

Out of Time: Sentimentalism and Temporality in Long Nineteenth-Century American
Literature

By

Matthew Allen Beach

B.A., Providence College, 2001

M.A., Boston College, 2009

M.A. Brown University, 2013

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Date _____

Philip Gould, Advisor

Recommended to the Graduate Council

Date _____

Ellen Rooney, Reader

Date _____

James Egan, Reader

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date _____

Andrew Campbell, Dean of the Graduate School

CURRICULUM VITAE

Matthew Allen Beach was born in Stoneham, Massachusetts on July 15, 1983. He graduated *summa cum laude* from Providence College in 2005 with a B.A. in English. He received an M.A. in English from Boston College in 2009. Beach earned an M.A. in 2013 and a PhD in 2017 from the Department of English at Brown University. While at Brown, he received support from the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice and the S.T. Joshi Endowed Research Fellowship. Beach has presented his work at the NecronomiCon and the John Hay Brown Library. His work on Lovecraft will appear in *Lovecraftian Proceedings Vol. 2* (2017).

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INTRODUCTION

In the first part of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith offers some preliminary remarks on the vagaries of sympathy: “A stranger passes by us in the street with all the marks of the deepest affliction; and we are immediately told that he has just received the news of the death of his father. It is impossible that, in this case, we should not approve of his grief. Yet it may often happen, without any defect of humanity on our part, that, so far from entering into the violence of his sorrow, we should scarce conceive the first movements of concern upon his account” (I, i, 3, 4). For Smith and his theory of man’s innate moral capacity, such a scene should naturally evoke sympathy for the grieved person on the part of those who witness his emotions (a position Smith calls “the spectator”). Yet here he observes it “often happens” that such a scene will engender no response on the part of the spectator. What has gone wrong? Smith offers a possible explanation: “Both he and his father, perhaps, are entirely unknown to us, or we happen to be employed about other things, and do not take time to picture out in our imagination the different circumstances of distress which must occur to him. We have learned, however, from experience, that such a misfortune naturally excites such a degree of sorrow, and we know that if we took time to consider his situation, fully and in all its parts, we should, without doubt, most sincerely sympathize with him” (I, i, 3, 4). Smith identifies time, or rather the lack of it, as what has interfered with the proper expression

of sympathy.¹ If the spectator (or the audience) had paused to “take time to picture out in [her] imagination” the distress of the grieving person, she would “naturally” feel a “degree of sorrow” and “without doubt, sincerely sympathize with him.” For Smith, sympathy takes (place in) time, or rather, time is a necessary (pre)condition for the operation of sympathy.

Even if the spectator takes time to imagine the distress of the grieved person, Smith notes this “picture” of the other’s pain often pales in comparison to the emotion felt by the sufferer and, what is worse, is fleeting: “After all this, however, the emotions of the spectator will still be very apt to fall short of the violence of what is felt by the sufferer. Mankind, though naturally sympathetic, never conceive, for what has befallen another, that degree of passion which naturally animates the person principally concerned. That imaginary change of situation, upon which their sympathy is founded, is but momentary” (I.i.4.7). For Smith the momentary nature of the spectator’s “change of situation” appears to be due to her continued awareness of her position as an outside observer: “The thought of their own safety, the thought that they themselves are not really the sufferers, continually intrudes itself upon them; and though it does not hinder them from conceiving a passion somewhat analogous to what is felt by the sufferer,

¹ The other explanation offered by Smith in this passage for sympathy misfiring is that the grieved person and his father were unknown to the spectator. Such a statement supports Julie Ellison’s (1999) argument that Smith intends his theory of moral sentiments to underwrite (and tighten) the social and affectionate bonds among peers rather than forge new bonds with strangers (who may also be below one’s rank). However, while Ellison’s argument has force, it may be more appropriate to say that, as this passage indicates, the spectator is more readily provoked into taking the time to allow for the expression of sympathy for those who are already known versus those who are unknown. Knowing another person, for Smith, means you will more readily pause to take the time needed to sympathize with them. In other words, the temporal threshold of sympathy is higher for those who are unknown (or distant) to the spectator or audience.

hinders them from conceiving any thing that approaches to the same degree of violence” (I.i.4.7). Though these statements on the imperfect and analogous nature of sympathy may help qualify some of the later twentieth-century literary criticism of Smith’s (and sentimentalism’s) collapsing of the difference between the self and the other,² it also registers what I argue is a central component of the sentimental tradition: sympathy’s and feeling’s relation to time. In the above passages, Smith paints a picture of the sympathetic spectator confronting the temporal demands and dynamics of sympathy. In so doing, he inquires into the nature of sympathy and the emotions’ link with time: How does one make time for sympathy? How much time does sympathy require, and how long does it last? How does sympathy use, make, or take time? What happens when sympathy runs out of time?

It is the argument of this project that time extends beyond a simple prerequisite of sympathy (“taking time”) to play a vital role in the operations of the sentimental tradition itself. Through a reading of American fiction in the long nineteenth century, I argue that

² Richard Brodhead (1998) argues that the rise of sentimentality in nineteenth-century America was part of a larger political and cultural transition from corporeal (sovereign) to psychological (disciplinary) power for containing the other. He reads the sentimental novel as representative of a new form of power he calls “disciplinary intimacy” or “discipline through love,” which accomplishes its task of disciplining (the child) through the medium of familial and/or maternal affection. In a similar vein, Amy Kaplan’s (1998) directs attention to the way sentimental domesticity accomplishes a disciplinary purpose when it is deployed outside of the home in order to domesticate dangerous and threatening (racialized) others. Even Shirley Samuels, who acknowledges the democratic potentials of sentimentalism, remains wary of the “dual sentimental aims of social containment and social change” (1992, 8), a tension she would later develop at greater length in *Romances of the Republic* (1996). Laura Wexler (Samuels 1992) also examines how educational institutions deployed the tropes of sentimental domesticity to indoctrinate Native American and African American populations into white, middle-class bourgeois values. Unlike Kaplan, Wexler draws attention to the way sentimentalism was institutionalized by various educational programs, a connection Brodhead also notes in his earlier article.

sentimentalism not only entails but also requires a complex orientation to time. Employing queer theory methodologies which theorize the relation(s) between temporality and the body, I trace sentimentalism's orientation to time back to its grounding in the feeling (sympathetic and affective) body. Sentimental narratives themselves, I suggest, offer complex theories of how the affective body is intertwined with temporality and what the body's relation to time produces, both aesthetically and politically. Therefore, though this project draws on queer methodologies to read sentimental texts, it also argues that the sentimental tradition represents a lost or unacknowledged archive for queer theory that can substantially contribute to current debates on temporality, the body, and affect. In my reading, sentimentalism's exploration of the relation between time and the body produces forms of alternative if not queer temporalities. In sentimentalism, the sympathetic, feeling body carries one "out of time" into new or alternative times in which other forms—of time, of action, of life—become possible.

The form of the novel, I argue, offers a privileged space to explore the relation between time and the (feeling) body. To begin with, if Smith is correct that sympathy requires time, then the narrative space of the novel allows authors of sentimental fiction to *make* time for the operation of sympathy. The purpose of the sentimental novel is to provoke the reader into sympathy, to make them take the time to pause and exert their sympathetic imagination over the scene before them rather than (as in Smith's example) hurrying on about their business on the street. And although the reader or spectator can only approach a "degree of [the] passion" that "animates the person principally concerned," the author is capable of dwelling at length upon a description of this passion

(or scene, or character) in order to produce a more substantial “analogue.” The author is able, that is, to take her time, as is the reader, who is able to read and reread as time and pleasure allows. The formal conventions of narrative enable the author to extend or slow down, as it were, what Smith imagines as a fleeting “change of situation.” The “momentary” duration of sympathy Smith notes is partially mediated either by extending the opportunity for this imaginative change in the space of the narrative or, as we will see in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, by repeating the same (form of) scene over and over with variations. Making time, taking time, extending or repeating time. These are some of the ways the temporal form of the novel enables sympathy to play out its “imaginative” or fictional operation.

Beyond these initial and broad ways the novel allows (sentimental) authors to play with time, which will be explored in more depth in the chapters to follow, I also argue the novel has an intricate relation between time and the body. The form of the novel allows for an exploration of the feeling body in time, and the way the body feels (in) time conversely shapes the form of the novel. The sentimental tradition offers a privileged archive for exploring this dimension of the novel because scenes of sympathy in sentimental fiction take place around, between, or within bodies, particularly suffering bodies. The body in sentimentalism is often a suffering body, whether it suffers pain (externally or internally) or from intense emotions (either positive or negative).³ It is my

³ Smith himself is suspicious of the body as an object of sympathy, or more specifically, of pain as a possible object of sympathy. He argues that the spectator cannot sympathize with pain, by which he means that the body of the spectator cannot feel the same pain felt by the body of the person suffering that pain except very faintly (he gives the example of drawing one’s own arm back when seeing a blow about to be struck on another person’s arm). While we cannot feel the same pain the other person feels, Smith argues we can sympathize with the situation of the person in pain through imagining the

argument that the feeling, suffering body of sentimental fiction is also engaged in a relation to (forms) of time, and this feeling body has effects on the form of the novel and narrative itself. Thus the sentimental tradition represents an opportunity to explore the novel's intertwining of the body, time, and narrative form(s).

Previous generations of literary criticism have often overlooked if not disparaged the sentimental tradition as a site of critical complexity. Beginning with Herbert Ross Brown's (1940) condemnation of sentimentalism as no more than a "salve" for complex political problems, there has been a critical tendency to treat sentimentalism as at best ancillary or at worst destructive to politics and political sensibility (280). The popularity of sentimental novels in the nineteenth century and beyond was held responsible for a wider "feminization of American culture" (Douglas 1977) that weakened American democratic values by sentimentalizing them; it also served as either an index or cause of the spread (and threat) of a conservative, mass culture. This "feminization" narrative has survived in various guises in literary criticism; its legacy is a tendency to read sentimental texts as categorically detached from or anathema to politics or, to put bluntly, "bad" works of fiction that privatize rather than politicize readers. The most forceful

consequences of their suffering—that is, the temporal dimension of their pain (its futurity): "Pain never calls forth any very lively sympathy unless it is accompanied with danger. We sympathize with the fear, though not with the agony of the sufferer. Fear, however, is a passion derived altogether from the imagination, which represents, with an uncertainty and fluctuation that increases our anxiety, not what we really feel, but what we may hereafter possibly suffer. The gout or the tooth-ach [sic], though exquisitely painful, excite very little sympathy; more dangerous diseases, though accompanied with very little pain, excite the highest" (I.ii.1.9). For Smith, then, pain calls forth an imagination of the suffering body's future, although it evades the problem of the other person's pain. Other authors working in the sentimental tradition, however, adopt different approaches to the body in pain. I address the question of pain, the body, and time at length in Chapter 3 below.

contemporary critic of sentimentalism is Lauren Berlant, whose work tracks the rise of what she calls the “intimate public sphere.” In “The Female Woman,” Berlant argues that “sentimental ideology” acts as a “structure of consent” that enables women to participate through readerly consumption in “ [an] intimate collective identity...whose values remained fundamentally private” (270). Berlant continues her polemic in *The Female Complaint* (2008), where she argues that in the intimate public sphere “the political as a place of acts oriented toward publicness becomes replaced by a world of private thoughts, leanings, and gestures projected out as an intimate public of private individuals inhabiting their own affective changes” (41). For Berlant, these “affective” changes fall short of registering any substantial “public” effect and therefore represent an evasion of if not an escape from the political arena. Although Berlant remains ambivalent about the political and personal value of this intimate public, her argument about the privatizing effect of a sentimental sense of belonging is ultimately not far from Ann Douglas’ view of sentimental aesthetics as “the political sense obfuscated or gone rancid” (307).

This project contests the reading of the sentimental tradition as necessarily private, politically evasive or irrelevant, and formally or aesthetically immature. In so doing, it builds on work begun by literary critics in the 1980s and 1990s that attempted to reinterpret the formal, cultural, and political complexity of the nineteenth-century sentimental novel.⁴ The critical debates over sentimentalism ultimately boil down to an

⁴ Feminist literary critics argued that women’s fiction performed both cultural and political work by articulating oppositional female subjectivities that contested patriarchal power and national discourse. In *Sensational Designs* (1985), Jane Tompkins argues that sentimental and other aesthetically devalued genres of fiction perform “cultural work” by deploying stereotypes and other popular discourses to influence a wide audience.

argument about the relation between sentimental aesthetics and politics. For Douglas and Berlant, sentimental aesthetics formalize a network of private affects that are defined in opposition to the public realm of politics. In contrast, critics such as Glenn Hendler (2001) argue that sentimental aesthetics produce “a publicly oriented form of subjectivity” through the medium of sympathetic identifications (22). Hendler builds on Smith’s theory of the socializing function of sympathy, as well as Raymond William’s theory of “structures of feeling” and Jurgen Habermas’ description of the rise of the public sphere, in order to argue that sentimentality helped produce the modern (liberal) subject—a subject whose (affective) interiority was always implicitly oriented to a form of publicity. For Hendler, the sentimental structure of feeling helped precipitate (and was in turn informed by) the rise of liberalism and the democratic public sphere. He therefore aligns himself with an earlier generation of critics who interpreted sentimental sympathy as (potentially) democratic in both form and content. As Philip Fisher argues in *Hard Facts* (1985), the “political content of sentimentality is democratic” in its experimental extension of humanity to previously excluded figures (99). Or as Shirley Samuels

Women’s sentimental fiction, according to Tompkins, could therefore be just as liberating, democratic or oppositional as the masculine literary tradition, as well as aesthetically complex. Nina Baym argues more modestly in *Woman’s Fiction* (1978) that the master-narrative of sentimental novels entails the (middle-class white) heroine’s development of self-discipline and autonomy. Baym also takes the previous generation of scholars to task, identifying their scholarship as well as the texts they canonized as participating in a common “melodrama of beset manhood” that positions the male author (and critic) in a struggle “against flagrantly bad best-sellers written by women” (1981, 130). Cathy Davidson’s *Revolution and the Word* (1986) proposes a “history of the text” model for tracking the rise of the novel in America; she reads the early American novel as “a form of education, especially for women” that allowed those excluded from the political construction of the new nation to participate in competing “literary versions of emerging definitions of America” (67). For Davidson, the American novel is therefore a site of representative excess: it offers a public forum of political and aesthetic representation for those disenfranchised by or ambivalent about the new nation.

observes in her introduction for the collection *The Culture of Sentiment* (1992), sentimentality “appears not so much a genre as an operation or a set of actions within discursive models of affect and identification that effect connections across gender, race, and class boundaries” (6). The sentimental tradition is also arguably democratic in that it represents not a passive “female complaint” but the real plight of women’s social, political, and psychological subservience to men as well as their struggles for personal agency. This liberal reading of sentimentality has led many scholars of nineteenth-century sentimental novels to interpret them not as excessively affected but rather as a form of social and psychological realism animated by a concrete political project.

The question of sentimentalism’s precise aesthetic status and value has been hotly debated at least since Tompkin’s influential chapter in *Sensational Designs*, “But Is It Any Good?,” where she argues that the dismissal of sentimentality owes more to specific historical and academic interests rather than any faithful assessment of the genre’s inherent aesthetic value. Joanne Dobson (1997) attempts to provide such a revaluation of sentimentality by suggesting the application of the same formalist analyses used to read the privileged (male) canon will reveal the sentimental genre to be just as complex and varied as its traditional counterpart (i.e., the romance). She argues that “like other forms of expression” sentimental literature “can be ‘good’ or ‘bad’” and “can be used for good or ill” (268). June Howard (1999) offers a reconsideration of the literary and philosophical tradition informing sentimental aesthetics. Howard situates sentimentalism in the transatlantic debates over moral and aesthetic theory that took shape during the Scottish Enlightenment and the early days of the Republic. She traces the origins of sentimentalism back to *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, as well as other Enlightenment

moral theorists and transatlantic writers (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson) who theorized aesthetics and the imagination as intimately bound up with the cultivation of the (innate) moral sensibility. In “Sentimental Aesthetics” (2004), Elizabeth Maddock Dillon provides a different transatlantic genealogy that routes sentimentalism through the continental tradition of German aesthetic theory, specifically that of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller. She links German aesthetic theory to the rise of the modern liberal subject in the young republic, for both Kant’s and Schiller’s aesthetics “instructs individuals about their own capacity for freedom while allowing the liberal polis to operate as a community of taste” (503). Dillon also provides a useful way of understanding the connection between the seemingly personal experience of affect and the public realm of politics and culture: she argues that sentimental aesthetics “concerns both an affective immediacy (subjective autonomy) and a formal heteronomy—the connection of emotion to politics and cultural ideals and aims” (515). For Dillon, sentimentalism’s heteronomy—the way it connects affective immediacy to seemingly external forces such as politics—is not static but rather open to debate and contestation, both in the public sphere as well as within sentimental texts themselves.

One possible way to evade the pendulum swing between the genre’s progressive or conservative construction of political agency is to read sentimentalism as a site-specific and varied project of rethinking inter-subjective relations as based on affect, the body, and time, rather than as a coherent “ideology.” In other words, a more fruitful method for assessing the “agency” of a sentimental text or trope would be to evaluate the way it circulates affects, bodies, and temporalities into new forms and configurations that can be either radical or conservative (or some mixture of both). The connection between

the sentimental reconfigurations of affective and temporal relations and the larger “political” sphere would also remain open to negotiation rather than determined in advance. As Dillon also argues in “Sentimental Aesthetics,” the most productive way to approach sentimentalism is to read it as “linked to versions of political agency” through a “*reflective* connection of emotion to culture” that enables various forms of political negotiations (518). In short, we should read sentimentalism as constantly (re)negotiating the way its own terms and values—affect, time, bodies, and so on—relate both to each other and to “larger” cultural and political concerns.

Affect in sentimentalism has effects, and these effects are not limited to “private changes” alone. The texts examined in this project, like most texts within the sentimental tradition, have their own intricate theories on the relation between (an aesthetics of) the feeling body and action. These theories, I argue, often amount to a pragmatic theory of action informed by the body’s relation to time. The feeling body acts in (and on) time to produce, change, or contest the world around it. Theories of pragmatic action in the sentimental tradition vary from text to text in terms of the specific relations they posit between time and the body. Once again, sentimental texts’ theories of pragmatic action are neither categorically conservative nor progressive but vary dramatically from text to text. For instance, in Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), tears—the register of intense emotion in the sentimental novel—represent an affective action that freezes the present to return to the past. Ellen Montgomery’s constant tears act to reform her negative emotions over the loss of her mother; this is accomplished through a tearful (and oft repeated) return to what has been lost in the past so that the loss can eventually be truly mourned and moved beyond. This, as we will see, is in marked contrast to how

tears operate to prepare for and effect extreme action in the present in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). The temporal trajectory of affect in Stowe's novel is directed toward the present as it opens out onto an uncertain future, whereas in Warner's novel affect is directed toward the recuperation of the past in order to heal the present. Both configurations of the relation between the feeling body and time represent theories of pragmatic action that have important implications for the form of both novels.

Sentimentalism is about reading. For Smith, though we can never truly feel what the other feels, we can "enter into" or "bring home" an analogue of what they feel through the "vehicle of the imagination"—that is, through a fiction. Sentimental narratives give a textual structure to the sympathetic imagination, providing the imaginary vehicle through which the audience may read and therefore sympathize with the emotions, suffering, and experiences of the other. In other words, sentimental texts attempt to realize a type of reading through the elaboration of specific narrative forms. My reading of the sentimental tradition follows this form in that it is a generous or, indeed, sympathetic reading of the form(s) of sentimental fiction and its afterlife. Indeed, my understanding of a generous reading is in part informed by the sentimental tradition's idea of sympathy. A sympathetic reading is one that moves along with (or analogous to) the form of the text; it attempts to draw close to the text while never forgetting that it remains irreducibly other. Generous or sympathetic does not, of course, necessarily mean uncritical. Quite the opposite, as close attention to the form of a text it bound to raise points of disagreement as well as agreement, or to use the language of the sentimental tradition, moments of distance as well as identification. In this regard, this project is specifically positioned against an easy reading of sentimentalism's ideological

affiliations through an assessment of the text's political "content"—in other words, a symptomatic reading. While sentimentalism was indeed a powerful discourse that exerted a strong degree of influence in its time, as critics such as Jane Tompkins and Lora Romero (1997) have pointed out, reducing a particular text to an expression of either a conservative or progressive ideology too quickly overlooks the complexities and variations present within the novel form(s).

As Romero also notes, texts and discourses are far too complicated for that since the novel form allows the text to contain multiple contradictory ideological positions at once: "We seem to be unable to entertain the possibility that traditions, or even individual texts, could be radical on some issues (market capitalism, for example) and reactionary on others (gender or race, for instance). Or that some discourses could be oppositional without being outright liberating" (4). A sympathetic reading is attentive first to the form of the novel before its (varied) political content; or, to put it another way, to the form *of* the political content in the novel before the significance of its particular position. None of this precludes the reader from being critical of the (sentimental) novel or identifying where its political allegiances reside. But it does stress the importance of the *form* of those allegiances and the need to attend to them carefully if the reader wants to understand how texts theorize social, political, and affective relations.

This form of reading is also influenced by recent critical attention to the importance of reading and form or aesthetics,⁵ as well as what Elizabeth Freeman (2010)

⁵ Recent critical work in this vein has often been loosely grouped together as "New Formalism," although form and reading is not exclusively addressed by New Formalists. My interest is less in New Formalism as a movement or field than in the significance of (critical theories on) form, aesthetics, and reading within literary studies. Marjorie Levinson (2007) provides a helpful overview (and critique) of recent work

calls a return to or “longing for form” within queer theory after the “de-formative” work of the so-called “anti-social thesis” (xiii). Freeman notes that this longing for form leads to “perhaps the queerest commitment” of her work: an investment in the practice of close reading. She describes close reading as “the decision to unfold, slowly, a small number of imaginative texts rather than amass a weighty archive of or around texts, and to treat these texts and their formal work as theories of their own, interventions upon both critical theory and historiography” (xvii). In this, she follows Eve Sedgwick’s (2003) call for a reparative style of reading which (in brief) aims to do more with the form of a text than unmask the hidden ideology beneath its surface.⁶ Such a close attention to the form of the text also appears to be behind Sedgwick’s earlier articulation of the need to reevaluate the sentimental tradition in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). There she acknowledges the “range of meanings of sentimentality” and argues it should properly be read “not as a thematic or a particular subject matter, but as a structure of relation” (143). Sedgwick identifies this sentimental structure of relation as one of “vicariousness,” so that sentimental genres and rhetorical modes are unified not by “consistencies of subject matter” but rather “inhere in the nature of the investment by a viewer *in* a subject matter” (150). While Sedgwick is invested in a project of “rehabilitating the sentimental,” she

returning to the question of form and reading, and several recent collections such as *Close Reading* (2002) and *Reading for Form* (2006) gather scholarship both new and old on the topic. The main criticism against New Formalism is that it does not represent enough of a departure from “Old Formalism’s” (i.e., New Criticism’s) putative de-historicizing of the text in favor of a formal analysis. Not all contemporary critics attentive to form are wary of its relation to history; indeed, many argue that an attention to form is crucial to understanding the operation of history, as work by Ellen Rooney (2000) and others demonstrates. This present project aims to make a contribution to debates about form’s or aesthetics’ relation to history and politics.

⁶ “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You” (2003).

admits that “neither rehabilitation nor rubbishing, wholesale, is...possible” because sentimentalism’s “ethical bearings” can “be discussed only in the multiple contexts of their writing and reading” (154, 157). Like Romero after her, Sedgwick argues the formal complexity and variations of the sentimental novel preclude an overall evaluation of its ethical or political bearings, and that therefore these formal features are what readers should attend to if they wish to understand the significance of a specific text.

This project unites queer theory’s return to the question of form with Sedgwick’s call to reevaluate the sentimental tradition.⁷ Following Sedgwick, queer theorists have often turned to readings of sentimental texts, and many contemporary scholars working on sentimentalism likewise often employ methodologies originally developed in the context of queer studies.⁸ This cross-pollination stresses the critical linkages or points of intimacy between the two fields. Questions of desire, affect, and intimacy, all central concerns of the sentimental tradition, are addressed by scholars working in the field of queer theory. It is not only that queer theorists address critical problems analogous to the central concerns of the sentimental novel and the scholarship surrounding them; queer theory also has intimate ties to the sentimental tradition because it often analyzes the various forms of gender and sexual relations and identities that were solidified during the long nineteenth-century sentimental tradition. Queer theory in part represents a return to

⁷ Indeed, inasmuch as Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, along with Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990), are thought to inaugurate the field of queer theory, the call to reevaluate the sentimental tradition has been present in queer theory from its very inception.

⁸ For example, Romero and Dillon both end their studies with a “queer” reading of canonical nineteenth-century authors. Romero provides a reading of the homosocial romance in *The Scarlet Letter* and Dillon argues that Emily Dickinson’s poetry represents a “queering” of the marriage relation.

sentimentality and affect after the neglect or dismissal that characterized much of the criticism during the postwar era of literary studies. In many ways, queer theory extends the sentimental tradition's project of reinterpreting kinship relations, which involved an effort to reform kinship to make it more inclusive and open to individual desire and choice—in short, to democratize kinship and desire (or love).

However, queer theories of alternative temporalities and their relation to the body have yet to be placed in conversation with the sentimental tradition of the long nineteenth century. As noted above, reading sentimental texts for the ways they theorize time and the body offers insight into the novel's relation to temporality. It also reveals a range of complex theories of temporality that anticipate and revise our current understanding of the interrelations between the body, affect, and time. To be clear, this reading of the feeling body in time within sentimentalism represents less a “queering” of the sentimental tradition than an exploration of the sentimental underpinnings of queer theory itself. The aim is not to validate specific queer theories of temporality but rather to show that the sentimental novel (or aesthetics) possesses its own complex theories of time that rival contemporary queer formulations. Such a reading will add to our understanding of how the body in time inform and are formed by the novel, sentimentalism, and queer theory alike.

The sentimental tradition travels outside its own time. This project also argues for the long afterlife of the sentimental tradition by tracing the persistence of sentimental tropes and concerns through genres not normally associated with sentimentalism—namely, late nineteenth-century realism and early twentieth-century (gothic) modernism. While the dominance of the sentimental novel is typically thought to wane following the

Civil War,⁹ I argue that its central tropes and literary forms, particularly those related to the feeling or suffering body, are adapted by later historical genres to address its own pressing concerns. Leonard Cassuto (2009) has recently argued that although “[t]he heyday of sentimental fiction lasted from the 1820s until the 1880s or so,” the “sentimental outlook ranged widely before and since then, and has dispersed throughout the culture” (8). Cassuto finds traces of the sentimental outlook, particularly its theories of the family unit and the affections, in the most unlikely of places. In particular, he argues that “sentimentalism invented the American crime novel” through (in part) its focus on the family and the domestic space as well as its division between the home and the market (9). Cassuto argues that the work of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler were a reaction against the sentimental tradition that nevertheless preserved many of its core assumptions, and that while early “hard-boiled fiction struggles to assimilate its sentimental legacy,” over the course of the twentieth-century “the conflict eases, and sentimentalism asserts itself more and more openly within hard-boiled fiction” (14). While this project does not examine the detective or crime novel, it does, like Cassuto’s work, inquire into the lasting impact sentimentalism has had on the genres that came after it, whether through their models of the family, as Cassuto suggests, or their treatment of the feeling body in time, as I argue.

⁹ There are numerous historical, literary, and cultural reasons for the decline of the American sentimental novel in the latter half of the nineteenth century. First and foremost is the aftermath of the Civil War, the internecine violence of which raised doubts about sentimentalism’s belief in the general benevolence of human nature as well as its familial model of social and political affiliation. Other reasons include (but are not limited to) the rise of urbanization and industrialization (which fractured the traditional family imagined in sentimentalism), the emergence of new genres that defined themselves against sentimentalism (realism), and shifting conceptions of human nature drawn from scientific and political theory (Darwinism and Marxism).

Chapter 1, entitled “‘Still I Live’: *Wieland* and Queer History,” begins this inquiry into the long (after)life of sentimentalism by examining the temporality of the post-revolutionary “novel of seduction” through a reading of Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland*. This chapter reads Brown’s novel as interrogating the relation between time and the body in an historical moment characterized by uncertainty over both the meaning of the past and the shape of the future. My argument is that *Wieland* and the seduction novel figure the body as the ground through which history and temporality is felt and enacted in all of its pressing uncertainty. I read *Wieland* as concerned with how the body is seduced into the production of historical narrative, and moreover with how this embodied engagement with history evokes ambiguous affective responses ranging from pleasure to horror. My reading builds on contemporary research in queer theory on affective historiography and the body’s relation to the past. While this work begins to theorize a concept of history and temporality that is routed through the body, it often overlooks the earlier moment in the genealogy of affective history upon which Brown is drawing: the mid to late 18th century philosophical and literary debates over how the subject (or the citizen) should “feel” in relation to history. In representing the body as the proper figure or medium of history, Brown’s novel engages with contemporary sentimental theories of history which understood the subject (in both senses of the term) of history as a matter of (proper) feeling. Sentimental historicism theorizes the feeling body and the capacity for sentiment as fundamental to historical understanding, and Brown’s novel attempts to think through the repercussions of sentimentalism’s linkages between the body, feeling, and time. By reading Brown’s novel as offering its own theorization of the relation between the body and temporality, this chapter uncovers an

earlier moment of affective historiography that provides a deeper genealogy to as well as a new perspective on how queer historiography understands the relation between history and the body.

Chapter 2, entitled “The Temporality of Tears: Exhaustion and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” continues this exploration of the relation between time and the body by turning attention to the form(s) of temporality advanced by the mid nineteenth-century domestic sentimental novel. Scholarship on the sentimental novel, and in particular Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, has often argued that sentimentalism requires or at least effects a certain memorialization or homogenization of time.¹⁰ While sentimentalism may to some degree rely upon memorial time, it also, through its very form, contains other temporalities that are at odds with and even work against this memorialization. In this chapter, I offer an alternative reading of the temporalities at work in the domestic novel that pays close attention to how action is mobilized in Stowe’s narrative. In distinction to “memorial” time, I argue that the sentimental novel sets time in motion rather than reifying it through what I call the temporal logic of exhaustion. This exhaustion manifests itself in Stowe’s novel through scenes of affective and physical exhaustion, namely, through moments of tears and bodily suffering. For Stowe, scenes of tears and suffering, rather than memorializing time, mobilize it toward an uncertain and precarious future. Rather than simply an adornment or spectacle, scenes of tears and suffering have critical effects in the sentimental novel; the most important of these effects is a form of (temporal) exhaustion, in which tears and suffering act as a kind of catharsis which initiates the sufferer into a

¹⁰ There is a critical arc that extends through Ann Douglas’s *The Feminization of American Culture* to Lauren Berlant’s *The Female Complaint* which reads sentimentalism as relying upon what Berlant calls “memorial time,” that is, an abstracted and generalized form of time which makes the dynamic of identification possible.

new mode of temporality and prepares the way for action. Another way of saying this is that in Stowe's novel, and sentimentalism more generally, affect is transitive rather than intransitive (or memorial): it makes things happen, sets time in motion, rather than freezes it in place. For Stowe, "tears" represents a form of sentimental shorthand for a more elaborate theory of pragmatic action that is grounded in the body's response to (physical and affective) suffering.

A related goal of this chapter is to revise our understanding of the relation between suffering or trauma and history in order to resist a hasty historicism that equates traumatic events or periods in history (i.e., slavery) with the creation of traumatized subjectivities and lives. Stowe situates her theory of exhausted action within the temporal framework of "everyday" life under slavery to stress how her theory of exhausted action interrupts or breaks with the everyday, to frame the violence and abuses of slavery as constant (everyday) rather than occasional (traumatic) occurrences, and finally to exhaust her readers' possible objections through repeated examples. In reading Stowe's representation of life under slavery, this chapter takes its lead from Berlant's recent work on re-theorizing the temporality of the everyday in *Cruel Optimism* (2011). While Berlant's theory of the "impasse" helps to complicate critical commonplaces about trauma, her work again falls victim to the tendency to only impute (temporal) complexity to a specific modernist archive. Reading the temporality of Stowe's representation of life under slavery helps correct this critical oversight by showing how *Uncle Tom's Cabin* advances its own complex theorization of the impasse, the moment, and the everyday.

