. And perversely, the protective quality of rust comes precisely from its tendency to reduce the metal of a man to nothing, leaving only the hidden gem of a sentimental heart. Rust is refigured again at the end of the conversation as a kind of bashfulness: in some this bashfulness is “the awkwardness of a booby” quickly transformed by exposure to the world into the “pertness of a coxcomb” while in others it is “a consciousness, which the most delicate feelings produce, and the most extensive knowledge cannot always remove” (9). While the wearing away of the first type of rusty

bashfulness quickly exposes the man of no real substance, the latter is a kind of persistent percipience, an emotional and perceptual consciousness that an increase in knowledge “cannot always remove.” Travel (or exposure to the world) merely has the effect of exposing what the gentleman already is: a coxcomb or a man of feeling. Travel accomplishes this exposure by affording the gentleman sights which will draw his heart out and into visibility. Harley, it comes as no surprise, is of “the latter species of bashful animals” as is Silton, that “striking instance of excellent metal, shamefully rusted” (9).<sup>31</sup> Rust, in Mackenzie’s novel, becomes a figure for Harley’s particular experience of mortification. Harley is worn by his exposure to the emotional excesses of others—his trajectory in the narrative is one of decay or mortification of the flesh.

The mettle of a man cannot finally be determined by sight, for gentlemen may be personated by men of baser metal—as the gauger episode demonstrates. But if the metal merely shields something that lies beneath, then external appearances are unimportant. This being said, Harley’s sentiments work through a sympathetic response to visible signs of distress—his is an optical system of sympathetic first sight. So what does it mean that he is occasionally fooled? How can Harley’s optical system both be chided for its naiveté and its ties to feminine vanity and credited for its optimism?

Harley’s sentiment is a matter of the purity and brilliance of his own heart. The feelings produced in him by the sight of other people’s suffering are real and true, even when the signs of suffering are not. Thus a man’s sentiment does not, finally, depend on others so much as on the signs and images of distress: on aesthetic ploys or on “sights”

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31 The best explanation for this equivocating description of Silton as “shamefully rusted” is one derived from Harkin’s reading of Mackenzie’s intentions in writing the novel. When understood as both a valediction and a critique of the Man of Feeling’s approach to the world, the novel can then be seen to at once approve and disapprove of characters like Silton.

that will stimulate the sentiments. And the value or profit of the sentimental encounter is precisely and perversely in the outlay of the gentleman's sentiments, figured narratively and visually in the disbursement of alms and of tears.

Although the Man of Feeling demonstrates his capacity for fine feeling by the disbursement of such tokens of his affections, the object of ultimate importance in Mackenzie's tale is that which is invisible and immutable—the sentimental heart. The sentimental object—a suffering woman, a beggar's feet—makes that which is invisible visible, leaving traces of its invisibility through the visible token of a coin or a tear. Mackenzie's novel is not about making sentimental scenes visible to spectators in text and out (although it does try to do this). The novel's primary concern is with making the heart of the Man of Feeling visible by presenting the spectacle of the sentimental gentleman's visual apprehension of another's situation.<sup>32</sup>

Harley will become truly a man of feeling when he ceases to be a man of flesh and blood—or a man of metal. The body must be abandoned, not to become pure mind or unchained reason, but to become pure feeling. Loss and ruin and rust are thus crucial thematic structures in the narrative—they are, finally, the plot or trajectory of Harley's history. For Harley's tale is about the erosion of the body in the service of freeing the most sentimental of objects, the heart. It is at the moment of Harley's declaration of love for his mistress that he dies; the sight is too much for the unhappy Miss Walton, who nearly dies herself. If Harley's declaration of his heart seems somehow to produce his body's mortification, it also leads to his body's transformation into a highly affecting sentimental object.

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<sup>32</sup> Everett Zimmerman also notes that the reader's gaze is directed to the Man of Feeling and his response rather than to the scenes he witnesses.

The penultimate chapter of Mackenzie's novel describes the narrator's final encounter with the Man of Feeling. Entitled "The Emotions of the Heart," the chapter uses the presentation of Harley's body to in-text spectators (the narrator and old Edwards) to create an intense affective response in the reader. The narrator serves as a textual model for the response of the reader, and as such, provides the one clearly didactic episode in the novel.

I entered the room where his body lay; I approached it with reverence, not fear: I looked; the recollection of the past crowded upon me. I saw that form, which but a little before, was animated with a soul which did honour to humanity, stretched without sense or feeling before me. 'Tis a connection we cannot easily forget:—I took his hand in mine; I repeated his name involuntarily:—I felt a pulse in every vein at the sound. I looked earnestly at his face; his eye was closed, his lip pale and motionless. There is an enthusiasm in sorrow that forgets impossibility; I wondered that it was so. The sight drew a prayer from my heart; it was the voice of frailty and of man! the confusion of my mind began to subside into thought; I had time to weep! (131)

The narrator, known to the reader as he is known in the parish—as the Ghost, responds with intense emotion to his friend Harley's death. The body's lifelessness makes the past crowd upon him; reduced to a "form" without "sense or feeling," Harley's body becomes talismanic, a physical object standing in for lost being and lost history. The "enthusiasm" of his sorrow as he speaks Harley's name makes the narrator think he feels a "pulse in every vein." The articulation of Harley's name produces the activity of the heart; this

despite the visible evidence of his death. The stirrings of the heart are everywhere evident—a phantom pulse in one body and a heart's prayer in the other. While Harley's body draws a response from the Narrator's heart, that response suggests that Harley's heart lives on.

Harley's passing and the tribute paid to his loss by the tears of the Ghost and Edwards demonstrate his uniqueness. Harley's untimely end is itself sentimental and it gives his story sentimental value. In part, this sentimental value is achieved through Harley's heirloom qualities: he is unique, an anomaly from the past; and his value, closely tied to memory and dependent on narrative, is fleeting. The scarcity and uniqueness that define the Man of Feeling are at the very center of the novel's production of readerly pleasure. When Lady Stuart worries that she may not display "proper sentiment," she fears being merely ordinary. What the narrative demonstrates is that a person of feeling cannot be made, only exposed. Only the sensitive will respond; and like Harley, they will be unperturbed by fakery because their sympathy is genuine, is organic, and thus transcends the vagaries of the everyday world. Readerly identification with Harley is stymied by his mistakes, but identification is not what is called for. The sentimental readers of the tale will not model their response on Harley's, they will simply have the same response. Character, in this sentimental novel, is not so much developed as exposed. The novel's sentimentalization of Harley's character, its transformation of him into a sentimental object, will bring the already sentimental heart of the reader into visibility.

Mackenzie's sentimental novel eliminates the equivocation of Sterne by strictly isolating sensibility from sensuality. Harley's encounter with a prostitute is case in point.



Despite the compromising appearance of his interaction with Miss Atkins, their exchange is purely sentimental. When the girl's estranged father discovers the pair alone in her room, he takes Harley for a "villain." The reader knows, however, that Miss Atkins has given nothing except her sentimental history while Harley has behaved the perfect gentleman. Harley overcomes the father's misapprehension of the scene and ultimately facilitates the family's reconciliation.

Harley, it is clear from the outset, is in love with Miss Walton. However, he declares his love only on his deathbed. His affection for the lady, though returned, will never go beyond verbal expression and a significant meeting of eyes. Harley's love for Miss Walton avoids any sully association with bodily desire, because his impending death precludes the possibility of carnal love. Harley's encounters with ladies—whether whores or cherished companions—are governed by pathos, never eros.

Harley's sentimental vision is not reliable; he often makes mistakes about the people he encounters. However, Harley's mistakes are always a matter of optimism. He sees people in the best possible light and accepts their self-representations as authentic. Unlike Yorick, whose sentimental encounters provide emotional stimulus and vivacity, Harley's emotional involvement with others is physically and emotionally draining. The sadness of the world is corrosive. While Harley's flesh is mortified, Yorick seeks vivacity and experiences that will stave off physical and emotional mortification.

The sentimental novel is governed first by what is seen. Looking through the emotional eyes of men of feeling, readers are spectators to the suffering of others. The hero demonstrates the importance of receptiveness and expressiveness, and models fine feeling for the audience. Questions of virtue and sociability are entangled with the

problem of visibility. Sometimes the signs written on the bodies of others are false.

Sometimes our self-absorption or narrow-mindedness occludes our sight. Sometimes our spectatorship of others produces the wrong kind of emotional response.

Yorick and Harley encounter all of these visual conundrums in the course of their sentimental journeys. For Harley, the problems are finally unimportant. Though his eye may fail to notice the signs of treachery, his heart's response is always true sympathy. This response gives him only pain—his heart bleeds and eyes weep for all he encounters. Yorick's experience suggests that the human drive for connection—for love and social bonds—is constantly thwarted. Yorick feels most alive when he connects emotionally and physically with others, and yet the difficulties of achieving and maintaining any kind of communion are enormous.

Yorick's narrative is a battle against disintegration and incoherence. Sterne seems to indicate that the writing of the novel put him in a similar position, though if we are to believe his letter on the subject to the Earl of Shelburne, the outcome of Sterne's battle is far more like Harley's than Yorick's: "Yorick...has worn out both his spirits and body with the sentimental Journey—'tis true that an author must feel himself, or his reader will not—but I have torn my whole frame into pieces by my feelings" (qtd. in Cross 464).

### Chapter 3 The Spectacle of Virtue's Suffering

*My manner of thinking, so you say, cannot be approved. Do you suppose I care? A poor fool indeed is he who adopts a manner of thinking for others! My manner of thinking stems straight from my considered reflections; it holds with my existence, with the way I am made. It is not in my power to alter it; and were it, I'd not do so. This manner of thinking you find fault with is my sole consolation in life; it alleviates all my sufferings in prison, it composes all my pleasures in the world outside, it is dearer to me than life itself. Not my manner of thinking, but the manner of thinking of others has been the source of my unhappiness.*

—D.A.F. Sade in a letter to his wife

#### Libertinism as a Manner of Thinking

Sade was imprisoned for taking liberties: with his wife's money; with whores and other girls; with his mother-in-law's and the French Court's tolerance. He was intractable; he refused to mend his ways—to use discretion in his financial or sexual affairs. Fearing the force of public sentiment, the family sought to protect Sade from public trial by putting him under the king's power, shielding and imprisoning him through the text of a letter.<sup>1</sup> Later, the hidden power of letters would drive Sade to distraction and to complex numerological readings of letters he received in prison.<sup>2</sup> Depriving him of his liberty in

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<sup>1</sup> Sade was not incarcerated as punishment for a conviction, but was, instead, removed from public circulation by a *lettre de cachet* issued by the King. Although biographers disagree about the identity of the party responsible for his incarceration, it seems clear that neither the king nor the mother-in-law had much interest in seeing Sade free. Because there were no charges, there were also no stipulations regarding sentence and thus no way to tell when he might be released. Sade's letter to his wife appears as front matter in the Grove edition of *Justine*, page x.

<sup>2</sup> Sade's frustration at the invisibility of his sentence led to the development of an imaginative numerological system of letter interpretation. In addition, knowing that the letters would be read by state officials, Sade wrote with several audiences in mind and resorted to subterfuges and codes to convey sensitive information in his own correspondence. Biographers and critics alike have made much use of Sade's letters. Francine du Plessix Gray's 1998 biography of Sade draws its portrait of the writer with especial attention to the voluminous correspondence between Sade and his wife, Renée-Pélagie.

an attempt to check his libertinism was, however, a miscalculation. Sade, as Jean Paulhan puts it, “cared about liberties...he had liberties on the brain” (6). Incarcerating Sade did not make him see the virtue of restraining his behavior or thinking; limited in his ability to act, Sade was thrown back on the resources of his imagination, where he took liberties. By imprisoning Sade, the family hoped to make him virtuous, curb his excesses. Instead, it made him a writer.

Sade remained incarcerated for a substantial part of his adult life because of his “manner of thinking.” The meaning of this phrase is an underlying matter of dispute between Sade and his correspondent, Madame de Sade. She refers to his libertinism, and so does he. But while Madame de Sade understands his libertinism as mere perversity, a stubborn persistence in error, Sade contends it is at once an innate characteristic and a reasoned philosophical stance. Sade’s libertinism, in his words, “stems straight from my considered reflections” and “holds with my existence, with the way I am made.” Thus it is a matter of both mental and physical libertinism, neither giving rise to the other, rather interdependent and organic. On this basis, Sade declares himself unwilling to “pay” for his liberty with the “sacrifice” of his “principles or tastes.”

Jean Paulhan has pointed out that Sade did nevertheless pay for his manner of thinking, “and paid dearly.” For Paulhan, and many other critics besides, the price paid is of great interest. The average man is intrigued by the criminal, by his transgression and his punishment—by his suffering. In Paulhan’s analysis, the law-abider is particularly intrigued by the criminal who has paid or is paying, because the intervention of

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Biographer Maurice Lely has regarded the numerological letters as evidence of increasing paranoia and madness in Sade. For a discussion of the letters in relation to Sade’s formation as a novelist, see John Phillips’s “Sade and Self Censorship.”

punishment “straightens out everything,” making it possible for us to “become fond of them,” “bring them oranges in prison,” even “feast upon their words” (5). For these spectators, transgression is little more than a curiosity. Some critics have even maintained that Sade pursued incarceration and couldn’t live without the prison walls.<sup>3</sup> Here, transgression is mere perversity—Madame de Sade’s position.

This turns out to be Paulhan’s point as well. Paulhan argues that *Justine* contains a secret: “Justine is Sade himself” (35). However, the argument that what Sade sought through his writing was more punishment, that Justine is Sade’s accomplice in his pursuit of masochistic pleasure, fails to take Sade’s “manner of thinking” into account (on its own terms). Paulhan accounts for “Sade” the literary-historical phenomenon by diagnosing Sade the man (as a masochist) through a reading of one of Sade the writer’s novels. It is an interpretive act that harbors its own secret: Paulhan has been transformed by his reading of *Justine* into another of Sade’s libertines. For while Justine labors to abstract some higher meaning from her experiences, the libertines, her in-text audience, constantly negate this abstraction, re-realizing language in physical act, returning from abstraction (and narration) to experience (and theatrical staging). Stimulated by her sentimental tale of victimage, Justine’s libertine audience makes her the victim of their lubricities, staging anew the spectacle of virtue’s violation.

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<sup>3</sup> In *Lautréamont and Sade*, for example, Maurice Blanchot wonders “if the censors and the judges who claim to lock Sade up, are not actually in Sade’s service, and are not fulfilling the burning desires of his libertinage. Sade, who has always longed for solitude in the depths of the earth, for the mystery of a subterranean and reclusive existence...” (9). Georges Bataille sees Sade’s project as the pursuit of absolute sovereignty, a project that commits Sade to waste and ultimately to self-destruction. The Sadean libertine’s object, in Bataille’s reading, is silence and solitude.

In characterizing the writing as a means of masochistic behavior, as Sade begging to be chastised, Paulhan reads *Justine* as the libertines read *Justine*; and like the libertines, Paulhan transforms the producer of the narrative into a victim. But in making Sade a victim, Paulhan falls into the interpretive trap that Sade has laid for his readers. The equation of writer and character is an attempt to subdue Sade, making him the victim of his own desire for punishment and transforming him into a curious spectacle of willful suffering and self-destructiveness.<sup>4</sup> This reading “straightens out everything” by imprisoning Sade the writer and Sade the man within a diagnosis that reduces him to a function (as all victims are reduced to functions). While this focus on punishment facilitates the taking of oranges to the securely incarcerated, it gets us no closer to understanding Sade’s transgression or his libertinism. It essentially ignores Sade’s argument that liberty cannot be paid for, or it wouldn’t be *free*.

If Paulhan reads Sade’s work as an expression of the desire to be punished and contained, his reading may well be a response to Surrealist critics who liberated Sade from the obscurity of *l’Enfer* and elevated him to the level of divinity.<sup>5</sup> Andre Breton characterized Sade as the most subversive author in history, and Apollinaire called him “the freest spirit who ever lived.” The Surrealist celebration of Sade has been described as at once motivated by a “revolutionary” interest in “overthrowing bourgeois mentality and culture” and an appropriation of Sade’s manner of thinking as “singular precursor to Surrealism” (Allison, Roberts, & Weiss 2). Sharing Sade’s preoccupation with the

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<sup>4</sup> Because the object of masochism’s violence is oneself, it is more of a curiosity than a danger. Paulhan’s argument uses this observation to argue that Sade in the original is now safe for consumption. “Well I know that Nature encompasses every taste, every mania. This particular one is no more harmful or more unpleasant than any other. Nor is it any less. But for mysteriousness it is not to be surpassed” (36). Paulhan’s reading of Sade’s libertinism focuses on punishment at the expense of liberty.

imbrication of eros and death and the representation of limit experience, the Surrealists invoked Sade as predecessor. The publication in 1930 of Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* marks the rupture of the Surrealist movement, the banishment of Georges Bataille, and a new deployment of Sade. Bataille's ensuing denunciation of the Surrealist's utopian sentimentalism and his articulation of a "heterology" of base materialism constituted his rejection of one interpretation of Sade's manner of thinking for another. Sade's work, Bataille argues, is of interest for its investigation of "sovereign inner experience" and its transgressive deployment of the base and the vile (ibid. 4). Bataille would negate the Surrealist sublimation of Sade (as pure transgression) by rubbing Breton's nose in the coprophagia and gleeful destructiveness Bataille saw as definitive in Sade's thinking and being.

Another critical appropriation of Sade initiated by the Surrealists is Sade's connection to or prefiguring of modernity (and post-modernity). Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* presents Sade as the ultimate revolutionary occupying the height of "unreason" while pointing to his novel *Juliette* as a text that effectively marks the close of an episteme—the end of the classical period and the beginning of the age of sexuality.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, Foucault makes the provocative argument that literature comes into existence in the late eighteenth century with the works of the Marquis de Sade.<sup>7</sup> In his investigation of Sade's importance to Foucault's "historiography," Georges Van Den Abbeele argues that "not only...does Sade turn out to be at once the exemplar and the

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5 L'enfer denotes the space in libraries devoted to dangerous and dirty books.

6 Peter Cryle's essay "Beyond the Canonical Sade" notes that Foucault makes this argument in the quite visible absence of any specific discussion or analysis of the novel in question.

7 Foucault makes this claim in the article "Le langage à l'infini."

birthplace of literature as the transgressive repetition and consumption of other languages, but the very metaphor of the literary text's function as an enlightening lightning flash is itself explicitly drawn from a particular scene in Sade, namely, the death of Justine" (10). Concluding his *Madness and Civilization* with a discussion of this scene, Foucault interprets Justine's perverse death as a figure for Sade's thought and that thought as transgressive herald of the arrival of a new age.<sup>8</sup> Noting its troubling circularity, Van Den Abbeele describes Foucault's interpretation as "requir[ing] that the scene of Justine's death be read as an allegory of Sade's text, which is itself read as an allegory of the crumbling classical episteme" (10).

Sade's "manner of thinking" has frequently and famously been read as at once aberrant and exemplary enlightenment thought. Like Foucault, Horkheimer and Adorno employ Sade's manner of thinking as allegory, seeing in his novels an "aberration of instrumental reason" that provides a radical critique of "rationalist, Kantian, utopian models—i.e. of the very notion of truth itself" (Allison, et. al. 3). Sade, they argue, like Nietzsche, "mercilessly elicited the implications of the Enlightenment" (Horkheimer and Adorno xvi). For Horkheimer and Adorno, the instrumentalizing tendency of reason is typical of enlightenment thought. The excessive lengths to which Sade takes his interrogation of that manner of thinking, however, is what exposes the will-to-power at the heart of Enlightenment.

Sade's interrogation of enlightenment principles is very much linked to the body, as a reader of any of his novels will know. Annie Le Brun, whose essays introduce Jean-

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<sup>8</sup> Foucault's discussion centers on the depiction of Justine's death in *Juliette*, which differs from that in *Justine* mainly by the amplification of the sexual implications of her death. In *Juliette*, the lightning enters Justine's mouth and leaves through her vagina.



Jacques Pauvert's complete edition of Sade's extant works, argues that Sade's writing represents his violent rejection of what he saw as the betrayal of enlightenment thought. Le Brun draws attention to the importance of materialism to Sade's thinking, insisting that his "manner of thinking" is "absolutely atheist, ...[a] mental insurrection from which he never, in his whole life, swerves..." (41). Le Brun sees Sade as effectively alone in his critical exploration of the consequences of atheism, which necessarily included the demise of the concept of good and evil as well as the eradication of the divine right of kings and its companionate privileging of the aristocracy. For having declared the death of God, the enlighteners proceeded to justify moral law and existing social systems by proclaiming them natural. Having defined Enlightenment as the liberation of thought from prejudices—as rational independence—the enlighteners closed ranks around a new ideology of natural virtue and the great chain of being.

In the forced solitude of incarceration, Sade took liberties with human institutions, questioning their basis and value. He questioned the limits placed on human behavior by social and moral law and investigated the limits placed on human thought by abstract ideas and beliefs, rejecting the inconceivable, the transcendent, and the absolute. He continued the enlightenment project of critical solitary thought. In the letter to his wife, Sade explains that his "manner of thinking" is inseparable from his physical existence, articulating a natural and necessary link between the abstract realm of thought and the concrete realm of action and things. It is a manner of thinking that rejects Cartesian dualism; it is also a manner of thinking that we can only access through words. Many readers, and most notably Roland Barthes, have seen Sade's work as a drive to say

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everything and leave nothing unsaid. They have taken this taxonomic drive to get everything down in words as the end of Sade's manner of thinking. But while this way of reading gets at Sade's "savage joy of saying" (Le Brun 142) and perhaps elucidates his resolve to "concede nothing ineffable to the world" (Barthes 37), it misses or represses Sade's tendency to speak from and to the body. For Sade, thought cannot be kept separate from the body. Stemming straight from his "considered reflections," Sade's manner of thinking "holds with [his] existence, with the way [he] is made." Reading Sade as the impossible effort to speak the unspeakable thought, as Barthes does, or as a masochistic effort to draw punishment on the body, as Paulhan does, inevitably reduces Sade's "manner of thinking." Sade's libertinism is his transgression; his freedom is premised on the taking of liberties. Abstraction must therefore take form in action. Ideas and bodies, bodies and ideas, copulating furiously.

In this chapter, I will look at the novel *Justine* as an expression of Sade's "manner of thinking." In *Justine*, Sade uses the sentimental heroine to expose the perversity of virtue and the perverse pleasures of reading novels. Laboring constantly to uncover what Le Brun calls the "fallacy of bodiless ideas" (142), Sade's work investigates the extraordinary power of words to at once evoke ideas and provoke bodies.

### **Sade's Theory of the Novel**

Written as a preface to the story collection *Crimes de L'Amour*, "Idée sur les Romans" (1800) articulates Sade's thinking about the novel, tracing its history and advancing a theory of its origins. For Sade, novels arise as a response to an epistemological crisis and provide a solution to that crisis. Emerging in the earliest

writing cultures at the moment they “first recognized gods,” fiction is used “to create fear and hope, and to unsettle the mind” (99). Writers produced the “language of phantoms from whatever they imagined would be most likely to seduce or terrify, and consequently, from whatever was most incredible” (99). Sade then identifies the next major development in the evolution of the novel as a shift in focus from one kind of imaginary creature to another: from gods to heroes.

When whole nations, at first guided by their priests, after having slaughtered each other in the name of their chimerical divinities, later take up arms for their kind or their country, the homage offered to heroism counterbalances the tribute paid to superstition; not only do they then most rightly substitute these new heroes for their gods, but they also sing their warriors’ praises as once they had sung the praises of heaven...and soon new novels appear, doubtless more probable and far more suitable for man than were those tales that extolled naught but phantoms. (98-99)

The progress that this shift connotes is located in its trajectory toward man’s experience, or the real. Nevertheless, the novel still reflects more of human weakness than human strength. For Sade, the basis of the novel is man’s “need to pray and to love,” a subservience which he sees as deriving from man’s existence and characterizing it.

Man is prey to two weaknesses....Wheresoever on earth he dwells, man feels the need to pray and to love: and herein lies the basis for all novels. Man has written novels in order to portray beings whom he implored; he has written novels to sing the praise of those whom he loves. (99-100)

While novels that portray beings man implores are “dictated by terror or hope,” novels that “sing the praise of those whom he loves” are “full of niceties and sentiments” (100).