Chapter 3, entitled "Crippling Time: Charles Chesnutt's *Conjure Stories*," extends the previous chapter's discussion of the temporality of exhaustion and suffering through a

reading of Charles Chesnutt's short fiction, particularly *The Conjure Stories*. This chapter develops the previous chapter's analysis of temporality under slavery by reading Chesnutt's fiction in order to more directly examine how African American literature theorizes time, particularly in the era of Reconstruction during which Chesnutt was writing. Scholars of African American literature and culture have long noted that the institution of slavery (and its aftermath) had a profound impact upon African Americans' experience of time. Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues in "The Literature of the Slave" that the slave is deprived of the temporality that structures the life of the (white) human, and hence is made to "stand outside of time." Rather than see the slave as merely existing outside of time, however, I argue Chesnutt's *Conjure Stories* explore how slavery has damaged or *crippled* the African American's relation to time, as well as what it could possibly mean to "reconstruct" a relation to time in the aftermath of slavery. To do so, this chapter explores what current work in the field of disability theory contributes to a reading of Chesnutt's conjure stories. Disability theory's focus on the way different forms of embodiment are both lived and represented, its attention to physical suffering and pain, and its exploration of how definitions of the human are predicated on a specific type of bodily form make it useful for examining the issues of racial embodiment and racialized violence under slavery. These concerns, I argue, also ally disability theory with the sentimental tradition and its focus on (relating to) the suffering body. More importantly, the inchoate theory of "crip time" provides a way of reading the temporality of African American literature that situates it neither "outside of time" nor comfortably within linear time, but rather in a crippled yet also crippling relation to progressive (white) temporality. Chesnutt's theory of the persistence or survival of pain through time

offers a theory of reconstruction as the (aesthetic and political) project of combining heterogeneous forms in (and through) time.

Chapter 4, entitled “The Shadow (Out) of Time: H.P. Lovecraft’s Optimism” builds upon the previous chapter’s discussion of the heterogenous elements of time to make a case for H.P. Lovecraft’s theory of temporality as a form of (weird) optimism. Much of Lovecraft’s fiction, particularly “The Shadow Out of Time,” brings together the central concerns of this project (the relation between temporality and the body, exhaustion, history and knowledge, for example). This chapter reads Lovecraft’s fiction in the context of the debates about futurity, negativity, and optimism that have taken place over the past decade in queer theory. I argue that, contrary to the majority of readings of his work as nihilistic (or pessimistic), Lovecraft’s fiction also advances a form of optimism that resides in an embodied, felt relation to time. As his fiction and correspondence demonstrate, Lovecraft’s understood his cosmic philosophy as offering consolation if not a strange form of hope to those struggling with what he termed the “local” problems of human existence. The framing of his philosophy as a form of consolation as well as the way his tales intertwine the affective body and time place Lovecraft in weird relation to the sentimental tradition. His “weird optimism” is enacted at both the formal level of Lovecraft’s narratives, which proceed diegetically toward the revelation of truth, and through their specific theorization of time as simultaneously an inexhaustible *long durée* and a complex of overlapping, embedded temporalities. The felt relation to time that Lovecraft’s narratives enact leads to a different form of agency, one that frees the subject from the constraints of liberal subjectivity’s often narrow view of time. While this knowledge often drives his narrators mad, I argue there is an

underlying optimism to Lovecraft's theorization of time as enduring and multiple: a weird optimism that resides in *knowing* and *feeling* the terrors of time which is not reducible to pessimism. As in Stowe's novel, intense affective experiences in Lovecraft orient the individual to new possibilities in (and of) time. The weird optimism of Lovecraft's tales, however, resides less in their transformation of the narrator (or subject) than in their theory of the infinite potentiality of time itself.

The texts examined in this project begin to demonstrate the theoretical complexity, variability, and expanse of the sentimental tradition's concept of the body in time. Sentimentalism's distinct conception of the feeling body's relation to temporality, I would suggest, diffuses even further through time than the historical period covered in this project. However, while not comprehensive, these studies begin to reveal the theoretical and rhetorical appeal of sentimentalism's intertwining of the body, affect, and time as well as its adaptability across a range of literary genres. Like (or along with) the feeling body, the sentimental tradition travels out of time and adapts to the changing temporal demands and urgencies of the moment.

CHAPTER 1: “STILL I LIVE”: *WIELAND* AND QUEER HISTORY

I. Sentimental Pasts

The anonymously authored “Account of a Murder” (1796),¹ the “authentic case” Charles Brockden Brown drew upon while composing *Wieland; or, The Transformation* (1798),² is originally prefaced in *New-York Weekly Magazine* by a brief letter from a woman named “Anna” who identifies herself as a friend of the author. Addressing herself to the editors of the magazine, Anna explains she submitted the story “at the particular request of a friend, who is well acquainted with the circumstances that gave rise to it” (2011, 266). The reprinting of the letter alongside the article appears designed to lend credence to the sensational story that follows: the devout and “austere” Mr. Y—’s grisly 1781 murder of his entire family in their Tomhanick (now Tomhannock) home following a vision of a spirit that commands him to destroy all his “idols.” What is most significant about the letter, though, are the qualifications Anna provides to authorize the

¹ “An Account of a Murder Committed by Mr. J—Y—, upon His Family, in December, A.D. 1781” was originally published in *New-York Weekly Magazine; or Miscellaneous Repository* on July 20 and 27, 1796. It was reprinted in *Philadelphia Minerva* on August 20 and 27, 1796, which is likely where it first came to Brown’s attention (Waterman 266). In *New-York Weekly*, the article is framed by two serials which illustrate the dangers of indulging the passions or fancy: it is preceded by “The Fatal Effects of Indulging the Passions, exemplified in the History of M. De La Paliniere” and followed by “The Victim of Magical Delusion, or, Interesting Memoirs of Miguel, Duke de Ca*i*a, Unfolding Many Curious Unknown Historical Facts.” The full name of Mr. J—Y— is James Yates.

² As Bryan Waterman points out, Brown scholars have identified another similar case possibly informing the novel, that of William Beadle’s 1782 murder of his family in Wethersfield Connecticut (4, n2).

anonymous writer as a reliable narrator of this grim history. Anna tells the editors the story “is drawn up by a female hand, and she here relates respecting Mr. Y— what she knew of him herself, and what she had heard of him in her father’s family, where he had been an occasional visitant” (266). At first glance, Anna appears to ground the article’s authority in what would be considered sound historical evidence by modern standards: first-hand experience with the subject as well as reports collected from those familiar with Mr. Y—. However, if we consider how the author came to such knowledge as well as the conditions under which she writes, we begin to see that her authority relies upon a type of historical knowledge vastly different from that of modern forms.

First of all, the author’s knowledge of Mr. Y— is largely derived from stories of his “occasional” visits with her father’s side of the family. Rather than a sampling or collection of information from a variety of sources, Anna locates her friend’s authority in a form of communal knowledge housed within the extended family. Moreover, Anna implies the author’s knowledge of these stories is the result of an indirect and equally occasional overhearing of their retelling: “what she had heard of him from in her father’s family.” The transmission of this knowledge is framed as a form of receptivity enabled by an intimate setting. Equally important, Anna grounds the composition of the article in an embodied perspective: “An Account of a Murder” is “drawn up by a female hand.” During an historical period that literary critics and historians have frequently noted was characterized by fierce debates over the status of authorship and fiction,³ Anna draws

³ There is a common consensus among literary historians that novel reading was considered a dangerous or at least an ambivalent pastime in the early republic. Cathy Davidson argues in *Revolution and the Word* (1986) that the novel was seen as harmful because it threatened the traditional elites’ (clergymen and politicians) authority. The question of novel reading therefore served as the locus for debates over authority, liberty,

particular attention to the hand of the author as well as its gender. As if to spite future critics who would lament the “feminization” of American culture that putatively took shape following the Revolution,⁴ Anna references the female hand of the author in a way that is clearly meant to buttress the narrative’s authority rather than detract from it. Finally, there is the central medium of the author’s knowledge, which is not noted by Anna but remains implicit in the form and composition of the article: memory. Although Anna dates her letter “May 17, 1796,” the central events of the narrative took place in December 1781. Fifteen years have elapsed between the murder of the Yates family and the publication of the article. Of course, it is not clear when the author composed the article, nor why she should seek to publish it at this particular moment. It is certain, though, that it was written some time after the events took place, since the article includes (as does Brown’s novel) excerpts from the murderer’s confession and an account of a visit to his cell at an unspecified later date. The author of “An Account of a Murder” draws upon her recollection of Yates, the stories of her family, and Yates’ own unreliable narration to craft an account of the murder which hovers somewhere between fact and fiction, history and narrative. Grounded in both personal and familial memory and facilitated by an embodied (and gendered) perspective, the author’s historical authority

and (republican) virtue in the new republic. For more on the early status of the novel, see Davidson (1986), particularly Ch. 3, “Ideology and Genre.”

⁴ As Philip Gould (1999) points out, the argument for the “feminization” of American culture is primarily a product of post-World War II literary criticism. Cold War literary critics championed a liberal “masculine” tradition against a “feminine” sentimental one that it identified with “mass culture” and ideology, and hence with the threat of totalitarianism. The most influential work within this critical trajectory is arguably Ann Douglas’ *Feminization of American Culture* (1977). For more on Douglas and the continuation of the feminization narrative in contemporary literary theory, see Chapter 2 below. For a more in-depth account of the formation of the “feminization” narrative in literary criticism following World War II, see Gould et. al., *America the Feminine*, Spec. issue of *differences* (1999).

relies upon a particular felt and communal relation to the past. It is, in brief, a form of sentimental historicism.

This chapter considers Brown's *Wieland* as concerned with the same linkages between history, memory, and the body that are on display in texts such as "An Account of a Murder." I argue *Wieland* interrogates the relation between time and the body in an historical moment characterized by uncertainty over both the meaning of the past and the shape of the future. I read *Wieland* as a gothic sentimental novel of seduction that attempts to think through the temporality of the post-revolutionary moment, specifically as it relates to the unfolding future (as well as past) of both the community and the nation. My argument is that *Wieland* and the seduction novel figure the body as the ground through which history and temporality are felt and enacted in all of their pressing uncertainty. In representing the body as the proper figure or medium of history, Brown's novel engages with contemporary sentimental theories of history that understood the subject (in both senses of the term) of history as a matter of (proper) feeling. Sentimental historicism theorizes the feeling body and the capacity for sentiment as fundamental to historical understanding, and Brown's novel attempts to think through the repercussions of sentimentalism's linkages between the body, feeling, and time. For Brown, the Gothic sentimental genre offers an opportunity to explore the "return of the past" as a seductive force that puts pressure on the feeling body to produce meaning in the present. In my reading of *Wieland*, seduction also (if not primarily) operates in an aesthetic as well as political register for Brown. In *Wieland* the seductive force of time (as distinct from history) acts on the feeling body to produce meaningful temporal forms and narratives—in short, to produce history itself.

The return of the past is a prominent theme in (readings of) early (American) Gothic sentimental novels. Critics such as Cathy Davidson (1986) and Julia Stern (1997) have argued that the early American novel provides a medium for those whose voices were shut out of the founding of the nation to be heard—primarily, women and ethnic minorities. In addition to providing a voice for those excluded from the new republic, Davidson reads the early American Gothic novel as a critique of American individualism and enlightenment reason: “the Gothic can subtly challenge the status quo of so-called traditional or premodern societies while also criticizing the inherent problems of so-called modern society, especially progressive philosophical or economic theories (liberalism, deism, rationalism) based on a notion of human perfectibility” (309). In other words, the Gothic “focuses on the systemic possibilities and problems of postrevolutionary American society and of the postrevolutionary self in action in that society” (310). Building on Davidson’s argument, Stern suggests that the Gothic sentimental novel’s fascination with both otherness and the past represents an “imagination of the nation’s encrypted others, making articulation of their stifled voices its unforeseen, if nevertheless defining, cultural work” (5). For Stern, the early American novel is ultimately a “gothic formation devoted to channeling the voices of the socially dead” (12). In her reading, *Wieland*’s deployment of a cacophony of forgotten and excluded voices “explodes the proposition that the people can speak in unison or share a synoptic view of the future. In the absence of these congruences, the legitimacy of the post-Revolutionary social order becomes increasingly precarious” (21). Stern identifies Clara’s narrative(s) of her father as a “defiantly feminist reclamation of the tragic history of the Wieland family,” though she argues this reclamation is nevertheless “severely

undermined in an act of narrative abdication to male authority and voice” (14). For Stern, *Wieland* and the Gothic novel in general stages a struggle between competing voices (masculine and feminine) for authorial control over both the past and present of the new republic.

The problem with this reading, and the interpretation of the early American (Gothic sentimental) novel as representing the voice of the excluded in general, is that it often reinforces a feminization narrative of American literature. In identifying the Gothic sentimental genre as the medium of an excluded citizenry (primarily women), this strand of criticism inherently genders sentimentalism as a “feminine” genre. Indeed, Stern argues that “[a]dopting the vocal accent of one of the groups occluded and silenced by the Founding, republican fiction manifests the feminization of American culture Ann Douglas describes...” (12). She frequently refers to the genre of Gothic sentimentalism as a “feminized literature of feeling,” suggesting that “feeling” clearly (and exclusively) connotes “feminine” (6). The identification of sentimentalism as a feminine genre also poses a problem for reading male authors such as Brown who worked within it. For not only does this framework raise the question of their cooptation of a “feminine” genre or voice; the feminization narrative promulgated by Douglas also requires that a “serious” writer such as Brown must rise above the popular (i.e., feminine) genre he is working within. However, unlike Douglas, Stern stresses the political importance of sentimentalism and its “reclamation” of forgotten histories. Her work also reveals how male authors were seriously attached to sentimental techniques even as they (ostensibly) critiqued them. Stern asserts that “Brown’s critical investment in the operative fantasy of fellow feeling—which his four major novels systematically conjure and vigorously

interrogate—it itself utterly dependent on the very sentiment it scorns” (29). As we will see, while Brown certainly interrogates sentimental sympathy this does not mean he is “dependent” on it, which connotes a form of weakness or at worst a kind of authorial “effeminacy.” Brown engages with sentimentalism on its own terms because he is interrogating the forms of history and time the genre accesses. While Brown is certainly concerned with both the past and those whose voices have been excluded from the new republic, *Wieland* approaches these issues through the novel’s engagement with the question of history and time’s relation to the present, an interrogation that is made possible by sentimentalism rather than in spite of it.

The argument that Brown engages with sentimentalism to think through the past’s relation to the present is closer to Leonard Tennenhouse’s (2007) reading of the work of the early American novel. Tennenhouse argues that the American gothic novel is less concerned with the guilt of the past than with adapting that (primarily British) past into a new relation to the present. For him, the early American appetite for both Gothic and sentimental seduction novels speaks to the new republic’s desire to think through older (British) models of kinship and social relations in a new context. According to Tennenhouse, “the gothic novel works hand and glove with sentimental fiction to banish as obsolete an older model of kinship relations and to propose the modern household as the site where modern social relations are reproduced” (100). Both the gothic novel’s evocation of an older aristocratic model of kinship and the seduction novel’s navigation of marriage relations bespeak an investment in redefining familial and social systems away from a model based on rank and blood toward one based on contractual agreements

grounded in mutual feeling.⁵ As Tennenhouse notes, “the seduction story favored by American readers broke up the family only to bring disparate people together in a new contractual relationship” (53). Tennenhouse argues that the gothic and sentimentalism are “two sides of one discursive coin” in that “the gothic supplies the emotion over which sentimentalism gains authority in a process of domestication” (97). In other words, both the gothic and the sentimental genre treat feeling and the passions as the ground of individual subjectivity, social relations, and morality. Whereas the gothic genre interrogates the passions *in extremis* (feeling exceeding its “proper” boundaries), the sentimental genre examines feeling in its civilizing capacity (feeling as domesticated and domesticating). In Tennenhouse’s reading, then, *Wieland* and other early Gothic and sentimental novels are less concerned with the return of the past than with interrogating that past’s relevance within a shifting model of kinship and social relations grounded in sentiment rather than tradition.

While there are merits to both Stern’s reading of the Gothic genre as a medium for the voices of the dead (both the nation’s past and the socially dead) and Tennenhouse’s argument that the Gothic registers a desire to adapt if not break with the past, *Wieland*’s treatment of history and time does not fit easily into either of these two extremes. Brown’s novel does not uncritically channel the voice of the past, but neither

⁵ Elizabeth Maddock Dillon (2004) makes a similar argument about the early American seduction novel, linking the post-revolutionary popularity of seduction narratives to the new republic’s anxiety over the fractured social and political body. She suggests that following the Revolution new models of affectionate (sentimental) marriage came to embody “the subject in a male or female body in such a way that the threatening aspects of the headless (liberal) social and political order are obviated” (116-17). Since following the Revolution “identity is no longer provided by the corporate political body and the social totality implied therein,” marriage becomes the primary form of subject ratification because it entails the social recognition of individual identity (122).

does it suggest the past has no relevance or power over the present. A simple reading of the novel, of course, could interpret it as advocating a break from the religious fanaticism supposedly characteristic of an earlier (pre-revolutionary) era which Brown believes has no place in the new “enlightened” republic. However, the way the novel dwells on Clara’s investment in the (question of the) past through a form of sentimental historicism complicates an easy categorization of *Wieland* as a Gothic novel in either Stern’s or Tennenhouse’s definition. The narrative’s ambivalent interrogation of the past has arguably been overlooked because *Wieland*’s classification as the “first” American Gothic novel tends to foreclose an investigation of the novel’s investment in sentimental theories of history. For example, despite reading the Gothic and sentimental genres as “hand and glove,” Tennenhouse categorizes *Wieland* as a Gothic novel both because its plot turns on the Gothic trope of the “secret history” and because the eruption of familial violence deals a “direct blow to the sentimental premise that affect can serve as the basis of community” (108). However, like his adaptation of the conventions of the epistolary novel, Brown’s text borrows heavily from the Gothic genre while never residing fully within it. In terms of plot alone, *Wieland* begins as a sentimental history, develops into a gothic narrative with seductive undertones, and ends as a moralizing seduction tale. Even this narrative breakdown is too tidy, since elements of all three genres (historical narrative, gothic, seduction) run throughout the novel in various guises. For example, the mysterious death of the elder Wieland functions as more than a simple Gothic trope of a haunting (traumatic or excluded) past. As we shall see, Clara derives a form of pleasure from reflecting on her father’s mysterious end and crafting histories of his fate. The past operates as a seductive force in the novel, capable of evoking both pleasure and awe (and

sometimes horror). As such, historical narratives in Brown's novel—both those crafted by Clara and the text of *Wieland* itself—are often a hybrid of the sentimental and the Gothic genres' conventions for theorizing the past. *Wieland* therefore confounds an easy categorization as a Gothic novel, and with it the ways we read the novel's theory of the feeling subject's relation to the past.

As this begins to indicate, my interpretation of seduction in *Wieland* departs from previous readings of the political implications of Brown's use of the seduction plot. One of the main strands of Brown criticism and *Wieland* scholarship in particular is a reading of his work as reflecting on the political status of fiction, authorship, and authority in the new republic. Edwin Fussell (1983) reads *Wieland* as a reactionary meditation on the role of literature in the instigation of the Revolution as well as the conflicted position of the post-Revolution author, who like the "biloquist" Carwin must "talk both English and American" (174). Building on Jane Tompkins' (1985) discussion of *Wieland* as concerned with the fragile state of political authority and identity in the new republic, Elizabeth Barnes (1997) interprets the novel as addressing the question of (literary and political) seduction and "how authority will be constructed after the fact of revolution" (54). Barnes argues that for Brown truth ultimately resides in "the voice of the author" because "the seducer's arts are...superseded by the art of the novelist, whose own method of influence distinguishes him from the seducer chiefly by position: i.e., in the novel of seduction, the author has the last word" (55). As Stern would argue, Brown relies on the authority of the author to recover the forgotten or excluded voices that have been relegated to the political margins of the new republic.

These readings once again focus on the politics of (Brown's use of) the Gothic seduction plot, specifically as it relates to questions of (political) voice and exclusion or inclusion. Though such readings have their use, I want to recuperate the trope of seduction as a term that involves a relation among time, sympathy, and understanding or knowledge production within the form of the novel. While my reading of *Wieland* is not necessarily opposed to political interpretations of the text, it approaches seduction as a way to understand how Brown thinks about narrative and its relation to the novel form. Drawing on queer theories of seduction and its relation to the body of history (in both senses), I read Brown's treatment of seduction through an aesthetic rather than a political register. Reading seduction in *Wieland* through an aesthetic register circumvents the attempt to locate his politics in specific moments or features of the text by focusing instead on how seduction is woven into the temporal form of the novel itself. In other words, my reading is primarily concerned with how seduction impacts the form of Brown's novel rather than trying to locate his politics within the tale of seduction. The intention is not to displace politics with aesthetics, but to resist the extremes or at least the ease of political readings of the Gothic seduction narrative through a careful attention to the form of the novel. In this manner, the Gothic seduction novel can be more readily thought without thinking a specific (progressive or conservative) politics, and readings of these narratives can productively explore interpretive avenues beyond identifying the political content of the text.

In my reading, the narrative form of *Wieland* itself becomes a meditation on the process of constructing a novel or historical narrative. Brown's novel operates as a meditation on what it means to write history, and the trope of seduction informs the

narrative shape as well as impetus of this meditation. While the result may still be in line with some of the political interpretations of *Wieland*, in my reading the novel becomes a site of thinking through aesthetically what previous criticism has addressed politically—the recovery of disenfranchised voices, the forging of new forms of authority and contractual relations, etc. Attending to the formal and narrative features of seduction in *Wieland* shows Brown’s relation to politics and history in a different light. For Brown, the (formal) production of historical narratives is equally as important as the specific content of those narratives. *Wieland* is as much an investigation into *how* narratives and novels are produced as it is into what those narratives say (about politics, the past, etc.).

Queer theory helps shift the terms of the debate by drawing attention to how the feeling body is seduced into (and out of) the production of historical narratives in Brown’s handling of the gothic seduction narrative. Queer theory methodologies that offer insight into the affective relations among time, experience, and history have yet to be brought to a reading of the Gothic seduction novel. As Drexler and White note (2010), because of a confluence of institutional and interpretive reasons the field of early American literary criticism has long been indebted to methodologies borrowed from the field of history. As a result, readings of early American literature often evince a “theory gap” not present in other periods of study.⁶ One of the consequences of this theory gap is

⁶ Drexler and White trace the “theory gap” in early American literary studies back to the absence of a “strong canon” and to the field’s initial reliance for interpretive and institutional support on the discipline of history. Regarding the former, Drexler and White argue that while in other fields “the spread of a range of theoretical lexicons was greatly facilitated by the textual and institutional infrastructure provided by a conservative [“strong”] canon,” the “weak” or diffused canon of early American literary studies did not provide a similar infrastructure (487). Though arguing that this “absence of a strong literary canon” is also “the field’s greatest strength,” Drexler and White point out that such a canon has drawbacks when it comes to fostering theoretical conversations

that terms such as “history” and “context” are taken for granted as stable concepts in readings of early American literature, which precludes a critical investigation of what these texts mean when they reference (or theorize) history. The critical perspective of queer theory enables a new kind of reading that allows us to see seduction, history, and the Gothic novel differently: as a form concerned with theorizing the feeling body’s production of (historical) narratives.

I have referred to *Wieland* as a gothic seduction (or gothic sentimental) narrative not only because the Gothic genre has its roots within the sentimental tradition and therefore shares similar assumptions but also because the novel blends elements of both of these genres (insofar as they are distinct). *Wieland* mobilizes the sentimental seduction tale’s tropes of the mysterious seducer, the loss of innocence, and (the temptations of) pleasure; it also deploys the Gothic tropes of familial secrets, the extremes of feeling (passion, horror), and the mystery of the unknown. More importantly, “gothic sentimental” seems best to capture the novel’s interrogation of the past, poised as it is somewhere between a gothic and sentimental historicism—that is, between the pleasures of both attachment and horror and between a desire for proximity and for distance. As a gothic sentimental novel, *Wieland* interrogates different modes of relating to the past through the feeling body; it therefore explores a range of affective investments in and responses to history. Clara variously experiences pleasure, nostalgia,

over a shared canon of texts. Drexler and White also point to the critical methodologies and concepts inherited from the field of history as contributing to the theory gap, arguing that early American literary criticism often amounts to a form of historical contextualization rather than an engagement with the text itself. Drexler and White suggest reintroducing (or refocusing on) the “gap” between text and context, or literature and history, in order to provoke more compelling theoretical readings of early American literary texts.

awe, and horror when reflecting on the past—a range of emotion that exceeds the confines of the Gothic genre but is contained within Brown’s larger exploration of sentimental modes of historicism. For Clara, the past is not reducible to a forgotten “tragic history” as it is for Stern. Clara’s recovery of the past has as much to do with reclaiming a lost pleasure as it does a forgotten voice. By crafting a form of gothic sentimental historicism, Brown’s novel is able to explore the seductive force of the ambiguous pleasures (and pain) evoked by the past. Working before strict “genre” boundaries were codified and experimenting with a hybrid blending of literary forms, Brown examines how both sentimental and Gothic forms register the seductive pressures of time. The “return of the past” in *Wieland* is therefore best understood not as a purely Gothic trope but rather as integral to the novel’s interrogation of how forms of sentimental historicism figure the insistent and ambiguous pull of time on the body.

As Mike Goode has argued in *Sentimental Masculinity and the Rise of History* (2009), late eighteenth-century debates over how the historian should relate to history were ultimately rooted in the ambiguity of feeling itself. As he points out, the pressing question for practitioners of history in the late eighteenth-century “was rarely *whether* historians and students of history should feel but rather *how* they should feel” (23, emphasis original). In short, Goode uncovers a forgotten sentimental past at the disciplinary origins of modern history. He argues that following the publication of Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), historical epistemology was (re)grounded⁷ in “a thinker’s manliness and his capacity for feeling” (5).⁸ For Burke,

⁷ As Goode points out, sentimental theories of feeling and sympathy played a role in historical epistemology before Burke’s *Revolutions*. The work of David Hume, Hugh Blair, and Adam Smith, to name just a few, all assign a (varied) role to feeling in the

the historian understood or encountered history through a feeling relation to the customs, laws, and figures of the past. As Goode puts it, within the sentimental (or Romantic) historical epistemology inaugurated by Burke “a man needed to feel the idea of history in order to think it” (8). The debates that arose over *Revolution*’s sentimental epistemology were concerned not with its grounding of history in feeling but rather with the quality of a specific historian’s feelings. The debates turned, in other words, on the ambiguity of feeling and its capacity to slide from more “proper” social sentiments into more personal interests such as desire. How was one to know if the historian’s reverence for the past was not expressive of a more personal erotic longing (something Burke himself was

work of the historian or philosopher. However, as Goode argues, the role of feeling within historical epistemology prior to Burke is mostly secondary. It facilitates a desire for historical understanding but does not inform it. Unlike Burke, neither Blair nor Hume “grants sentiment the power to produce historical understanding, only the power to produce the kind of individual investments in a particular past that makes such understanding seem worthwhile or even necessary” (Goode 28). Smith, like Paine after him, worries that too much sympathy for the past may interfere with the circulation of “natural” sentiments among the living. Such a gloss does not do justice to the complexity of these thinkers’ theories of the relation between feeling and history; however, it does highlight how Burke’s grounding of historical epistemology in feeling (rather than alongside it) represented a decisive shift or innovation.

⁸ Goode’s argument throughout *Sentimental Masculinity* is that the debates over the historian’s proper felt relation to history were also debates over the meaning of masculinity. Goode notes that recent scholarship on sentimentalism shows “how the eighteenth-century discourse of sentiment was one arena in which British society was working out the content of manliness as a privileged sign of sociability and civic virtue” (13). The rise of a sentimental historicism in the mid- to late-eighteenth century definitively “linked feeling, manliness, and sociality to each other and to historical authority” (9). More importantly, Goode’s argument that manliness and feeling were categorically intertwined further complicates the “feminization” narrative; within sentimentalism, feeling was constitutive of masculinity rather than its binary opposite. As Goode puts it, “men came to be perceived as manly by the end of the eighteenth century precisely *because* they feel rather than in spite of it” (19, emphasis original). Goode’s work contributes to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to revise our conceptions of the relationship between masculinity and sentimentalism. For more on the complex relationship between masculinity, affect, and sentimentalism, see Glenn Hendler’s *Public Sentiments* (2001) and the collection *Sentimental Men* (1999) edited by Hendler and Mary Chapman.

accused of)? Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791), which was written (in part) as a response to Burke's *Revolutions*, contested what he saw as Burke's sacralizing of the past at the expense of the present. In brief, *Rights* argues for the primacy of the present over the past, and therefore takes Burke to task for clinging to a faded history that has no relevance to the present political moment. Yet as Goode points out, while Paine criticizes Burke's (and sentimental historicism's) specific felt relation to history, he does not contest the grounding of historical thought *in feeling itself*. Indeed, as Goode shows, his argument depends upon it: Paine argues a relation to the past is detrimental because it produces "artificial" sentiments, whereas an investment in the present produces more "natural" feelings. At the heart of the debates over sentimental historicism, then, is a question of the ambiguous relation between feeling, the body, and history.⁹

As Goode observes, these debates over historical epistemology were carried out not only in broadsides and pamphlets but also in the new genre of the novel. Goode's case study in *Sentimental Masculinity* is Scott's Waverly novels. I have chosen Brown's *Wieland* for two reasons. First, to argue that the debate over sentimental history reached the genre of the novel earlier than Goode's chosen example (the first Waverly novel was published in 1814). Second, and more importantly, to suggest that the arguments over what Goode calls Romantic history (and thus implicitly confines to Britain) were part of a larger transatlantic debate. American citizens were still trying to determine their relation to their own tumultuous (recent) history, as well as how the events of the French

⁹ For Goode, this ambiguity resides in the difference between "feeling" and "sentiment." His text is meant to demonstrate that "the interstices between the terms feeling and sentiment—the feelings that do not reduce to sentiment—were central to the question of history's social significance, its authority, and, in what I am suggesting amounted to much the same thing, its manliness" (18).

Revolution reshaped their perceptions of both the past and future of the American Revolution. Late eighteenth-century sentimental novels such as Brown's intervened in the debate over history and feeling in ways that will both contribute to and complicate contemporary theorists working on the relation between the body and history.

Similar to Goode's reconsideration of late 18th century historicism, Mark Kamrath (2010) draws attention to the complexity and depth of Brown's interrogation of historical knowledge, and makes a strong case for the relevance of Brown's work to contemporary historical theorists. He argues that Brown was "a writer of 'radical history' whose historical observations and historiographical meditations offer important insights into cultural and critical issues in his day and our own" (xiv). Kamrath notes that Brown's novels and essays frequently reflect "on narrative meaning and truth" and more importantly that "Brown's self-conscious historiography and inquiry into the differences between 'history' and 'romance' points to an ignored tradition of linguistic self-consciousness that applies epistemological doubt to grand narratives" (xiv).¹⁰ He reads the plots and the aesthetic form of Brown's novels as challenging the idea of a solitary and authoritative linear historical narrative. According to Kamrath, Brown's novels interrogate the forces that construct historical meaning, and as such are interested in both

¹⁰ Kamrath stresses the similarities between Brown's self-conscious questioning of historical narratives and New Historicist theories of history as a linguistic construction in order to bolster his larger claim for Brown's "modernity" or at least anticipation of the theories of history developed after the linguistic turn. However, Kamrath often appears at pains to maintain contemporary theory as the measuring stick of historical insight, choosing to label Brown "modern" rather than risk calling New Historicism "non-modern," or more accurately, unoriginal. As Hilary Emmett (2015) puts it in a review, "what is demonstrated by Kamrath's contextualized readings of Brown's works is that such a relationship to history is less evidence of Brown's modernity than evidence of the nonnovelty of 'new' historicism" (213).

the question of historical objectivity as well as the influence of feeling, memory, and (partial) interpretation on the writing of historical narratives. Kamrath argues that Brown's "novels are driven by historical and historiographic concerns, especially the manner in which feeling and memory can supplement historical 'facts' and inform his narrator's—and his readers'—ability to recall the past and live in the present" (30). He also notes the importance of sentiment in Brown's historicism: "The use of 'memory,' in particular, for Brown becomes a means not only of approaching the past but, when informed by sentiment or emotion, of actively ascertaining knowledge and truth" (30). For Brown, as we will see below, the foundation of the historian's knowledge resides in a feeling relation to the past. While Kamrath's work does not stress the role of the body in the production of historical meaning, it does convincingly argue that for Brown feeling and sentiment are not an impediment but an impetus to historical understanding.