In Sade’s opinion, neither of these is a suitable basis for the novel in an age of strength and enlightenment. “It is not by portraying the fastidious languours of love or the tedious conversations of the bedchamber that one can obtain any success with the novel, but by depicting robust and manly characters who, playthings and victims of that effervescence of the heart known as love, reveal to us both its dangers and misfortunes” (106). Representative of this new novel, for Sade, is the work of British writers Richardson and Fielding, whose novels have “taught us that the profound study of man’s heart—Nature’s veritable labyrinth—alone can inspire the novelist, whose work must make us see man not only as he is, or as he purports to be—which is the duty of the historian—but as he is capable of being when subjected to the modifying influences of vice and the full impact of passion” (107). The novelist’s charge is to study man under stress, to put man into situations where ideas about what humanity is and means are put to the test. Thus Sade’s *new novel* is a psycho-sociological study, and, in its treatment of man’s character, more valuable and more true than the “etching needle of history [which] only depicts man when he reveals himself publicly” (109).

Sade reserves his greatest admiration for novels that arouse affective response, creating an experience in which “our hearts are inevitably rent asunder” (110). The novelists that Sade credits are those who, with Prévost, create novels “filled with touching and terrible scenes which invincibly affect and involve the reader” (110). The novelist is thus obliged to do two things: to represent man by depicting his most intense

experiences, and to create an intense experience for the reader through that representation.

Sade learns from Richardson and Fielding that “’tis not always by making virtue triumph that a writer arouses interest” (106). *Clarissa*’s genius is Richardson’s refusal of the reader’s desire for Lovelace’s reformation. A changed Lovelace would provide a happier ending, but destroy the extraordinary pathos of *Clarissa*’s decline. But despite his admiration for the advances made by the new novels, Sade points to the necessity of further evolution, or perhaps “another effort” at revolution. Virtue is a relic of “times past” when heaven was “a source of fear and trembling.” Sade argues that as eighteenth-century man has declared war against the fictions that repressed him in the past, the novelist must keep pace. Aberration and transgression are no longer grounds for divine punishment, but rather part of the process of enlightenment. To answer the audacious effort of 18<sup>th</sup> century man, Sade offers his own “audacious effort,” work that is “absolutely new and in no-wise a mere re-working of already oft-told tales” (114). Sade offers, as he concludes his treatise on the novel, *Crimes de L’Amour*, a collection of fiction that takes aberration as its subject.

Originally written as a short tale for inclusion in this collection, *Justine*’s only appearance in *Crimes de L’Amour* is Sade’s strident disavowal of its authorship. The original 1787 version of *Justine*, just 130 pages, was stricken from the *Crimes* collection, considerably revised, and then anonymously published in two octavo volumes in 1791.<sup>9</sup> *Justine* was Sade’s first publication, preceding *Crimes de L’Amour* by nine years, and was enormously successful, going through six printings in the first decade alone. The

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<sup>9</sup> See Seaver & Wainhouse’s Introduction to *Justine*, 450.

anonymous publication of *Justine* and the other “philosophical” novels is not unusual, and neither, perhaps, is Sade’s disavowal of its authorship; publication of such novels could, and regularly did, land writers in jail. In Sade’s case, though the novel did not lead to his first arrest, it certainly contributed to his continued and subsequent incarceration.

To stop at this explanation of Sade’s disavowal of *Justine*, however, seems inadequate. First to print, *Justine* was Sade’s first child,<sup>10</sup> a child begotten in his pursuit of crimes of love. It is with the publication of his *Crimes* that Sade chooses to deny his paternity. However, *Justine*’s was a tale that he would return to, repeatedly revising and re-issuing; his creation would swell from its original 130 pages to well over three thousand.<sup>11</sup> Dedicating the 1791 version to the companion of his later days—the “example and honor” of her sex, Constance Quesnet—Sade would describe the novel as “one of the sublimest parables ever penned for human edification” (456). This characterization of the novel is entirely in keeping with the writerly intentions Sade declares in “Idée sur les Romans”:

Never, I say it again, never shall I portray crime other than clothed in the colors of hell. I wish people to see crime laid bare, I want them to fear it and detest it, and I know no other way to achieve this end than to paint it in all its horror. Woe unto those who surround it with roses! Their views are far less pure, and I shall never emulate them. (116)

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<sup>10</sup> *Justine* was not, however, his first major novel. Completed in 1785, the manuscript of *The 120 Days of Sodom* was written first, but then lost in the storming of the Bastille. It was rediscovered and published by Iwan Bloch in 1904.

<sup>11</sup> This figure refers to the combined page length of *La Nouvelle Justine* and *Juliette*, the companion novels published in 1797.

Sade needn't have mentioned *Justine* at all in his essay on the novel. And yet, in the very next line of the essay, Sade stridently disavows *Justine*: "Given which, let no one any longer ascribe to me the authorship of *Justine*" (116). Sade's fictions, "Idée sur les Romains" would have us believe, could not include a work such as *Justine*, which depicts "views...far less pure." Yet *Justine*, the dedication (and frame narrative) of the novel would have us believe, represents the purest of intentions. Mere perversity?

Sade's disavowal of authorship did not, finally, correct the public association of his name with the novel. Indeed, it is much more likely to have had the effect of reminding readers of a previous publishing success. Sade's rejection of *Justine*'s authorship is quite simply a lie. Sade's presentation of *Justine* as a parable of redemption and virtue is at least disingenuous. So what does this strange and perverse contradiction represent? For this reader, Sade's impassioned avowals and disavowals of *Justine* suggest a game, one in which the author's intentions have been lodged beneath one of several shells. Under which of these shells does my intention lie? The reader points and chooses, the shell is removed, and nothing there. Again she points and chooses, but again nothing lies beneath. And then she laughs and realizes that she's been had. The playfully perverse relationship between the two texts presents the intention of the author within a dialectical oscillation between good and evil.<sup>12</sup> The author of *Justine* had nothing but impure intentions; the author of *Justine* had only the purest of intentions. What is interesting about this shell game is the way in which it pits the reader's desire for meaning against

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<sup>12</sup> Lucienne Frappier-Mazur might identify this as an example of the "existential choice" that characterizes the libertine aesthetic.

the writer's perverse embrace of equivocation. What is also interesting is the irritation it produces.

### **The Perversion of the Sentimental Heroine**

*Justine, or Good Conduct Well Chastised* (1791) opens with a lengthy address to the reader which gives way to a third-person frame narrative. The opening address prefaces the novel, but is not sufficiently separate from the novel to constitute an authorial preface. Divided by a simple line break, the opening is part of the framing device and thus a part of the fiction. While the frame narrative sets the scene for Justine's narration, the framing address to the reader sets the parameters for hermeneutic practice. The speaker, identified with the writer, characterizes the novel as a tale of the depraved spirit's reformation through the lessons provided by virtue's suffering. In doing so, the speaker places the novel squarely in the tradition of Richardson's work—reiterating *Justine's* obvious ties to *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*—and presents the novel as Juliette's story, not Justine's; for it is Juliette's "depraved spirit" that is recalled to duty by Justine's narrative of persecution.<sup>13</sup>

The opening address to the reader presents the writer's motives as of the highest moral order—the reformation of the depraved—and the tale itself as a didactic exercise productive of enlightenment and moral reform. The educational value of the work, the address argues, more than justifies its unusual, even perverse, approach:

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<sup>13</sup> Juliette's presence as audience to Justine's tale is emphasized throughout the novel by Justine's periodic addresses to her: "Madame, would you believe it?" Nancy K. Miller has characterized Juliette as the "suture" because she offers the opportunity for Justine to narrate her experiences: "for Justine to speak for herself, and at length, a captive is granted an audience" ("Vicious Circle" 222).



It is essential to show that through examples of afflicted virtue presented to a depraved spirit in which, however, there remain a few good principles, it is essential, I say, to show that spirit quite as surely restored to righteousness by these means as by portraying this virtuous career ornate with the most glittering honors and the most flattering rewards. Doubtless it is cruel to have to describe, on the one hand, a host of ills overwhelming a sweet-tempered and sensitive woman who, as best she is able, respects virtue, and, on the other, the affluence of prosperity of those who crush and mortify this same woman. But were there nevertheless some good engendered of the demonstration, would one have to repent of making it? Ought one be sorry for having established a fact whence there resulted, for the wise man who reads to some purpose, so useful a lesson of submission to providential decrees and the fateful warning that it is often to recall us to our duties that Heaven strikes down beside us the person who seems to us best to have fulfilled his own? (458)

The tale to follow, the address explains, is a cruel tale; one in which a virtuous woman's virtuous behavior is answered with adversity and punishment. In deploying the theological concepts of repentance, providential stricture, and divine retribution, the address to the reader associates Justine with Christ and the writer with divine power. It is the author who strikes down his heroine at the narrative's close and his dispensation of justice calls attention to the perversity of divine justice more generally. Justine, Christ-like, is struck down for her audience's benefit—not for her sins, but for ours.

Justine's mortification, the opening address argues, need not be "repent[ed]" if there be "some good engendered of the demonstration." But this good—a "lesson of submission" gleaned by he who "reads to some purpose"—depends on the reader's translation of negative reinforcement into positive. Justine's virtue is brutally and serially punished. The novel concludes when she is blasted by lightning. Yet readers of "purpose" will see that the vengeful hand of heaven punishes the virtuous Justine in order to remind the audience to be virtuous. In "consideration of these intentions" the writer solicits "the reader's indulgence for the erroneous doctrines which are to be placed in the mouths of our characters, and for the sometimes rather painful situations which, out of love for truth, we have been obliged to dress before his eyes" (458). Like Juliette, the reader of Justine's instructive tale will be recalled to duty. However, reformation hinges on reading practice—readers must read with the intention of being reformed.<sup>14</sup> Thus the writer makes the reader's response to the tale a matter of his own interpretive abilities and "purpose." Should the reader not be reformed, the reader—not the writer—must assume blame.<sup>15</sup>

Sade's pretension to a higher (moral) truth in the address to the reader is the opening move in the classic libertine game: the seduction. The *roman libertin* has been

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14 Roland Barthes has described Sade's narrative world as a "school society" where the "education is not of this or that character, but of the reader" (24). The address to the reader with which Justine opens would seem to suggest such a didactic purpose. Jane Gallop has argued that "one might treat the entirety of Sade's writings as a meditation on teaching, in that what is continually, repeatedly represented is a confrontation between ignorance as innocence and knowledge as power—a confrontation constitutive of the classroom dialectic. What insists in Sade's writing is the drive to 'teach someone a lesson'" (42). See Gallop's *Thinking Through the Body*, especially chapter 3: "The Student Body."

15 The authorial claim to performing public service by exposing the ways of vice is a common strategy of both the pornographic and libertine novel. The "Editor's Preface" to *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, for example, presents the work as a collection of real letters that provide "a service to public morals" by exposing the stratagems of the "wicked" (940). In Sade's hands, the apology for vice is strategically deployed to foreclose interpretation.

characterized by Jean Marie Goulemot as “rest[ing] essentially on the art of persuasion, for to seduce is to bring the other person to give way to the insistence of desire, and to recognize, by means of a mechanism that is not so far removed from that of religious conversion, that the one who preaches the law of pleasure is right and that one must yield to that law” (49). Though Goulemot categorizes Sade’s novels as pornographic rather than libertine, his description of the role of seduction in the libertine novel is very suggestive when considered next to Sade’s address to the reader. The encounter between writer and reader that initiates *Justine* operates through the strategic manipulations of the seduction. Having made the reader responsible for his own behavior and response, Sade proceeds to test the reader’s virtue. The reader must indulge the writer’s use of “erroneous doctrines” and “painful situations” because they are the writer’s only means of disseminating “truth.” But to discover the “truth” that virtue is the right path, the reader has to ignore, as *Justine* does, all of the negative consequences of following virtue’s path. Indeed, the only positive reinforcement of virtuous behavior is the frame narrative and its description of Juliette’s retreat behind a “Carmelite veil.” Reading for the “truth” that virtue is the right path is possible only if the reader allows the author’s framing discourse and the frame narrative to dictate the meaning of the tale they contain and thus only if the reader turns a deaf ear to the “erroneous doctrines” and a blind eye to the “painful situations...dress[ed] before his eyes.” The reader of “purpose” is and must be a naïve reader determined for virtue.