The reading of the body's role in the production of (historical) meaning in Brown's work builds on research in queer theory on affective historiography. This scholarship approaches the work of history as an affective or bodily encounter with traces of the past. Such encounters with the past take various forms throughout this body of work and may include (but are not limited to) the archival work of recovery, physical contact with living remnants of the past in the present (bodies, artifacts, texts), or the exercise of individual or shared memory within an affective community. The "queer historical impulse" of such work, as Carolyn Dinshaw succinctly puts it in *Getting Medieval* (1999), is motivated by a desire to "touch the past" in order to forge "connections across time" between different bodies, identities, and communities (1). The purpose of this desiring touch is not only to recover what has been lost but also to take

hold of forgotten (sexual and political) possibilities in order to forge a more livable future. However, as Heather Love's *Feeling Backward* (2007) argues, such a desire to touch the past has to contend with the possibility of encountering bodies and texts that "turn their backs on the future" and instead "choose isolation, turn toward the past, or choose to live in a present disconnected from any larger historical continuum" (8). The hand that reaches out to touch the past can find its caress rebuffed or embraced. Affective history therefore seeks to navigate these extremes of proximity and distance, or intimacy and intractability, through the medium of the feeling body. As in the earlier work of Burke, for queer theorists, feeling or sentiment is not ancillary to historical understanding but rather crucial to its operation and forms of knowing.

While queer theory begins to theorize a concept of history and temporality that is routed through the body, this work often overlooks an earlier moment in the genealogy of affective historiography: the mid to late-eighteenth century philosophical, political, and literary debates¹¹ over how the subject (or the citizen) should "feel" in relation to history. This concern is apparent, for example, in Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke's debates over the relation between sentiment and history, which amounted to an argument over whether the historian should "feel" a relation to the past or whether this past had

¹¹ As some literary critics have pointed out, the distinction between politics and aesthetics represents a later historical formation that would not have made sense to writers such as Brown. As Edward Cahill argues, Brown's novels interrogate various contemporary theories of the imagination in order to elaborate their "central relation to national polity and social transformation" (33). Anthony Galluzzo makes a similar argument about Brown's engagement with theories of the sublime in *Wieland* (2009). In short, for Brown and other writers of the period, theories of imaginative and aesthetic experience are also arguments about social and political forms. Burke's theory of the sublime, for instance, relates both to the awe one should feel for the proper working of one's national government as well as the terror of its breakdown, such as in the French Revolution (which Burke himself explored in his *Reflections*).

exhausted its relevance to the present. To put it another way, the question of affect and the body's relation to temporality has a longer history than current critical scholarship recognizes. The attempt to encounter the past through the medium of the feeling body has its historical roots in a sentimental past that queer theory has yet to touch. By reading *Wieland* as offering its own sentimental exploration of the relation between the body and temporality, this chapter aims to uncover an earlier moment of affective history that may provide a deeper genealogy to as well as a new perspective on the current debates over queer historiography. A rethinking of the ways sentimental texts construe the relation between time and the body will help redraw the lines not only of queer historiography's own history but also our understanding of the complexity of the sentimental genre's central concerns. Such a reconsideration, in other words, contributes to a rethinking of developmental narratives of American literature wherein sentimentalism represents a naive genre that gradually matures into a more "sincere" and (aesthetically) valuable realism. Sentimental texts like *Wieland* explore theories of the interrelations of time, affect, and the body through (as well as within) their aesthetically complex narrative forms. As queer theory's interest in forms of affective epistemology also begins to indicate, the sentimental novel's grounding of (historical) knowledge in feeling has never entirely disappeared from literary criticism and history. Another way of saying this is that revisiting the complexity of the sentimental genre challenges the feminization narrative of American literature. To rethink how sentimental texts such as *Wieland* theorize the relation between time and the body therefore revises both our (disciplinary) understanding of queer history and (American) literary history more broadly.

Of course, queer theory itself has long contested normative forms of history that privilege narratives based upon (sexual) generation and chronology. To cite just one instance, Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) juxtaposes "queer time" to the temporality of "the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (1), or what she later calls the "oedipal time" of familial generation (*QAF* 2011). For many queer theorists, variations of "oedipal time" continue to underwrite modern forms of (Western) history, with its focus on reproduction, sequence, and development. What remains, however, and what queer affective historiography attempts to address, is how to conceptualize new forms of relations between the (sexual, feeling) body, history, and time that do not fall back into the same normalizing logics of chronology. Jordan Stein has recently raised the problem of chronology in relation to the discipline of (American) literary history and the study of the novel, suggesting that literary history still falls victim to the "persistence of history understood as chronology, even as critiques of American exceptionalism have rescued history from the nation" (2013, 860). Stein argues the persistence of chronology within literary history and beyond is due to the conflation of "two concepts that are in fact quite distinct: history and time" (856). Time, Stein suggests, is difficult to define but represents a "phenomenal ordering of events," whereas history is "less a modality of sequential time than a modality of sequential narrative" (856). Stein argues that as a form of narrative, "history surely can obey the logic of temporal sequence, but it can also accommodate other kinds of temporalities: history can be cyclical, circular, recursive, or reincarnated; history can be continuous, discontinuous, or interrupted" (857). In short, for Stein history as a narrative modality is open to a variety of temporal forms, and queer theory, with its theorization of alternative or "queer"

temporalities, is in a privileged position to contribute to rethinking the relations between history and time as well as the way novels mobilize a variety of temporal forms in excess of their chronological narratives.

The distinction between history and time has proved a productive if difficult topic for queer theorists. In a recent roundtable on queer temporalities (Dinshaw et. al., 2005), there is little agreement over the distinction between the two, or their relation to other key terms such as “historicism” and “queer” (although the former appears most commonly to denote the form of linear chronology critiqued by Stein). Whereas Dinshaw speaks of the “queer desire for history” and an attempt at “collapsing time through affective contact” (178), Lee Edelman argues that “we aren’t...subjects of history” and critiques the tropes whereby “we’re obliged to keep turning time *into* history” (181). Between (once again) these extremes of proximity and distance, are critics such as Carla Freccero (2006) and Elizabeth Freeman, whose work focuses on encounters with historical traces of the past, or, as Freccero puts it, the “affective force of the past in the present” (184). What most do agree on, however, is that time or history exerts, or in some cases *is*, a pull or force on or in the present. Even Edelman, the most resolutely “ahistorical” of those participating in the discussion, figures time as a force. He refers to the “queerness of time’s refusal to submit to a temporal logic—or, better, the distortion of that logic by the interference, like a gravitational pull, of some other, unrecognized force” (188). Whether this force is the touch of a hand, the haunting of a ghost, or the pull of the Real, time is here figured as that which exerts a pressure on the body in the present.

In a sense, the (master) trope of time as a force reiterates rather than explains the “unrecognizable” quality of time. The arguably more abstract figure of time as pressure

or pull leaves it unclear whether time exerts a force (and if so upon what) or if it is *itself* this force. On second blush, though, it is apparent this particular figure of time operates as a master trope because its ambivalence encapsulates multiple vectors of time at once: the direction of this “pull” may be toward the past or future, or its pressure may fall more directly on the present moment. The figure of the pull also allows for more complicated vectors or involutions of time in excess of the linear past-present-future form, such as those enumerated by Stein and other queer historians. Time, in other words, can pull in many different directions at once. The figure of time as a pressure also expresses the insistence of time, its irresistible and unremittent quality. More importantly, since “pressure,” “force,” and “pull” are all transitive verbs, this master trope indicates that time takes an object. Time is a pressure exerted upon something, and it is the quality and effects of this pressure on its object that queer historians attempt to trace. In *Wieland*, this ambivalent and insistent pull is understood as a form of seduction. For Brown, the seductive power of time is a result of its enigmatic quality as well as the object of its pressure: the human body. In Brown’s novel, as we will see, it is time that seduces the feeling body into (and out of) history.

The argument that time is a seductive force exerted on the body draws upon Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of “erotohistoriography” from *Time Binds* (2010). Freeman defines erotohistoriography as a queer historical method informed by the desiring (or feeling) body’s encounter with the past. She clarifies that erotohistoriography is not a “desire for a fully present past” since it “does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as a hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter” (195). Freeman’s

erotohistoriography therefore offers a theory of time as well as a historical method. She understands the present as a hybrid temporal form, containing traces of the past as well as glimpses of potential (alternative) futures. For Freeman, it is the erotic or desiring body that navigates this hybrid temporality, since she understands the encounter with traces of the past (and future) as preeminently pleasurable. Her theory of erotohistoriography is offered as a corrective (or at least supplement) to queer forms of history focused on melancholia and trauma. Freeman reminds queer affective historians, in short, that history may be a source of (erotic) pleasure as well as pain. She notes that “we might imagine ourselves haunted by bliss and not just trauma” (120).¹² Erotohistoriography ventures the “queer possibility that encounters with history are bodily encounters” (105) and that this encounter includes “erotic dimensions” such as (bodily, affective) pleasure (134). Freeman also draws attention to the linkages between this theory of erotohistoriography and an earlier sentimental form of history.¹³ However, given my

¹² Freeman suggests we may be haunted by bliss as well as trauma following a (re)reading of Abraham and Torok’s work on melancholia (1994). For Freud, melancholia is the result of a narcissistic identification with the lost object occasioned by the painful trauma of separation. Abraham and Torok argue in contrast that melancholia is occasioned by something more ambivalent than a painful loss. For them, as Freeman explains, the past “consists of latent excitations not yet traversed by the binary between pain and pleasure, preserved and suspended in this very ambivalence and capable of being released as *pleasure* rather than simply being repeated as incomplete mastery over pain” (Freeman 119). In other words, for Abraham and Torok the lost past “encrypted” in melancholia is a pleasurable one; within the ambivalence of loss, melancholic incorporation contains “a long-ago interrupted idyll of erotic contact with the lost object” (119). For Freeman, therefore, melancholia can be understood as a trace of past forms of pleasure. It is, in other words, a form of erotohistoriography

¹³ Freeman notes that the late-eighteenth century “‘man of feeling’ properly encountered history through sympathetic identifications with its personae and modes of living. This transference relationship took place not only in the mind but also through more visceral attachments, identifications, and attempts to reinhabit past worldviews, all of which in turn reconstituted the historian’s body as a finer instrument of sensibility” (100).

argument that queer historians both overlook and owe an unacknowledged debt to an archive of sentimental texts that theorize the relation between the feeling body and history, Freeman's brief discussion of sentimentalism represents a step in the right direction but does not go quite far enough.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Freeman's interpretation of affective history as a seductive encounter or interplay between the feeling body and hybrid temporal traces offers a compelling way to begin to theorize the "pull" of time on the body.

This chapter considers how Brown's novel intervenes in the inaugural debates of a sentimental historicism that understands the body as the primary medium or register of history. Rather than provide definitive answers for how the historian (or citizen) should feel in relation to history, *Wieland* interrogates the vexed yet compelling relation(s) between the feeling body and time that informs sentimental historicism. This interrogation is above all apparent in the novel's form, which turns repeatedly on the question of the relation between the individual body and history (or time). *Wieland's* questioning of the pressure of time on the body is also explored through the novel's particular genre, the (Gothic) sentimental seduction narrative. The novel ultimately theorizes the relation between time and the body as a form of seduction that both drives and threatens to undermine the project of history. In *Wieland*, "time" always remains a

¹⁴ To be fair, Freeman's brief discussion of sentimental historicism is but a part of her chapter's larger genealogy of forms of history grounded in the body. The main issue with Freeman's theory of erotohistoriography in this context is the primarily modern archive she constructs. Her texts include *Ormond* and a contemporary avant-garde film. The one text Freeman reads that has obvious ties with (gothic) sentimentalism is Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which is significant in this context because of the well-documented linkages between Shelley, Godwin, and Brown. However, out of all the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth century sentimental texts she could have chosen to illustrate the genealogy of erotohistoriography, Freeman selects a highly canonical text rather than a more "traditionally" sentimental one.

questionable (and hence seductive) force in part because the characters are unable to completely coincide with a particular historical moment. In other words, like many contemporary queer historians, Brown's novel interrogates the question of the individual's relation to history as an interplay of intimacy and distance. In Brown's work, however, there is a gap or remainder in the feeling subject's relation to history because of her inability to completely bridge this temporal distance. The novel encourages us to think of this remainder, this lack of complete intimacy, as the seductive force of time itself which both drives and exceeds the project of history. *Wieland's* exploration of the seductive relation between time and the (feeling) body therefore offers a reminder to contemporary queer theorists to reckon with the ambiguity of their desire to "touch the past."

II. Uncertain Histories

Brown dwelt at length on the project of history throughout the course of his writing career, not only in novels such as *Wieland* but also in journal articles, letters, historical sketches, and short essays. In "Walstein's School of History" (1799), Brown's narrator, Krants of Gotha, praises Professor Walstein's method of writing history for its "minute explication of motives" as well as its "power of engrossing the attention" and "felicity, purity, and compactness of style" (145). For Krants, Walstein's virtue as a historian resides in his ability to trace or develop a theme through time in order to "exhibit the influence of some moral or physical cause, to enforce some useful maxim, or to illustrate some momentous truth" (146). Reviewing the work of Walstein's cadre of pupils, who carry on and develop their teacher's style, Krants remarks that the chosen

theme itself is open to individual selection and interest: the theme or “purpose” of historical writing “may be more or less simple, capable of being diffused over the surface of an empire or a century, or of shrinking into the compass of a day, and the bounds of a thought” (146).¹⁵ What matters, for Walstein and his pupils,¹⁶ is that these historical texts help the reader make sense of the “uncertainty of history” (147) and in so doing contribute to no less than the general “happiness of mankind” (148). For as Krant remarks, history, both past and present, offers only (or at first) a confusing tangle of events, actions, and motives: “Actions and motives cannot be truly described. We can only make approaches to the truth. The more attentively we observe mankind, and study ourselves, the greater will this uncertainty appear, and the farther shall we find ourselves from truth” (147). A writer trained in the Walsteinian school of history makes sense of the uncertainties of history not by reporting on dates and facts but rather by (re)weaving these tangled threads into the tapestry of an intelligible narrative, or as Krants calls it, a “system.” The historian, in short, is a crafter of fictions who attempts to suture together the disparate strands of historical events into a meaningful story.

It is tempting to read this short fictionalized essay as simply a thinly-veiled statement of Brown’s own historical and aesthetic philosophy. This temptation is

¹⁵ Walstein’s theory of the multiple forms of historical writing is eerily similar to Stein’s argument for the different temporal modalities of historical narrative: “[H]istory can be eventful or everyday; history can measure events macroscopically or microscopically; history can be lost, recovered, revised, or rewritten” (2013, 857). The difference between “eventful” and “everyday” historical writing is the primary difference between the work of Walstein and that of his pupil, Engel. See n15 below for more on Engel’s historical method.

¹⁶ It remains unclear throughout “Walstein’s School” what relation Krants has to his subject, Walstein. It is possible Krants is a student of Walstein (or a student of one of his students). It is also possible he is simply an admirer or reader of the Walsteinian school of history.

bolstered by, among other things, the second installment of “Walstein’s School,” which analyzes the work of Engel, “the eldest of Walstein’s pupils” (150). Engel’s historical narrative, the life of one “Olivo Ronsica,” reproduces the plot of Part I of Brown’s own *Arthur Mervyn*. *Arthur Mervyn* was published on May 21st, 1799, and “Walstein’s School” appeared in the August-September 1799 issue of Brown’s own periodical, *Monthly Magazine, and American Review*, so the second part of the essay clearly functions as an advertisement for Brown’s new novel. Along with “The Difference Between History and Romance” (1800), “Walstein’s School” has therefore often been read as Brown’s theory of the distinction between history and literature, or, more accurately, on the indistinctness between the two. Amanda Emerson reads Brown’s essays on romance as articulating the historiographic method of his fictional production (2006/7). She argues that Brown’s novels operate “as experiments in the correction of history by fiction” wherein the “history-telling character-narrators...share with Brown the project of braiding the few available strands of observed phenomena together with the many possibilities of fiction to craft coherent, morally edifying historical narratives” (127). However, while Brown’s essays theorize the role of the novelist-historian as a crafter of (moral) truths, his novels, as Emerson notes, problematize rather than demonstrate the historiography elaborated in “Walstein’s School.” In *Wieland*, the narrator Clara’s “attempts to coax instructional marrow from the bones of event and action fail again and again” (136). The uncertainty of history, of the relation of event and action to a more systemic truth, drives but ultimately overwhelms the production of coherent historical narrative in *Wieland* and Brown’s other novels. Emerson concludes the repeated failure of the individual narrators in Brown’s novels to craft a meaningful

fiction implies his historiographic method “may be a challenge that requires multiple narrators” (136). For Emerson, *Wieland* and Brown’s other novels demonstrate Brown’s endorsement not of Walstein’s theory of history (a singular overarching narrative or “system”) but rather that of his pupil, Engel, whose historiographic fictions are multivocal and positioned at the level of the “everyday” rather than the event.¹⁷ Read this way, Brown’s novels demonstrate the need for a more “democratic” or at least communal production of historical narratives that, according to Emerson, may serve as a meaningful supplement (if not replacement) to the official “national” account of the new republic’s past.

Even taken as a negative example of his theory of history and aesthetics, though, Brown’s fiction and *Wieland* in particular are more fascinated with exploring the uncertainties of history than it is with crafting a coherent or “certain” historical narrative. In short, Brown’s novels serve less as a demonstration of the historiography of his essays

¹⁷ In contrast to Walstein’s attention to public figures or statesmen (i.e. Cicero), the focus of Engel’s histories is on the situation of the “common” man: “The general and the statesman have arduous duties to perform; and, to teach them their duty, is of use: but the forms of human society allow few individuals to gain the station of generals and statesmen. ...But though few may be expected to be monarchs and ministers, every man occupies a station in society in which he is necessarily active to evil or to good” (151). Though Engel is aware that “human affairs are infinitely complicated” and “the condition of no two beings is alike”, an “exact similitude is not required to render an imaginary portrait useful to those who survey it” (154). This imaginary portrait of human affairs should relate incidents “which most forcibly suggest to the reader the parallel between his state and that described, and most strongly excite his desire to act as the feigned personages act. These incidents must be arranged so as to inspire, at once, curiosity and belief, to fasten the attention, and to thrill the heart” (154). Engel’s theory of historical “portraits,” in short, offer a theory of the function of the novel: the novel represents characters the reader can identify with in order to both entertain (“thrill”) and instruct (in how to “to act”) its audience. Although “Walstein’s School” criticizes the “sentimental softness” of most novels’ treatment of “love and marriage” (two primary “relations” of the “common man”), it is notable that Engel’s historical aesthetics relies upon the formal conventions of the sentimental genre, in that it seeks to move the reader’s “heart” through an identification with the primary characters of the text.

than an exploration of a historicism in crisis. Interpreting Brown's essays as the key to his fiction ultimately leads to a reading of his novels as formal failures since they consistently fall short of producing the type of explanatory narrative required by texts such as "Walstein's School." Rather than holding Brown's novels to the apparent standard of his historical essays as Emerson does, it is more productive to read Brown's work in both of these genres as exploring the problems inherent in producing a coherent (historical) narrative. Texts such as "Walstein's School" and *Wieland* explore the formal and aesthetic challenges of crafting historical narratives, and as such are more concerned with what drives narrative production as well as the form(s) these narratives take rather than the "coherence" of the product itself. Brown's texts explore, in other words, the forces that both drive and undermine the construction of historical meaning. In Brown's work and sentimental historicism more generally, this force, I am suggesting, is the more shadowy figure of time itself—the pressure or pull exerted upon the body which prompts both the creation and dissolution of historical narrative. In *Wieland*, the pressure of time falls primarily upon the character of Clara; through her attempts to make sense of the uncertainties of her past, the novel interrogates how the feeling body is seduced into (the production of) history.

Before turning to a reading of *Wieland*, it should be noted the primary distinction that may be drawn between Brown's essays and his novels is that his fictional interrogation of (sentimental) historicism focuses more extensively on the impact of the pressure of time on the body (of the narrator), its seductive element or pull. Yet even Brown's essays hint at the seductive quality of time, which we can see if we attend to the formal features of these texts. Perhaps following in Brown's own blurring of history and

fiction, critics have often failed to remark on the fictionalized form of “Walstein’s School” and taken this essay as an unproblematic direct statement of Brown’s theories of history and romance without reckoning with the essay’s fictional qualities. Emerson, for example, does not remark at length upon the function of the fictional author of the essay nor upon the potential complications this creates for a reading of “Walstein’s School.” The distance between Brown and the fictional author is further reinforced by the framing of the piece as a translation: “From the German of Krants of Gotha” (145). Most likely, these formal features of the essay are disregarded because the text builds on the theory of fiction and history detailed in Brown’s (signed) “The Difference Between History and Romance.” In this essay, Brown argues that the author of historical narratives “is a dealer, not in certainties, but probabilities, and is therefore a romancer.”¹⁸ However, though the content of “Walstein’s School” stresses the importance of a historical narrative or system as a way to eliminate (or at least reduce) the uncertainties of history, the form of the essay implies otherwise. The framing of “Walstein’s School” as a translated review from a German scholar raises questions about the relation between aesthetic form and historical narrative. The fictional persona of Krants and the presentation of the piece as a translation from an unnamed translator (presumably Brown) introduces a measure of distance or imprecision into a text that is presumably about eliminating uncertainty. The reader is kept several degrees removed from the subjects of the text, Walstein and Engel, as well as from the author, Krants, whose own relation to the two historians remains unclear. Brown’s comments on the uncertainty inherent in

¹⁸ Brown’s essay was published in April 1800 in *The Monthly Magazine and the American Review* vol. II, issue 5, 251-253. Cited from the Charles Brockden Brown Archive. brockdenbrown.cah.ucf.edu.

writing historical narratives in his later essay also indicate that he chose to frame “Walstein’s School” as a foreign translation in order to stress this point. Concerning the possibility of certainty in historical narrative, Brown writes: “That which is done beneath my own inspection, it is possible for me certainly to know and exactly to record; but that which is performed at a distance, either in time or place, is the theme of foreign testimony.”

Similar to the structure of an epistolary novel (such as *Wieland*), the framing of “Walstein’s School” as a translation introduces a measure of temporal distance into the form of Brown’s essay. Lloyd Pratt (2010) notes that a letter “imagines a shared sense of time linking addressee to signatory, while implicitly acknowledging the lag time separating the two” (19). Like a letter, a translated essay has passed through and been reshaped by multiple hands and so traversed not only the distance of space but also of time in order to reach its (American) audience. The type of temporal and spatial distance built into the form of a translated text is counterbalanced by the intimacy of the genre, which seeks to adhere faithfully to the original or, viewed the other way around, to draw the “foreign” text close. This interplay of intimacy and distance present in the translated text begins to hint at the seductive quality of time which confronts the weaver of a narrative, whether she be a historian, narrator, translator, or, in the case of “Walstein’s School,” all three. Like translating a foreign text, approaching a particular historical moment (in or through a text) entails submitting to the seductive temporal dynamic of intimacy and distance: the pull to draw close to the moment (d)riven by the uncertainty of distance.

The question of distance and intimacy built into the form of the text is echoed in the topic of the essay as well, which explores the similarities and differences between Walstein's style of writing history and his students' work. Krants opens his essay with a remark on the close bond formed between Walstein and his cadre of pupils: "They gradually separated themselves from the negligent and heedless crowd, cleaved to each other, and frequently met to exchange and compare ideas. Walstein...frequently admitted them to exclusive interview, and, laying aside his professional dignity, conversed with them on the footing of a friend and equal" (145). Walstein's works are read by his students "with great attention" and "considered as...specimens of the manner in which history was to be studied and written" (145). Because of the intimate bond between teacher and student(s), Krants remarks, with a touch of irony, it is "[n]o wonder that they found few defects in the model; that they gradually adopted the style and spirit of his composition, and, from admiring and contemplating, should, at length, aspire to imitate" (145). The similarities between these "imitations" and the style of their mentor is so pronounced that the "works of Walstein and his disciples were hastily ascribed to the same hand" (145). While Krants clearly endorses Walstein's historical method, the irony of his description of the pupils' ready imitation of their mentor's style ("no wonder that") as well as his assessment of the "hasty" attribution of their work to a single author suggests that for Krants an intimacy with one's source is not the only standard or value of historical narrative.

Indeed, Krants cautions against the accuracy of the hasty appraisal of the similarities between the works of Walstein and those of his disciples. He notes readers are more apt to seek out connections than discrepancies: "All observers, indeed, are, at

the first and transient view, more affected by resemblances than differences” (145). For Krants, the resemblance of style should not obscure the differences separating each work. Even while seeking to imitate their mentor, the disciples craft texts unique to their own particular concerns: “It could not but happen...that the criterion of excellence would be somewhat modified in passing through the mind of each; that each should have his peculiar modes of writing and thinking” (145). Though his pupils attempt to intimately adhere to Walstein’s method, each of their (re)productions introduces a measure of difference or distance from his original model. Krants’ casual explanation of this difference—“It could not but happen”—takes for granted the inevitability of the gap inherent in the act of imitation. For Krants (as for Walstein) the “original,” whether it be a particular historical moment or a style, is a vanishing point that the writer or historian can only ever approximate. The effort to reproduce Walstein’s style therefore “could not but” produce texts different from that which they seek to imitate. For Krants, though, the inability to remain entirely intimate with the original represents a productive difference rather than a failure. While both Walstein and his pupils’ work “embraced the same scheme of accounting for events,” there were pronounced “marks of difference in the different nature of the themes that were adopted, and of the purpose which the productions of each writer seemed most directly to promote” (146). These mark(s) of difference between Walstein and his pupils mirror the inherent uncertainty of the historian’s narrative project. Both the pupils’ style and their explanatory narratives (insofar as they are separable) strive for an impossible intimacy with an originary past: their writing seeks to imitate Walstein’s “scheme of accounting” to make sense of a decisive historical moment or figure. In “Walstein’s School,” accepting the inevitability

of the distance inherent in both of these approximations is necessary to the historian's method. As Freeman argues, the historian must make due with (seductive) traces of the past rather than its full presence. The uncertainty of history is both what drives the historian and what dictates that he will only ever be able to produce an approximation—an intimate but imperfect historical narrative. Krants stresses the productive difference of each attempt to imitate or approximate, for it is Walstein's disciples' ability to navigate this dynamic of intimacy and distance that enables them to produce a wealth of texts that read history from a range of perspectives.

The formal interplay between intimacy and distance in "Walstein's School" figures prominently in *Wieland* as well. One of the ways this dynamic emerges is through Brown's adaptation of the conventions of the epistolary novel. Pratt notes that as "the epistolary form finds its way into the novel, it is stripped of some of its commonsense associations with delay and disjuncture. Through the artifice of the novelistic universe, the letter is refigured to signify the simultaneity of characters living at a geographic distance—the 'meanwhile'" (19). The form of the epistolary novel compresses the (temporal and spatial) delay or distance of the letter into a narrative simultaneity: even if written weeks or months apart, one letter follows the other in the diegetic space of the narrative. However, even within the epistolary novel's temporal and spatial compression, delay or distance remains inherent in the genre's form: "the letter never completely sheds its association with delay—indeed, plots often turn on epistolary delay—and so the epistolary novel is much less about simultaneity than would first appear to be the case..." (19). Brown plays with these temporal and formal dynamics of the epistolary genre in *Wieland* in order to tease out the varied ways time impacts the

production of (historical) narratives. He frames the novel as Clara's explanatory letter to a close friend who has inquired into the "depth of [her] distresses" (7). However, while Brown's text borrows some of its conventions, *Wieland* is not quite an epistolary novel. Indeed, Clara expresses her aversion to the process of (letter) writing. The first line of the text is "I feel reluctant in complying with your request" (7). As this opening indicates, the conversation between Clara and her friend is entirely one sided. The novel is framed as the response to a request made before the beginning of the text itself which the reader is not privy to. It is unclear whether this request was made orally or in writing. Like the epistolary novel, *Wieland* both gestures backward in time to a solicitation made before the production of the narrative as well as forward to the addressee's eventual receipt of the text. However, the reader never hears from Clara's friend, who remains unnamed throughout the novel. It is therefore uncertain if Clara's friend ever receives the text, although the publication of the novel appears to indicate her addressee has read the text and obeyed Clara's desire for a wider audience: "If it be communicated to the world, it will inculcate the duty of avoiding deceit" (7). The novel therefore gestures toward the future delivery of the letter into the hands of her friend while remaining ambiguous on whether or not this exchange ever occurs. Indeed, the final chapter is dated *three years* after the events of the previous chapter, which appears to indicate that Clara has withheld rather than sent her narrative. In short, if *Wieland* is an epistolary novel, it is a decidedly hermetic one. It is also characterized by a complex intertwining of temporal compressions and delays. The absence of an (epistolary) interlocutor¹⁹ makes Clara's

¹⁹ In a sense, Brown makes up for the absence of an interlocutor by introducing other (authorial) voices *within* Clara's own narrative. At significant moments of the plot in *Wieland*, Brown shifts narrative control away from Clara to other characters in the

“letter” one prolonged, simultaneous narration (which is further reinforced by the absence of the dated letters typical of the epistolary genre). The disjunction between the final chapter and the one preceding it, however, brings to the fore the temporal delay underlying the epistolary novel’s apparent simultaneity. In playing with some of the generic conventions of the epistolary novel, Brown’s text mobilizes the temporal dynamics adhering in their form and so further compounds the novel’s interrogation of the temporality of sentimental historicism.

In *Wieland*, the uncertainty of history is first registered through the mysterious figure of the elder Wieland, the deceased patriarch of the family. After Clara’s opening address to her unnamed friend, she proceeds to detail the ancestry of the Wieland family beginning with her grandfather’s birth in Saxony. She relates how her father, a man of “morose and gloomy reflection,” converts to Protestantism after chancing to encounter the writings of the Camisards and embarks for America to preach to the North-American Indians (9). After settling along the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia, he discovers that “a nearer survey of savage manners...shook his resolution” and instead devotes his time to raising a family and the cultivation of his farm estate, Mettingen (11). However, the elder Wieland remains haunted by his abandoned evangelical mission. As he ages, he becomes convinced his hesitations to perform his religious duty will incur some form of mortal retribution: “He did not describe this penalty. It appeared to be nothing more for some time than a sense of wrong. ...Time, instead of lightening the burden, appeared to add to it. At length he hinted to his wife, that his end was near. His imagination did not

novel, most notably to Carwin (his “explanation”) and her brother Wieland (his confession). If Clara’s hermetic letter is never met with a responding voice from without, Brown allows her narrative to encounter a response from within.

prefigure the mode or the time of his decease, but was fraught with an incurable persuasion that his death was at hand” (14). The elder Wieland is convinced nothing can be done to expiate his offense. He was allowed a measure of time to perform his duty and because of his delay must now suffer the consequences.

On the night he believes his fate is approaching, the elder Wieland lies awake watching the clock whose midnight toll calls him to worship at the temple he built in the rocky hills surrounding his farm: “Now frequent and anxious glances were cast at the clock. Not a single movement of the index appeared to escape his notice. As the hour verged towards twelve his anxiety visibly augmented. ...At length the hour was spent, and the clock tolled. The sound appeared to communicate a shock to every part of my father’s frame” (15). He departs for his nightly service while his wife remains behind, anxiously watching out of a bedroom window facing the temple. Suddenly, she sees a flash as the temple is illuminated from within: “A gleam diffused itself over the intermediate space, and instantly a loud report, like the explosion of a mine, followed. ...The gleams which had diffused themselves far and wide were in a moment withdrawn, but the interior of the edifice was filled with rays” (16). Her brother, a surgeon, hears the sound and rushes to the temple. When he reaches the summit, he sees what “resembled a cloud impregnated with light. It had the brightness of flame, but without its upward motion. It did not occupy the whole area, and rose but a few feet above the floor. No part of the building was on fire. As he went forward the light retired, and, when he put his feet within the apartment, utterly vanished” (17). Clara’s uncle finds the elder Wieland stretched across the floor of the temple, his body burned and his right arm “exhibit[ing]

marks as of having been struck by some heavy body” (17). Shortly thereafter the elder Wieland expires, his body decaying rapidly into “crawling putrefaction” (18).

Though Clara initially treats this narrative as a curious event in her family’s past, it becomes clear as the story progresses that Brown situates the elder Wieland’s mysterious end as the bedrock of the novel. The elder Wieland’s death operates as a controlling figure for the uncertainty of history throughout Clara’s narrative. More importantly, the lingering question of his end registers the pressure time exerts on the individual body to make sense of the past—that is, to craft a history. As in “Walstein’s School,” the “facts” of this decisive historical event remain inherently uncertain. Indeed, Brown frames the event of the elder Wieland’s death as a fragmented narrative told from multiple perspectives. First the reader is provided with the wife’s account as she watches from the window, and later with the story of Clara’s uncle, the first to arrive on the scene. Before his death, the elder Wieland also provides his own (incomplete) narrative of what transpired in the temple:

By his imperfect account, it appeared, that while engaged in silent orisons, with thoughts full of confusion and anxiety, a faint gleam suddenly shot athwart the apartment. His fancy immediately pictured to itself, a person bearing a lamp. It seemed to come from behind. He was in the act of turning to examine the visitant, when his right arm received a blow from a heavy club. At the same instant, a very bright spark was seen to light upon his clothes. In a moment, the whole was reduced to ashes. This was the sum of the information which he chose to give. There was somewhat in his manner that indicated an imperfect tale. My uncle was inclined to believe that half the truth had been suppressed. (17)

What is notable about the elder Wieland’s narration is that, aside from the mention of “a person bearing a lamp,” it contributes little to what is already known to the reader from the combined accounts of the wife and uncle. Even this new piece of information is questionable, since Wieland attributes it to a production of his “fancy.” Rather than

clarify the event through a reliable first-person narration, Brown instead elects to stress the partial and tentative quality of individual (historical) accounts: Wieland's is an "imperfect tale" that only relays the "information which he chose to give" while "half the truth" remains untold. It is uncertain whether the elder Wieland is unwilling to communicate the rest of the tale or unable to, either because of his injuries or some more mysterious reason. What the whole "truth" of the event entails (if anything) is never revealed in the novel. Numerous natural and supernatural explanations are entertained, the most prominent of which are divine retribution and spontaneous combustion,²⁰ but the ultimate fate of the elder Wieland remains uncertain at the novel's close. Even the later chapters that unravel the narrative's seemingly supernatural events fail to definitively account for what happened to the elder Wieland (among other things). For Brown, this is precisely the point. The "truth" of the Wieland patriarch's death, and history more

²⁰ Reflecting on her father's death for the first but no means last time in the novel, Clara wonders: "Was this the penalty of disobedience? this the stroke of a vindictive and invisible hand? Is it a fresh proof that the Divine Ruler interferes in human affairs, meditates an end, selects and commissions his agents, and enforces, by unequivocal sanctions, submission to his will? Or, was it merely the irregular expansion of the fluid that imparts warmth to our heart and our blood caused by the fatigue of the preceding day, or flowing, by established laws, from the condition of his thoughts?" (17). Brown provides a footnote on spontaneous combustion, citing instances first published in foreign medical journals in February and May of 1783 and reprinted in translation in the Philadelphia *American Museum* in 1792 (n6, 18). The case cited in these articles is that of a priest named Bertholi, whose death Brown clearly used as inspiration for the fate of the elder Wieland: Bertholi was said to have burst into flames while praying, his arm exhibited a heavy bruise, and his body began to decay quickly after expiring. Brown's footnote appears to lend credence to spontaneous combustion as the "actual" explanation of the elder Wieland's death, especially since it appears to be in line with Brown's intention for his novel to "correspond with the known principles of nature" (4). However, while this explanation may be more "scientifically" sound, it is neither verified nor disproved in the novel as the actual cause of the elder Wieland's death. It is simply offered as a more "natural" explanation alongside the supernatural one of divine retribution.

generally, does not reside in the details of what happened that night but rather in what meaning those left behind make of the uncertainty of the past.

Brown provides one final perspective on the elder Wieland's death: Clara's. It is here we begin to see more clearly the seductive quality of time in *Wieland*, for Clara's narration intertwines the question of her father's fate with her bodily response to its uncertainty. She relates that at the time of her father's death she was just a child, but "the impressions that were then made upon me, can never be effaced. I was ill qualified to judge respecting what was then passing; but as I advanced in age, and became more fully acquainted with these facts, they often became the subject of my thoughts" (18). The figure of her father haunts Clara's narrative, putting pressure on her to provide an explanatory account despite the scant details available to her. Yet in spite of the gruesome nature of his death and the familial disruptions it caused (her mother also died shortly thereafter), the question of her father's mysterious end is not a traumatic one for Clara. Quite the opposite. She notes that her "reflections" on her father's death "never conducted me to certainty, but the doubts that existed were not of a tormenting kind. ...My wonder was excited by the inscrutableness of the cause, but my wonder was unmingled with sorrow or fear. It begat in me a thrilling, and not displeasing solemnity" (30). That the doubts over her father's death elicit "solemnity" ("observance of ceremony," *OED*) rather than sadness or terror indicates the reverential quality of these reflections as well as their repeated occurrence.

More importantly, the repetition of these questions is connected with a form of pleasure—"not displeasing"—rather than with the more painful (and unwilling) repetition typically associated with trauma. Clara's reflections on her father's fate represent an

embodied response to historical uncertainty; her doubts “excite” and “thrill” her sensations. Brown here registers the lingering uncertainty of the elder Wieland’s death through the medium of Clara’s bodily pleasure in order to explore the seductive pressure of time. “Time” in this passage is figured as the (pleasurable) pressure of historical uncertainty on the body. This pressure acts as a seductive force that elicits both a bodily and a narrative response. For in addition to evoking a form of pleasure, the seductive pressure of time also incites Clara to the production (and dissolution) of narratives explaining her father’s death. Her admission that her solemn reflections “never conducted [her] to certainty” indicates that Clara is continually engaged in making and remaking histories (explanatory narratives) of her father. In linking the production of these narratives with a form of embodied pleasure, Brown is remarking on the seductive quality of time and its function within histories grounded in the feeling body—that is, within sentimental historicism. Through Clara’s reflections on her father, Brown imagines a form of history set in motion by the seductive pressure of time that intertwines the body, pleasure, and narrative. As Clara’s opening meditation on her father’s death begins to indicate, in *Wieland* it is time that seduces the feeling body into (and out of) histories that make meaning of the past’s uncertainty.

Along with other contemporary theorists of the relation between the body and history, most notably Burke, Brown conjoins the production of historical narrative with the reading of historical texts. For Burke, historical documents are more than simple indexes of the past. In his theory of history, the reading of a historical text (or artifact) is the crucial medium through which the historian enters into a feeling relation with the past. Through the exercise of sympathy, the historian feels his way into (or along with)

the author and historical period of the text. Within Burke's historical method, this process simultaneously facilitates a deeper understanding of a particular era's sentiments and refines the historian's own capacity to feel (i.e. his "sensibility").

As with many early American seduction novels concerned with the role of fiction in the new republic, *Wieland* stages multiple scenes of reading throughout the narrative. While other early novels would often include scenes of reading fiction in order to instruct their readers on how to properly interpret texts, in *Wieland* Brown notably focuses significant attention on the reading of "non-fiction" or historical texts:²¹ memoirs, religious tracts, court documents, and newspapers. Though Brown is undeniably invested in the politics of reading fiction in the young republic, *Wieland* also stages several crucial scenes that center on the reading of texts outside of the novel genre. In these scenes, Brown explores the operation (and at times the limits) of sentimental historicism's method of sympathetic reading. For example, after her friend (and love interest) Pleyel fails to arrive for an arranged meeting, Clara fears some harm has befallen him. Seeking distraction as well as solace, she turns to an important document left behind by her father:

The state of my mind naturally introduced a train of reflections upon the dangers and cares which inevitably beset an [sic] human being. By no violent transition was I led to ponder on the turbulent life and mysterious end of my father. I cherished, with the utmost veneration, the memory of this man, and every relique connected with his fate was preserved with the most scrupulous care. Among these was to be numbered a manuscript, containing memoirs of his own life. The narrative was by no means recommended by its eloquence but neither did all its value flow from my relationship to the author. Its stile [sic] had an unaffected and picturesque simplicity. The great variety and circumstantial display of the

²¹ As noted above (n8), the distinction between politics and aesthetics, or non-fiction and fiction, is a later historical formation. Indeed, most early novels contain a foreword or address to the reader that asserts the narrative which follows is grounded in "fact" or "truth." The point here is that in *Wieland* Brown does not contain his scenes of reading to novels alone but also explores how other genres of texts both elicit sympathy and inform historical understanding.

incidents, together with their intrinsic importance, as descriptive of human manners and passions, made it the most useful book in my collection. (66)

As a devoted daughter, Clara has preserved the personal effects of her father as living memorials of his life (and his death). However, Clara states the “value” of her father’s memoirs does not reside entirely in her “relationship to the author.” As Brown makes clear, this manuscript is significant to Clara both because of her personal connection to the author and as a historical document facilitating insight into a previous historical period. As an artifact of a particular historical period, the elder Wieland’s manuscript operates as a medium for the reader to engage with the past through the exercise of sympathy. Hence Clara considers the memoir the “most useful book in her collection” because it provides sympathetic insight into the “manners and passions” of a historical period through the figure of her father. As in Burke’s theory of (sympathetic) historical reading, in this scene Clara decides to read the manuscript not only to gain further insight into her father and his historical era but also to soothe and refine her own feelings. Prior to deciding to read the manuscript Clara describes herself as “distressed” by a “fatal passion” (presumably love or desire); reading about her father’s struggle with his passions helps temper and edify her own (66). In presenting scenes of reading that focus on historical texts, Brown is able to explore the function and usefulness of sentimental historicism’s mode of sympathetic reading as well as interrogate its limits.

In addition to the manuscript, there is one other notable piece of her father’s property Clara preserved: the clock hanging in her room is “the same instrument which formerly hung in my father’s chamber, and which, on account of its being his workmanship, was regarded, by every one of our family, with veneration. It had fallen to me, in the division of his property...” (46). More than a simple material remembrance,

Clara's possession of her father's clock registers both the novel's obsession with time and the insistent pressure of the past on Clara's present. Clara is not only continually engaged in making meaning of her father's uncertain end; the temporality of her daily life is also measured by the ticking of the elder Wieland's timepiece. This is not to say that Clara's past (her father's time) either determines or is fully present in Clara's present. Rather, Brown presents the clock as a seductive trace of the past, an insistent echo out of time that Clara responds to through the medium of her body. In the above scene, Clara hears the clock "give the signal for twelve," the hour of her father's call to service (and death knell), and this sound "awakened a series of reflections, respecting his death" (46). Yet the clock is not only a figure for the past, for it is also structures Clara's present: the ticking of the clock registers both the present and the echo of the past simultaneously.

The figure of the clock is what Freeman refers to as a "hybrid temporal form," an object that intertwines multiple temporal registers at once. In her theory of erotohistoriography, the hybrid temporal object enables the feeling body to stage an encounter with the past in the present. Through this encounter with a hybrid object in the present, the feeling body is able to register traces of the past as well as catch glimpses of potential futures. Here, Clara registers the seductive echo of the past through a pleasurable encounter with her father's clock in the present (as it tolls midnight), which leads her to reflect (once again) on his mysterious end as well as her own uncertain future. In this scene, Brown stresses the lingering pull of traces of the past on the present. In *Wieland*, the past is always returning and being folded into an uncertain relation to the present. Brown drives this point home by pairing the midnight tolling of the clock with Clara's first experience of the mysterious voices that have been confounding her family

circle: “I was not allowed to pursue [her reflections on her father]; for scarcely had the vibrations ceased, when my attention was attracted by a whisper, which, at first, appeared to proceed from lips that were laid close to my ear” (46). As on that fateful night years ago, the tolling of the elder Wieland’s clock heralds an event surpassing comprehension. For Brown, it is not that the past simply repeats itself, but rather that it continues to insist on an intimate relation to the present. Like a mysterious whisper “laid close to [the] ear,” the past continues to resound in all its uncertain and seductive insistence.

As we have seen, *Wieland* explores how the feeling body responds to the seductive pressure of time through the crafting of historical narratives. As we will see below, the form of Brown’s novel also examines sentimental historicism’s specific style of writing history. In *Wieland*, specifically through Clara, Brown theorizes an embodied form of writing that itself registers the effect of time’s pressure on the body. In so doing, the novel is able to pose (if not answer) the question of what power the past continues to have over the present.

III. Living On (the Past)

Wieland’s exploration of sentimental historicism is intimately concerned with the relation between the feeling body and time. Beginning with Clara’s reflections on the elder Wieland, Brown’s novel dwells at length on the feeling subject’s dynamic relation to (the passage of) time. As Mark Seltzer (1978) observes, “[r]eferences to time litter the narrative” and through their repetition activate a “sense of agency” so that time “does in fact take on a causal power in the novel” (85). Indeed, the figure of time is frequently invoked in *Wieland* as a force capable of accomplishing that which human effort or

reason cannot. Consider Clara's conversation with her brother Wieland on the subject of their father's death. Similar to Clara, Wieland confesses he has entertained at least "twenty suppositions" about the cause of his father's death without reaching a definite answer (31). He concludes, "Time may convert one of them into certainty. Till then it is useless to expiate on them" (31). To cite one more instance among many: after her love interest Pleyel wrongly believes Clara to be guilty of an illicit affair, her brother counsels her, "Some new event ... [will] occur to disentangle the maze" (86). The younger Wieland relies on the figure of time as an ameliorating force capable of converting uncertainty to conviction. In Seltzer's reading, both Clara and her brother fail to find "stable explanations within the confused processes of time" and therefore turn "to time itself as an independent source of explanation" or, at least, resolution (86). To recall Stein's distinctions between different forms of time (and history), Seltzer interprets the figure of time in *Wieland* as primarily a form of chronological narrative that "disentangles" a jumble of (uncertain) events into a resolution.

However, understanding time as purely chronological or linear presents a problem for forms of history grounded in the feeling subject's relation to the past. If time is primarily linear, then the past is a receding moment on the horizon and its traces are under constant threat of being eradicated by time's ineluctable slide toward the future. In other words, part of the uncertainty Brown attributes to history is due to the temporal distance between the historian and the events she is writing about. However, sentimental historicism's theory of folding the past into a relation to the present through the feeling body requires a more complex and recursive view of temporality than such a linear figure of time would allow. Brown's vested interest in exploring the past's continuing influence

on the present leads him to interrogate progressive views (and narratives) of time that would leave the past behind. *Wieland* questions the primacy of linear time in the moments where it reflects on the ability of time's forward momentum to eradicate the past. For example, after some time has passed and Clara has (somewhat) recovered from the shock of her brother's murder of his family, she remarks with surprise on how she was able to recuperate from her grief: "Such is man. Time will obliterate the deepest impressions. Grief the most vehement and hopeless, will gradually decay and wear itself out. Arguments may be employed in vain; every moral prescription may be ineffectually tried; ... yet, as day follows day, the turbulence of our emotions shall subside, and our fluctuations be finally succeeded by a calm" (173). As Seltzer argues time, rather than reason or will, appears to be the primary agent of change in this passage. As Clara further confides, she has "not the consolation to reflect that my change was owing to my fortitude or to my capacity for instruction. Better thoughts grew up in my mind imperceptibly" (174). The movement of time forward or "growth" has apparently affected a change of Clara's thoughts rather than any concerted effort on her part. That *Wieland* is suggesting the progression of time (and with it linear forms of temporality) is the primary agent of change, though, is not entirely clear. Another way to read this passage is to see it as part of Brown's reflections on how the passage of time affects the feeling subject's view of the past. Here, Brown explores how (temporal) distance may provide a form of perspective on the past. As Clara remarks while recovering from her initial discovery of the murders: "Slowly, and with intermitted beams, memory revisited me. The scenes that I had witnessed were revived, became the theme of deliberation and deduction, and called forth the effusions of more rational sorrow" (120). With some

distance from the event, the “scene” becomes clearer in Clara’s mind and subject to more “rational” perspective and “deliberation.” It is even more convincing, given Brown’s concerns with the relation between the feeling subject and the past, to read these moments reflecting on the passage of time not as pronouncements but rather as questions: What does time effect or change? How much of the past does the forward movement of time eradicate? If (linear) time does eradicate or change our view of the past, what can we hope to recover of the past? In short, how does the past live on in time and in what form? Brown’s belief in the necessity of remembering (and narrating) the past in order to understand the present leads him to explore these questions in *Wieland*. Through the complex temporal figures of his novel, Brown will suggest that the past lives on (if nowhere else) through an embodied style of writing that registers and responds to the pressure of the past.

In other words, while *Wieland* (and at times Clara) may understand time as an explanatory (linear narrative) force, it is less clear that *Wieland* solely figures time this way. To argue as Seltzer does that time alone is the “cause and explicator” of events in *Wieland* is to simplify the operation of the figure of time in the text, particularly when it comes to the way Brown constructs Clara’s narrative (86). Clara’s narration is notable for both its shifting reflections on (the effects of) time and the way it figures complex temporal forms through an embodied style of writing. In Clara’s narrative, time doesn’t (only) disentangle mazes but also creates them. The complex temporal forms of the text are in part a result of Brown’s framing of Clara’s narration as a retrospective account of the events leading up to her brother *Wieland*’s murder of his family. The “present” of Clara’s writing of the account is interwoven with the past events of the narration, creating

a complex entanglement as Clara loops in and out of the present and past tense, or just as often wavers somewhere between the two. As Seltzer notes, “The ‘now’ of the narrative is increasingly complicated by eruptions of Clara’s present knowledge of events which she, at once, relives and relates. Repeatedly, the tense marker is ‘was now,’ curiously hesitating between present and past” (86).

Take the very beginning of the novel, where Clara intimates what (emotional) state the events of the narrative will drive her to by their conclusion: “My state is not destitute of tranquility. The sentiment that dictated my feelings is not hope. Futurity has no power over my thoughts. To all that is to come I am perfectly indifferent. With regard to myself, I have nothing more to fear. Fate has done its worst. Henceforth, I am callous to misfortune” (7). The curiously matter-of-fact tone of this opening expression of her emotional state is matched by the simple declarative sentence structure of Clara’s statements about her condition. The flat tone of these assertions (which matches the sentiment expressed) is reinforced by the use of a litotes (“not destitute of tranquility”) yet also complicated by the implication that a lack of hope brings with it a form of contentment. Clara’s admission that “futurity” is lost to her evokes a (foreclosed) time beyond the narration at the very moment Clara is beginning her narrative about the past.

Further complicating this temporal loop, Clara goes on to contrast her present view of time with her previous thoughts of the future. After her reflections on her father, Clara recalls the carefree nature of her childhood and adolescence: “The felicity of that period was marred by no gloomy anticipations. The future, like the present, was serene. Time was supposed to have only new delights in store” (20). Here the narrative finds Clara looking back at looking forward, and once again she introjects the “now” of her

writing into the past of the narrative through a retrospective judgment of her adolescent hopes for the future: “was supposed to.” More than a simple contrast between Clara’s past and present, these narrative moments entangle multiple temporal registers at once as Clara is simultaneously affected by her recollection of the past in the present and revises in the present how she interprets the events of her past. As Seltzer observes of Clara’s narration: “Re-vision of the past, not new knowledge, alters both opinion and memory, and the multiplication of references to time increases the ambiguous status of Clara’s knowledge at any time” (86). As we have seen, ambiguity or uncertainty is central to the way Brown conceives of the feeling subject’s relation to time. This ambiguity both drives the production of historical narratives and precipitates their revision when they when they no longer make sufficient meaning in the present. Clara’s “re-visions of the past” find her once engaged in the project of crafting a history (this time her own) in response to the past’s inherent uncertainty. Formally Brown figures these moments of temporal entanglement in *Wieland* as mixtures of past and present tenses or the interruption of one tense into another.

The temporal loops and twists of Clara’s narrative frequently evoke her embodied style of writing, for the shifts between different moments of narrative time often occur as Clara registers in writing the bodily (physical and emotional) effect recollecting the past has on her. Though Clara may claim to be “callous” and “indifferent” at the beginning (which is simultaneously the end) of her narrative, the text of *Wieland* finds her reacting powerfully to the events she is narrating. It appears that if futurity has no power over her thoughts, the past still continues to activate her sentiments and her body. As should be clear by now, this is because *Wieland* is as much concerned with Clara’s “present”

reactions to the events of the narrative as the events themselves. In these moments, Brown explores the effect of the past on the feeling body as it is filtered through the medium of writing—that is, through an embodied form of writing (history).

Consider Clara's introduction of Carwin, the mysterious figure who incites the tragic events of the novel:

I now come to the mention of a person with whose name the most turbulent sensations are connected. It is with a shuddering reluctance that I enter on the province of describing him. Now it is that I begin to perceive the difficulty of the task which I have undertaken; but it would be weakness to shrink from it. My blood is congealed; and my fingers are palsied when I call up his image. Shame upon my cowardly and infirm heart! Hitherto I have proceeded with some degree of composure, but now I must pause. I mean not that dire remembrance shall subdue my courage or baffle my design, but this weakness cannot be immediately conquered. I must desist for a little while.

I have taken a few turns in my chamber, and have gathered strength enough to proceed. Yet have I not projected a task beyond my power to execute? If thus, on the very threshold of the scene, my knees falter and I sink, how shall I support myself, when I rush into the midst of horrors such as no heart has hitherto conceived, nor tongue related? I sicken and recoil at the prospect, and yet my irresolution is momentary. I have not formed this design upon slight grounds, and though I may at times pause and hesitate, I will not finally be diverted from it.
(41)

Recalling the reluctance to write expressed at the very beginning of her narrative, Clara pauses on the threshold of describing Carwin to register the physical effects this “dire remembrance” has on her. Specifically, Clara expresses her hesitation as a form of bodily fatigue that interferes with her (physical) ability to write: she is overcome with a “shuddering reluctance” and “weakness” as she recalls the figure of Carwin; her “blood is congealed” and her “fingers are palsied.” Clara's memory of Carwin evokes such a visceral bodily response that her very fingers are frozen in the act of (written) recollection. Brown here draws attention to the physical effects of writing (history) on the body, specifically when the subject matter involves a mysterious (figure from the)

past. Yet this passage does more than explore the pressure or effect the past may have on the subject's body in the present.

More importantly, this scene intertwines the process of writing with both "literal" and metaphorical references to the body. The passage slides from references to Clara's body as she struggles to perform the physical act of writing to figuring the difficulty of her narrative project through metaphors drawn from the body. Clara remarks that, if simply describing Carwin causes her "knees [to] falter and sink," then how she will "support" herself when she "rush[es] into the midst of horrors such as no heart has hitherto conceived, nor tongue related?" Here Clara describes not only the physical effect writing has on her but also likens her narrative to an (unstable) body "rushing" toward "horrors." The mixture of references to physical and narrative bodies in this passage blurs the boundaries between the two, interweaving the body of the narrator with the "design" or body of the narrative itself. Brown figures the relation between these two "bodies" as reciprocal if not complementary. Though the forward momentum of the narrative may threaten to overwhelm Clara, this passage also stresses the narrative's dependence on Clara's physical body. Through the medium of writing, the narrator (or author) engages in an embodied, reciprocal relation with the past. In Brown's theory of writing history, the production of the body of the narrative both depends and has effects upon the body of the narrator/author. The result is a form of writing that understands the production of historical narrative as a dynamic and embodied process.

Finally, this passage is notable for involving both the body of the narrator and the narrative in complex temporal circuits. Concomitant with the physical effects writing about the past has on her, Clara is also caught between the "rush" of the narrative action

and a desire to “pause” its forward momentum. Her “shuddering reluctance” and “palsied fingers” represent temporal as well as physical markers of the effect of writing: her body and that of the narrative struggle against a state of suspension while hovering on the threshold between “desisting” and “proceeding.” Clara’s palsied hand, frozen in the act of writing, registers her physical response to wavering between two different modes of (narrative) time: pausing and rushing. Through Clara’s embodied response to the prospect of recounting her “dire remembrance” of Carwin, Brown provides a portrait not just of a feeling subject writing about time but a feeling subject moving *in* (and against) time through writing. The multiple references to different tenses and forms of time (i.e., “now come,” “proceed(ed),” “immediately,” “momentary,” “little while,” “at times,” etc.) in a passage that registers the effects of the past on the feeling subject indicate how intimately Brown intertwines the body, time, and writing. To put it another way, Clara’s narrative vacillations stress how writing about time intimately involves the feeling subject in complex temporal circuits.

Since Brown understands historical writing as an embodied process, these complex temporal circuits are also inevitably figured in the form of the narrative itself. Clara’s indication in this passage that she often “hesitates” and “recoils” from her “task” represents the first occurrence in *Wieland* of a formal device Brown employs throughout the rest of the novel: a narrative moment where the authorial voice pauses to interrupt the action in order to reflect on the difficulty of writing about the past. These frequent interruptions of the narrative introduce involuted temporal circuits into the form of the text, as Clara shifts out of the past tense into the present to register a narrative difficulty before returning once again to the past. As noted above, Clara’s “interruptions” of the

narrative indicate that in *Wieland* Brown is concerned with multiple temporal trajectories: the history of her father and brother as well as Clara's "present" moment of narration.

When Clara pauses to reflect on the narrative, these two temporal arcs meet and interact in complex ways beyond a simple shifting of tenses. For instance, in the passage above, Clara does indeed pause as she is momentarily overcome by her (narrative) requirement to describe Carwin: "I must desist for a little while. I have taken a few turns in my chamber, and have gathered strength enough to proceed." Unable to decide between "hesitating" and "rushing" forward, Clara does both. Her confession that she must pause and take a few turns about the room before continuing invokes both of these temporal modes, with the implied pause of the action "behind the scenes" and the seamless onward flow (or rush) of the narrative action in the text itself. The combination of these seemingly opposed temporal vectors (halting or continuing the flow of narrative time) is accomplished through the form of the paragraph break, which signals both the cessation of one narrative unit and the beginning of another. Clara's "pause" occurs between the lines of the two paragraphs, and Brown provides no indication of the duration of her "few turns" about the room. It could be a few minutes, or a few hours, before Clara "returns." More interesting than the exact duration of this pause is the way the paragraph break invokes Clara's "present" in the interstices of the text. Brown's indication of Clara's "pause" both within and alongside the form of the text draws attention to her specific ("present") moment of time as well as narrative's capacity to represent temporality.

While it could be argued that such an implied break from the narrative indicates a problem with representing temporality, it is more convincing given Brown's concern with historical narrative that temporality is instead being figured through the complex form of

the text—through its movement from the past tense to the present, followed by a temporal (paragraph) break, and then the resumption of the past-present narrative dynamic. Such a figuration of time in this passage indicates a complex temporal circuit that weaves through various arcs of time both within and alongside the narrative. The temporal loops and twists in *Wieland* suggest the complex forms writing about the past introduces into (or even requires of) a sentimental historical narrative. Through Clara's embodied style of writing, Brown figures the complex involutions of time required by sentimental history through the specific form of the text itself.

Throughout *Wieland*, Brown interrogates how an embodied style of writing registers the pressure of time through the very form of the narrative. In line with the theory of history he expounded in "Walstein's School," Brown figures the temporality informing historical accounts as simultaneously narrative (i.e., linear) and fragmented or uncertain. Consider a pivotal moment in the narration of the events leading up to Wieland's murder of his family, where Brown has Clara once again interrupt the action. Before relating the scene where she discovers the body of her sister-in-law Catharine, Clara pauses to reflect on the difficulty of writing about this past event:

Alas! My heart droops, and my fingers are enervated; my ideas are vivid, but my language is faint; now know I what it is to entertain incommunicable sentiments. The chain of subsequent incidents is drawn through my mind, and being linked with those which forewent, by turns rouse up agonies and sink me into hopelessness.

Yet I will persist to the end. My narrative may be invaded by inaccuracy and confusion; but if I live no longer, I will, at least, live to complete it. What but ambiguities, abruptness, and dark transitions, can be expected from the historian who is, at the same time, the sufferer of these disasters? (112)

Once again Brown references the hand of the author which, as before, is simultaneously paused in its "enervated" or palsied state and rushing forward with the writing of the

narrative. Clara's hesitation builds suspense for the gruesome scene she is about to narrate even as it allows her to halt if not reverse the flow of the narrative. In a more fleshed out version of the previous passage, where Clara momentarily recoils from her narrative "design," her hesitation here between scenes provides insight into the overall form of the narrative arc: the "chain of subsequent incidents" becomes clear in her mind and are "linked with those which forewent."

Yet this clear vision of the chain of events is complicated by Clara's admission that her narrative is vulnerable to "confusion" and "inaccuracy." Because she is both the "historian" and the "sufferer of these disasters," the links of the narrative chain are often occluded or broken by "ambiguities, abruptness, and dark transitions." Clara's own involvement with the events of the narrative provide both an intimate awareness of their narrative arc and inform the way she is able (or unable) to figure their narrative relation. Based on passages such as these, it may appear that the feeling subject's intimacy with the events of the narrative are a hindrance to rather than a catalyst for a proper historical account. Yet as we have seen, history cannot be written from a neutral or disembodied perspective for Brown. It is always partial and retains elements of uncertainty or "ambiguity." When the historian is also the subject or "sufferer" of the history being written, this ambiguity is compounded but the result is also a more intimate account since for Brown the historian's reactions to the events (both past and present) *are* part of that history rather than hindrances to it.

For instance, after being told Catharine's children (Clara's nieces and nephews) have also been murdered, Clara employs such a "dark transition" as she elects to skip over the details of the event: "Allow me, friends, to close my eyes upon the after-scene.

Why should I protract a tale which I already begin to feel is too long? Over this scene at least let me pass lightly. Here, indeed, my narrative would be imperfect. All was tempestuous commotion in my heart and in my brain. I have no memory for ought but unconscious transitions and rueful sights” (119). Once more Clara’s embodied response to the unfolding of the narrative influences how she represents the form of the events in writing. As above, Clara expresses both an awareness of the narrative arc as well as a confusion over its (temporal) connections. Her request for permission to “close [her] eyes” upon the scene implies she recalls the chain of events even as she confides that the “tempestuous commotion” in her brain and heart clouds their connection into a series of “unconscious transitions.” Employing a narrative arc in turn continuous and fragmentary while weaving between multiple vectors of (narratorial) time, *Wieland* builds complex temporal figures into the form of the text itself. Moreover, the twists and turns between these (narrative) temporal forms are always accompanied (or accomplished) by references to Clara’s embodied style of writing. Brown thereby binds together the complex temporal forms of the narrative with Clara’s (sentimental) body to craft a text that theorizes how sentimental historicism’s embodied writing registers the forms and pressure of time.

The narrative’s interweaving of Clara’s sentimental body with complex temporal forms suggests Brown’s answer to the novel’s question about the (after)life of the past. *Wieland*’s exploration of an embodied style of writing that (narratively) responds to the pressures of time suggest that the past lives on through the specific form of the text. As we have seen, Clara’s embodied style of writing registers time through its figuration of complex textual and narrative forms. Her narrative’s folding of the past into relation to

the present figures the complex circuits of time through its very form. As Clara's text demonstrates, the past lives on as it is figured in writing and her embodied style of writing sustains the past by being receptive to its pressure. Furthermore, Brown's theory of sentimental historicism suggests writing about the past sustains the life of the writer since the writer intertwines her body with the body of the narrative. Take one final instance of Clara's interruption of the narrative, as she pauses (for the last time) before narrating the scene where she contemplates murdering her brother before he can murder her:

Here let me desist. Why should I rescue this event from oblivion? Why should I paint this detestable conflict? Why not terminate at once this series of horrors?—Hurry to the verge of the precipice, and cast myself for ever beyond remembrance and beyond hope?

Still I live: with this load upon my breast; with this phantom to pursue my steps; with adders lodged in my bosom, and stinging me to madness; still I consent to live!

Yes, I will rise above the sphere of mortal passions; I will spurn at the cowardly remorse that bids me seek impunity in silence, or comfort in forgetfulness. My nerves shall be new strung to the task. Have I not resolved? I will die. The gulf before me is inevitable and near. I will die, but then only when my tale is at an end. (169)

As throughout the narrative, Clara here binds her life to the body of the narrative.

Indeed, she figures the two as coterminous. She has “resolved” to die but “only when [her] tale is at an end.” Clara understands the very act of writing her narrative as the only thing keeping her alive. As she elsewhere asserts, “When I lay down the pen the taper of life will expire: my existence will terminate with my tale” (164). Her expression in the passage above of a desire or “consent” to live (at least as long as the tale is unfinished) colors the way we read the numerous digressions and pauses in *Wieland*; rather than a lack of formal cohesion on Brown's part, these narrative dilations can be read as Clara's method for lengthening the “taper of [her] life.” The form of the narrative body—its

duration, temporal twists, and complex narrative arc—is synonymous in the text with the form of Clara’s bodily life. By grafting together the vitality of Clara’s body with that of the narrative, Brown suggests that history (and the historian) lives on through writing; in particular, through sentimental historicism’s method of figuring complex forms of time through an embodied style of writing. In addition to consenting to live on, Clara’s expression “Still I live” is also one of surprise that the writing of the narrative has been able to sustain her life for this long. Why consent to live on and write this history, when the past is like an adder “lodged in [her] bosom...stinging [her] to madness”? Because, as Brown demonstrates in this passage, writing history in some way sustains life even as it sustains the past. The past lives on through the form of historical writing, and writing figures as well as sustains the (past and present) life of the historian.