Many sophisticated readers of the novel—those not determined for virtue—have commented on the author’s will-to-power and the text’s carnal solicitation or seduction of

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its audience. Kathy Acker, for example, has argued that Sade “uses text to overthrow our virginites, virginites not born from the body but from the logos; he seduces us through writing into overthrowing our very Cartesian selves” (234). She urges readers to “*remember*: in Sade’s texts, stories exist for the purpose of seduction” (235). For Lucienne Frappier-Mazur Sade’s use of seduction as narrative strategy reflects his libertinism. Libertinism, she argues, anchors its aesthetics in “existential choice.” This is nowhere more visible than in the libertine novel which “oscillates between two options, according to whether it posits or not the transgression of moral consciousness: this entails either the obscene representation of the body, or the fiction of innocence” (“Sadean Libertinage” 188). Sade employs the oscillation at the heart of the libertine aesthetic—“assert[ing] innocence” while “actualiz[ing] transgression through the obscenity of his language”—and thereby “exposes the duplicity of the libertine model, which needs the justifications of discourse in order to maintain the fiction of innocence” (188). Thus Sade’s fiction is simultaneously a deployment of libertine strategies and a critique of the *roman libertin*. Sade employs the narrative strategy of seduction in which the “narration attacks the reader on several fronts” alongside a narrative strategy of amplification or excess that enacts a critique of libertine fiction by pushing “the power relation inherent in erotic conquest to extreme forms of physical violence” (184).<sup>16</sup>

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16 Frappier-Mazur is particularly interested in tracing Sade’s engagement with the libertine aesthetic and the libertine novel. Annie Le Brun is interested in the same juxtaposition of verbal and physical but argues a slightly different point about Sade’s motives. For Le Brun, Sade’s depiction of the most unjustifiable acts and passions alongside a philosophical discourse of justification represents an effort to “foil that questionable play of justifications which can be made to serve any feelings, especially the loftier ones” (67). In this way, Sade’s novels expose the cruelty at the heart of human nature and the sophistries at the heart of logical explanation, “denying us...those disguises our ferocity has hit upon to cloak itself” (67). Though these critics differ in their explanation of Sade’s reasons for manipulating his reader, they represent a fairly generalized critical agreement that strategic control of the audience is central to Sade’s project.

The address to the reader that opens *Justine* suspends readers in just such an “existential” oscillation. The reader is obliged to witness horrors and lubricities, but his reaction to such spectacles is made a matter of determination and purpose. In announcing his intentions, the writer directs the reader to the appropriate interpretation and response, disavowing alternative responses to the text. Such responses are identified at the outset as reflecting the perverse practices of the reader, not of the writer who has made every effort to “anticipate those dangerous sophistries of a false philosophy” (458). The reader of purpose—determined for virtue—will read in the false philosophies and painful situations a confirmation of their determination for virtue. The address to the reader asserts the writer’s innocence even as it actualizes its transgression by admitting the necessity of “painful situations” and “false philosophies.” It offers the reader a choice which is finally an impossible choice and no choice.

The opening address transgresses the reader’s expectations and the generally accepted role of prefatory remarks: it does not prevent possible misreadings so much as *present* the possible misreading. It does so as a means of laying the blame for any perversity squarely in the lap of the reader. But it also describes a reading practice that arrives at virtue through perverse interpretation: the possible misreading is perversely announced as the intention, and the reader can only achieve the misreading by perversely ignoring all the evidence and insisting on an interpretive practice that the novel chastises at every turn.

Redeeming the depraved heart through the depiction of “afflicted virtue” is a far better description of Richardson’s *Clarissa* or *Pamela* than of Sade’s *Justine*. The virtuous heroines of these novels are certainly subjected to “a host of ills,” and their steadfast virtue

purports to bring characters and readers alike to a tearful appreciation of virtue. Clarissa and Pamela are virtuous because they say no and stick to it, contradicting the desires of their libertine heroes. In Pamela's case, the repetition of her refusal eventually produces Mr. B's reformation and a denouement in which she can finally say yes—to marriage. The spectacle of Clarissa's suffering, visual testimony to her virtue, cannot save Lovelace, not least because Lovelace's continued persecutions are necessary to the production of more pathetic spectacles. But Belford's witnessing of Clarissa's suffering, as he both reads her letters and observes her writing those letters at her coffin-turned-desk, moves him profoundly—Belford sees, cries, and is redeemed.

In Richardson's novels of sentiment, the body of the virtuous heroine reflects and communicates strong feeling. One of the hallmark characteristics of the virtuous maiden is her tears. Clarissa's tears nearly redeem Lovelace, and they have a sublime and redemptive effect on Belford. The virtuous maiden is reduced to tears by assaults on her virtue. Tears are her last line of defense, and they generally work very well. The crying woman is a spectacle of virtue persecuted, and in novels where virtue is the object, the spectacle moves the viewer to an appreciation of virtue's sublimity if not to moral reform. In the sentimental novel, tears are visual testimony to the sentimental victim's suffering and virtue as well as evidence of the audience's sensibility.<sup>17</sup>

*Justine* casts a sentimental heroine in a pornographic narrative that combines the gloomy settings of the Gothic novel with the episodic structure of the picaresque. Justine is just 12 years old when the untimely death of her parents throws her and her sister out of their

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17 R.F. Brissenden distinguishes the sentimental novel from the novel of sentiment, primarily so that he can separate Richardson's novels from the herd. Brissenden argues that Richardson is, like Sade, more of an anti-sentimental writer. Richardson is interested in passions and sentiments not in emotional "transport" per se. I'm not sure I agree with either the characterization of Richardson or the insistence on designation.

convent school and into the world. Left nearly penniless and without resources, Justine seeks sympathy and benevolence but instead encounters the cruelty and sexual exploitation of libertinism. Her first-person narrative of these traumatic adventures is framed by a narrative that provides background details of Justine's, and more particularly, her sister Juliette's history. The frame traces the two sisters' paths: from their divergence—Juliette's successful rise to wealth and power and Justine's slogging path through disaster—to their reunion at a traveler's inn. Justine is under arrest and being transported to the courts where she is likely to be convicted of arson and murder and sentenced to the gallows. The meeting of the two sisters, who for various reasons do not recognize each other, occasions the full telling of Justine's history for which the frame narrative sets the stage.

Noting its relatively conventional structure, Sade biographer Neil Schaeffer describes *Justine* as a "parody of the moral and rational world" exemplified by Richardson's *Pamela* and situates the novel relative to both Richardson's novels of sentiment and the tradition of the philosophical romance (411).<sup>18</sup> In Voltaire's *Candide* and Johnson's *Rasselas*, as in the sentimental narratives of Sterne and Mackenzie, the hero's journey is characterized by his serial exposure to visual spectacles of emotional import and verbal disquisitions which relate (or fail to relate) to the sights the hero has encountered. Presented with "a variety of individuals standing for various philosophical theories or stances," the character accumulates experience and wisdom (Schaeffer 413). Sade's *Justine* shares and parodies this narrative structure just as it shares and parodies many of the features of the novel of sentiment. R.F. Brissenden has described *Justine* and

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*La Nouvelle Justine* (1797) as “perverse fables” reflecting a profound “dissatisfaction with sentimental optimism” (66) and “designed as systematic revelations of the falsity of the sentimental psychological and sociological theories of the eighteenth century” (133). Bleaker in outlook than the philosophical novels of Voltaire or Johnson, and without the comic ambiguities of Sterne’s sexualized sentimental mode, Sade’s *Justine* describes a world in which the defining feature of man’s nature is cruelty. Virtue and benevolence are exposed as unnatural rhetorical stances.

While Sade’s heroine uses much the same technique as Richardson’s heroines—contradicting the libertine philosophies of her persecutors, refusing her consent under any circumstance, and reproducing her experiences in an effort to redeem others—the effect couldn’t be more different. Justine is a sentimental heroine who finds herself in a truly perverted novel, one where the characters continually respond perversely to visual and verbal representations of her suffering. The framing of the narrative, emphasized by the interruptions of a frame audience ever eager for more descriptive detail, provides a repetition of this important aspect of Justine’s history: every time she encounters someone new she tells the tale of her misfortunes in great detail, thereby exciting their passion and leading them to victimize her once again. Her drive to honest and complete confession, typical of the sentimental heroine, feeds the libertine’s lust.

In *Justine*, the spectacle of virtue persecuted incites the audience to further persecution. Miller identifies the “posture of supplication” as Justine’s “unique means of self-defense” (“Vicious Circle” 219). When Justine cries and begs for sympathy, she

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18 Richardson’s novels abandoned the episodic structure of the philosophical novel and the narrative of incident more typical of Defoe and Fielding in favor of a novel of character. *Pamela* and *Clarissa* are represented not so much through their actions as through their emotional and moral responses to situations.



invariably inspires her libertine audience to new heights of libertinism, and more often than not, to further assaults on her virtue (and more reasons to cry). What Justine's early experiences demonstrate is precisely that tears lubricate the libertine imagination. As several of Sade's libertines explain, libertines feed their own desire on the emotional excesses of their victims. Libertines, like readers, take their pleasure from the suffering of others.

The aphrodisiac effect of Justine's tears and supplications are evident in her first encounter with a libertine. Having only just lost her parents and place in the world, Justine seeks the help of a wealthy merchant named Dubourg whom she tells her troubles and asks for work. Dubourg points out that the services of a delicate and sensitive girl are of little value to a household and that she would "be better advised to occupy [her]self with giving men pleasure" (470). Dubourg, who has little "fondness" for beggars, tells Justine that "the virtue wherof [she] makes such a conspicuous display is worthless" (470). An "illusion," virtue's value is limited to that invested in it by "pride." Dubourg concludes his lecture by telling Justine she must either "consent" to libertinism or seek assistance elsewhere. Justine's distress erupts in tears she is "unable to check," but her visible distress and pleading only serve to enflame Dubourg's passions. The libertine attempts to "force" from Justine what she "would not accord him voluntarily," but Justine ultimately escapes his clutches and curses his "barbarities."

Her bravery is not well-received by her landlady, however, and she is sent back to Dubourg the next afternoon. Confronted with the same single option, Justine again resorts to tears and supplication, and again her efforts yield "lubricity" rather than sympathy:

...a man who was already finding, in the very spectacle of my suffering, one further vehicle for his horrible passions! Would you believe it, Madame? becoming inflamed by the shrill accents of my pleadings, savoring them inhumanly, the wretch disposed himself for his criminal attempts! (473)

Nevertheless, Dubourg again fails to rape Justine when his “flames [are] extinguished in the fury of his enterprises” (474).

The spectacle of Justine’s threatened virtue is repeatedly deployed in the narrative as a visual stimulus to that most libertine of sensations, lubricity. Presented with a threat to her virtue, Justine cries and begs for mercy, and in doing so enflames her audience. Her sentimental effusions meet with renewed libertinism. Justine’s failure to understand the effect of her tears and pleadings—no matter how often she observes the result—ensures that she will continue to be victimized. Dubourg’s characterization of Justine’s virtue as an “illusion” and “conspicuous display” impugns both the value and honesty of Justine’s emotional responses. Moreover, the issue that Dubourg raises—the visible “display” of virtue—will become increasingly troubling to Justine.

The Dubourg scenario is repeated over and over again in the narrative—Justine is confronted with perversity, cries and begs for mercy, and is subjected to persecution. Though Justine continues to search for an appropriately receptive audience—one that will respond with sympathetic kindness to her tale of suffering—she encounters only perverse audiences that respond with cruel carnality. One of her most upsetting encounters with an unsympathetic audience occurs at Saint Mary-in-the-Woods. Justine has made her way to the isolated monastery in hopes of succor, but instead of assistance,

Justine is subjected to more humiliation and torture. At Saint Mary-in-the-Woods, Justine stumbles into the lair of a society of libertines who promptly imprison her. Their cruelties prompt the following response:

I who located all my glory, all my felicity in my virtue, I who thought that, provided I remained well-behaved at all times, I could be consoled for all fortune's ills, I cannot bear the horrible idea of seeing myself so cruelly sullied by those from whom I should have been able to expect the greatest comfort and aid: my tears flowed in abundance, my cries made the vault ring; I rolled upon the floor, I lacerated my breast, tore my hair, invoked my butchers, begged them to bestow death upon me...and Madame, would you believe it? this terrible sight excited them all the more. (572)

Justine's disappointment at the monks' libertinism is expressed in the usual way. And in the usual way, the spectacle of Justine's anguish evinces renewed libertine excesses. Nevertheless, Justine always reacts with surprise—"Madame, would you believe it?"—when her conspicuous display of distressed virtue "excites them all the more."

This failure to register past experience is all the more curious in relation to the intensification of Justine's affective response. The intensity of her emotional outcry results from her outrage at her persecutors' identity: they are men of the cloth. But the amplification of her response also suggests that her suffering and her virtue are *performed*, and with some melodramatic flair. The spontaneous eruption of tears is here augmented, if not replaced, by rolling on the floor and lacerating her breast. Moreover, she has expanded her descriptive range, making the vault ring with her cries. This

dramatic intensification is thrown into greater relief by the repetition of the phrase “and Madame, would you believe it?” In calling her audience’s attention to the spectacle by hailing them, Justine as narrator makes explicit her efforts to bring the spectacle of her distress before *their* eyes. The rhetorical question posed to Juliette attempts to access and manipulate her response to the scene.