Drawing on while also interrogating the methodological tools of queer theory, this chapter has explored a renewed understanding of seduction as a trope that (re)figures the affective relations among time, the body, and the production of narrative form in the novel. More than just a register of political content, seduction in *Wieland* concerns the feeling body’s production of narratives in and as a response to the pressures of time. Through its deployment of the seduction plot, Brown’s novel examines how narratives are produced more than the precise (political) content of specific narratives. In so doing, Brown (and this reading) are not attempting to separate form and content, or aesthetics and politics. Rather, attending to the form of seduction in *Wieland* offers insight into how the production of narrative histories operates in, on, and through time. In *Wieland* the seductive force of time acts on the feeling body to produce meaningful temporal forms and narratives—to produce history itself. Such a reading does not evade politics

but inquires into its formation at the intersection of (feeling) bodies, time, and (historical) narratives. By focusing on the form of history in *Wieland*, and how this history is formed through seduction, this reading engages the narrative production of meaning as well as that production's intimate ties to the body (and its pleasure and pains). For Brown, the novel form functions as a meditation on what it means to write history. Reading the form of seduction in *Wieland* reveals the linkages among time, narrative form, and the body that inform the literary and historical (or aesthetic and political) project Brown undertook across his novels, essays, and histories—the project of rethinking the past's relation to the present in order to produce more meaningful narratives (of and for) the future.

As for Clara's future, it would appear her desire to live wins out in the end, or more accurately that the writing of the narrative has not only sustained but revitalized her life, for the ending of *Wieland* finds her reflecting on the events of the novel from the remove of several years. The final chapter is preceded by a bracketed note: “[*Written three years after the foregoing, and dated at Montpellier*]” (173, italics original). Much to her surprise (and perhaps regret), Clara does not die after narrating the climactic scenes of the narrative. “I imagined that I had forever laid aside the pen.... My destiny I believed to be accomplished, and I looked forward to a speedy termination of my life with the fullest confidence. ... [Y]et here I am, a thousand leagues from my native soil, in full possession of life and of health, and not destitute of happiness” (173). Yet this leap forward in time (and space) also represents a temporal recursion. The end of the novel finds Clara living in Montpellier, the city that served as the seat of the Camisard sect whose writings influenced the elder Wieland to immigrate to America. The ending of *Wieland* therefore returns to what is effectively the primal scene of the novel, the life and

mysterious death of the patriarch of the Wieland family. This jump forward three years rapidly progresses the narrative timetable even as it circles back in time to the beginning of the novel, creating a temporal loop that appears to inextricably bind Clara's present (and future) with the past. Even this far removed in time and space, Brown suggests, the past continues to return to put pressure on the present.²² This return of (and to) the past is further stressed by Brown's choice to relocate Clara from her "native soil" to the "ancient world" of France. She tells the reader she eventually relented to her uncle's suggestions to move from Mettingen to Europe: "Preparations were easily made, and after a tedious passage, we set our feet on the shore of the ancient world. The memory of the past did not forsake me; but the melancholy which it generated, and the tears with which it filled my eyes, were not unprofitable. My curiosity was revived, and I contemplated, with ardour, the spectacle of living manners and the monuments of past ages" (176). The composition of the narrative and the distance of a few years (as well as a surprise marriage to Pleyel) has also allowed Clara to appreciate the pleasures of directing her sentimental historicism outside of her family circuit, contemplating in proper Burkean fashion the "spectacle of living manners and the monuments of past ages." The final chapter of *Wieland* therefore finds Clara engaged in a more extensive project of sentimental history. Though her vision of the past remains filtered by the "melancholic

²² The much-maligned return of the Louisa Conway subplot is partially remedied by reading it as emblematic of the recursive temporal loops of the final chapter, where Brown progresses the action by returning to the questions raised at the beginning of the novel. The reintroduction of the Louisa Conway subplot is often seen as the "return" of the seduction narrative after the conclusion of the gothic narrative. However, as should be clear, it is misleading to speak of such a return since the entire text of *Wieland* is concerned with the seductive pressure of time and its effects on the body.

tears” in her eyes, she has come to the realization that such tears (and the form of embodied historical understanding they represent) are “not unprofitable.”

Some half-hearted moralizing aside, the novel closes by stressing the continual life and insistence of the past’s pressure. The chapter’s temporal logic, which moves simultaneously forward and back in (narrative) time to recuperate the remains of the past, figures in brief Brown’s final answer to the question of sentimental historicism’s capacity to bring the past to life through its embodied style of writing. For Brown, the past continues to have effects so long as the body is receptive to its seductions and the involuted temporal circuits it sets in motion. Sentimental historicism’s theory of the body as the primary medium or register of history suggests that the past lives on through the feeling subject’s seduction into (and out of) embodied historical narratives that figure the operations of time through their form. As for Brown’s fear, that the past will gradually be erased or eradicated, such a theory also implies that the past will only be forgotten when the body no longer has what Clara calls “the nerves” or “strength” to respond to or continue living with it. It implies, that is, that the past will only be exhausted when the body itself reaches a point of exhaustion. As we will see, however, such a point of bodily and affective exhaustion also holds out the prospect of forging different relations to time and with it the crafting of new histories.

CHAPTER 2: THE TEMPORALITY OF TEARS: EXHAUSTION AND *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*

I. Reading Time

In her critique of sentimentalism in *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977), Ann Douglas singles out Little Eva from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) as the embodiment of all that is wrong (and strangely seductive) about sentimentalism. According to Douglas, Little Eva's "greatest act is dying," and, while she concedes that her death is "not futile," Douglas argues that it remains "essentially decorative" because it "is not particularly effective in any practical sense" (2). Douglas goes on to locate in the "decorative" or "camp" (2) death of Little Eva the prototypical figure for the "indispensible and disquieting comforts of mass culture" (3). In short, Stowe's novel, as well as the rest of the (American) Victorian sentimental literature it indexes, served for Douglas as an "introduction to consumerism" as well as a certain form of commodified femininity (3). Yet for all the force of her criticism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Douglas retains a certain ambivalent attachment to the figure of Little Eva.

¹ She opens her analysis of Stowe's novel with a personal narrative that is, significantly, an anecdote of reading. Douglas recounts that as a child she read "with formative

¹ Douglas implies that much of this ambivalence is related to the form of pleasure the spectacle of Little Eva's death provokes. For Douglas, the "charm" (2) of Little Eva's death scene evokes a disturbing (and hence ambivalent) pleasure, since the image of the dying Eva lingers on in the "reader's fantasy" (2). Douglas here gestures toward future feminist scholarship that would attempt to unpack the relationship between spectatorship, fantasy, and "the gaze." More recently, Laura Hinton argues in *The*

intensity” from a collection of sentimental fiction that was “a legacy from [her] grandmother’s girlhood,” and that, from all of these novels, what she remembers best, “what was for me as for so many others, the archetypical and archetypically satisfying scene in this domestic genre, was the death of Little Eva” (1). While this seemingly naïve or “childish” reading of Stowe’s novel would later give way to one characterized by more critical distance (or at least the desire for it), Douglas’ text betrays a lingering fascination with the figure of Little Eva that cannot quite detach itself from the memory of her early reading.

Arguing against Douglas in *Sensational Designs* (1985), Jane Tompkins asserts that sentimental literature in general and Stowe’s novel in particular performed progressive “cultural work” by deploying stereotypes and other popular discourses to influence a wide audience (122-146). For Tompkins, the “sentimental power” of a figure such as Little Eva resides in her ability to set off a chain of “action taking place in individual hearts,” which is made all the more efficacious by being represented in the easily recognizable form of stereotype (128).² Yet although Tompkins differs with Douglas in virtually every respect, these two influential critics of sentimentalism

Perverse Gaze of Sympathy (1999) that sentimentalism relies upon “a visual power structure gendered male, and a sympathetic spectator whose ‘sentiments’ are sadomasochistic” (2). In a similar vein, Marianne Noble (2000) argues that sentimental sympathy authorizes a masochistic and therefore erotic pleasure for its readers. The pleasure and enjoyment of a scene such as Eva’s death, and sentimental suffering in general, is indeed marked by ambivalence. For my purposes here, however, what is interesting about this ambivalent pleasure is its ability to set off specific temporal disruptions or circuits, as we will see in the discussion of Douglas’ shame below.

² Recent scholarship has challenged the notion that Stowe relied primarily upon an uncritical use of stereotypes to achieve her rhetorical effects. For example, Barbara Hochman argues in “‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ in the ‘National Era’: An Essay in Generic Norms and the Context of Reading” that Stowe deployed old stereotypes (such as the motif of the dying child) in new and even subversive ways that would have been surprising to the original readers of her serialized novel in the *National Era*.

converge in surprising ways around the effect of reading Stowe's novel. As Laura Wexler points out, Douglas' narrative of an (ambivalent) relation to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is uncannily mirrored in Tompkins' interpretation of Stowe's novel.³ Tompkins also begins her analysis of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with an anecdote of reading; unlike Douglas, however, her anecdote is not of an early reading of Stowe's novel but rather of a non-reading or, more specifically, a reading characterized by its *belatedness*. In a confessional tone that echoes Douglas' analysis of her attachment to Little Eva, Tompkins describes retrospectively her first (missed) encounter with Stowe:

Once, during a difficult period of my life, I lived in the basement of a house on Forest Street in Hartford, Connecticut, which had belonged to Isabella Beecher Hooker—Harriet Beecher Stowe's half-sister. This woman at one time in her life had believed that the millennium was at hand and that she was destined to be the leader of a new matriarchy. When I lived in that basement, however, I knew nothing of Stowe, or the Beechers, or of the utopian visions of nineteenth-century American woman. I made a reverential visit to the Mark Twain house a few blocks away, took photographs of his study, and completely ignored Stowe's own house—also open to the public—which stood across the lawn. Why should I go? Neither I nor anyone I knew regarded Stowe as a serious writer. At the time, I was giving my first lecture course in the American Renaissance—concentrated exclusively on Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman—and although *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written in exactly the same period, and although it is probably the most influential book ever written by an American, I would never have dreamed of including it on my reading list. (122)

For Wexler, both Tompkins and Douglas exhibit a similar readerly response to Stowe's novel, or more particularly, an identical way of describing what reading entails and the effects it has. For these two critics, "[t]he problem of reading and responding to sentimentalism takes shape largely as an intimate matter, a question of the individual's

³ Wexler, Laura. "Tender Violence: Literary Eavesdropping, Domestic Fiction, and Educational Reform." In Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*. 9-38. Wexler's larger argument involves a repositioning of sentimentalism as an "imperial project" deployed by the middle class against "different classes and even races" in order to domesticate them (15).

training and sensitivity” (15). According to Wexler, this similar approach to reading as a form of intimate response reduces the act of reading to a question of “personal taste” that obscures the more important issue of “historical positioning” (15). Ultimately, this intimate form of reading registers the “educated middle class” position shared by both Douglas and Tompkins, a position that for Wexler is elided in the intimate response that locates the individual reader in the private space of feeling and taste outside of historical time.

The line of argument advanced by Douglas and later Wexler relies upon an implicit and unexamined separation between feeling and history. Even Tompkins’ efforts at rehabilitating the sentimental novel ultimately splits the difference by locating the work performed by the genre in the vague arena of “culture” somewhere between the putative “private” domain of feeling and the “public” space of politics. As we saw in the case of earlier American sentimental authors such as Brown, this later division between private and public (or sensibility and politics) into separate (and unequal) domains would have made little sense. While Brown and others working within the sentimental tradition interrogated the relation between feeling and politics or history, the question for them was not how to bridge (or preserve) the private/public divide but rather what forms of feeling were more productive politically and historically. Indeed, the operative assumption of sentimentalism is that the quality of one’s feelings (one’s “sensibility”) is inextricably related to one’s politics (one’s political beliefs and acts). The question for such authors therefore becomes a matter of theorizing what forms of feeling are most productive politically rather than whether or not feeling has any relation to politics.

The underlying assumption of Douglas' argument, which continues through current critical scholarship on sentimentalism and figures most prominently in the work of Lauren Berlant, is that the genre forsakes any form of political "realism" by focusing on the "private" affective life of the individual. Berlant offers a succinct version of this criticism in *The Female Complaint* (2008): "The political as a place of acts oriented toward publicness becomes replaced by a world of private thoughts, leanings, and gestures projected out as an intimate public of private individuals inhabiting their own affective changes" (41). The problem with Berlant's critique throughout this text, however, is that "the political" and "the public" are never defined as such but only in opposition to "intimate" publics and private feeling, respectively. In other words, there is a public/private dichotomy operating in Berlant's text that buttresses her critique of sentimentalism yet remains unexamined and undefended. Presented this way, feeling is by definition prohibited from having any political effect or valence. For Berlant, the public is the space of the "real" (and hence realism), which relegates sentimentalism to a fantasy domain that offers "*relief from the political*" (10, emphasis original). As a fantasy, feeling or affect can only evade or at worst distort the "real" realm of the political for Berlant. More importantly, Berlant characterizes the "private world" of feeling as a domain of passivity or failed action; she juxtaposes the impotent "leanings" and "gestures" of "affective change" with the political bravado of "acts oriented toward publicness." Wittingly or not, Berlant's argument thereby reproduces the ideology of separate spheres it putatively sets out to critique by relying upon a private-public binary wherein "private" (and "feeling") operates as the repository of everything Berlant identifies as antithetical to politics and the "public."

At the time Stowe was writing, the gendered rhetoric of “separate spheres” was a more recent historical development and therefore still in flux, although it already had much institutional and cultural support.⁴ The domestic space of the home was identified as the domain of the affective life (presided over by the figure of the loving mother) while the public space of the market and politics was the arena of men. Later literary critics such as Douglas and Berlant have tended to reify this rhetoric of separate spheres, which (in part) determines their dismissive reading of the domestic sentimental novel as politically impotent because of its supposed separation of feeling from politics. However, while the idea of separate spheres was taking shape as the dominant ideology of the period, it is a mistake to interpret the domestic sentimental novel as merely a reflection of this rhetoric. As Leonard Cassuto points out (2009), “The guiding assumption of separate-spheres thinking was that men dominated the professional world

⁴ The historical emergence of separate spheres ideology is beyond the scope of this chapter, and is the result of a complex of economic, (liberal) philosophical, and cultural developments. In brief, the Industrial Revolution resulted in shifting economic conditions that required men to work outside of the home, relegating women to the care of children and the homestead. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon (2004) offers a compelling argument regarding the role played by the “private” space of the home within liberal theories of citizenship in the nineteenth century, suggesting that “[w]ithin sentimental liberalism, the home is not simply an escape from the pressures and exigencies of market competition; rather, it is the highest political good for both men and women: home is the location where freedom is ultimately instantiated” (202). Dillon goes on to show that the constant invocation of this “private” space of freedom in public complicates the simplistic public/private divide of separate spheres ideology. Finally, the rise of domestic manuals and the domestic novel foregrounded the role of women in the care of the home and child-rearing as well as the importance of female education. Stowe’s sister, Catherine Beecher, wrote one of the most influential of these manuals, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (1841). Because the manuals and especially the novels were writing within the sentimental genre, later literary critics have interpreted them as complicit in the power structure of separate spheres ideology. However, as this chapter aims to show, this criticism reifies both the idea of “separate spheres” and the sentimental (domestic) novel and therefore prevents attention to the way sentimental authors such as Stowe theorized the complex relations between feeling and the socio-political realm (or the private and public spheres).

while women managed the personal, household sphere. This ideology never described the reality of everyday life for most Americans, but it certainly affected the way that many of them thought about the world, both at the time and later on (and even now)” (105). The relation between feeling and politics, and more precisely between feeling and action, was something Stowe certainly thought about at great length. As in Brown’s time, the sentimental novel in the mid-nineteenth century, and Stowe’s novel in particular, reflected *on* (rather than merely reflected) the relations between feeling, action, and politics. Presumptively characterizing feeling as “private” and therefore separate from the public or political realm of action simplifies the myriad ways the sentimental novel interrogates rather than reiterates the public/private divide and occludes how novels such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* offer their own theories on the relation between feeling and action.

Douglas and Berlant ultimately fault sentimentalism for failing to engage the political realistically. However, if we do not presume a definition of affect as (solely) private and read Stowe’s novel for its specific theorization of the workings of feeling, what we notice in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is how feeling precipitates the individual into an engaged, pragmatic relation to action (and history). This becomes clearest when we attend to the temporality of feeling in the novel, especially in scenes of affective intensity—i.e., in scenes of tears. By focusing on the temporality of feeling and tears in the novel, I argue *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* presents a creative, pragmatic view of political reality oriented toward the future. For Stowe, the temporality of feeling is future-oriented. Intense emotion in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* opens up previously foreclosed avenues of action oriented toward a precarious yet hopeful future reality. Political reality in

Stowe's novel resides primarily in the domain of the possible, of the future. Though this may sound like a form of utopianism, the novel's consciousness of the future is grounded in an elaborate theory of future-oriented pragmatic feeling. Through what I call the temporal logic of exhaustion, Stowe provides a theory of the relation between feeling, action, and time (futura) in scenes of tears. In these scenes, Stowe's characters are exhausted through intense emotion and pushed to a (temporal) limit which precipitates action oriented toward an uncertain but potential future reality. By reading the temporality of tears in Stowe's novel, we can reevaluate *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* and sentimentalism's relation to (political) realism as a form of pragmatism grounded in future-oriented feeling.

Berlant also frames her critique of sentimentalism as a reading of the forms of temporality offered by the genre. Her "sentimental trilogy" tracks the rise of what she calls the "intimate public sphere."⁵ Similar to Wexler, Berlant criticizes sentimentalism for positioning both its characters and readers outside of time in an ahistorical intimate public populated by (fantasmatic) subjects of "pure feeling." Berlant argues that sentimental aesthetics operate according to a formula of "generalization and transcendence" (FC 26), whereby the reader, by identifying with a character in a novel, is made to transcend her particularity and offered access to a generalized community of intimates united through fellow-feeling. Berlant describes the kind of sympathetic identifications that sentimental novels encourage as providing the reader with the option

⁵ This trilogy includes *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* (1991), *The Queen Of America Goes to Washington City* (1997), and most recently *The Female Complaint* (2008). Berlant's earliest thoughts on sentimentalism and the intimate public sphere were first elaborated in "The Female Woman: Fanny Fern and the Form of Sentiment." (Samuels, 1992).

to “sublimate [her] singularity on behalf of maintaining proximity to a vague prospect of social belonging via the generic or conventional plot that isolates an identity as the desired relay from weakness to strength, aloneness to sociability, abandonment to recognition, and solitary agency to reciprocity” (11). For Berlant, this “transcendence” amounts to little more than a fantasy, in the psychoanalytic sense, one which she ties to the “drive to become unhistorical, to become general through repetition into convention” (14). Ultimately for Berlant, the problem with sentimentalism is the question of its temporal logic; for her, the fantasy of belonging to (if not participating in) a seemingly ahistorical intimate public represents little more than an escape from the vicissitudes of time and, more specifically, the realm of history and politics. To be precise, it is not so much that sentimentalism is entirely “ahistorical” for Berlant, but rather that the form of time it endorses (or appears to require), which she terms “monumental time,” tends toward reifying and transcending historical processes. For Berlant, sentimentalism “seeks out the monumental time of emotional recognition, a sphere of dreaming and memory, and translates that sense into an imaginary realm of possible acting, where agency is somehow unconstrained by the normative conventions of the real as it presents itself” (21). According to Berlant, the temporal logic of sentimentalism tends to freeze time rather than set it in motion and, what is more, it leads to a certain impotence or passivity in the face of “the real.”

In this chapter, I want to argue against this reductive view of sentimentalism’s relation to time. Although sentimentalism may encourage a drive to memorialization, this is not, so to speak, the only way the pendulum swings. The sentimental novel in general, and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in particular, advance myriad (and sometimes

competing) temporal logics not only at the level of content but also in its very form. To put it another way: while Berlant is right to suggest that sentimental aesthetics plays tricks with time, it is less clear that the form of temporal dislocation or disruption the sentimental novel encourages is always primarily that of an ahistorical memorialization. We can already gather a sense of the dislocating effects the sentimental novel may have on a reader's sense of time from the two apparently contrasting narratives that open this chapter. While both Douglas' and Tompkins' responses to Stowe's novel index a specific way of reading based on class, it is not so much the class implications that stand out in this context but rather a more nuanced parallel. What is curiously similar about these two (scholarly) narratives about reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is less how they betray a specific class affiliation or how they memorialize time than the way they involve both Douglas and Tompkins in a temporal feedback loop that sets time in motion rather than freezes it in place.

While these two anecdotes are both presented as memories, the narratives they relate are not situated safely in some monumental past. These narratives of reading exert a force on the present; more importantly, a force that puts the temporality of the present itself into question. First of all, as Wexler notes, these two narratives each evoke an affective response in the present from Douglas and Tompkins, that of shame and regret, respectively, at a perceived betrayal which is related to the course of their own life (and academic) narratives: "Where Douglas betrayed her scholarship by responding to the women, Tompkins betrayed her womanhood by siding with the men" (14). Douglas' shame is the result of a specific temporal circuit. Her critical resistance to the figure of Little Eva in the present conflicts with the memory of the pleasure she experienced while

reading Stowe's novel as a child. Her shame is the effect of this temporal pull back to a moment that is at once remote yet intimate, disavowed yet pleasurable. It is not that this memory and its pleasure cause Douglas to "regress" to a prior stage; rather, the anecdote with which she opens her text mobilizes several distinct temporalities that come into ambiguous contact in the present. This temporal circuit evokes shame because Douglas is confronted with a formative past moment of her life, her reading as a child, which she can neither fully dismiss nor assume.⁶ Shame is the effect of these two temporal trajectories, her childhood reading and her later academic career, colliding in the present moment of the anecdote. Hence the ambiguity of the opening of Douglas' text, which I am suggesting is in part due to the temporal loops it sets in motion as well as the shame this circuit calls forth. Douglas is tempted by the pull of a past pleasure that will not remain past, and the remainder of *The Feminization of American Culture* is in a sense an effort to overpower this pleasure. Her historicizing of sentimental discourse as a collaborative effort between nineteenth-century domestic women and Unitarian ministers to wrestle power from a previous generation of republican (Calvinist) men can also be read as an effort to safely situate and hence defuse the power sentimental discourse possesses to mobilize time in complex and ambiguous ways.

⁶ This definition of shame builds upon Giorgio Agamben's analysis in *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999). For Agamben, shame is less an affect than a structural condition of the divided human subject. He defines shame as the experience of an intimacy that is at simultaneously subjectifying and desubjectifying: "[t]o be ashamed means to be consigned to something that cannot be assumed. But what cannot be assumed is not something external. Rather, it originates in our own intimacy; it is what is most intimate in us" (105). My analysis here is in line with this definition of shame, though it also suggests that shame involves a significant temporal dimension or circuit. The subject's inability to coincide completely with herself, which is Agamben's definition of shame, is ultimately an effect of her dispersal in and through time. In other words, part of what remains most intimate and yet most unassumable in the self is precisely the play of self-identification and -difference that temporality sets in motion.

For Tompkins, as noted above, her regret is related to a form of belatedness in her reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. If Douglas feels shame for spending *too much time* reading sentimental novels, Tompkins experiences regret for *not having time* to read Stowe's text, or more specifically, for having read it *too late* for it to serve the same formative function it did in Douglas' case. However, while Tompkins' anecdote appears at first to express a personal regret or failing, her narrative forges complex connections across time that extend beyond her own story to encompass the interwoven fabric of past and future women. Tompkins' anecdote, in other words, is less a solitary academic narrative than a communal story of the temporal connections between women. Her opening narrative positions her within a lineage of women in and across time, in which she assumes her own place through the very act of recognizing these temporal linkages. Douglas' anecdote also indicates a temporal lineage amongst women, since her edition of Stowe's novel was part of a library that was "a legacy from [her] grandmother's girlhood." But where Douglas seeks to distance herself from this lineage, Tompkins is more invested in tracing its flows and tightening its connections. It is not only that Tompkins is living in the basement of a house once owned by Isabella Beecher Hooker; she is also living in the very *time* that Hooker, as a millennial thinker, gestured toward as the era of prophetic fulfillment. At the moment of writing, Tompkins is living the time Hooker believed would be that of "a new matriarchy." This is another dimension of Tompkins' belatedness in relation to Hooker (and Stowe): her arriving too late to this millennial promise and her living the time which Hooker herself thought would have fulfilled it. Of course, Tompkins' indication that her own moment has not lived up to this prophecy implies her work is in some way reanimating (if not fulfilling) this promise

from the past. All the same, Tompkins' invocation of Hooker's millennial writings makes for a dizzying temporal loop, as Tompkins looks back to Hooker looking forward to her own moment. Like Douglas, then, Tompkins' reading involves her in a complex temporal circuit or involution that is far removed from Berlant's notion of sentimentality's "monumental" or memorial time.

I draw attention to these readings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* not to focus primarily on reader response but to begin to indicate that the power of the sentimental novel is ultimately one of its temporality, a temporality that can also have strange effects on its readers. Of course, one of the effects of reading is that it can play tricks on the reader's sense of time by imbricating her in multiple temporal registers. As Lloyd Pratt argues in *Arches of American Time* (2010), the reading subject is "faced with a relationship to the future in which that future is a disconcertingly undefined vector made so by virtue of the fact that any given present is felt to incline toward several different futures (and pasts) simultaneously" (7). As Pratt also notes, in addition to the temporal effects reading may have on the subject, "an equally complex universe of time defines any individual work of writing if we are willing to recognize it there" (19). For Pratt, this complex universe of time is an unavoidable effect of texts' (and specifically novels') deployment of various genres and tropes that enact multiple and often contrasting temporal registers. In light of Pratt's and others' analysis of the complex temporalities embedded in all literary forms, I want to attend to the specific forms of temporality that are enacted in the sentimental novel. In short, I want to read (for) time in Stowe's novel. Reading time in this context, then, means both registering the strange temporal effects novels may have on the reader's own experience of time, and more significantly, reading for the traces of shifts in

temporality in the form and content of a text. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as I suggest below, these temporal shifts are registered in and around scenes of tears, and more specifically, in scenes of tears which lead to moments of physical, affective, and emotional exhaustion. Something occurs in these moments of tears in Stowe's novel that cannot be reduced to the memorialization of time in a (sentimental) spectacle.

More precisely, I argue that the sentimental novel involves a very specific form of temporal play or logic that is in excess of Berlant's concept of monumental time. While sentimentalism may seek to evoke a simultaneity that, in Berlant's view, is timeless, it also, through its very form, contains other temporalities that are at odds with and even work against this memorialization. In the case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the specific temporality that conflicts with the "drive to memorialization" is what I am calling the temporal logic of exhaustion. This exhaustion manifests itself in Stowe's novel through scenes of affective and physical depletion, namely, through moments of tears and bodily suffering. For Stowe, scenes of tears and suffering, rather than memorializing time, mobilize it toward an uncertain and precarious future. Rather than simply an adornment or spectacle, as Douglas and Berlant would argue, scenes of tears and suffering have pragmatic effects in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The most important of these effects is the emergence of a form of (temporal) exhaustion, in which tears and suffering act as a kind of self-draining or catharsis which initiates the sufferer into a new mode of temporality and orients them toward future action. In other words, while tears in Stowe's novel register both a physical and emotional or affective suffering, it is not only the body that is drained (or overwhelmed) by these scenes of tears. Tears in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also function to drain or deplete a mode of time itself, to bring a form a temporality to the

brink of exhaustion. Exhaustion emerges as the endpoint of these scenes of tears and suffering, and it functions as a threshold or limit that signals the emergence of or initiation into a new form of (precarious) temporality. Exhaustion thus sets time in motion by opening up the potential for a new temporality or relation to time to emerge and with it new forms of action. To put this another way, if “reading time” involves attention to what Dana Luciano describes as the “texture and detail” of how “texts *make time appear*,” my argument is that the texture of time in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* comes into stark relief during its most dramatic scenes of tears and suffering (21, emphasis original). What becomes clear from a reading of these scenes for the “details” of time they make appear is that temporality itself is changing in some way, either speeding up or slowing down, or in any case moving toward a threshold which I am calling a temporal exhaustion. Scenes of tears in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* make clear that some form of time has exhausted itself, and that, on the horizon, or over the river, a new form of time as well as mode of life waits in all its precarity.

II. The Time of Tears

Tears take place and make things happen in time. In the sentimental novel, scenes of tears, often shared with others, are not (only) expressions of an internal emotional or affective state: being sad, overwhelmed, angry, happy, or relieved. When a character or community of characters weeps in a sentimental novel, it does not mark a lull in the action or scene or, as many critics dismissive of the sentimental genre have argued, a mark of passivity or (personal and political) resignation. Tears are the driving force of the sentimental novel, the trope that lubricates the mechanism of its plot. More than that,

tears and the scenes in which they occur are the pivotal points of action in the sentimental novel. In the logic of the sentimental novel, tears represent a special form of activity. The shedding of tears has effects in the sentimental novel that cause ripples in and across time. If we attend not only to the simple “spectacle” of a character weeping but also to what occurs in and around scenes of tears in a sentimental novel such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, it becomes clear that tears function to effect some form of action rather than simply registering that some action has (already) occurred. Another way of saying this is that in Stowe’s novel, and sentimentalism more generally, tears and the affects they express or engender are transitive rather than intransitive (or memorial): they make things happen, set time in motion, rather than freeze it in place. Tears make things happen in time and, as we will see below, they also take time, exhaust it.

Previous critics have picked up on the connection between tears and time in the sentimental novel. In *Arranging Grief* (2007), Dana Luciano examines the “temporal imaginary” of the sentimental novel in order to read “the kinds of time to which mournfulness offered access” (3). According to Luciano, the nineteenth century endorsed mourning to such a degree because grief functioned as a necessary supplement to the new demands of liberal temporality. For Luciano, grief grants the subject access to a past moment of affective plentitude that appeared to be lost with nineteenth-century liberalism’s focus upon progressive temporality. The act of grieving allows the liberal subject a reprieve from the demands of public time by permitting the subject to momentarily dwell upon a lost object of love. As a recompense for this return to the past, the subject receives a kind of affective rejuvenation that allowed him or her to more

adequately comply with the demands of progressive liberal temporality.⁷ According to Luciano, however, grief and tears in the sentimental novel authorize a form of “temporal play” which exceeds these neat boundaries, since grief opens “slippages that manifest not only as outright resistance to or critique of historical norms but also as subtler alterations enabling minute, enlivening variations in the becoming of the human subject and the perpetuation of its histories” (21). In Luciano’s reading, the grieving subject’s return to an affective past always creates some form of excess that cannot be contained by the liberal temporal imaginary and hence threatens to disrupt its steady flow. In the case of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Luciano argues this excess appears in Stowe’s refusal to confine (maternal) affection and sympathy to a lost past. For Luciano, scenes of grief and tears in Stowe’s novel manifest an excessive irruption of maternal affect in the present. Reading the scene in which the fugitive Eliza wins over the Bird family by appealing to their own grief over their lost child, Luciano notes: “Eliza’s story not only succeeds in winning the Bird family to her side...but also reopens, against the commercial rationalization of time championed by the Senator, the natural time of affection, showing how the cherishing of grief makes space for the restorative feeling-in-common of sympathy” (52). According to Luciano, the innovation of Stowe’s novel is its effort to insinuate “the corrective influence of ‘natural’ maternal affection into the time of public life” and thereby to incorporate “affective time into the linear development of the nation” rather than

⁷ Luciano builds upon Elizabeth Maddok Dillon’s reading of the temporality of liberalism in *The Gender of Freedom* (2004). For Dillon, the “liberal narrative” endorses a linear progression from the private space of the home (childhood) to the public sphere (adult citizenship). However, as Dillon observes, the (male) liberal subject’s constant invocation of “the private” in public creates a temporal return or recursivity that disrupts the smooth linear functioning of liberal temporality. Dillon sees in this disruption an opening for the liberal subject to debate and therefore revise the relations between public and private spheres that prevail in liberalism.

resigning it to the past (178-9). In Luciano's reading, tears in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* saturate and compound time, adding their own affective temporality to the "linear" progression of the nation; they complete or fulfill time by providing an affective "corrective" that makes up for an apparent lack in linear-national time.