As Justine’s innocence is attacked, her virtue becomes increasingly a matter of theatre or “illusion” and, as the following discussion will suggest, of determination. Justine must act out virtue, must make it in some way visible, as she loses her ability to represent virtue, particularly as she accumulates experience and loses the innocence associated with the physiological signs of virtue, including virginity. But in perfecting the visible representation of virtue, she produces an ever more powerful stimulant for the libertine imagination. In her first experience with Dubourg, a minor and rather fumbling libertine, she escapes without harm, but the tests posed by subsequent libertines will grow in force and change in nature, forcing her to renegotiate or rationalize her relationship to virtue and to deploy ever more affecting visual displays of emotion.

Although Justine’s sentimental effusions and postures of supplication mark her as a victim in Sade’s libertine universe, many readers have noted that she is accorded distinctly different treatment than the typical victim. Roland Barthes remarks that excepting murder, the characteristic that most distinctly separates the libertine from the victim is their access to speech: “The master is the one who speaks, who disposes of language in its entirety; the object is the silent one who remains separated through a

mutilation more absolute than any erotic torture, from any access to speech” (32).<sup>19</sup>

Barthes describes Justine as an “ambiguous victim” because her access to speech and her role as narrator trouble the general distinction between libertine and victim. Libertines like Dubois, the skirted Robin Hood, seem to see in Justine a possible ally in their pursuit of transgression. Libertines offer Justine choices and pursue her consent through philosophical disquisitions and debates meant to seduce her to a libertine manner of thinking. Dubois, for example, draws Justine’s attention to the socially repressive function of virtue in an attempt to persuade her to join the band of merry thieves:

Nature has caused us all to be equals born...it is up to us to correct its caprices and through our skill to repair the usurpations of the strongest. I love to hear these rich ones, these titled ones, these magistrates and these priests, I love to see them preach virtue to us. It is not very difficult to forswear theft when one has three or four times what one needs to live; it is not very necessary to plot murder when one is surrounded by nothing but adulators and thralls unto whom one’s will is law; nor is it very hard to be temperate and sober when one has the most succulent dainties constantly within one’s reach; they can well contrive to be sincere when there is never any apparent advantage in falsehood. (481)

Having experienced the libertinism of magistrates and priests first-hand, Justine sees some sense in Dubois’s justification of crime. “I must confess that if ever I was shaken it was by this clever woman’s seductions; but a yet stronger voice, that of my heart to

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<sup>19</sup> Philippe Sollers presents a similar account when he argues that “the Sadean monster...is the one who says what he does and does what he says and never anything else” (43).

which I gave heed, combated her sophistries; I declared to Dubois that I was determined never to allow myself to be corrupted” (482).

Justine often finds the arguments of the libertines seductive. Her refusal to accept their position is a matter of determination rather than logic. She believes in God, and therefore in good, evil, and virtue, and for this reason she is “determined” against the libertine way of thinking. She closes her eyes to the facts of experience—that her virtuous acts are always punished while evil is perpetually rewarded—and when forced to experience libertinism or to recount it, she weeps.

By refusing to become a libertine, and perhaps more particularly, by weeping whilst refusing, Justine renounces libertinage for victim-hood. Thomas Dipiero has observed that Justine’s “version of virtue” consists in “nothing but negation” (258); she answers libertinism with its adverse. Justine’s negation of libertinage entails a return to the postures of supplication; these postures are in turn negated by the libertines who reject her plea for sympathy with a physical enactment of their libertinism. Determined against crime, and negating the libertine perspective with recourse to the depiction of sentimental virtue, Justine becomes the stage on which the libertines can enact their transgression of bourgeois values. She negates their arguments by inhabiting the position of virtue, and they negate her virtue as a means of transgressing the values she represents. Justine takes her negation of libertine philosophy from the discursive to the somatic and the libertines follow her lead, joining practice to precept.

Dubois and her band of thieves accept Justine’s determination against libertinage by making her a victim. While the men settle on the obvious response to her virtue and virginity—rape—Dubois suggests a scene that will satisfy the libertines’ desires while

preserving Justine's valuable maidenhood for the open market. Justine will strip naked and "adopt one after the other all the positions we are pleased to call for" while Dubois satisfies the "hungers" of the band. Justine's response to Dubois's plan—more tears and pleading—serves only to set the scene in motion. Justine becomes the focal point of the spectacle, with her passivity serving as the cynosure of the libertine's activities: "I am the focal point of these execrable orgies, their absolute center and mainspring" (733). One of the thieves ties strings onto any part of Justine's body capable of holding a string and tugs at them while Dubois ministers to him, his orgasm concurring with his victim's loss of balance. As in all of Sade's novels, the libertine dictates the organization of the visual space by announcing stage directions before the scene commences. Libertines exalt in their ability to dictate the action and control the passive victim—in this case, she who is determined for virtue. It is precisely this passivity that the spectacle of Justine as marionette ridicules.

The spectacle of Justine's objectification enacts relationships of power: each body takes its place as either libertine (actor) or victim (prop). In each episode, Justine is offered the option of acting as a libertine or passively accepting her victimization. When offered this choice, Justine rejects libertinism. Though she does not explicitly choose victim-hood, her rejection of active libertinism consigns her to the adverse position.

Libertines seem to recognize the ambiguity that Barthes notes in Justine. She can be, and occasionally is, seduced by them. They appeal to her reason, offer her choices, and even attempt negotiation: options which victims like Omphale or Rosalie are never offered. The leader of Dubois's band of thieves, Coeur de Fer, offers Justine an unusual deal: he wants her to become "his woman," and in exchange he offers her protection from

other male interest. This deal is unusual on two counts: first, the offer sounds suspiciously like marriage, a union that libertines generally keep separate from their lubricious exploits; and second, Coeur de Fer promises Justine that he “will attempt nothing without [her] consent” (486). With this offer, Coeur de Fer accords Justine the courtesies due another libertine, for only libertines have will enough to consent.<sup>20</sup> As in Justine’s first libertine encounter with Dubourg, Coeur de Fer attempts to persuade her of the foolishness of attaching such value to her virtue and its physical manifestation, her maidenhead: “How can a girl be so dull-witted as to believe that virtue may depend upon the somewhat greater or lesser diameter of one of her physical parts? What difference does it make to God or man whether this part be intact or tampered with?” (487) Meeting with further resistance on her part, he then proposes a solution that will satisfy them both (he is a deft negotiator): he will forego the hymeneal pleasures and venture into “mystery’s asylum” where “it connects itself with love by ties of prudence” (488). Justine balks at sodomy, having heard it “offends Nature” and is revenged by “the hand of Heaven.” Coeur de Fer then attempts to “rectify” Justine’s ideas.

Coeur de Fer’s initiation of strategic rear-assault on Justine’s manner of thinking is a means of doing in language what he desires to accomplish physically. Jean Marie Goulemot has described the libertine novel as a “form based on dialectic, and on the art of persuasion, in which the reader and the person who resists must both be seduced and persuaded to give themselves up” (50). Coeur de Fer’s diction, however, suggests that his act of verbal persuasion is itself an act of rape. In his discussion of the intersections of

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted, however, that consent is really a foregone matter on both sides. Victims, by virtue of their passivity, are incapable of consenting; and libertines always consent. To withhold consent would express a squeamishness or moral rectitude deadly to the libertine.



power, discourse, and the body in *Justine*, Thomas Dipiero argues that the libertine's harangues are not "purely intellectual enterprises—they become, in fact, acts of violence themselves because they ravish the discursive structure of reason as the Enlightenment traditionally conceived it" (255). Extending Barthes's observation that the harangue (verbal display) makes the difference of the libertine manifest, Dipiero argues that "violence in the libertine scheme of things is thus violation of and by language. Saying equals doing, for the libertines...and they attempt to effect a one-to-one correspondence between word and referent, halting the metonymic slippage of signifiers. In short, they try to be the masters in control of truth" (255). While language becomes violence, violence is the inscription of the libertine's "physical and ideological dominance" on the body of the victim. In commencing to "rectify" Justine's ideas, Coeur de Fer has already initiated his sodomization of her.

Justine's surrender to Coeur de Fer's "seductions" is prevented in this case not by Justine's determination for virtue but by the interruption of plot. "I was going to abandon myself and become criminal through virtue; my opposition was weakening" (490). But just as Justine is about to grant her consent and yield a principle in order to protect the physical manifestation of her virginity, a carriage is heard outside and the highwaymen rush to their work. When the thieves return, Justine is "compelled to accept" her share of the blood-stained booty, but with the interruption returns her resolve to retain her virtue.

One of the ways that Justine maintains her virtue—even after she loses her maidenhead—is by withholding her consent. Angela Carter argues that rape is less frightening to Justine than seduction, for "a rape may be performed in the singular and denies the notion of consent" (49). By contrast, seduction requires participation and

hinges on consent “for one must be willing or deluded, or, at least, willing to be deluded, in order to be seduced” (49). Although Justine never, after this close shave with Coeur de Fer, consents to participation in libertinage, she is often “compelled to accept” her part in libertine behavior. She accepts her share, but refuses to accept responsibility for actions she takes under duress. In effect, she redefines these actions as passivity, as a matter of the will of others rather than her own, and thereby embraces the spectacle of herself as the puppet of others.

In Richardson’s epistolary novels, the virtuous heroine disseminates both her virtue and her suffering through her letters. In both *Clarissa* and *Pamela*, reading augments or even replaces direct observation: the heroine’s audience, moved by witness accounts of her physical expressions of suffering, find confirmation and elaboration in the heroine’s written descriptions of her persecution. This is why the libertines, Mr. B and Lovelace, are so keen to see their respective lady’s letters. They seek her written testimony as proof of her virtue and as measure of the effectiveness of their persecution. The perverse delight afforded to the libertine by reading his lady’s letters stems from his observation of the effects of persecution. It is precisely this perversity (reading as a means of observing the heroine’s pain) that the reader reiterates and that critics of Richardson cited in their attacks on the virtue of the novels. Richardson’s more sympathetic readers warned him of the dangerous tendency to “depiction” especially in “warm scenes” that aroused readers’ passions overmuch. Less sympathetic, Fielding satirized *Pamela* in a tale of crude materialism and shameless pandering to the prurient interests of readers. Shamela’s “virtue” and resistance to love are purely mercenary.

Richardson's sentimental heroine is incapable of concealing emotion she feels or of performing emotion she doesn't. In both her letters and her emotional responses, she strives for transparency. Libertine heroes, on the other hand, are characterized by a general distrust of emotional response which stems from their ability to counterfeit sensibility. Lovelace and Mr. B use disguise and false displays of emotion to insinuate themselves into the heroine's heart or bedchamber. Reading the heroine's letters offers the libertine the opportunity to observe the inscription of his power on her thinking. For Pamela, this is as much a violation as any physical transgression. Indeed, the transgression of the private body and the transgression of the letter are linked when Pamela begins sewing her letters into her underclothes. The transgression that is most unspeakable in *Clarissa*—the rape—is immediately visible in the disintegration of the heroine's written discourse, and then gradually mirrored in her physical body. It is as though the original relationship between letter and life has reversed. The rape is the one emotionally overwhelming experience that the heroine cannot represent either in writing or in emotional gesture. Though words and gestures fail her in the face of that traumatic experience, it is nevertheless conveyed materially in her body and text. In Richardson's novels, virtue communicates in language and physical gestures that are transparent, while libertinism communicates in language and gestures that obscure the truth through rhetoric and disguise.

Something like the opposite relationship characterizes Sade's *Justine*. While the libertine attempts to control meaning and effect a correspondence or transparency between word and deed, Justine seeks to define herself (as virtuous) through the strategic negation of everything libertine. While the libertine chooses the obscene word that

collapses the distance between sign and referent, Justine exploits the strategies of *gazage*, building meaning through metonymic slippage.

Justine scrupulously avoids obscene language in the telling of her tale, veiling the obscene in euphemism. While martial and mechanistic metaphors tend to govern the representation of male libertine anatomy, Justine employs religious metaphors to characterize the female victim's sexual parts: thus the thieves of Dubois's band pledge to burn their "incense upon the altars' entrance" instead of penetrating her virginal orifices (484).<sup>21</sup> Justine protects her audience from the brutal reality of sexual violence and the surgical precision of libertine obscenity by adorning her descriptions with decorous metaphors. As she delicately puts it, she "soften[s] their expressions...and sweeten[s] the scene itself" because "their obscenities were such your modesty might suffer at least as much from beholding them unadorned as did my shyness" (484). Thus Justine labors throughout her narrative to "offer [her] sketches in the least revolting colors" (671).