Yet in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, tears also take or waste time. While I also want to explore what kinds of time mournfulness offers access to, in my reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* tears function less as a return to the past than as an action that both manifests and exhausts the present moment while pointing toward a future potentiality. Tears, in other words, do not always slide backwards in time. The temporal shifts they initiate or register can be much more complex. Consider the very first scene of tears in Stowe's novel, which occurs during Eliza's meeting with Mrs. Shelby after overhearing the news that her son Harry is likely going to be sold to a slave trader: "Eliza started. 'O, Missis!' she said, raising her eyes; then, bursting into tears, she sat down in a chair, and began sobbing" (15). Eliza's tears here could not be described as the affective expression of a form of mourning or melancholy: she does not weep for the loss of her son, for she has not (yet) lost him. Rather, this scene of tears represents an intensification of the present moment as one of potential crisis, and as such it is directed forward rather than backward in time. Eliza weeps not only for the potential loss of her son but also over the thought of how she would react if he were actually to be sold. Her tears here both anticipate a future loss and, as we will see, prepare her for potential action.

We can see how tears here function to have effects in and across time in Stowe's novel by tracing Eliza's responses to the unfolding news her son is going to be sold. After overhearing Mr. and Mrs. Shelby arguing over the sale of the young Harry, Eliza

displays all the signs of a physical and affective exhaustion: “When the voices died into silence, she rose and crept stealthily away. Pale, shivering, with rigid features and compressed lips, she looked an entirely altered being from the soft and timid creature she had been hitherto” (41). Stowe notes that overhearing the news Harry will be sold has completely “altered” Eliza’s “being.” What, precisely, has been altered here? It seems that something has been lost or drained out of Eliza’s very being, though what this “something” is remains vague. At the physical level, this news has drained the color from her (already pale) face and stolen the words from her (tightly shut) lips. Yet this loss is also an apparent gain or transformation; Stowe describes Eliza as “stealthily” creeping away not only from the closet in which she was concealed but also from the “soft and timid creature she had been hitherto.” The news of Harry’s impending sale has transformed Eliza into the polar opposite of a “soft and timid creature,” namely, a strong and determined one. She creeps in to her and Harry’s room to watch her son sleeping and, as she surveys their small apartment, she reflects that “here was, in short, her home; and, on the whole, a happy one it had been to her” (41). It becomes clear here that what the news of Harry’s sale has drained is her attachment to her “home” and present mode of living. What has been drained or exhausted in addition to the color of her face and her timidity is precisely Eliza’s attachment to her “home” in the Shelby’s house and the form of life organized around it.

Most significant, however, is that at no point between overhearing the news that Harry is sold to her decision to escape with him does Eliza shed a single tear. She does not cry when she hears the conclusion of Mr. and Mrs. Shelby’s argument or when she decides to take action by running away. It could be argued that this is because, as critics

of sentimentalism have it, tears do indeed register a form of passivity, which also implies that any actual or decisive action could not involve tears. Yet Stowe is careful to note the precise relation Eliza's actions have to tears when she makes the decision to escape with Harry. The moment of decision comes as she watches over the young child sleeping in bed with a smile on his face: "No tear dropped over that pillow; in such straits as these, the heart has no tears to give, —it drops only blood, bleeding itself away in silence. She took a piece of paper and pencil, and wrote, hastily, 'O, Missis! Dear Missis! Don't think me ungrateful... I heard all you and master said to-night. I am going to try to save my boy...' " (41-2). While Eliza drops no tears on Harry's pillow, this is not, as Stowe makes clear, because crying would interfere with her decision to act. Rather it is because at this moment Eliza has exhausted all of the tears she could possibly shed; or, to put it the other way around, it is because Eliza has drained her heart of all possible tears that she has reached the threshold of exhaustion in which action becomes possible. Here, in this scene where tears have exhausted themselves, a decisive break occurs. Stowe describes this threshold of exhaustion (of tears) in a curious way, as the terrain of "blood." Instead of shedding tears, Eliza's heart "drops only blood" in "silence." At the extremes, after or beyond tears, it is the heart itself that weeps. Yet, as we see from this scene, these heart-tears are the opposite of passivity; Stowe associates these metaphorical tears of blood with vitality and raw emotion and therefore with the very impetus for action. These silent tears of the heart register both Eliza's emotional exhaustion as well as her position bordering on the threshold of action. As Eliza takes up the pencil and paper to write a letter to her "Missis," she crosses this threshold and thrusts herself into a new future defined only by risk and threat. In a sense, Eliza spills the "silent" blood

welling in her heart and behind her “compressed lips” all over the page and with this action seals off her previous time with the Shelbys. Yet her decision to write this letter marks a moment that would not have been possible had Eliza not exhausted all her tears for her past life and with it her attachment to the “on the whole” happy time she had made in the Shelbys’ home.

This moment in time into which Eliza is thrust is analogous to what Berlant terms the “impasse” in *Cruel Optimism* (2011). For Berlant, the impasse is “a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic” (4). According to Berlant, the impasse names a moment of “ordinary crisis” rather than a traumatic event.⁸ In this “intensely present” stretch of time, “the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that might help to clarify things, maintain one’s sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic crises with these processes that have not yet found their genre of event” (4). For Berlant, the impasse is a moment of crisis in which the subject’s “optimistic” attachment to a form of living is called into question. Berlant argues that “[a]ll attachments are optimistic,” since every investment in an object or fantasy is to some degree directed at the propagation or preservation of what the subject believes to be a form of “the good life” (23). In the impasse, this optimism or mode of living is called into question; as a result, the subjects finds herself “developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on” (8). In short, the impasse is an extended moment in

⁸ The distinction between the ordinary and traumatic event, in terms of their temporality, will be discussed at greater length in the following section. In short, for Berlant the impasse is not a traumatic event (with the rupture or exceptionality this implies) but rather a moment situated in the “ordinary” time of the everyday in which the subject scrambles to adjust to new and unexpected demands.

present time in which the subject's previous habits of living no longer suffice and in which they must scramble through an enigmatic present in order to find new potential ways of adjusting to the emergent demands of a precarious life.

Of course, Berlant does not extend her analysis of the impasse to the sentimental novel. As elsewhere, her work in *Cruel Optimism* falls victim to the critical tendency to only impute (temporal) complexity to a specific modernist archive. Yet Stowe's novel contains its own theory of the moment that is as complex as Berlant's concept of the impasse, if not more so. This is nowhere more clear than in the memorable scene of Eliza and Harry's crossing of the Ohio River during their flight from captivity. Berlant does treat this scene in *The Female Complaint*, but she reads it as another example of sentimentalism's reliance upon a memorial or "sublime" time that transcends the everyday. For her, this scene lifts "feminine agency out of the attenuations of the everyday toward a form of sovereignty beyond the materiality of power. Electrified by the awesome power of the mother to harness her own sublimity to the natural sublime, Eliza transforms into a species of superpersonhood" (44). In this reading, Eliza becomes a transcendent ideal of sublime motherhood far removed from everyday "material" processes and time. Yet if we read this scene closely for its representation of time, we can see that it not only entails a depiction of the impasse as complex as the modernist novel but even refines our understanding of Berlant's concept of the impasse:

A thousand lives seemed to be concentrated in that one moment to Eliza. Her room opened by a side door to the river. She caught her child, and sprang down the steps towards it. The trader caught a full glimpse of her, just as she was disappearing down the bank; and throwing himself from his horse, and calling loudly on Sam and Andy, he was after her like a hound after a deer. In that dizzy moment her feet to her scarce seemed to touch the ground, and a moment brought her to the water's edge. Right on behind they came; and, nerved with strength such as God gives only to the desperate, with one wild cry and flying leap, she

vaulted sheer over the turbid current by the shore, on to the raft of ice beyond. It was a desperate leap—impossible to anything but madness and despair; and Haley, Sam, and Andy, instinctively cried out, and lifted up their hands, as she did it.

The huge green fragment of ice on which she alighted pitched and creaked as her weight came on it, but she staid there not a moment. With wild cries and desperate energy she leaped to another and still another cake; —stumbling—leaping—slipping—springing upwards again! Her shoes are gone—her stockings cut from her feet—while blood marked every step; but she saw nothing, felt nothing, till dimly, as in a dream, she saw the Ohio side, and a man helping her up the bank. (65)

What we notice immediately about this famous passage is the stress Stowe places upon Eliza's precarious position in "the moment." Indeed, the word "moment" occurs no fewer than four times in this passage. And it is not just any moment, but one so intensely present that it feels as though a "thousand lives" are "concentrated" within it. The "dizzying" effect of this moment indicates that it is not frozen in time, nor as transcendent as Berlant would have us believe. In Stowe's representation, Eliza's precarious crossing of the river it is both an accelerated and extended moment in time in which the *presence* of the present becomes so overwhelming as to be dizzying. The intense present temporality of this moment is even reflected in Stowe's brief shift out of the past tense into the present: "*Her shoes are gone*—her stockings cut from her feet—while blood marked every step." Yet this present moment also propels itself forward into a precarious future, as Eliza leaps from block of ice to block of ice, or rather, from moment to precarious moment. Her bloody footprints on the ice trace her movement not only over the river but also through this difficult moment of impasse in which Eliza attempts not to "tread water" but to keep her footing on it. The source of her strength is not "superhuman" but rather a result of the affective exhaustion which Stowe here calls "desperation." Stowe notes that Eliza "saw...[and] felt nothing" until she arrived on the

opposite shore. This absence of feeling, Eliza's affective exhaustion or desperation, is precisely the source of her strength in this passage. It is what enables her to take extreme action. Her desperate exhaustion is what allows her to act without thinking, to remain numb to the shards of ice ripping through her socks and cutting her feet, and to spring "upwards again" after "slipping" and "stumbling." It is only by crossing this threshold of exhaustion that Eliza becomes capable of propelling herself over the river toward the possibility of a precarious freedom waiting on the other side.

It may seem counterintuitive to describe exhaustion or desperation as a source of power, but this passage as well as others in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* makes clear that a form of (physical and affective) exhaustion enables rather than prohibits extreme action. This exhaustion takes various forms in Stowe's novel. The most memorable of these forms of exhaustion is one we have already touched upon, the sickness and eventual death of Little Eva. While much of the criticism focuses on her death scene, the description of Eva's "sickness" has received less attention. Lora Romero comments briefly upon Eva's sickness in *Home Fronts* (1997): "In representing Eva's slow decline, Stowe wages a bio-political critique of patriarchal power. The novelist describes Little Eva's body as something that is being used up too quickly" (79). For Romero, Stowe's novel is a bio-political critique that attacks the way state power uses up the bodies of slaves and women alike. Yet in Romero's analysis, Eva's sickness is a weakness rather than a potential for (or sign of) strength or action. The "using up" of Little Eva's body is here a passive effect of the system of slavery (and patriarchal power).⁹ While I agree that Eva's body is

⁹ Romero reads *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an example of "bio-political resistance:" she argues that Stowe presents a critique of the state's power over the bodies of both slaves and women. For Romero, the novel works to identify or link the state's depletion

“being used up” in a particular way, I think the focus on her passivity is misplaced. Eva is not passive but rather extremely sensitive or receptive, and it is this receptivity to the environment that exhausts her emotional sensibilities to the point of death. Yet this is a sickness that Eva does not just submit to but also to some degree wills, in an almost perverse fashion. It is, in other words, a choice on Eva’s part to allow herself to be exhausted by opening herself to feeling too strongly. In short, while the standard reading of Eva’s sickness is as either a loss of childhood innocence or a growth towards sanctification (and hence death), I want to read Little Eva’s sickness and death as the consequence of a heightened affective receptivity to the environment which both inflames and drains her body. The final consequence of this affective overstimulation is death, but it is not a death that merely falls upon Eva unawares but one she herself wills as a decisive action. Eva’s death releases her from the “evils” of slavery into the eternal bliss of heaven, and even more, her dying has effects on the way those around her experience their own relation to time.

The arc of Little Eva’s physical and affective exhaustion begins after Tom tells her the story of old Prue, the slave who takes to drink after her infant dies of neglect: “Tom, in simple, earnest phrase, told Eva the woman’s history. She did not exclaim, or wonder, or weep, as other children do. Her cheeks grew pale, and a deep, earnest shadow passed over her eyes. She laid both hands on her bosom, and sighed heavily” (225).

Unlike “other children,” Little Eva reacts to this news in an unguarded and direct fashion.

of the slave’s body with the nervous exhaustion of the hysterical domestic woman. Romero goes on to suggest that Stowe’s project of “sentimental hygiene” (her vision of a more “healthy” relation between body and mind) is in part responsible for creating a new form of female subjectivity that provided women with more mobility outside of the home because they were able to leverage their roles as caregivers to justify their access to certain forms of social programs, institutions, and professions.

She does not exclaim in anger, wonder in doubt, or weep hysterically; rather, she takes the news directly to her heart, as she lays “both hands on her bosom” as if storing and safeguarding it there. Eva’s tendency to take everything directly to heart, to exhibit a heightened emotional receptivity that absorbs her surroundings without any mediation or defense, is again displayed when her father, Augustine St. Clare, relates a story of how he “broke” a rebellious slave, Scipio, by granting him his free papers: “As he finished, she suddenly threw her arms around his neck, burst into tears, and sobbed convulsively” (242). When her father becomes concerned that she’s exhibiting nervous behavior, Little Eva reassures him: “I’m not nervous, but these things *sink into my heart*” (243, emphasis original). She later tells her father that he was wrong to try to protect her from the influence of the pain and sorrow that surround her: “You want me to live so happy, and never to have any pain,—never any suffering,—not even hear a sad story, when other poor creatures have nothing but pain and sorrow, all their lives;—it seems selfish. I ought to know such things, I ought to feel about them! Such things always sunk into my heart; they went down deep...” (285).¹⁰ Eva rejects the defenses against the harsh reality around her which her father seeks to maintain; instead, she claims a right to know and to feel, deeply, the pain and sorrow of the “poor creatures” around her. Her heightened receptivity leads to her overwhelming compassion for the slaves on her father’s plantation; she takes everything she sees and hears “down deep” into her heart. Yet the depth or strength of her feelings is also ravaging her young body. Her affective receptivity leaves her open to every sensation, so that each instance of cruelty or abuse on

¹⁰ In this passage, Little Eva also embodies the ideal reader of Stowe’s text, someone who will reject the prohibition against “sad stories” of slavery and take the narrative of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* directly to heart. See Section IV, below, for a more extended discussion of Stowe’s theory of reading.

the St. Clare plantation ignites her compassion and begins to exhaust her physically. Her sensitivity and sickness is not the result of a “nervous” exhaustion or form of hysteria, as her father fears, for this implies that Eva’s affective response is beyond her control. Rather, Little Eva chooses to feel and to take on the suffering of those around her; she offers up her own body to receive the impression of the “pain and sorrow” of her environment. By opening herself in this fashion, Eva begins to exhaust every physical and affective capacity she has at her disposal.

It becomes clear that Eva’s affective sensitivity is beginning to exhaust her body after she witnesses her cousin Henrique whip his new slave boy Dodo. Following a heated debate with Henrique, “Eva, who had been stimulated, by the society of her young cousin, to exertions beyond her strength, began to fail rapidly” (280). Eva had often heard stories of the abuses done to slaves, but witnessing them for herself proves too much for her sensitive heart: “Eva was an uncommonly mature child, and the things she had witnessed of the evils of the system under which they were living had fallen, one by one, into the depths of her thoughtful, pondering heart. She had vague longings to do something for them...” (283). Though Eva’s affective sensitivity has drained her body, it has also filled her heart with a longing to take some form of action to alleviate the “evils of the system.” Little Eva tells Tom that she “can understand why Jesus *wanted* to die for us,” and moments later she confesses, “I’ve felt that I would be glad to die, if my dying could stop all this misery” (283). While it may seem odd to argue that Eva wills her own death, Stowe makes clear that Eva gradually moves to an understanding her own exhaustion and dissipation as an act of (Christ-like) sacrifice for those around her as well as a release from the “evils of the system” into the eternal bliss of heaven. She tells St.

Clare, “It’s all no use, papa, to keep it to myself any longer. The time is coming that I am going to leave you” (284). Eva confides to her father that “she would rather be in heaven” since there are “a great many things here that make me sad, that seem dreadful to me. I’d rather be there; but I don’t want to leave you,—it almost breaks my heart” (284).

Almost. For Eva’s death is not characterized by agitation or pain but rather by a kind of peaceful wasting or fading away. Though she mourns leaving her father and Uncle Tom, her dying is described as a scene of beauty because of her calm acceptance, which later critics such as Douglas would disparage as “kitsch.” Eva’s gradual wasting away, as she hopes, has a profound effect upon her father, specifically on his experience of time. St. Clare is characterized in the novel as a vacillator, as one who cannot make up his mind about what to do with his slaves. He indefinitely defers his decision to some future point by rationalizing away the “evils of the system.” Yet after Eva, from her sickbed, tells her father that “You will come to me,” St. Clare has a vision in which “his whole past life rose in a moment before his eyes” (286). St. Clare hears again “his mother’s prayers and hymns” and relives “his own early yearnings and aspirings for good; and, between them and this hour, years of worldliness and skepticism, and what man calls respectable being. We can think *much*, very much, in a moment” (286). Eva’s deathbed words force St. Clare to pause and attend to his spiritual state in the present moment. In this intense moment of time, St. Clare is finally brought to reflect on how the actions he has taken over the course of his life have led to the present moment. While this taking of accounts does not immediately lead to a change of heart, Eva continues to have this effect upon her father’s experience of time right up until her death. As St. Clare is waiting outside Eva’s room, after finally admitting to himself that the end is near, he is

neither anxious nor mournful but rather calm: “[O]ne could not resist the soothing influence of that air of innocence and peace which seemed to breathe around her. St. Clare found a strange calm coming over him. It was not hope,—that was impossible; it was not resignation; it was only a calm resting in the present, which seemed so beautiful that he wished to think of no future” (301). Rather than reflecting on his past, as he did in his previous “vision,” St. Clare here comes to “rest calmly” in this moment as he stands outside Eva’s room. As Stowe notes, this is not a moment of hope or despair that looks ahead, but rather a present instant of calm that is directed at “no future.” St. Clare, the great waster of time (in the negative sense), here comes to appreciate the importance and preciousness of the moment. Eva’s wasting away has certainly not gone to waste, for it brings St. Clare to a new appreciation of the fleetingness of time and leads him a step closer to the realization of the importance of taking action in the moment.

Eva’s effect upon others’ sense of time extends beyond her own father. This is clear in her actual death scene, as the members of the St. Clare household crowd around her bed: “The child lay panting on her pillows, as one exhausted,—the large clear eyes rolled up and fixed. Ah, what said those eyes, that spoke so much of heaven? Earth was past, and earthly pain; but so solemn, so mysterious, was the triumphant brightness of that face, that it checked even the sobs of sorrow” (306). Here Eva reaches the endpoint of her exhaustion, but, as in the case of Eliza, this is an exhaustion that grants her access to a new mode of temporality. For “Earth was past, and earthly pain;” and the eternity of heaven, and its freedom from pain, awaits her. Despite the criticism that this scene is emotionally manipulative, designed to bring the reader to tears, Stowe is quite clear here that no one weeps over Eva. The image of her dying, exhausted, yet “triumphant” body

“checked even the sobs of sorrow.” Her death evokes a time beyond tears for all who behold her dying face, the “solemn” and “mysterious” time of the afterlife. The locks of hair Eva gives to her family members and the slaves serve not only as a personal memento but more importantly as a reminder of this time beyond time.

III. Everyday Exhaustion

This discussion of moments of exhaustion may appear to lend some support to a reading of sentimentalism as an unrealistic genre that often slips into (if not depends entirely upon) forms of melodrama for its effects. Indeed, the argument over the sentimental genre’s relation to “realism” is long and varied.¹¹ While I do not deny that Stowe’s novel contains elements of melodrama, I want to argue that the focus on melodramatic tropes obscures how Stowe positions her novel at the level (and time) of everyday life. For Stowe, the only way to attack the institution of slavery is on its own temporal grounding. An institution that has become so commonplace as to seem “natural” can only be undermined through an opposing portrait of the everyday life of those living under the day-to-day operations of the slave system. In addition to the

¹¹ These arguments have often taken the form of defending nineteenth-century sentimentalism (and women’s fiction more broadly) against the charge that is an unrealistic genre. In *Woman’s Fiction* (1978), Nina Baym argues that the purpose of woman’s fiction is to “show their readers how to live” (26) by developing “feminine self-sufficiency” (40); for Baym, domestic sentimental fiction is above all a practical (and hence realistic) genre that aims to teach its readers how to navigate the real world. Cathy Davidson makes a similar argument during her reading of the “sociology of sentimental fiction” in *Revolution and the Word* (1986), where she suggests that “many of the novels of the time are not the frothy fictions that we commonly take them to be but evince, instead, a solid social realism that also constitutes a critique (even if sometimes covert) of the patriarchal structure of that society” (200). More recent scholarship by critics such as Glenn Hendler (2003) and John C. Harvard (2012) has continued to suggest that the seemingly strict divide between sentimentalism and realism is not easy to maintain.

moments of exhaustion that disrupt the temporality of slavery which we explored above, Stowe's novel also aims at another form of exhaustion directed at the reader: by depicting the "everyday exhaustion" of life under slavery, Stowe intends to wear out or exhaust all of the reader's possible defenses of the "peculiar institution" by depicting the everyday harm it causes and therefore lead them (like her characters) to the precipice of future-oriented pragmatic action. Stowe's ultimate goal is therefore to offer a redefinition of the way contemporary society understands trauma under the system of slavery, in order to change society's understanding of the harm done by slavery from the mistaken belief that any violence is an isolated occurrence to a more accurate portrait of the everyday abuses slavery encourages. By doing so, Stowe hopes not only to draw attention to the everyday injustices of slavery but also to reinvigorate an exhausted society and prompt them to action through a more sensitive attention to the everyday affective connections and "influences" among people.

Stowe's effort to situate her work as a representation of the everyday can be seen through a reading of both her preface to the novel as well as her infamous "Concluding Remarks." In her preface, Stowe asserts that her novel is one part of a more wide-spread artistic effort to transmute the "common" life of the people living under slavery to the level of representation: "The poet, the painter, and the artist, now seek out and embellish the common and gentler humanities of life, and, under the allurements of fiction, breathe a humanizing and subduing influence, favorable to the development of the great principles of Christian brotherhood" (3). Stowe's description of her novel as merely an "embellishment" of the common 'humanities' of life, a dressing up of reality in the

“allurement of fiction,” is a common defense of the novel in her time.¹² This reality, however, proves to be elusive or at least out of the reach of the common everyday person. It is the task of the “benevolent” artist to search out and bring to light the hidden reality of the everyday abuses that exist under slavery: “The hand of benevolence is everywhere stretched out, searching into abuses, righting wrongs, alleviating distresses, and bringing to the knowledge and sympathies of the world the lowly, the oppressed, and the forgotten” (3). By bringing these facts to light, Stowe hopes to appeal to her jaded readers by awakening their slumbering sense of sympathy: “The object of these sketches is to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race, as they exist among us; to show their wrongs and sorrows, under a system so necessarily cruel and unjust as to defeat and do away the good effects of all that can be attempted for them, by their best friends, under it” (3). However, we can see from Stowe’s extended description of her novel’s purpose that the seemingly straightforward concept of reality she begins with becomes progressively more complicated. The “reality” her novel seeks to depict is both “common” and obscure at the same time. Even more interesting, while Stowe suggests it is the purpose of the artist to uncover these hidden realities, she also acknowledges that the novelist can do little more than scratch the surface. So while Stowe is hopeful her

¹² Since the rise of the genre in the eighteenth century, novels have been viewed with suspicion if not outright disdain due to their apparent tendency to privilege entertainment over education as well as fiction over fact (or history), not to mention their treatment of various illicit plots (i.e., the novel of seduction). Not least of all, of course, was the strong connection between novels and a wide female readership, which certainly didn’t help the novel’s case in the public eye. This suspicion of novels as distorters of truth persisted through Stowe’s own time. The majority of novels contain some variation on the form of preface that Stowe writes here in order to disarm objections that the novel strays too far from truth (or, from another perspective, to authorize such a straying). See Davidson’s *Revolution and the Word* for a more complete trajectory of the historical development of and resistances to the novel, especially Chapter 3, “Ideology and Genre.”

sketches can shed some light on the “wrongs and sorrows” of slavery, she is painfully aware that “what may be gathered of the evils of slavery from sketches like these, is not the half that could be told, of the unspeakable whole” (4). The “whole” of slavery remains unspeakable and to some degree unrepresentable; the most Stowe’s novel can offer is a representation of the reality of slavery to an extent that has not previously been attempted, and, in so doing, to attempt to position its apparently unrepresentable evils within the temporality of the everyday.

The point here is not to debate whether or not Stowe’s novel “really” gives an accurate portrait of common life under slavery. Even Stowe herself acknowledges the degree to which fiction may change an apparently separate reality, even if it is only to dress it up or “embellish” it to make the portrait more vivid. Rather, what is significant is how Stowe’s description of her novel in the preface situates her fiction at the level of the everyday in order to speak about what is in some sense “unspeakable.” The representation of the unspeakable is one of the main concerns of contemporary trauma theory. Critics from Agamben to Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra have offered various theories for how the subject works through trauma, whether through “witnessing” or some other form of symbolic representation.¹³ While I acknowledge the usefulness of these readings, there is a tendency in trauma theory to slip into a hasty historicism that

¹³ It is interesting to note in this context some of the theoretical convergences between trauma theory and sentimentalism. For example, LaCapra’s concept of being open to “empathic unsettlement” at the sight of victimization is very close to sentimentalism’s philosophical (and formal) tactic of fostering sympathetic identifications between observer (reader) and sufferer (character). For LaCapra, this empathic unsettlement “involves a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other’s position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other’s place. Opening oneself to empathic unsettlement is...a desirable affective dimension of inquiry that complements and supplements empirical research and analysis” (“Trauma, Absence, Loss,” 722-3).

equates traumatic events or periods in history (i.e., slavery) with the creation of traumatized subjectivities and lives.

Although these critics think through trauma and its consequences in different ways, what unites their theories is an understanding of trauma as an exceptional event that interrupts ordinary life. Yet what happens when some form of trauma or crisis inheres in the very definition of “ordinary life”? This is precisely the question Berlant engages in *Cruel Optimism*. She frames her text as a revision of trauma’s theory’s focus upon the exceptional event because it obscures the way subjects manage “ordinary” traumas and crises everyday. Berlant argues that trauma theory “conveniently focuses on exceptional shock and data loss in the memory and experience of catastrophe”; as such, it often overlooks “that most such happenings that force people to adapt to an unfolding change are better described by a notion of systemic crisis or ‘crisis ordinairiness’” (10). Berlant wants to develop a concept of crisis or trauma that situates it within the temporality of the everyday rather than the exceptional: “Crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what’s overwhelming” (10). For Berlant, most subjects who are confronted by a crisis are not entirely shattered or overwhelmed as often depicted in trauma theory. Rather, in the “impasse induced by crisis, being treads water; mainly, it does not drown. Even those whom you would think of as defeated are living beings figuring out how to stay attached to life from within it” (10). As we saw above, this impasse is defined by a specific organization or orientation of time, an intensification of the present as a moment of crisis in which the subject “treads water.” To redefine trauma within the category of the ordinary is to suggest that this intensification of the moment

becomes a part of the fabric of everyday experience and time itself. Every moment is one of what we could call bearable trauma; every day is a continuation or repetition of a systemic crisis to which the subject has to some degree habituated. The temporality of the everyday in Berlant's account, then, is paradoxically one of both continual crisis and no crisis at all.

It is not difficult to see that Stowe's representation of daily life under slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is one of crisis ordinariness. Although Stowe's text is replete with numerous scenes of violence and abuse, these scenes are repeated to such an extent that they come to be seen not as isolated (traumatic) occurrences but rather as the very fabric of life under slavery. That is, the repetition of scenes of physical and emotional violence in Stowe's novel acts to situate these abuses not as exceptional events but instead as part of the everyday temporality of a slaveholding society. Stowe makes clear that her text aims at a representation of the daily temporality of violence when she describes the harsh conditions Uncle Tom endures at Legree's plantation: "But to live,—to wear on, day after day, of mean, bitter, low, harassing servitude, every nerve dampened and depressed, every power of feeling gradually smothered,—this long and wasting heart-martyrdom, this slow, daily bleeding away of the inward life, drop by drop, hour after hour—this is the true searching test of what there may be in a man or woman" (396). Each day, every day, a gentle slave is being degraded by a harsh master, a mother is daring to escape with her baby, an innocent child is being corrupted by the evils of slavery, and families are being torn apart at the slave auction. Stowe describes the "hour after hour" of daily violence as a slow draining of time, a bleeding out of the inner life (of the heart) "drop by drop." It is this slow exhaustion of the heart through everyday violence and degradation

that defines the temporality of life under slavery. For Uncle Tom, “to live” means simply to try to survive or “wear on,” to adjust as much as possible to the “harassing servitude” that dampens his nerves. And Tom does survive by adjusting as he can to this condition of everyday crisis ordinariness, at least, for a while, until his exhaustion reaches its breaking point or threshold.

Stowe’s representation of violence, though apparently melodramatic (especially to a modern day reader), is above all an effort to depict these “normal” crises of the slave system. In terms of its temporality, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is “realistic” in that it attempts to represent the “ordinary crises” of the everyday. Its repetitive scenes of abuse, though they also have shock value, are intended to redefine our understanding of trauma by *saturating* the everyday with violence.¹⁴ Through both a formal and temporal accumulation, violence is made to seem almost mundane or quotidian (or at least expected) in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Violence is a part of life rather than an interruption of it; for Stowe, it is a fact situated within history rather than an exceptional interruption of history. As Stowe herself later commented in *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853), she understood that she could not “give any idea of the horribly cruel and demoralizing effect of [slavery], except by presenting facts in detail” (qtd. in Romero, 86). It is through the repetition of “facts in detail” that Stowe aims to redefine her readers’ understanding of the relation between violence, crisis, and time in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

¹⁴ As many critics have noted, Stowe’s representation of violence is problematic because of its differential application depending upon a character’s “racial makeup.” Hence Eliza, whose skin is “almost white,” escapes the violence of being torn away from her young son. Uncle Tom and the darker-skinned characters throughout the novel are not so lucky. Those characters with darker skin seem fated to violence and even death in Stowe’s novel, while those with lighter skin have the potential for some kind of salvation or escape from violence.

Of course, since Freud's work on trauma in "Mourning and Melancholia" and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, repetition has been interpreted as a way of working through traumatic events through a process of adjustment over time. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* does contain elements of this form of repetition, but my argument here is that repetition in the novel first and foremost functions in order to intensify (rather than dissipate) violence as an aspect of the everyday life of slavery. Certainly, by adopting the formal tactic of repetition in order to represent the temporality of everyday life under slavery, Stowe also risks a kind of negative exhaustion in which the reader become inured to its violence through repeated or excessive representations of abuse.¹⁵ Stowe compensates for this risk by escalating the scenes of violence over the course of the novel while repeating their essential form. The primary form this takes is the breaking up of the family unit or at very least the mother-child dyad, which as many critics have noted is the ur-text of sentimental violence.¹⁶ Stowe repeats this violence to the family unit with various degrees of intensity over the course of the novel, while often pausing to note that these scenes of separation are not the exception but the norm. For example, Stowe concludes (or interrupts) her description of the separation of the slaves on board the *La Belle Riviere* from their families with the exclamation: "But what needs tell the story, told too oft,—every day told,—of heart-strings rent and broken,—the weak broken and torn for the profit and convenience of the strong! It needs not be told;—every day is

¹⁵ This repetition of violence also risks the judgment that the sentimental novel depends upon (or at least makes possible) a form of sadistic or masochistic pleasure for its readers. See Hinton (1999) and Noble (2000) for a more complete analysis of sentimentalism's relation to sadism and masochism, respectively.

¹⁶ In *Hard Facts* (1985), Philip Fisher argues that the ur-text of sentimental violence involves four components: a mother, a child, an outside force (or person) that intervenes to violently separate them, and a spectator who views this scene from afar but is prevented from intervening.

telling it..." (130). This slave ship also serves as the setting for another scene of the type of exhaustion we examined in the previous section. This moment occurs after the trader, Haley, steals a slave woman's child and sells him without her knowledge. When the woman learns of what happened, she "did not scream. The shot had passed too straight and direct through the heart, for cry or tear" (135). Instead, this "poor, dumb-stricken" woman remained "quite calm" right up until the moment she drowns herself in the river under the cover of night (135). The framing of this story reminds us that it is within the context of a ubiquitous everyday violence that people living under slavery are occasionally pushed to the threshold of exhaustion and undertake extreme action.