According to Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, Sade divided his works between those that were obscene and explicit and those that deployed a strategy of *gazage* or "the veiled depiction of sex and violence under decent terms" (185). *Justine* as a novel does not fit this category, but Justine as a narrator deploys the strategy of *gazage* in her effort to avoid explicit description. In her discussion of Justine's narrational squeamishness, Jane Gallop comments that "in the domain of Justine, there is something potentially sayable, a tangible naked body, that is not said, but is veiled behind what is said. What isn't said, here, is that which would violate contingent social propriety, but is nonetheless

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21 Jean-Marc Kehrès has noted that this use of religious terminology has the effect of "creating an ironic sense of sacrilege and profanation" (102). If so, this adds to the interest of the libertine audience. Justine's diction is itself enflaming. By choosing the language of the sacred and of sacrifice, Justine feeds her libertine audience's interest in sacrilege.

perfectly respectful of language, just not of the language that is proper to Justine” (*Intersections* 53).

Justine’s verbal style negates the obscene language and behavior of the libertine by introducing veiled language and the discourse of sentimental effusion. And yet, as we are repeatedly shown, Justine’s sentimental approach to storytelling tends to produce anew the obscenities she seeks to hide from view in her sentimental approach to storytelling. In her strategic use of veils and metaphors, Justine aestheticizes libertine spectacle, making the obscene decent for her audience. To make her tale decent, however, Justine must resort to rhetorical obfuscation and disguise.

John Locke devotes a section of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to a consideration of rhetoric and figurative language. In a section entitled “Of the Abuse of Words” Locke expresses a certain amount of anxiety at language’s ability to obscure reality and control the judgment. For Locke, figurative language “can scarce pass” for a “fault” particularly “in discourses where we seek rather pleasure and delight than information and improvement” (10:34). Locke worries, however, that

...if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *ideas*, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat: and therefore, however laudable or allowable oratory may render them in harangues and popular addresses, they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or

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instruct, wholly to be avoided; and where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault either of the language or person that makes use of them. (3:10:34)

Locke concludes his discussion of the abuses of rhetoric—“that powerful instrument of error and deceit”—by inferring a connection between rhetorical “eloquence” and “the fair sex.” Both “Beauties” employ “arts of deceiving, wherein men find pleasure to be deceived” (10:34). The stability and honesty of signs (and of women) requires plain speaking—a style that Justine as narrator rejects.

In her efforts to secure the sympathetic judgment of her (violently unsympathetic) audience, Justine rhetorically amplifies the pathetic. Comparing Justine to Diderot’s Suzanne Simonin, Nancy K. Miller observes that the “pathos-producing devices” of the narrator must be constantly varied in order to sustain the reader’s sympathy and compassion. Justine’s and Suzanne’s efforts to encourage affective response represent their continuing effort to “revalorize the victim in the reader’s eye” (220). For Miller, Justine’s suffering is not meant to round out her character; it is instead “designed to support the system in which she circulates” (221). Justine’s deployment of sentimental gesture and discourse return us to the question of the reader’s seduction. In her analysis of *Justine*’s seduction of the reader, Miller focuses not on the role of the framing discourses or the libertine harangues but on the role of Justine’s oft-repeated story. Miller investigates the text’s entrapment of the reader—and the critic—in the “vicious circle” of narrative repetition. Justine is “the object of a verb used to trap the reader and lure him into Sade’s world” (226). The reader is snared by his implication in the circuits of repetition that Justine enacts in her narration: “what Justine as narrator registered as

chronology was in fact stasis and progression repetition. Justine's text is but a pretext for a sexual combinatory whose permutations are infinite" and which leaves "no way or reason to stop until the author or his reader is exhausted" (226).

The libertine response to Justine's narration suggests that her use of *gazage* in the rendering of details is more inciting to the imagination; it clearly and repeatedly has the effect of titillating her audience into surpassing the libertine behaviors she describes. Justine's stylistic sweetening of the description is presented as an effort to make her story less obscene, but has the effect of making her story more sensually affecting, more erotic. Moreover, Justine obligingly caters her description to the needs of her audience. In the case of her confession to Dom Sévérino at Saint Mary-in-the-Woods, she realizes, "when able to reflect calmly" upon her interview with the monk, that he "had several times permitted himself certain gestures which dramatized the emotion that had heavy entrance into many of the questions he put to me...and lingered lovingly over obscene details" (562). Juliette and Corville, her frame audience, likewise demand details, and she obliges. Justine's art of description entices her audience through the proffering and withholding of the detail.

In his analysis of the "rhetorical status" of description, Philippe Hamon notes that description "orient[s] the consumption of the text by the reader" (14). Description then plays a key role in reader's hermeneutic and aesthetic responses to texts. In the novel, description is generally seen as a second order concern to the development of the narrative. In Sade's pornographic novels, however, internal audiences regularly assert their interest in the details. When Justine pauses in her narration to ask "Have I not already more than soiled your imagination with infamous recitations?" Corville insists

she continue, arguing for explicit details in the service of both sentimental and psychological verity:

‘...we insist upon these details, you veil them with a decency that removes all their edge of horror; there remains only what is useful to whoever seeks to perfect his understanding of enigmatic man. You may not fully apprehend how these tableaux help toward the development of the human spirit; our backwardness in this branch of learning may very well be due to the stupid restraint of those who venture to write upon such matters. Inhibited by absurd fears, they only discuss the puerilities with which every fool is familiar, and dare not, by addressing themselves boldly to the investigation of the human heart, offer its gigantic idiosyncrasies to our view.’ (671)

In its presentation of the obscene detail as public service, Corville’s remark recalls the discursive strategies employed by the address to the reader with which the novel begins.

Hamon describes the detail as “that which over-determines meaning and significance” adding that it “stops, blocks and suspends the momentum of reading” (11). When a narrator pauses to fill in the details, the narrative progression halts; time stops and space begins to fill with inactive actors and props. In Justine’s narration of her encounters with obscenity and libertinism, veiled depiction of action and accumulation of visual detail (euphemistic and otherwise) have the effect of suspending time for the elaboration of theatrical space. A spectacle takes shape. Moreover, her attention to the audience makes the boundary between the stage and spectators permeable, inviting transgression. Justine’s libertine audiences eventually become actors as they stage a



renewed assault on Justine's virtue. Hamon notes that "description might be that place in the text where the generative power of language might show itself most clearly and as quite unmanageable" (25). Justine's experience with the unmanageable effects of her storytelling seem to support this view.

Justine's strategic "abuse of words" is nowhere more visible than in her relationship to her virtue/virginity. In her early encounters with libertines, Justine acts mainly as prop for the libertine's activity and thus maintains her virtue through passivity. Once at Saint Mary-in-the-Woods, however, Justine is enlisted as an active participant in the orgies rather than a visual object of stimulation. Having defined her virtue in relation to her passivity, Justine's new active participation forces her to re-define her notion of virtue yet again.

Whatever had been my trials until that time, at least I was in possession of my innocence. Merely the victim of a few monsters' attempts, I was still able to consider myself more or less in the category of an honest girl. The fact was I had never been truly soiled save by a rape operated five years earlier, and its traces had healed...a rape consummated at an instant when my numbed state had not even left me the faculty of sensation. Other than that, what was there with which I could reproach myself? Nothing, oh! nothing, doubtless; and my heart was chaste, I was overweeningly proud of it, my presumption was to be punished; the outrages awaiting me were to be such that in a short while it would no longer be possible, however slight had been my participation, for me to form the same comforting ideas in the depths of my heart. (557-8)

Justine's experiences with various libertines, including the loss of her virginity, have not deprived her of her virtue. She has maintained "possession of [her] innocence" by being passive (even unconscious). She even imagines the disappearance of the effects of rape and loss of hymen: "never truly soiled" except by a rape whose "traces had healed." In her consideration of her own narrative so far, she deems herself guiltless and presents the healing of rape's traces as the return of virtue, or the truly unsoiled. But in *Saint Mary-in-the-Woods*, Justine is "compelled to accept" not just her share but an active part in the orgies, and this activity again dispossesses her of innocence—at least momentarily. Justine eventually creates a new paradigm that rationalizes her action by redefining her participation as passivity. Because she is compelled, she reasons, her actions are not a matter of her own will or intention and therefore not active participation.

Justine's body is a graphic medium on which libertines leave their marks—Rodin's brand exemplifies this practice. Justine, however, uses her narrative to erase or veil these marks from view. In drawing her audience's attention to the rapidity with which the traces of libertinism disappear, including the traces of her hymen's transgression, Justine negates the libertine's inscription of her body. If, as Dipiero argues, the libertines seek "the foreclosure of interpretation marking a nonsymbolic relationship to reality," Justine employs ambiguities and symbolism to make interpretation slippery enough to support a depiction of herself as forever unsoiled. Justine is an "ambiguous victim" not just because she has access to the language that is supposed to denote only mastery, but because she employs language to (re)cover what the libertine has stripped away. She employs eloquence and ornament to "move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment" and this, Locke might say, is a "perfect cheat."

In his analysis of the heroine's body, Dipiero points out that if the body functions "to represent graphically the putatively self-evident moral of the story—it also occasionally functions as the organ of textual or narrative strain itself" (248). The libertines attempt to shrink the gap between representation and real by writing on the body, but Justine's body, in its refusal to stay marked, exposes the failure of that attempt and, for Dipiero, heralds "the failure of difference and the attendant end of writing" (249). Dipiero looks to *Justine* in order to "demonstrate that the principal tensions operating in eighteenth-century French fiction—tensions fundamental to the novel genre and to the concomitant phenomenon of literary realism—are rhetorically inscribed in the heroine's body" (248). *Justine*, Dipiero argues, is a novel that is deeply engaged with the issue of *vraisemblance*, a concept which "fostered the illusion of an unmediated, non-ideological representation of the world" carrying with it a "rhetorical claim to formal transparency" and thus a "foreclosure of interpretation" (249-50). The libertines, in their desire for the "adequation of the Real," reject interpretation. However, their reliance on the philosophical harangue on the one hand, and the failure of their somatic *écriture* on the other, means for Dipiero that the "libertines' accession to the Real can never be unmediated, and they must instead content themselves with *vraisemblance*" (258).

The meaningless repetition of violence to which [Justine] is doomed...contributes to the creation of a protective narrative shell whose nefarious realism cushions the work's critical investigation of novelistic practices, primarily its relationship to truth and its capacity for self-demystification. Justine occupies a paradoxical position as both the object of libertine violence and the narrating subject of that violence; because of

the discursive nature of the transgression and the violence in *Justine*, continued repetition of fantastic scenes of abuse indicates the potential for the destruction of the subject and...an accompanying desire for the end of meaning. (249)

Dipiero's reading of *Justine* is extraordinarily seductive, especially in its effective connection of Sade's novel to a broader discussion about the construction and function of the novel. However, as persuasive as I find his account of Justine's part in this libertine fiction, I can't help but think that Justine once again finds a way to elude his inscription of her body with Sade's reflections on the novel. Justine "occupies a paradoxical position," a phrase which calls to mind Barthes's characterization of our heroine as an "ambiguous victim" which itself calls to mind Paulhan's characterization of Justine as "Sade's accomplice."

Justine as storyteller poses a problem, and that problem seems to have to do with her "abuse of words"—her creation of ambiguity. Justine's storytelling has a rupturing effect. Representing herself as forever unsoiled, her narration turns spectators into actors who seek to despoil her once more. Dipiero notes that "the more fully [libertines] are able to reduce her to pure instrumentality, the better she is able graphically to encode and represent to them their mastery" (258). This is the libertine desire. This is also the critic's desire. *Justine* solicits our inscriptions of desire and meaning. And yet, when she leaves our snares, she subtly hides or heals the marks.

Justine uses storytelling to make what is un-virtuous in her experience unclear. She even employs a stage name or alias for herself as character (Thérèse), thereby adding a level between the self who experiences and the self who narrates. Justine's narrational

strategies are her most titillating act of negation: while the libertines seek to inscribe their power on her body, she hides their inscriptions with her strategies of *gazage*. She uses euphemistic language and sentimental discourse to make a conspicuous display of her virtue. And as it turns out, Dubourg is quite right when he describes virtue as an “illusion.” Justine can only make her virtue visible by negating libertinism. Thus she labors in her narration to mediate her representations of libertinism and make immediate her sentimental representations of virtue oppressed. While the libertines chastise her virtue, Justine’s narrational style renders libertine behavior chaste.

When Sade returns to Justine’s story, expanding and revising the tale into the 1797 *La Nouvelle Justine*, he makes one central formal revision: he tells Justine’s story in third-person narration. He also makes a number of adjustments to the details: Juliette is not reformed but instead heaps more adversity on her sister; and the lightning bolt that destroys Justine enters through her mouth and leaves through her vagina. These revisions negate Justine’s effects as a storyteller and open the way for a less ambiguous heroine—Juliette. Sade undertakes the novel *Justine* as a parody of Richardson’s novel of sentiment, one meant to systematically expose virtue as illusory and ridiculous. In his early plans for the novel, he ascribes a particular virtue to his heroine, and then narrates the perverse negation of that virtue: “*Piety*. Free again, she continues on her way and goes into a church to hear mass, which she has not heard for some time; the vault collapses at her feet, and she is seriously injured by a stone” (qtd. in Le Brun 139). But in *Justine*, the heroine’s narration becomes a means of representing virtue by negating libertinism. The sentimental heroine occupies “that place in the text where the generative power of language might show itself most clearly and as quite unmanageable” (Hamon

25). Sade's revision of *Justine* takes the storyteller function away from his heroine, perhaps because her narrational style has proven unmanageable.

Justine's life, Nancy K. Miller argues, "is defined and measured solely by what she tells... [and] her life ends when there is nothing more to tell" (222). Miller regards the circularity of the text, Justine's constant return to the same situation, and even more particularly her return to the clutches of Saint-Florent (her first violator), as confirmation of a "disparity between the code and the message, the mimesis of the quest and its subversion" (223). Justine returns to where she began, even as she physically returns to her original unmarked state. The extraordinary resilience of Justine's body and Saint-Florent's restoration of what Miller calls her "virginal dimensions" (223) seem renewed evidence of her character's design "to support the system in which she circulates" (221).<sup>22</sup> For Miller, the restoration of Justine's virginity and bodily integrity "means that her story as *souffre-douleur* is potentially endless, despite the conclusion of the novel, beyond the terminus of the printed page" (224). Justine's body thus becomes an iconic representation of the "vicious circle" that character and reader alike find themselves caught inside.

But the telling must finally end. The writer must close the book on his character's life.<sup>23</sup> Justine's end, however, is an excessive solution to the narrative problem of ending in the episodic novel. Having finally gained the felicities due a virtuous girl, Justine withers, depressed. "Uniquely destined for sorrow," she felt "the hand of misery forever

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22 Saint-Florent has Justine sewn up so that he can reiterate his theft of her virginity. Roland Barthes and Angela Carter pay particular attention to the implications of sewing in their readings of Sade. See Barthes's *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*, pp. 168-169 and Carter's *The Sadean Woman*.

23 Sade in fact seems to have found it quite difficult to close the book on Justine's life. He would tell the story again in the 1797 *La Nouvelle Justine*.

raised above her head” (741). And then, during a sudden and violent storm, Justine, protecting her pampered sister from the terrors of the wind, “dashes to the windows which are already being broken...gives a minute’s fight, is driven back and at that instant a blazing thunderbolt reaches her where she stands in the middle of the room...transfixes her” (741). The bolt enters her heart, “consumes her face and chest,” and exits through her belly. The frame narrator tells us that “the miserable thing was hideous to look upon” (742). Nevertheless, it is the looking upon this miserable thing that prompts Juliette’s retreat to a nunnery. Not “blinded by that false-gleaming felicity ...enjoyed by the villians,” Juliette reads the lightening as a warning to herself. But her logic is blind, even as she looks upon the evidence before her. Juliette says: “The prosperity of Crime is but an ordeal to which Providence would expose Virtue, it is like unto the lightning, whose traitorous brilliancies but for an instant embellish the atmosphere, in order to hurl into death’s very deeps the luckless one they have dazzled” (742). The lightning is an ordeal, a test of virtue. But it hurls into death “the one [the traitorous brilliancies] have dazzled.” Heaven will punish my wickedness, Juliette reads...but the evidence before her shows the punishment of Virtue.<sup>24</sup>

The closing scene of the frame narrative is perverse because non-sensical and excessive. Justine blasted by the hand of God, Juliette rushing for the monastery, Corville abandoning property with instructions that it be turned into a pious legacy and becoming

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24 Van Den Abbeele reads Justine’s death as pure negation: “the ultimate blackening of her dead body being a horrid negation of the Lockean tabula rasa, of the enlightenment myth of progress and emancipation through the cumulative effect of sensory stimulæ (the epistemological basis of eighteenth-century theories of education)” (14).

a sensitive politician. The redemption is sudden and complete, and followed by some parting words from the writer:

O you who have wept tears upon hearing of Virtue's miseries; you who have been moved to sympathy for the woe-ridden Justine; the while forgiving the perhaps too heavy brushstrokes we have found ourselves compelled to employ, may you at least extract from this story the same moral which determined Madame de Lorsange! May you be convinced, with her, that true happiness is to be found nowhere but in Virtue's womb, and that if, in keeping with the designs it is not for us to fathom, God permits that it be persecuted on Earth, it is so that Virtue may be compensated by Heaven's most dazzling rewards. (743)

If we have read—as the writer directed us at the outset—with the purpose of being reformed, then we must surely close our eyes to the fact of Justine's final punishment. For if the hand of God, then God's action is perverse. How can we, following Juliette's model, be “convinced” that “true happiness is to be found nowhere but in Virtue's womb” while confronted with the body of virtue, her womb quite exploded? I began this reading of *Justine* by arguing that the address to the reader perversely presents the misreading as writer's intention. This misreading is difficult to achieve. We must, like Justine, and then Juliette, close our eyes to the facts before us. If we fail to misread, as I think we must, we will not find the truth, instead we will find perversion because we will respond to Justine's tale in the way that the libertines she meets respond. But this failure to misread is, given the terms and context of Justine's tale itself, the *natural* response. Everyone who hears the tale responds in just this manner.



Perversity is the natural response of every reader to a text. This is Sade's insight about the novel, and a lesson he learns from Richardson. Libertines, like readers, and readers, like libertines, take their pleasures from the suffering of others. The libertines respond perversely to Justine's virtue, but their response is the natural one. The reader determined for virtue, by contrast, engages in that other, discredited perversity—a stubborn persistence in error.

**After word(s)  
Reading, Spectatorship, and the Critical Insight**

Words, when well chosen, have so great a force in them, that a description often gives us more lively ideas than the sight of the things themselves. The reader finds a scene drawn in stronger colours, and painted more to the life in his imagination, by the help of words, than by an actual survey of the scene which they describe.

—Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 416 (June 27, 1712)

*But one hesitates to use terms such as nostalgia or desire to designate this kind of consciousness, for all nostalgia or desire is desire of something or for someone; here, the consciousness does not result from the absence of something, but consists of the presence of a nothingness. Poetic language names this void with ever-renewed understanding and...never tires of naming it again. This persistent naming is what we call literature.*

—Paul De Man, “Criticism and Crisis”<sup>1</sup>

In some ways, this critical study reflects its writer’s nostalgia for a lost relationship to novels characteristic of naïve readers. Like the naïve spectator of a play, the naïve reader forgets that she is audience to a fiction and reads as though she were an eye-witness to the events described. She is transported to the scene of the narrative and experiences it as though it happens before and around her. She becomes emotionally and physically engaged. This is the way I remember my childhood experiences of reading.

Sophisticated readers don’t forget about the curtain or the other members of the audience around them. They look to the stage machinery, noticing effects and tracing those effects to their narrative causes. The sophisticated reader pays attention to the crafting of the aesthetic object and its manner of creating effects. But in this self-conscious approach, the sophisticated reader loses the sense of immediacy and engagement that characterizes the naïve reader’s experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Blindness and Insight 18.

Novels generally strive to entertain and transport their readers, and often solicit their emotional response. I have isolated the novels of Walpole, Sterne, Mackenzie, and Sade because they take these efforts to extraordinary and excessive lengths. The explicit goal of the Gothic, the sentimental, and the pornographic narrative is the affective response of its audience and their aesthetic success hinges on that audience response. The good Gothic novel will send chills up its readers' spines; the good sentimental novel can be measured in the number of tissues its readers soil; and the good pornographic novel will produce in its audience the lubricity it describes in its players. In their pursuit of affective response, the novels of narrative spectacle are not so much unique as exemplary of a more general tendency in narrative fiction. Affective response is at the heart of aesthetic experience and at the center of a reader's, a viewer's, or a listener's pleasure. Indeed, to speak of affective response is to speak of the aesthetic. What is relatively unique about the novels discussed in this dissertation is their explicit connection of affective response to visual apprehension and their effort to transform their readers into spectators of visual situations.

Can readers experience fiction as though it were happening before them? In his *Elements of Criticism* (1762), Lord Kames argues that in the best writing a reader is transformed into a spectator and the events unfold before him as though he is a witness. He calls the phenomenon *ideal presence*.

A lively and accurate description...raises in me ideas no less distinct than if I had been originally an eye-witness: I am insensibly transformed into a spectator; and have an impression that every incident is happening in my presence. (840)

When a work of fiction effectively transforms us from readers into spectators, it does so by suspending reflection and judgment and by stimulating the operation of the imagination into an act of perception. By making us see, Kames argues, the best fiction will touch our hearts and engage our sympathies. But here again, reflection must be suspended because a story “cannot reach the heart while we indulge any reflection upon the facts” (843) and because “the reader’s passions are never sensibly moved till he be thrown into a kind of reverie” (841).

For Kames, the suspension of reflection is the necessary precursor to a reader’s intense emotional and visual encounter with narrative, whether historical, personal, or fictional. Ideal presence is a reality effect—the transformation of representation or memory into something closely approaching real sensual experience. In “suppl[ying] the want of real presence” (87), ideal presence allows us to imagine our way into experiences not our own and thus not only facilitates fiction’s ability to entertain us but also promotes fellow feeling. Kames not only endorses the naïve reader, he argues that readers of the best fiction will be “insensibly transformed” into naïve readers who will experience the text as participant witnesses.

Eighteenth-century theories of representation are deeply engaged with art’s ability to represent the unrepresentable.<sup>2</sup> From the implicit demand of *ut pictura poesis* that literature transport readers through the representation of visual tableaux, to the characterization of the sublime in relation to visual obscurity, to Hume’s comment that sympathy is visible only in its effects, eighteenth-century writers connected the effects of works of art to the visual faculty (whether to its clarity or its obscurity). For writers like

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<sup>2</sup> For a more elaborate discussion of these theories, with particular emphasis on Kames and Du Bos, see David Marshall’s *The Frame of Art*, especially pp. 40-71.

Kames, the Abbé Du Bos, and Joseph Addison the function of art is to make visibly present the invisible and ineffable. Du Bos argues, for example, that “La musique peint les passions” (438). Addison likewise tied the power of words to their ability to produce images in the imagination: “a description,” Addison explains in *The Spectator*, “often gives us more lively ideas than the sight of the things themselves.” For Addison, verbal representations of visual experience could in fact be more vivacious than direct visual experience.

In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Edmund Burke takes the opposite position and denies the ability of words to paint pictures in the mind. For Burke, the effect of words “does not arise by forming pictures of the several things they would represent in the imagination” (167) and he insists to the contrary that “on a very diligent examination of my own mind, and getting others to consider theirs, I do not find that once in twenty times any such picture is formed.... Indeed, so little does poetry depend for its effect on the power of raising sensible images, that I am convinced it would lose a very considerable part of its energy, if this were the necessary result of all description” (170). Gotthold Ephraim Lessing undertakes a similar empirical investigation with similar results: “I see nothing, and I am annoyed by the futility of my best efforts to see something” (108).

In “The Rhetoric of Blindness,” Paul de Man says of eighteenth-century theories of representation that “the possibility of making the invisible visible, of giving presence to what can only be imagined, is repeatedly stated as the main function of art” (124). For De Man, what is at stake in these theories is a need for “reassurance” of ontological presence, paradoxically achieved through imitation: “representation is the condition that

confirms the possibility of imitation as universal proof of presence” (125). Burke’s insistence on the essential difference and superiority of verbal representation adopts a different attitude toward these issues, however. Burke and Lessing effectively dispute the *ut pictura poesis* tradition that Kames and Du Bos endorse. David Marshall points out that Lessing and Burke ultimately “won the day...at least until the modernist experiments of the twentieth century” (41). It is one of my contentions that the novels of narrative spectacle treated in this dissertation participate in this debate about representation, exploring Kames’s notion of ideal presence while also falling prey to Burke’s skepticism about the power of language to produce mental imaging.