Over roughly the last third of the novel, the primary object of violence begins to shift gradually away from the family unit to the body of the slave. It is as if Stowe has exhausted all possible representation of familial violence she can muster; or rather, after having represented as much of the daily *emotional* violence slavery causes as possible, she shifts her attention to the *physical* abuse it involves. This shift is coextensive with Uncle Tom's sale to Simon Legree and his relocation to the Louisiana plantation. Tom endures a variety of physical abuses on Legree's plantation, from the long hours in the field to harassment from the overseers and finally from Legree himself. The culmination of this physical violence occurs when Tom refuses to reveal to Legree where the escaped slaves Cassy and Emmeline are hiding. Legree tells Tom that he will "count every drop of blood there is in you...till you give up!" to which Tom replies that he would gladly give every last drop of his blood if it would "save your precious soul," but he won't give up Cassy and Emmeline (421). Legree's threat that he will count out every drop of Tom's blood immediately recalls Stowe's description of the daily life of slavery as a

“bleeding away of the inward life, drop by drop, hour after hour.” Here, however, this “drop by drop” violence has become quite literal; or rather, the violence diffused throughout the everyday time of slavery has come to the fore here in this scene. Tom’s willingness to offer up these drops of blood gives Legree pause. Indeed, Stowe describes this scene as a slowing down if not a stopping of time: “Like a strange snatch of heavenly music, heard in the lull of a tempest, this burst of feeling made a moment’s blank pause. Legree stood aghast, and looked at Tom; and there was such a silence, that the tick of the old clock could be heard, measuring, with silent touch, the last moments of mercy and probation to that hardened heart” (421). In this suspended pause, the old clock ticks out not drops of blood but “silent” moments of time, the “last moments” of Legree’s chance for salvation. For Stowe, in this moment verging on the eruption of violence it is not Tom’s time that is running out but Legree’s.

Legree’s “blank pause” lasts, however, “but a moment. There was one hesitating pause...and the spirit of evil came back, with seven-fold vehemence; and Legree, foaming with rage, smote his victim to the ground” (421). With a gesture to the reader’s sensibilities, Stowe here pulls back from representing the violence directly: “Scenes of blood and cruelty are shocking to our ear and heart. What man has nerve to do, man has not nerve to hear” (421). Stowe claims to be saving the reader from the shock of depicting such violence to the body of Uncle Tom. Yet, as Marianne Noble points out, Stowe’s choice not to represent the physical details of Tom’s torture intensifies rather than diminishes the scene’s horror. The reader is forced to “construct the images of torture within their minds, drawing upon words like ‘blood,’ ‘nerve,’ ‘foaming,’ and ‘shocking’” (136). This leaves the scene of torture up to the reader’s imagination, and

doing so “imparts the qualities of horror that they *know* accrue to physical distress, without containing the horror within language” (134). Therefore while this scene is possibly the most violent moment in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Stowe’s refusal to depict the physical details ensures that the violence does not become localized in a specific representation. Rather, the “horror” is intensified and diffused as far as the reader’s imagination will carry it, so that this scene becomes not a specific (and hence isolated) representation of violence but instead an index of the larger “unspeakable evils” of slavery in general that occur every day.

If violence under slavery is so entrenched as to be an everyday occurrence, how can the reader hope to prevent it? In her “Concluding Remarks” to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Stowe remarks that the best “any individual” can do to combat slavery and injustice is to “*feel right*” (452). In this conclusion, Stowe also reiterates that her desire in writing the novel was to “exhibit [slavery] in a *living dramatic reality*. She has endeavored to show it fairly, in its best and its worst phases. In its *best* aspect, she has, perhaps, been successful; but, oh! who shall say what yet remains untold in that valley and shadow of death...” (450, emphasis original). It seems clear that in order to combat the “living dramatic reality” of slavery, most of which “remains untold,” the form of feeling that Stowe suggests as a possible remedy must also take place on the level of “lived reality,” that is, the time of everyday life.

Critics have often been put off by this suggestion that what the individual should do to combat the injustice of slavery is to adjust the way they feel. Her suggestion appears to be a private solution to a public (and institutional) problem. Yet Stowe is quite clear that for her feeling represents not an individual but a social action, particularly

in its pragmatic effects. Indeed, Stowe's famous injunction to "feel right" represents more a theory of social interaction and connection than a command to adjust one's private emotional stance. For Stowe, those who "feel right" enact a form of agency or consciousness by acting upon (or at least being aware of) the "atmosphere of sympathetic influence [that] encircles every human being" (452). In this view, feeling entails a form of agency because it places the individual in affective relation to the social body: "feeling" circulates through the social body through the "atmosphere of sympathy," and "influence" is exerted through the sentimental bonds and identifications this circulation of feeling engenders. It is therefore important, according to Stowe, to feel right, since the way an individual feels determines the type of affective influence they in some sense release (or perform) to ripple through the social body's "atmosphere." Feeling is therefore not a private but rather a social activity, since the individual's feelings are consistently registered through the atmosphere of sympathetic influence of other members of society. Indeed, in Stowe's lexicon "atmosphere of sympathetic influence" is in many ways the definition of society itself. Social life for Stowe entails a constant adjustment of one's affective stance, both as a response to the sympathetic influence of others as well as a monitoring of the feelings one chooses to circulate in public. These adjustments to the sphere of affective influence occur in "real" everyday time, as the subject traverses the space of the home, the market, and other forms of social and public life. For Stowe, one's feelings are always, at every moment, acting upon surrounding people in subtle and not so subtle ways, so it is above all important for her to be aware of the types of affective influence one is exerting in the world.

Hence the importance of “feeling right.” Stowe asserts that “the man or woman who *feels* strongly, healthily, and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor of the human race” (452). How so? Because when this man or woman, filled with “strong, “healthy,” and “just” feelings, enters the social field of sympathetic influence, they to some degree, in Stowe’s theory, transfer a portion of this strength or health to those they come in contact with. For instance, as Eliza cradles the sleeping Harry during the first night of their escape, Stowe describes his touch as pouring “strength” into Eliza through an “electric stream” (55). Feeling in Stowe’s theory, especially in her discussion of “circulation,” represents a kind of affective social energy that can be passed from one relay to the next. This analogy of feeling with a form of energy or force is fitting, since Stowe’s point here is that those who feel right about slavery can reinvigorate a society exhausted by its everyday ravages. They can reawaken, through a kind of affective jolt, those members of society who have become dulled to the injustices of slavery through their everyday repetition. “Feeling right,” then, is not a private affective stance; it is a form of social praxis that seeks to mediate the affective atmosphere of everyday society. For Stowe, only the “healthy” influence of feeling right can interrupt (and potentially reinvigorate) the everyday exhaustion of slavery.

IV. “I *cannot* do away with it”: Exhausted Reading

Of course, Stowe’s final remarks are not addressed to “any individual” but specifically to *the reader* of her text. To return, then, to the question of the effect Stowe’s novel has upon the reader with which we opened this chapter. As should be

clear by now, Stowe's novel involves a very specific form of temporality as well as a theory of reading, both of which are related to what I have called exhaustion. Critics who remark upon the sentimental novel's theory of reading draw attention to the dynamic of sympathetic identification which sentimentalism fosters between reader and character. As Noble describes it, the goal of the sentimental novel (and Stowe's novel in particular) is "to produce in the reader's body a sensation of sympathetic pain as a grounding for an intuitive understanding of the slave's 'real presence' as a living, breathing, feeling human being" (134). Furthermore, this sympathetic pain is meant to awaken a "visceral consciousness...[that] is more likely to provoke action than dispassionate analysis" since "Stowe draws upon readers' own memories of pain, creating blueprints that guide readers to relive their own experiences of suffering and to associate them with those of slaves" (134). Reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* induces a sympathetic pain in the reader through what Noble calls the "sentimental wound," leading the reader to identify with the slave as a "feeling human being." Yet despite Noble's assertion that the purpose of Stowe's novel is to combat abstraction, her description here of the (body of) the reading self takes place in abstract or empty time. If we think of sentimentalism's theory of reading as one of exhaustion, however, the temporal frame of reading a novel such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* becomes more concrete.

Noble's analysis of sentimentalism's theory of reading becomes somewhat more concrete when she cites some contemporary reader reports and letters written to Stowe. Consider this letter from her friend Georgiana May that Stowe reprinted in the 1870s edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and which Noble reproduces as an example of the "sentimental wound" that reading her novel has:

I sat up last night long after one o'clock, reading and finishing "Uncle Tom's Cabin." I *could not* leave it any more than I could have left a dying child; nor could I restrain an almost hysterical sobbing for an hour after I laid my head upon my pillow. I thought I was a thorough-going Abolitionist before, but your book has awakened so strong a feeling of indignation and compassion, that I seem never to have had *any* feeling on this subject till now. ... This storm of feeling has been raging, burning like a very fire in my bones, all the livelong night, and all through my duties this morning it haunts me, –I *cannot* do away with it. Gladly would I have gone out in the midnight storm last night, and, like the martyr of old, have been stoned to death, if that could have rescued these oppressed and afflicted ones. (Qtd. in Noble, 141)

For Noble, Georgiana's reaction to reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* indicates how the sympathetic pain evoked by the sentimental wound provokes both pleasure and desire, specifically the desire to *do something*. However, for Noble the sentimental wound's provocation to act more often ends in fantasy rather than concrete action, such as Georgiana's "image of braving a lethal storm," which provides her "with a visualizable form of agency that answers her frustrated inarticulateness" rather than actual agency (141). Yet it seems apparent that Stowe would not have reproduced this letter if she read it as suggesting that the intended effect of her novel was to produce a fantasy of action.

Rather, I would argue that Stowe sees represented within this letter from her friend her own theory of the effect reading should have upon the reader. Stowe wants to provoke her readers to tears, to stir up their emotions into a "storm," in order to make them cry so much that their old feelings about slavery are drained away to make space for new feelings that lead to decisive action. As Georgiana puts it, after reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* she "seem[ed] never to have had *any* feeling on this subject till now." Stowe intends for the reader to exhaust all of his or her tears over the course of the novel so that, when they are finished, they close *Uncle Tom's Cabin* prepared to act. As we have seen, this is the overall temporal logic of Stowe's novel: first tears, then (following their

exhaustion) a decisive action. Though in Georgiana's case (in this letter at least) these tears do not appear to issue in a decisive action, what remains as the lingering effect of Stowe's novel is this provocation to act. Georgiana describes this lingering provocation as a "haunting" that she "*cannot* do away with." At the very minimum, it is to this threshold or potential for action that Stowe intends to lead her readers by exhausting all of their tears over the course of the novel. This exhaustion through reading, at least, is the intended result of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As we recall from Douglas' and Tompkins' accounts of reading (or not reading) Stowe's novel, the temporal play of the text can have unexpected effects on the reader's sense of time. While literary texts in general, through their admixture of various forms, tend to exert this sort of temporal pressure on readers, the sentimental novel and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in particular have a peculiar effect upon the reader's sense of temporality because their intention is to bring the reader to the brink of exhaustion. As we saw, this exhaustion is not only physical and affective, but it also marks a specific temporal threshold that precipitates the reader (or character) into future-oriented pragmatic action. Tears in Stowe's novel are brought into play not just to solidify an emotional connection between reader and character (and hence foster sympathy), but also to bring the reader to the brink of exhaustion and thereby create the potential for decisive action. The sentimental novel calls for more than the reader's sympathy with the pain and suffering of its characters. In Stowe's novel and in Charles Chesnutt's fiction, as we will see, the sentimental genre theorizes pain in relation to forms of temporality in order to mobilize the reader's feelings to the threshold of pragmatic action.

CHAPTER 3: CRIPPLING TIME: CHARLES W. CHESNUTT'S *CONJURE STORIES*

Time touches all things with destroying hand; and if he seem now and then to bestow the bloom of youth, the sap of spring, it is but brief mockery, to be surely and swiftly followed by the wrinkles of old age, the dry leaves and bare branches of winter.

—Charles W. Chesnutt, *The House Behind the Cedars*

I. Disability and the Body in Pain

This chapter extends as well as complicates the previous chapter's discussion of sentimental exhaustion through a reading of the temporality of pain in Charles Waddell Chesnutt's short fiction, particularly his "conjure" stories. By tracing the complex temporality of Chesnutt's conjure tales, this chapter intends to more directly examine how African American literature theorizes time, particularly in the era of (failed) Reconstruction during which Chesnutt was writing. Scholars of African American literature and culture have long noted that the institution of slavery and its aftermath had a profound impact upon African Americans' experience of time. Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues in "The Literature of the Slave" that the slave is deprived of the temporality that structures the life of the (white) human and hence is made to "stand outside of time" (101). Rather than see the slave as merely existing outside of time, however, I want to read Charles W. Chesnutt's *Conjure Stories* (1899)¹ as exploring how slavery has

¹ Beginning with the publication of "The Goophered Grapevine" in the August 1887 edition of *Atlantic Monthly*, Chesnutt wrote (and occasionally published) six more "conjure" or Uncle Julius stories over the course of the next decade before Houghton Mifflin suggested an edition of these popular tales under the title *The Conjure Woman*.

damaged or *crippled* the African American's relation to time, as well as what it may mean to "reconstruct" a relation to time in the aftermath of slavery.

To do so, I intend to explore what current work in the field of disability theory can contribute to a reading of Chesnutt's short fiction. Disability theory's focus on the way different forms of embodiment are both lived and represented, its attention to physical as well as psychological suffering and pain, and its exploration of how definitions of the human are predicated on a specific type of bodily form make it useful for examining the issues of racial embodiment and racialized violence under slavery. More importantly, the incipient theory of "crip time" provides a way of reading the temporality of African American literature that situates it neither "outside of time" nor comfortably within linear time, but rather in a crippled yet also crippling relation to progressive (white) temporality. Reading the temporality of pain in Chesnutt's fiction opens up onto questions germane to the fields of sentimentalism, African-American literature, and disability studies alike. In what varied ways does sentimentalism and African American literature represent pain, particularly the pain of slavery and its historical afterlife? Is "representation" the most productive way to speak about the treatment of pain in literature, or might pain operate along other formal or aesthetic axes

Chesnutt wrote six new conjure stories for the collection, four of which were published in the 1899 edition, along with the first three of the conjure stories published between 1887-90. The two rejected stories, "Tobe's Tribulations" and "A Victim of Heredity," found publication elsewhere (in the journal *Southern Workman* and *Self-Culture Magazine*, respectively). The final conjure story, "A Marked Tree," was written and published much later in Chesnutt's career in the 1924/1925 winter edition of *Crisis*. For a more detailed account of the stories' publication history, see Robert B. Stepto's introduction to *The Conjure Stories* (2012). Chesnutt himself provides a brief overview of his relationship with his publishers in the essay "Post-Bellum—Pre-Harlem" (1931).

beyond that of representation alone? And finally, what is the relation between time and the body, and more specifically, the disabled body or the body in pain?

Through a reading of the ways Chesnutt adapts sentimental techniques and forms to theorize the temporality of pain in his short fiction, this chapter aims to contribute both to African American scholarship's thinking about time in the nineteenth-century novel and to conversations in disability and pain studies on the relation(s) between pain and temporality. In so doing, it also intends to broaden our literary historical perspective on the cultural afterlife and influence of sentimentalism. Reading Chesnutt's *Conjure Stories* through disability theory, which as I argue below inherits (even as it struggles with) many of its ways of thinking about pain from sentimentalism, provides a perspective on the body in pain and its relation to time that is different from how African American scholarship has conceptualized temporality in nineteenth-century fiction. Most accounts of literary history within African American scholarship are measured in terms of national time, i.e., according to a division between antebellum and postbellum periods. I am not arguing this is not a crucial or productive temporal distinction to make or that the division between these two periods (and the events of the Civil War) do not impact African American literary production in the nineteenth century. It certainly influenced Chesnutt's writing of the *Conjure Stories*, as it did most "local color" or regionalist writing of the Reconstruction period which provided a Postbellum perspective on the Antebellum period. Rather, I argue that the rubric of national time (antebellum/postbellum) is only one (non-static) form of temporality among others through which African American scholarship of the nineteenth century should be evaluated. Disability theory's concept of "crip time" offers a way of reading these other

forms of time that also contributes to our understanding of how sentimentalism continued to influence African American literary production even in the “realist” period of the Reconstruction.

The short fiction of Charles Chesnutt may appear an odd choice for a study investigating sentimentalism’s relation to temporality. Chesnutt’s *Conjure Stories* have traditionally been periodized firmly within the regionalist or local color branch of realism that flourished after the Civil War. While I do not contest this categorization, I want to suggest that the labeling of his Uncle Julius stories as “local color” realism overlooks a strand of sentimentalism that runs through these tales in productive ways. Shifting the critical evaluation of Chesnutt’s fiction from its relation to realism to what it inherits (and adapts) from sentimentalism also helps us avoid specific critical dead ends that preoccupy some readings of realist fiction, especially when such fiction is written by African American authors. For instance, the question of whether “realist” representations of racial others are either subversive or hegemonic has preoccupied a large amount of Chesnutt scholarship. In *To Wake the Nations* (1993), Eric Sundquist argues that Chesnutt’s conjure tales represent a subversive adaptation of the custom of the “cakewalk,”² a minstrel performance put on for a predominantly white audience. Sundquist suggests that the cakewalk tradition and Chesnutt’s adaptation of it represent a “combination of satire and cultural celebration” that is at “once derivative and original, subordinated and resistant” (281). However, critics such as Richard Brodhead in *Cultures of Letters* (1993) argue more strongly that for all Chesnutt’s race-conscious

² Sundquist traces the origin of the cakewalk to multiple culture influences. He notes that while white minstrel shows clearly influenced its development in the mid-to late-nineteenth century, the cakewalk “was a dance with clear African American and shadowy African origins” (277).

efforts he could not escape the genre's demand to serve up "one group's life... as the stuff of another group's entertainment" (205), specifically, the entertainment of cultured Northerners who had an insatiable "appetite for consumable otherness" (206). In other words, this branch of criticism within African American scholarship on whether Chesnutt's representation of racial characters and customs is either "subversive" or "subordinated" converges with the critical evaluation of sentimentalism's portraits of (suffering) racial others. As Glenn Hendler (2001) notes, "historians of sentimentalism tend to focus either on its potential to build bridges between people or its colonizing proclivity to collapse them" (8). Literary critics of sentimentalism share with African American scholars a model of power that evaluates literary representations as *either* hegemonic *or* subversive. Such a binary model of power tends to occlude not only subtler navigations of power in a text but also how the temporal dynamics of literary figures and forms raise more productive questions about the body, pain, and time in African American literature that are not reducible to an either/or evaluation of a specific representation.

My argument is that these strands of African American and sentimental criticism converge not (only) because both fields (and genres) wrestle with the question of racial otherness as well as share an implicit binary model of power critique but rather because African American literature through the Reconstruction period (as well as before and beyond it) inherits, responds to, and adapts the sentimental genre's formal techniques for figuring the pain and suffering of others. As I intend to show, the field of African American studies forecloses potentially productive ways of reading (the temporality of) African American literature from the nineteenth century if it does not take into account

the sentimental genre's influence on the fiction of this period. As can be seen in both Sundquist's and Brodhead's readings of Chesnutt's *Conjure Stories*, there is a marked hostility or at best ambivalence toward sentimental figures and formal techniques in African American literature which hinges on an opposition between sentimentalism and realism. James Baldwin's famous dismissal of the sentimental genre in "Everyone's Protest Novel" (1949/1955) serves as an early indicator (if not progenitor) of the contemporary division between the two fields of African American and sentimental literary studies. Baldwin faults sentimental protest novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for its "ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion," which he reads as "the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel" (14). For Baldwin, sentimental novels are little more than "fantasies, connecting nowhere with reality" (19). Of course, Baldwin had his own important reasons for making such claims, not least of which was to carve out his own aesthetic space as an African American author (as Chesnutt himself had done in his own time). However, the conceit that sentimentalism's supposed lack of "realism" hinders the (political) purpose of African American literature rather than requires a different evaluation of how its figures and formal logic works within the genre persists through contemporary literary criticism. I argue that rereading Chesnutt's fiction and African American literature in this period for its adaptation of sentimentalism's figures of pain and forms of temporality rather than its "realism" provides a valuable new perspective for how African American scholarship thinks about time in the nineteenth-century novel. Reading Chesnutt's *Conjure Stories* for the way they figure the relation between time and the body in pain helps reorient (if not circumvent) the fraught question of whether these stories are subversive or not by attending to the formal temporal logic

underlying the tales rather than to the consequences or depth of a specific representation of racial otherness. Doing so also shifts the way we evaluate the “others” in Chesnutt’s tales from realistic portraits to sentimental figures, since it attends less to questions of verisimilitude (and what this may conceal) than to sentimentalism’s specific figuration of the quality and form of the other’s (bodily) pain and suffering in time.

Chesnutt himself had an admiration for several of the previous generation’s sentimental authors, Stowe in particular. He notes in his essay “Post-Bellum—Pre-Harlem” that “Harriet Beecher Stowe, especially in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, had covered practically the whole subject of slavery and race admixture” (907). While his appreciation for Stowe’s representation of slavery as well as her literary-professional success does not automatically make Chesnutt a sentimental author, it does suggest he is not hostile to the sentimental genre’s social purpose as well as some of its formal techniques. Indeed, as Michael Nowlin observes, when Chesnutt began writing what he thought of as his “novel of purpose,” *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), he took *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as well as Albion Tourgée’s *A Fool’s Errand* (1879)³ as his two models (153).⁴ Chesnutt’s understanding of the desired effect of his fiction is also in line with sentimentalism’s intention of appealing to (and reforming) the reader’s emotions. In a journal entry dated May 29, 1880, Chesnutt reflects that “[t]he negro’s part is to prepare himself for social recognition and equality” and that “it is the province of literature to open the way for him to get it—to accustom the public mind to the idea; and while

³ Tourgée’s novel also contains sentimental elements, most importantly a structuring marriage plot. It should also be noted that part of Chesnutt’s choice of these two novels as models is that they were both bestsellers in their time.

⁴ Nowlin, ““The First Negro Novelist”: Charles Chesnutt’s Point of View and the Emergence of African American Literature.”

amusing them to lead people out, imperceptibly, unconsciously, step by step to the desired state of feeling” (qtd. in Brodhead, 194-5). Of course, certain generic trappings of regionalist writing have been *dismissed* as sentimental, such as its representation of the faithful (former) slave and its rosy-colored pining for a lost (pastoral) past. This is not how I understand the sentimentalism of the *Conjure Stories*. Instead, I argue that Chesnutt’s tales are sentimental not because of regionalism’s putative fetishizing of otherness or its naïve nostalgia but rather to the degree that their focus on the body and its relation to temporality mobilizes concerns that, as we have seen, are central to the genre of sentimentalism. There is a strain of sentimentalism running through these tales that has been overlooked that concerns the problem of the body in pain and its relation to time. Chesnutt’s conjure tales construct various figures for how slavery cripples the slave’s relation to time, as well as explore what it may mean to escape the specific (painful) embodiment that the slave system imposes upon the black body. Reading how the *Conjure Stories* formulates its own concept of “crip time” provides a new critical perspective on how Chesnutt theorizes the relations among slavery, pain, and time and also offers more productive ways of evaluating the question of agency and resistance in Chesnutt’s work.

As we saw already in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the figure of the disabled body or the body in pain looms large in sentimental literature. The slow suffering as well as the damaged bodies of characters such as Eva, Uncle Tom, and Prue elicit the reader’s sympathy; indeed, to accomplish the sentimental goal of establishing a (partial) identification with suffering characters, the reader must first sympathize with their pain.

As scholars who argue for either the genre's sadism or its masochism have pointed out,⁵ sentimentalism is fascinated with as well as reliant upon representations of pain, suffering, and bodily harm (which are often accompanied by tears). In addition to the question of the ambiguous (readerly) pleasures sentimentalism's fascination with pain makes possible, disability studies scholars have raised the issue of the genre's exploitation of the disabled body as a trope to manufacture sympathy. Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues in *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997) that "sentimentalism uses disabled figures" specifically (if not solely) as a "spectacle to generate sympathy" (81). In sentimental novels such as Stowe's, certain characters (specifically female characters for Thomson) are marked by a "visible physical disability" that "operates as a badge of innocence, suffering, displacement and powerlessness, rendering the disabled woman a sympathetic and alarming figure of vulnerability who cries out from the narrative for rescue" (82). These disabled figures function as "icons of vulnerability who help generate a rhetoric of sympathy and scandal meant to propel readers from complacency to conviction" (82). For Thomson, the spectacle of the disabled body serves as the prop for sentimentalism's project of creating a "benevolent maternalism," a discourse of maternal care and charitable action that permitted nineteenth-century women more mobility in the public sphere (82). Yet Thomson argues that while this discourse of benevolent maternalism drew attention to vulnerable and disabled bodies in need of care, it was also implicitly (if not necessarily) frightened by the figure of a body lacking in agency and hence kept a measured distance from the putative objects of its own charity. She therefore argues that while benevolent maternalism justified a "program of feminine

⁵ See the Chapter 1, n1 and n14.

empowerment” (83), this particular way of generating sympathy “increasingly disavows the objects of its benevolence as it more anxiously idealizes its humanitarian figures” (83). For Thomson, the figure of the disabled body in sentimental literature serves a practical political end over and against any aesthetic complexity it may have. The disabled body is quickly (and gratefully) cast aside once it has accomplished its function of generating sympathy.⁶

This reading of sentimentalism’s treatment of disabled bodies registers a branch of disability theory that proceeds by way of analyzing the representation of disability in literature. As Michael Bérubé notes in “Disability and Narrative” (2005), “A good deal of disability studies work thus far has concentrated on the depiction of individual characters in narratives. This strand of disability studies has tended to focus on the representation of human bodies” (569). While Bérubé acknowledges that the critique of representations of disability serves an important political function by pointing out how disabled characters often fail “to do justice to the actual lived experiences of people with disabilities,” he takes issue with how this line of criticism “sometimes proceeds as if characters in literary texts could be read simply as representations of real people” (570). In other words, disability studies occasionally overlooks the literary or *aesthetic* function

⁶ Mary Klages makes a similar argument in *Woeful Afflictions* (1999). She notes that while “sentimental representations of disabled people provided a particular model of selfhood within which a disabled body could become something more than just a ‘poster’ arousing the compassion of able-bodied others,” this sentimental mode of representing disability “did not work directly to ‘liberate’ disabled people” because it “confine[d] representations of disabled people within narrow parameters” by creating “strict limits to the cultural meanings and functions of disabled bodies” (5). While Klages is not as dismissive of sentimental treatments of disability as Thomson, since for her “sentimental conventions” allowed for the representation of disabled people as “empathic actors” (7), like Thomson she ultimately reads sentimental representations as imposing too many limits upon the disabled person’s agency.

of the disabled characters and tropes it critiques. In order to make its argument for political representation, disability studies can often fail to do justice to the aesthetic function of the tropes it mobilizes. For Bérubé, what is lost in this line of critique is the relation between disability and aesthetic or narrative form, which, importantly, he understands as a relation between disability and temporality: “Disability is not a static condition; it is a fluid and labile fact of embodiment, and as such it has complex relations to the conditions of narrative, because it compels us to understand embodiment in relation to temporality” (570). In Bérubé’s reading, characters with cognitive disabilities operate as occasions for the text to reflect on the conditions necessary for arranging events into temporal sequence—that is, on narrative form itself. The trope of disability therefore functions as a moment of narrative self-awareness; for Bérubé, the figure of the impaired mind permits the narrative to dwell on its own aesthetic conditions and structure.

Disability in literature exposes narrative form not as a given but rather as a problem, and more broadly raises the question of disability’s relation to various forms of temporality. One way to get beyond the focus on character representation and to further theorize the relation between disability and narrative form, then, is to turn attention to the temporality of disability in literature. I want to suggest that this can be best accomplished by focusing on the temporality of the body in pain in literature, that is to say, through a turn to reading disability in literature for its theorization of various forms of “crip time.”

Of course, one of the primary reasons behind Bérubé’s disagreement with Thomson (and the disability scholarship she represents) is that they read two very different forms of disability: whereas Thomson focuses on the figure of the disabled body in sentimental literature, Bérubé attends to the trope of the impaired mind. The question

of how impairments of body and those of mind either differ or overlap is a longstanding issue in the field of disability studies. What, for example, does someone who is deaf have in common with someone born with autism, aside from the possible epithet “disabled”? For that matter, what do two individuals with different physical (or mental) impairments have in common with one another? In other words, Bérubé’s disagreement with Thomson is in part over the very definition of disability that opens out onto the broader contours of the field itself. My argument is that focusing on the body in pain will provide more coherence to the study of disability as well as redraw its parameters in productive ways. Though defining the object (or subject) of disability studies as the body in pain may leave certain forms of impairment out of consideration, provisionally narrowing the study of disability to a reading of the body in pain will help provide more theoretical focus to the field as well as further establish how disability theory both clarifies and differs from other contemporary theories of the body.

While pain has been conceptualized by various critics writing on the body, these theories’ usual focus on awakening the potential *abilities* and pleasures of the body leaves much to be desired for those working in the field of disability studies. Its often perfunctory treatment of pain, however, is less an oversight than a critical blind spot given the tacit assumptions underlying much of what Tobin Siebers calls contemporary “body theory.”⁷ As Siebers argues in *Disability Theory* (2008), disability and pain are

⁷ Siebers does not provide an extensive breakdown of specific authors or texts that represent the form of “body theory” he is criticizing. In general, he appears to equate body theory with social constructionist theories of the body, although the specific definition of social constructionism is once again left somewhat vague. However, from another perspective, Siebers’ understanding of social constructionism may be read as intentionally general since his text is redefining the term as any theory that elides the

problems for current body theory because disability runs counter to body theory's ableist assumptions as well as its focus on pleasure. He quotes Lennard J. Davis' remarks on why "current body theory avoids the harsh realities of the [disabled] body" (58) from *Enforcing Normalcy* (1995):

The body is seen as a site of *jouissance*, a native ground of pleasure, the scene of an excess that defies reason, that takes dominant culture and its rigid, powerladen vision of the body to task.... The nightmare of that body is the one that is deformed, maimed, mutilated, broken, diseased.... Rather than face this ragged image, the critic turns to the fluids of sexuality, the gloss of lubrication, the glossary of the body as text, the heteroglossia of the intertext, the glossolalia of the schizophrenic. But almost never the body of the differently abled. (Davis, 5)

The disabled body is anathema to (most) critics of the body, whether that critic conceptualizes the body as a vehicle of *jouissance*, a text, or locus of power relations. For Siebers, as well as for Davis, this is because much of current body theory is concerned with uncovering a new *able* body: "Hidden underneath the docile body—the body invented by the modern age and now recognized as the only body—is the able body" (Siebers 58). Body theory attempts to see through "the repressive apparatus of modern society" to discover this new body, a body that, as Siebers notes, is "rarely disabled" (59). Instead, it is "a body that feels good and looks good—a body on the brink of discovering new kinds of pleasure, new uses for itself, and more and more power" (59). For Siebers, much of body theory aims to liberate an able body from the "disabling" conditions of modern society; as such, the disabled body is at best overlooked and at worst (unconsciously) rejected as the nightmare of a theory invested in understanding the body as a locus of (latent) ability. While Siebers may to some extent be

intractability of the body in pain or the impaired body to focus on a body constructed solely around pleasure.

overstating his case here, his point that a discourse of ability and pleasure underlie much of contemporary body theory is difficult to deny.

When disability and pain do arise in contemporary body theory, disability theorists such as Siebers have been quick to point out that the way they are conceptualized often overlooks the complexity (or intractability) of pain and too quickly turns a disabling condition into a latent or transgressive form of ability. As Siebers observes, there are “only a few images of pain acceptable to current body theory, and none of them is realistic from the standpoint of people who suffer pain daily” (61). For Siebers, the “dominant model” of body theory understands pain as “either regulatory or resistant” (61). As a regulatory force, pain is “the tool used by society to enforce its norms,” while the resistance theory understands pain’s “repressive effect” as producing “an unmanageable supplement of suffering that marks out the individual as a site of resistance to social regulation” (61). Siebers critiques this either/or conception of pain for its understanding of pain as inhering in a form of individuality (which he links to the medical model of disability)⁸ and more importantly for its alchemical transformation of pain and disability into a form of ability (resistance). According to Siebers, most theories of the body “present suffering and disability either as a way of reconfiguring the physical

⁸ Disability theory draws a distinction between the medical and social model of disability. In the medical model, disability is viewed as an individual problem or defect that must be corrected through medical intervention. The medical model operates according to a certain set of norms concerning bodily health and function; if there is a physical or psychological impairment that causes an individual to fall short of these norms, he or she is identified as “disabled.” Most disability theorists have allied themselves with the social model, which pushes back against the individuating medical model of disability by observing how various social institutions and structures (medicine, architecture, law, etc.) create disabling conditions for people with various forms of impairments. For example, while a person may be impaired by the loss of a leg, he or she is disabled by an architectural design that does not provide ease of access for those not meeting the norms of bodily shape or health.

resources of the body or of opening up new possibilities of pleasure” (62). As he notes, “[r]are is the theoretical account where physical suffering remains harmful for very long. The ideology of ability requires that any sign of disability be viewed exclusively as awakening new and magical opportunities for ability” (63). Pain is not a very pleasurable concept for a theory that focuses on awakening the potential resources and resistances of the body. Pain can only serve as a temporary stage or conduit within this process of awakening the body to its (ableist) liberation: the birth pangs, soon forgotten, of the able body. While theories of the pleasurable potentials of the body have much to teach, the body in pain is ultimately not their primary object or concern. Therefore while other strands of body criticism—queer theory, for example—focus on the body in (and) pleasure, the body in pain should arguably fall under the purview of a disability theory that is invested in reading how this body intersects with various forms of aesthetic and political representation.