When Jonathan Crary characterizes the 18<sup>th</sup> century in relation to an Enlightenment vision dedicated to disembodied objectivity and technical precision, he essentially ignores a second, equally influential model of visual engagement, one characterized by its ties to the irrational and emotional. Narrative fiction of the 18<sup>th</sup> century often connects moral sensibility (virtue) to the visual sense. In this it follows the lead of moral sense philosophers like Hume, Shaftesbury, and Smith who tied moral sentiments to both taste (aesthetic response) and the visual faculty. This model of visual engagement represents an alternative visuality to that more commonly associated with Enlightenment thought. The tension between the two attitudes toward vision—one associated with education, classification, and scientific objectivity and the other tied to taste and affective response—is at work throughout the literature of the period. The dialectical struggle between these two visual attitudes shapes eighteenth-century culture and the developing form of the novel.

Like the Enlightenment more generally, narrative fiction of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is obsessed with the visual faculty and its connection to knowledge. In their exploration of irrational and emotional visual experience, the novels of narrative spectacle reject objectivity in favor of the visual apprehension of transcendent (and irrational) truth. At the outset of this study my hypothesis was that the novels of narrative spectacle represented a critique of the Enlightenment alignment of vision with rational understanding. As my familiarity with the literary and philosophical discussions of the period increased, however, I came to realize that the irrational, subjective approach to looking is at least as characteristic of the age as the objective, rational approach that I tend to associate with Enlightenment philosophy. While one set of Enlightenment thinkers endeavored to minimize the failure of the eye and make it a passive recorder of physical data, another set embraced subjective vision and argued that the eye's ability to express emotion was as important as its ability to apprehend empirical reality. If the disembodied eye can be seen as an emblem of reason and the goal of the Enlightenment approach to scientific knowledge, the spectatorial and incarnate eye represents an alternative and equally significant emblem of the period's visuality.

A second early hypothesis—that the novel of narrative spectacle explored the visual and spatial at the expense of narrative—also had to be revised to account for the novels' theatrical staging of storytelling. Visual experience in the novels finds a corollary in verbal storytelling and the two modes of representation vie for primacy. Thus, one of the unexpected discoveries of this study was the complexity of the role of storytelling within narratives that I originally understood as denigrating the verbal in favor of the visual.

In Walpole's Gothic novel *Otranto*, narrative scenes of storytelling are largely suppressed until the concluding sequence. This is a feature that the Gothic has largely maintained. Because the Gothic tale relies on the production of anticipation and surprise, and creates its aesthetic effects of terror through the occlusion of vision on the one hand, and the sight of terrified bodies on the other, characters are not generally afforded the opportunity to explain the source of their terror. In the Gothic, terror is made visible and palpable to audiences by calling attention to the presence of nothingness—terrified witnesses are rendered mute and the source of their terror is kept just out of the audience's view. In Walpole, the suppression of storytelling until the closing scene produces tension and throws readers on the resources of visualization and emotional response.

*Otranto* is the least fragmented and episodic of the novels, but also the most committed to representing visual encounters that do not depend on narrative explanations. Chapter 1 therefore provided an opportunity to analyze the structure of the visual encounter. In the opening scene of *Otranto*, a character's subjective emotional state is visually apprehended and felt by an audience. Crucial to Walpole's representation of a character's sublime experience of terror is the theatricalization of the visual encounter in the presence of an audience. The emotional situation of one person is communicated to an audience as if by visual infection. Their terror, like his, renders them mute. The emotional understanding that they experience (as if by contagion) is an emotional knowledge that is as indisputable and closed to interpretation as it is ineffable. In Walpole's novel, visual spectacle transmits emotional insight and transcendent



understanding while verbal representation is denigrated by its ties to the rhetorical obfuscation of the truth and ultimately indicted as false.

Storytelling takes a more important role in my analysis of the sentimental novel. In Sterne and Mackenzie, visual spectacle is augmented by verbal storytelling. Presented with a spectacle of emotional distress, the sentimental hero responds emotionally. Though the novels insist that the sentiments of their heroes are engaged upon first sight of the suffering of others, they nevertheless supplement the depiction of a visual encounter with the narration of the sufferer's story. This theatrical act of storytelling is provided not for the understanding of the man of feeling but for the reader.

The sentimental novels of Sterne and Mackenzie discussed in Chapter 2 are at once *skeptical* of literature's power to produce sympathy and social bonds and *exemplary instances* of the novel's ability to elicit affective response. They engage directly with the question of the work of art's impossible relationship to the ineffable and unrepresentable. In both Sterne and Mackenzie, written documents become emblematic. Harley's tale, as legacy of a life now lost, shares the fate of Sterne's Rabelaisian fragment. Both are testimony to the mutability of verbal communication and the futility of the desire for transcendent understanding. The Rabelaisian fragment represents both the promise and peril of sentimental writing: a tale promising to reveal the secrets of the human condition, the Rabelaisian fragment ultimately reveals only the fragility of written communication and the frustration and futility of the human desire for ultimate truths. Our desire to understand life by obtaining the counsel of the dead or dying is ultimately rejected by Sterne's novel—the Rabelaisian fragment is an impossible model of revelation that stands alongside the unfeeling and blind approach of the taxonomic preface written in the

Desobligeant. Written in isolation and without feeling, the visual approach that anchors the preface written in the *Desobligeant* is also rejected because it produces false clarity. To connect with others, Yorick must risk self-exposure and social mortification: he must open his own heart to public view.

Mackenzie's sentimental novel, I argue in Chapter 2, attempts to correct the failures of Sterne's sentimental mode, particularly its equivocation between sentimental and carnal sensation. But in suppressing the bawdy (or bodily) aspects of sensation, Mackenzie ultimately consigns his hero to physical mortification and a narrative that can only celebrate emotional communion as something lost. Harley is less a sentimental hero than a sentimental object—ephemeral in value, appreciated by few, and consigned to the past. Those readers who can appreciate Harley's value are granted some of the uniqueness and sensibility that characterize Harley himself, but these qualities neither fit them for life in the modern world nor help them to connect to other people.

Generally speaking, pornography works by moving the reader from one sexual spectacle to the next. It minimizes plot because plot is not the point...lubricity is. Fanny Hill says at the beginning of her narrative that she will not bestow so much as a strip of gauze wrapper on her narrative—that she will effectively bare all. And yet, like most written pornography, what follows is a set of pornographic spectacles in which bodies and acts are described in the most veiled and euphemistic language. Sade's pornography, as many commentators have noted, usually eschews euphemism in favor of surgical precision and the effort to leave nothing unnamed.

*Justine* is quite different from *The 120 Days*, *Juliette*, and *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. Far less explicit and violent than the other novels, *Justine* is the only (extant)

novel written as a first person narration. Like most pornographic narratives, *Justine* is characteristically episodic and each episode presents an orgiastic sexual spectacle. In my reading of *Justine*, however, I ultimately laid more stress on the role of storytelling and Justine's multiple roles as witness, spectacular cynosure, and narrator than on the narrative's construction around visual spectacle. Each time Justine encounters a new audience, she tells her story. And each time she tells her story, her audience makes her the victim (and cynosure) of a new lubricious spectacle. Thus while Chapter 1 analyzes the construction of the visual spectacle and Chapter 2 considers the relationship between visual encounter and verbal storytelling, Chapter 3's discussion of *Justine* focuses on the narrative spectacle of storytelling.

Justine's storytelling depicts her suffering in order to demonstrate her virtue and elicit her audience's sympathetic approbation. Her story, however, is a pornographic one: the experiences she relates have more to do with vice than virtue. Justine is a sentimental heroine whose experiences really tax her ability to produce a sentimental story. As a storyteller, Justine labors to abstract sentimental meaning from her experiences, but her libertine audiences consistently reject these abstractions and return her to the physical and carnal. Moreover, in striving to veil what is obscene in her history, Justine in fact produces a narrative that is more affecting to the lubricious and cruel imaginations of her audience. Packaging her distress in the narrative techniques of the sentimental testimony, Justine eroticizes the brutality she has experienced. In demonstrating the effects of Justine's sentimental tale on her audience, Sade performs a *critique* of the sentimental novel's production of pleasure at the distress of others while also attempting the *seduction* of any reader not determined for virtue.

Because of my interest in the novel of narrative spectacle's production of affective response, the testimony of readers—the naïve ones as well as the sophisticated ones—plays an important part in my analysis of each novel. The novels of narrative spectacle employ many strategies for constructing their ideal reader (as a naïve reader). The writers beg the indulgence of their readers, offer advice about how to approach the text, and provide (false) paratextual material to introduce or explain the narrative's origin and meaning. The effect of these strategies, I argue, is to make meaning a matter of feeling rather than interpretation and to encourage readers to adopt the practice of affective observation. Interpretation is discouraged and subverted and the reader is encouraged to adopt a visual and emotional attitude toward the work.

Critics take the rhetorical position of being the best possible reader of a text—sophisticated readers uniquely capable of elucidating a text's hidden meaning. Paul De Man's *Blindness and Insight* characterizes the relationship between the literary work and its readers in visual terms. The critic sees himself as uniquely equipped to represent the true insights of the writer and his literary work, regarding his writing as an elucidation of what has been hidden from other readers.

If the literary text itself has areas of blindness, the system can be binary; reader and critic coincide in their attempt to make the unseen visible. . . .the literary texts are themselves critical but blinded, and the critical reading of the critics tries to deconstruct the blindness. (141)

In other cases, it is not so much the writer or the text that is blind to its implications and insights as it is the early readers: “the ‘traditional’ disciples or commentators” (141). The critical reader distinguishes himself from the naïve readers who have come before.

These blinded first readers—they could be replaced for the sake of exposition by the fiction of a naïve reader, though the tradition is likely to provide ample material—then need, in turn, a critical reader who reverses the tradition and momentarily takes us closer to the original insight. (141)

De Man's analysis turns this rhetoric of blindness back on the critic when he argues that the moment at which critics "achieve their greatest insight" is also the moment of "greatest blindness with regard to their own critical assumptions" (109).

My engagement with other critical readers often performs a similar deconstruction of their critical insights. Maureen Harkin's reading of Mackenzie's novel, for example, represents both an extraordinarily interesting and insightful analysis of the novel and a critical reading that has fallen prey to the novel's efforts to construct its readers. Harkin characterizes Mackenzie's novel as universally misunderstood and his readers as perennially blind to both the text's meaning and the author's intention. As De Man makes clear (and here we are back in the metaphoric realm of blindness and insight), every critic must run this risk, for his greatest insights about a text will reveal what kind of reader he is (or has been made). Mackenzie and Sterne desire sympathetic, sentimental readers, and Mackenzie finds one in Harkin. Sterne makes room for a reader who is as liable to laugh as cry, and this perhaps explains his novel's continued success. For me, De Man's analysis confirms my suspicion that sophisticated readers are as nostalgic for presence and lost origins as naïve readers.

In his essay "Orpheus' Gaze," Maurice Blanchot describes the work of the artist in relation to risk and the effort to see what cannot be seen. Orpheus, successful in his quest to retrieve Eurydice from the underworld, is warned not to look back at her veiled

figure. To look is to lose forever. But Orpheus, the artist, *must* look and in looking must risk and lose all for “it is only in that look that the work can surpass itself, be united with its origin and consecrated in impossibility” (174). In Orpheus’ gaze, see Diderot’s blind letter to his Sophie and read, in the spaces where there is nothing, desire, loss, and despair.

The sophisticated reader is no less committed to the impossibility of seeing clearly an origin that is shrouded and forever lost to us. We seek it out in author’s letters, in drafts and commentaries, in the accounts of period readers. We turn our gaze on ambiguities and ambivalences in order to reveal what is hidden. We act on texts in order that they will not act on us—transforming us into the naïve readers we strive to distinguish ourselves from. Literature, De Man says, “is itself a cause and a symptom of the separation it bewails” (115).

The novel of narrative spectacle describes visual situations in which emotional knowledge passes between discrete individuals without the intervention of language. They thus entertain the possibility of unmediated expression, even as they offer this possibility in the representational mode of written discourse. As they create the illusion of leaving their own ontological nature behind, so they encourage the reader to leave off reading and experience the text as if every incident were happening in his presence. And in this, they exemplify the work of literature.

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