Of course, the move to conceptualize disability studies as theorizing the body in pain raises the question of how “pain” is being defined in this context. At its most broad, I understand pain to encompass various forms of physical as well as psychological distress. However, as Elaine Scarry points out in *The Body in Pain* (1985), one of the major problems pain raises, for both the theorist as well as the subject in pain, is that of its very definition as well as its ability to be communicated to others. Or, to put it another way, pain presents a problem for representation itself. For Scarry, “pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it” (4). It is “the utter rigidity of pain” that accounts for its “resistance to language;” even more troubling is that for Scarry pain’s resistance to language “is not simply one of its incidental or accidental attributes but is essential to

what it is” (5). She attributes this resistance to pain’s lack of a proper object: “physical pain...has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language” (5). Pain’s resistance to language also creates a divide between the subject who experiences pain and the other to whom she wishes to communicate her suffering. Scarry argues that “for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that ‘having pain’ may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to ‘have certainty,’ while for the other person it is so elusive that ‘hearing about pain’ may exist as the primary model of what it is ‘to have doubt’” (4). Thus for Scarry “pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed” (4).

Although Scarry does not acknowledge it in *The Body in Pain*, her text wrestles with the same central concern that informs the sentimental tradition: the question of whether one person’s pain can be communicated to another, and if so, what the most proper medium or vehicle for doing so is. Sentimentalism ventures that suffering is communicable to another person through the medium of sympathy, though the degree as well as range of this communication was often a matter of debate. Adam Smith (1759), for instance, argued that sentimental sympathy should be circumscribed by physical proximity: “Whatever interest we take in the fortune of those...who are placed altogether out of the sphere of our activity, can produce only anxiety to ourselves, without any manner of advantage to them” (140). Building on Smith’s concept of the sympathetic imagination, however, authors working within the sentimental genre argued literary texts enable the communication of the pain of “distant” others by engaging the reader’s

sympathy through narratives and representations of forms of suffering—in short, by making the distant other’s pain more proximate through literary form. Yet if Scarry is correct that pain ultimately remains “unshareable,” no matter how proximate it is, then the sentimental tradition operates according to a false premise. As Hendler points out, “If there can be no communications whatsoever—no bridge—between people’s experiences, then the sentimental ideal of ‘true sympathy’ is not merely utopian, it is a lie” (9).

Although sentimental authors may disagree on the precise degree, the shared “ideal” (or operative premise) of the tradition is the belief that an other’s pain and suffering is capable of being communicated in some form to a reader (or spectator) through the medium of sympathetic imagination. *The Body in Pain* may be read as a (re)interrogation of the central premise of sentimental sympathy in its close examination of the relation between pain, the body, and language. In addressing the question of the communicability and significance of pain and suffering, Scarry’s text as well as other work in the field of disability studies recapitulate the central concerns of the sentimental tradition and in many cases respond to the question of pain’s “sharability” in ways that echo earlier sentimental (aesthetic) solutions to the problem of the other’s pain.

Although Scarry (and other disability theorists) do not frame their response to the problem of pain in terms of sympathy, her argument about the degree of sharability of an other’s pain through the medium of language and representation converges in many respects with the sentimental tradition’s concept of the sympathetic imagination. For though Scarry first suggests pain is unrepresentable, she quickly argues that pain struggles to be represented nonetheless. Scarry notes that in most all descriptions of pain, one “almost immediately encounters an ‘as if’ structure: it feels as if...; it is as though...”

(15). In place of the missing referent of pain, the subject seeks out figural representations of her pain in order to lend it the form of objective reality. Descriptions of pain for Scarry are ultimately creative literary phenomena; pain fundamentally demands the operation of literary figures and forms to make it intelligible or objectifiable both to oneself and to another person. More importantly, these figural representations take shape within a larger narrative intended to communicate pain to another person through the language of recognizable (bodily) feeling: “The feeling of pain entails the feeling of being acted upon, and the person many either express this in terms of the world acting on him (‘It feels like a knife...’) or in terms of his own body acting on him (‘It feels like the bones are cutting through...’)” (16). These figural “as if” or “like” statements tell a story, brief as it may be (“It feels like the bones are cutting through my leg”), intended to communicate to another the feeling of bodily distress or suffering. Thus if for Scarry pain remains “unsharable” since only a representation rather than the pain “itself” (the missing referent) can be communicated, it is nevertheless “imaginable” to an other through comprehensible figures of feeling. In short, then, representations of pain for Scarry are forms of sentimental narrative. Through the use of specific literary figures or forms, the listener or reader is able to imaginatively feel the sufferer’s pain, that is, to sympathize with him or her (*pathos*, “feeling,” *syn-* “with, together”). Scarry’s suggestion that pain struggles to be communicated through aesthetic forms evokes the sentimental tradition’s concept of the sympathetic imagination, whereby the reader or spectator’s comprehension of an other’s pain is facilitated through the medium of an aesthetic figure or activity (imagination).

Scarry's analysis of pain as essentially literary in structure, as a subjective experience in search of figural as well as narrative (temporal) forms, also suggests why disability theory needs to attend more closely to the aesthetic form that pain assumes (or makes possible) in literature. For Scarry, both figural and narrative language are required to give shape to pain; that is, figure and narrative may be read as an attempt to give structure to pain by providing it with a temporal form. In the example provided above, as in most of Scarry's examples, the figural narrative of the pain "like...bones cutting through" is delivered in the present progressive tense which provides a specific temporal form to the pain. It situates the pain in the immediate present and registers that it will continue for the foreseeable future unless something is done about it—presumably by the one being addressed, which (as in the case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) represents a form of the sentimental genre's solicitation of the reader or listener through narratives of pain to act on behalf of the sufferer. It would be very different if the person communicated their pain, for instance, in the simple past tense: "It feels like the bones cut through my leg." The temporal structure of this figure communicates a more receding pain, a pain fading to some degree or intensity into the past. This is not to diminish or disqualify this form of pain from some type of redress, but simply to draw attention to the various temporal structures inherent in different figures of pain. In short, then, Scarry's analysis also suggests that pain has something to do with time. What is the body in pain's relation to time, and how may it be depicted in (or through) literary form?

It is here that the theory of "crip time" may guide us in a reading of pain's relation to literary form. The theory of crip time tries to explicate how (the body in) pain acts in and on time, as well as the restrictions that normative time may impose upon the impaired

body. As Alison Kafer observes in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), the concept of crip time is frequently referred to in disabled communities but as yet remains under-theorized by disability scholars. She notes that crip time emerges in this context as a “wry reference to the disability related-events that always seem to start late or to the disabled people who never seem to arrive anywhere on time” (26). In other words, crip time is colloquially understood to refer to the additional time required for disabled people to perform certain tasks or meet various external deadlines; its formula is “normative time + x ” (with x being the extra time required to account for one’s specific impairment). As such, crip time as commonly understood does not challenge or change normative time so much as request more of it. In order to theorize crip time as making possible what Kafer calls a “reorientation to time” (27), it is necessary to conceptualize it as more than just the request for additional normative time since this keeps the form or structure of normative time intact while simply demanding more of it. While Kafer acknowledges the importance of this demand,⁹ she argues that crip time should be conceptualized “not only [as] an accommodation to those who need ‘more’ time but also, and perhaps especially, a challenge to normative and normalizing expectations of pace and scheduling. Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds” (27). Kafer’s argument that crip time “bends” the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds implies that it puts pressure on time in order to warp the rigid structure of normative temporality. The theory of crip time therefore involves an

⁹ Kafer stresses that the request for more (normative) time remains a crucial demand for disability theorists and various disability communities alike. Crip time also involves an “awareness that disabled people might need more time to accomplish something or to arrive somewhere” because of various “ableist barriers” over which they have “little to no control” (26).

act of deforming or crippling time itself by warping it out of shape to meet various forms of embodiment. Its theory of time is more fluid in order to account for what Bérubé calls the “labile fact of embodiment.” Adapting theories of queer time from Judith Halberstam’s *In A Queer Time and Place* (2005), Kafer argues that crip time involves variations on queer deviations from normative time such as “strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices” (Halberstam 1). For example, she notes overlaps between discourses of AIDS and the temporality of “prognosis time” for those suffering from degenerative diseases (Kafer 37). Kafer is also careful to draw distinctions between queer and crip time, notably over what she sees as some of queer theory’s implicit fear of disability as well as its focus on nostalgia.¹⁰ While Kafer’s work represents an initial effort to think through crip time, and therefore often raises more questions than answers, her argument about the relation between disability and time helps to complicate the notion of crip time by beginning to theorize how disabled embodiment impacts the very form of temporality.

Yet what of the body in pain’s relation to time? While Kafer usefully formulates some of the ways disabled embodiment impacts the form of temporality, her analysis does not extend to how the body in pain may operate in and upon time. If we are to understand disability theory’s object as the body in pain, then we must conceptualize *crip time* as theorizing the convoluted relation between embodiment, pain, and temporality.

¹⁰ Nostalgia as an affect, as well as a critical paradigm, operates according to a before/after timeframe that becomes problematic for disability theory when it is applied to the condition of the disabled body. In the context of an acquired disability, the disabled person is often understood (mainly by others) to have a nostalgic longing for her body “before” her disability. Understood as such, the disabled person is haunted by this tragic loss of her healthy body, which she cannot recover and therefore nostalgically pines for.

Michael Snediker's *Queer Optimism* (2008) dwells at length on this close relation between pain and time. He argues that "pain alters how time measures or is measured at all" (93). Reformulating Deleuze's reading of pain in *Masochism* (1991), Snediker suggests that while "time, for Deleuze, contracts masochistic pain," the obverse may also and more often be the case (94). Through a reading of the poetry of Emily Dickinson, he argues that "pain contracts time," and therefore it is pain itself that "dictates temporal terms that might only retrospectively be seen to dictate it" (94). In other words, "pain's temporal properties are legislated by pain itself...[and are] only retroactively made to appear the effects of time" (107). Rather than temporality imposing a rigid structure on pain, "pain organizes time's own unfurling" (108).

To understand pain as imposing an organization upon temporality is a useful way to begin to think about crip time, especially as it relates to literary narratives. As we shall see in Chesnutt's fiction below, pain emerges in literary narratives in search of a figure or a form through which it may, to borrow Snediker's term, unfurl itself for the reader. For all of Charles Chesnutt's dark humor, I read his short fiction as primarily a struggle with the intractability of pain, particularly the enduring pain of slavery as well as of the slave's embodiment. Chesnutt's *Conjure Stories* attempt to explicate or define this pain, and in so doing Chesnutt formulates his own theorization of crip time by articulating this pain through various temporal forms. *The Conjure Stories* as well as Chesnutt's non-fiction essays on race in America theorize the complex relations between pain, time, and the (racial) body. Chesnutt's conception of the intertwining of pain and time move him beyond a treatment of the body of the African-American (and the body of African

American literature) purely in terms of national time to a “reconstructed” theory of time in which multiple forms of temporality are imbricated.

II. Conjuring Crip Time

Chesnutt’s *Conjure Stories* appear to rest firmly within the genre of regionalist or local color writing that flourished after the end of the Civil War. Similar at first glance to Joel Chandler Harris’ popular Uncle Remus stories, Chesnutt’s tales are set in “present” (postbellum) time and feature stories of plantation life under slavery delivered by a narrator who has experienced them firsthand. In the case of Harris and others, the genre is often notable (and has been criticized) for a certain strain of sentimental nostalgia that mourns (as it misrepresents) the loss of the “simpler” times before the advent of the Civil War. Chesnutt’s tales, however, diverge from Harris’ model. As critics such as Sundquist have pointed out, *The Conjure Stories* do not present a docile or passive image of African American life under slavery but rather explore the pain and violence of the slave system as well as various forms of African American resistance. Chesnutt’s tales therefore do not deploy the form of sentimental nostalgia for which authors such as Harris have been criticized. However, Chesnutt’s refusal to endorse this form of nostalgia does not mean *The Conjure Stories* rejects sentimentalism entirely. Chesnutt’s exploration of the body in pain and its relation to temporality draws on sentimental techniques and figures to theorize the ways slavery cripples the African-American’s experience of time. Finally, as we will see below, Chesnutt’s view of what it may mean to “reconstruct” time may be read as another form of sentimental nostalgia—a nostalgia

that does not mourn or memorialize the past but that does refuse to let it be lost, forgotten, in time.

Consider the first of the conjure tales, “The Goophered Grapevine.” This tale introduces the cast of characters Chesnutt would flesh out over the course of the conjure stories: the northerner John, who travels South with his wife (later identified as Annie) after the Civil war to “start a new industry” in grape-culture, and “Uncle” Julius McAdoo, a former slave on the McAdoo plantation that John purchases, who has remained “attached” to the property since the end of the war. “The Goophered Grapevine” establishes the form of (most of) the stories to follow: prompted by some occasion in the present, Julius tells a story of the “old days” on the plantation before the war that typically (though not always) involves some form of “conjure” or folk magic.¹¹ After his story concludes, John and his wife offer commentary on its meaning or share their affective responses, and Julius often extracts some advantage from the telling of his tale (which ranges from freeing a jailed nephew to being awarded the last slice of ham). In the opening story, John and his wife come across Julius on the McAdoo plantation as they are out scouting for a plot of land to develop into a grape vineyard. They find Julius seated on a log before a seemingly abandoned vineyard eating a hat full of grapes. Though he moves to make way for John and Annie, they politely tell him to stay and share with him their plan to buy the vineyard. Julius responds that, if he were John, he “wouldn’ buy di vimya’d” because it is “goophered,—conju’d, bewitch” (6). Following

¹¹ As we will see in Section III below, Chesnutt has a complex understanding of the historical origins of the conjure tradition and belief system, one that, despite his own occasional attempt to dismiss it as such, does not relegate it to the historical dustbin as mere “superstition.”

John and Annie's expressions of incredulity, Julius relates the story of how the vineyard was "goophered" in order to dissuade the Northern couple from purchasing it.

In the tale, "Ole Mars Dugal' McAdoo" enlists conjure woman Aunt Peggy to help prevent his slaves from stealing the grapes from his vineyard. Aunt Peggy places a goopher on the vineyard, so that anyone who covertly eats the grapes suffers a mysterious death shortly thereafter. Because several of his slaves die as a result, Mars Dugal' heads to town to purchase a new "field hand;" he returns with Henry, whom Julius describes as an "ole nigger, er de color a gingy-cake, en ball ez a hoss-apple on de top er his head. He was a peart ole nigger, do', en could do a big day's wuk" (9). Distracted by a hunt for a runaway slave from the neighboring plantation, the other "han's" neglect to tell Henry about the goopher. On his first day at the new plantation, Henry eats a few grapes from the vineyard and shortly after falls ill. Mars Dugal', not wanting to lose his newly purchased slave, takes him to Aunt Peggy, who gives him some "conjuh medicine" that "'ud keep de goopher off'n him tel de spring; but w'en de sap being to rise in de grapevines he ha' ter come en see her ag'in, en she tell him w'at e's ter do" (9). When spring does come, Aunt Peggy tells Henry that when "Mars Dugal' begub ter prune de grapevimes, he mus' go en take 'n scrape off de sap whar it ooze out'n de cut een's er de vimes, en 'n'int his head wit it" (9). Peggy assures Henry that "ef he do dat once't a year de goopher wouldn' wuk again 'im long ez he done it" (9).

A curious thing happens to Henry as he begins to follow Aunt Peggy's conjure prescription. After anointing his head with the sap from the grape vine, his hair grows back in wild healthy bunches. Henry's hair takes on the very properties of the medicine he applies to it, the rich sap of the young grapevine. As Julius describes it, his "ha'r

begun to quirl all up in little balls, des like dis yer reg'lar grapy ha'r, en by de time de grapes got ripe his head look des like a bunch er grapes" (10). But as Julius notes, this is not "de quares' thing 'bout de goopher" (10). Though when Henry arrived on the plantation he was "a little ole an stiff in de j'int's," the following summer "he got des ez spry en libely ez any young nigger on de plantation" (10). Henry's newfound youth and vitality, however, as well as his relief from the pain of stiff joints (no doubt brought on by a lifetime of labor), is not permanent. His health begins to fade once again in the fall as the vines start to die:

[D]e mos' cur'ouses' thing happen' in de fall, when de sap begin ter go down in de gravevimes. Fus', when de grapes 'uz gethered, de knots begun ter straighten out'n Henry's ha'r; en w'en de leaves begin ter fall, Henry's ha'r mence' ter drap out; en when de vimes 'uz bar', Henry's head wuz baller 'n it wuz in de spring, en he begin ter git ole en stiff in de j'int's ag'in, en paid no mo' 'tention ter de gals dyoin' er de whole winter. En nex' spring, w'en he rub de sap on ag'in, he got young ag'in, en so soopl en libely dat none er de young niggers on de plantation couldn' jump, ner dance, ner hoe ez much cotton ez Henry. But in de fall er de year his grapes 'mence' ter straighten out, en his j'int ter git stiff, en his ha'r drap off, en de rheumatiz begin ter wrastle wid 'im. (10)

As a result of the goopher, as well as the "medicine" he is given to counteract it, Henry's health becomes tied to the growth and decay of the grapevine crop. His very body, in other words, is bound up with the annual cycle of the seasons, and therefore with the crop's periods of growth, harvest, and decay. In the spring, Henry grows fertile and strong like the new grapes; in the fall, as the crop withers, so does his hair, his joints, and his health. Chesnutt stresses that this annual rotation is not just a cycle of age and youth, but more importantly one of pain and its absence. When Henry grows young, he becomes "soopl" (supple) and "libely" (lively), so much so that he can jump, dance, and hoe better than any other slave on the plantation. Chesnutt also implies that with Henry's newfound youth comes a resurgence of sexual energy (and fertility), so that jumping and

dancing are not the only physical activities Henry performs with his new supple body. Contrasted with this image of health is Henry's ("natural") condition as an old man: a stiffness in the joints and a creeping rheumatism that takes over his body, not to mention some implied form of impotence. We also note, familiar in disability narratives, the schedule or regimen of applying various forms of medicine to the body, depending upon the effects of the environment or season. To stave off the effects of the goopher, Henry has to "anoint" his head with sap from the vine each spring. He also describes the taste of the conjure drink Aunt Peggy gives him as "like whiskey wid sump'n bitter in it"—bitter medicine, indeed (9). The effect of the goopher therefore involves a regimen of (medicinal) care for the body, applied at a specific time during the year in order to momentarily delay the onset of pain and death, to push it back just a little bit further into the future (the fall). The conjure medicine has not so much reversed the linear flow of time for Henry as it has severed this linear form and knotted it in a loop, trapping Henry in a repetitive cycle between age and youth (or pain and relief) over which he has little control. Crip time in this tale is figured not as the repetition of pain through linear time but rather as the alternating rhythm of pain and release from pain.

Chesnutt describes the pain of Henry's inflamed joints as a kind of passive struggle that Henry submits to: "rheumatiz begin ter wrastle wid 'im." The image of "wrestling" with rheumatism is provocative, not only for the way the passive construction appears to deprive Henry of agency, but also for the porous if vague distinction between the internal and external contours of the body it sets up. One wrestles with some kind of external force that seeks mastery over the body from without, yet the image of "wrasling" also suggests that this force is held or gripped close to the body, in immediate

physical proximity, and hence is intimate though in some sense still external. This same porous boundary between inside and outside also defines Henry's relation to the grape crop: his body's cycle of pain and relief is bound up with the external life of the vineyard. Through the agency of the goopher and the conjure medicine, it is as if he has taken this crop and its life cycle into himself. "The Goophered Grapevine" therefore presents a cycle of pain and relief bound up with the intimate yet external temporal form of the seasons. It is not only the pain of rheumatism that Henry wrestles with; it is also, if not primarily, a form of crip time itself that his body is subjected to as a result of the goopher.

Yet the impersonal cycle of nature is not the only external force that subjects Henry's body to a painful struggle with time; these forces also wear a human face. Henry's cycle of vitality and wasting away quickly becomes a commodity in this tale. Mars Dugal' shrewdly sees that he can turn a profit off of Henry by selling him in the spring when his body is at its peak and buying him back in the fall once his joints have begun to stiffen. The fact that the slave's health is a purchasable good is itself not a new insight, but what Chesnutt adds to this in "The Goophered Grapevine" is this health's intimate link to time. Through a sentimental figure of the (slave) body undergoing an alternating cycle of pain and health, Chesnutt links the temporality of the slave's health to the economics of the slavery system. In other words, what is profitable about Henry's body in this tale is not only the labor it can perform but more importantly its specific relation to time: his young supple body prices highly on the market in the spring, and his aged, pain-ridden body is repurchased on the cheap in the fall. In this story, what is being sold in the slave market is the temporally limited (in terms of duration) abilities of a body before the time when pain overtakes it. Mars Dugal' is selling other traders the brief

period of time Henry will not be in rheumatic pain; in short, he is selling Henry's brief moment of health. "Health" is therefore defined in the context of the slavery system as the temporally indeterminate period of bodily ability before pain or disability renders that body useless (or at least unprofitable). Chesnut's Henry is a startlingly condensed illustration of disability theory's assertion that all human beings are only "temporarily able-bodied:" he passes from the bloom of able-bodiedness to the "wilting" of disabled embodiment in the span of a few short months. While for Henry this cycle repeats itself over and over, in the actual slave market this was of course not the case. What Chesnut's story appears to be registering in part is the repetitive cycle of this trade writ large. That is, what Henry's tale compresses in its illustration of a temporary health repeatedly for sale is the grueling cycle of a slave system that uses up the able bodies of slaves, discards them once they are pain-ridden and no longer "supple," and repeats the process over again.

Even Henry, however, cannot escape the ravages of the slave system for long. His abled-disabled embodiment cycle itself proves to be temporary, due, once again, to the intercession of outside forces. Following the advice of an enterprising Northerner (whom Julius clearly models on John), Mars Dugal' attempts a new method of crop cultivation that proves disastrous. When the grapevines died, "Henry died too,—des went out sorter like a cannell. Dey did n't 'pear ter be nuffin de matter wid 'im, cep'n' de rheumatiz, but his strenk des dwinel' away 'tel he did n' hab ernuff lef' ter draw his bref" (13). The image of Henry's health fading away like a candle at its end is a fitting metaphor for how the slave system slowly burns away or consumes all of the slave's time—that is, all of the health remaining in his body before his strength, like Henry's in

this final moment, “dwinel’ away” to the point where he no longer even has the ability to breathe. This slow suffocation is one of the ways Chesnutt theorizes how slavery cripples the slave’s relation to time: “crip time” is figured here as the repetitive rhythm of ever shorter and more painful breaths that slowly releases the remaining health from the body. “The Goophered Grapevine” therefore theorizes the slave body’s relation to time in two forms that turn along the axis of pain: as a seasonal cycle between pain and relief and as a slow and steady suffocation that drains the health from the body. While the first form of crip time is circular (or annual) and the second seemingly linear, these two temporal forms converge in the way they both capture the slave’s body in a relation to time that is defined by a recurrence of pain. What distinguishes these two figures of crip time is less their temporal forms (circular or linear) than the intensity of the pain they provoke: the chronic pain of Henry’s seasonal transformations from youth to age (and back) compared to the acute pain of a steady suffocation. “The Goophered Grapevine” thereby captures the range of bodily pain inflicted by the system of slavery and graphs their relation to time in two temporal forms that are less contradictory than supplementary figures of the quality of pain inflicted by the slave system.

Chesnutt revisits the question of the slave body’s relation to time and pain in his next conjure tale, “Po’ Sandy.” In this story, Sandy, who belongs to Mars Marrabo McSwayne, distinguishes himself as such a good worker that all of the McSwayne children want a piece of him. In an act of “fairness,” Mars Marrabo distributes Sandy’s time amongst them all, so that “one er his chilluns...take Sandy fer a mont’ er so, en den ernudder for a mont’ er so, en so on day erway tel dey had all had ‘im de same lenk er time; en den dey would all take him roun’ ag’in” (16). This schedule of shuffling

between masters and plantations becomes so disorienting for Sandy that “bimeby it got so Sandy did n’ hardly knowed whar he wuz gwine ter stay fum one week’s een’ ter de yuther” (16). Sandy tells his new wife, Tenie, that he has grown “monst’us ti’ed er dish yer gwine roun’ so much” and he “wisht I wuz a tree, er a stump, er a rock, er sump’n w’at could stay on de plantation fer a w’ile” (17). Tenie then reveals to Sandy that she used to be a conjure woman and, if he wants, she can turn him into whatever he desires so he “kin stay right whar you want, ez long ez you mineter” (17). She tells Sandy that he will not have a mouth or ears, but she can turn him back to human form once in a while “so you kin git sump’n ter eat, and hear w’at’s gwine on” (17). Sandy readily agrees to this transformation, since though as a tree he may lack some of his human senses he will, at least, have roots.

Sandy therefore exchanges his own body for that of another living organism (a pine-tree), specifically because this new form of embodiment enables a different relation to temporality than his old body did. As a mute and deaf tree, with his roots deep in the ground, Sandy’s new body stands in stark contrast to his previous body which was traded from hand to hand every month among the members of the McSwayne family. Chesnutt leads his reader to contrast the frenzied temporality of Sandy’s previous life with the stillness and security of the pine-tree. Sandy’s lack of ears is significant in this regard as well, since while his deafness prevents him from following the news of how the plantation responds to his seeming escape, it also suggests that he is now to some degree beyond the reach of his (many) master’s orders. He can no longer hear them. Through Sandy’s transformation, Chesnutt raises the question of what it would take to repair the slave’s damaged or crippled relation to time, divided as it is by the arbitrary will of the

master. This story expresses the slave's wish to stay in one place, to cultivate his own sense of and relation to time. "Po' Sandy" also provides a form in the figure of the tree for this more grounded and autonomous temporality. Rather than simply a plot device, Sandy's transformation raises questions about the temporality of the slave's body and life, and through the figure of the tree theorizes about new temporal forms that might repair the slave's crippled relation to time.

What kind of life and relation to his own body could the slave cultivate, this story asks, if his time was not so fragmented? If his time was in some way more "natural," whatever that might entail? What it does appear to entail, at very least, is a formative relation between temporality and space—Sandy's grounding in one specific (and immovable) place will enable him in some way to make his time his own. In "Po' Sandy," a time of one's own emerges from a space of one's own. Chesnutt's theorization of this less fragmented relation to time through the figure of the tree also evokes the domestic sentimental ideal of the home as a grounded space of affection that establishes the individual's "roots." Tenie's visits to Sandy, and her tending to his needs after transforming him back into human form, may be read as figures of spousal and maternal affection and caretaking in this domestic space the two have created together in the seclusion of the forest. The branching growth of the tree likewise registers a form of temporality typically denied to slaves: the ability to establish a family line through generation. They figure, in relief, the children Sandy and Tenie will never have.

Yet even as a tree, Sandy remains a living organism and so is still vulnerable to pain and impairment. During the day, a woodpecker comes and pecks at Sandy's bark, and when Tenie transforms him back that night "he had a little roun' hole in his arm, des

lack a sharp stick be'n stuck in it" (18). Later, Mars Marrabo's sends some of his slaves to "chop tuppentine boxes" and, alighting on Sandy, they "hack' de bark up two er th'ee feet, fer ter let de tuppentine run" (18). When Sandy is turned back into human form, "he had a big skyar on his lef' leg, des lack it be'n skunt" (18). These relatively minor injuries pale in comparison, however, to Sandy's ultimate fate as a tree on the McSwayne plantation. After Tenie is sent away to care for a sick child, Mars Marrabo decides to build a new kitchen and sends workers to cut down lumber for its construction. Sandy proves difficult to fell, and the workers' "axes...glansh off, en didn' pear ter make no progress thoo de wood; en of all de creakin', en shakin', en wobblin' you eber see, dat tree done it w'en it commence' ter fall" (19). Tenie arrives back on the plantation just in time to see, where Sandy used to be, a "stump standin' dere, wid de sap runnin' out'n it, en de limbs layin' scattered roun'" (19). Driven mad by desperation, she runs to the sawmill, where the mill-hands restrain her and "tied her arms wid a rope, en fasten' her to one er de posts in de sawmill" (20). She is bound in full view of Sandy as the workers prepare to mill him into lumber.

Then follows what Brodhead calls "one of American literature's great images of the violence of manufacture" (201):

[E]n den dey started de saw up ag'in, en cut de log up inter bo'ds en scantlin's right befo' her eyes. But it wuz mighty hard wuk; fer of all de sweekin', en moanin', en groanin', dat log done it w'iles de saw wuz a-cuttin' thoo it. De saw wuz one er dese yer ole-timey, up-en-down saws, en hit tuk longer dem days ter saw a log 'en it do now. Dey greased de saw, but dat didn' stop de fus; hit kep' right on, tel fin'ly dey got de log all sawed up. (20)

More than just a powerful image of the violence of manufacturing (especially since Julius notes that the saw used predates the mechanized saws of later industrial sawmills), the scene of Sandy's slow dismemberment serves as a figure for what Scarry calls the

“objectification of pain.” By transforming Sandy into a tree, Chesnutt is able to represent and narrativize the violence done to the body of the slave in a way that far exceeds in its graphic nature the images of torture in many other slavery narratives. It is “as if” the body of the slave is a tree that the master cuts up and mills for his own purposes. The pain of slavery “is like” the pain of a limb being sawn through slowly and methodically. Through the conjure conceit, Chesnutt is able to objectify the pain and violence of slavery in a quite striking and unforgettable way. The image of Tenie being forced to watch as her husband is slowly hacked to pieces with a saw is not only one of the most violent scenes (of “manufacturing”) in literature but more importantly is a powerful image of pain made objective—the “internal” objectless experience of pain is here made into a concrete figure (a saw repeatedly cutting into a tree limb) that is readily imaginable for a reader. Chesnutt here draws on the sentimental genre’s formula for evoking the reader’s sympathy to construct this scene of suffering, which we have already seen employed for similar purposes in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. This scene represents an instance of extreme violence and pain inflicted on the body of an “other” (Sandy) which is witnessed by a spectator (Tenie) who is powerless to intervene. Tenie stands in as a surrogate for the reader, who is made to feel through her sympathetic pain (as well as Chesnutt’s figural objectification of it) the pain of Sandy’s dismemberment as well as the violent rending of the couple’s affectionate bond. As in Stowe’s novel, this scene’s figuration of suffering engages the reader’s sympathy in order to solicit their pragmatic action on behalf of the suffer because, as we will see below, Chesnutt does not confine Sandy’s pain to the past but extends it into the “present.”

We also saw in Stowe's case how Uncle Tom's beating on the Legree plantation created problems for narrative representation (as well as genteel morals). We can imagine that Chesnutt would have run into similar issues if he had attempted the scene above without first conjuring Sandy into a pine-tree. Chesnutt is able to circumvent these issues by transforming Sandy's body into an object that allows for a narrative of violent dismemberment. In so doing, Chesnutt is also able to intensify the representation of this pain through a meticulous detailing of the saw's shaky movements and the wood's groans of resistance. What is more, Sandy's pain is not confined to this one tortuous moment. The kitchen Mars Marrabo builds from the lumber remains haunted by the dismembered Sandy and his cries of suffering: "Dey could hear sump'n moanin' en groanin' bout de kitchen in de night-time, en w'en de win' would blow dey could hear sump'n a-hollerin' en sweekin' lack it wuz in great pain en sufferin'" (21). Chesnutt here stresses the persistence of Sandy's pain through time, a pain that lives on and resonates through the very material structures of the slave plantation itself. Sandy's pain is literally trapped within the object he is transformed into (the kitchen); his moans and groans of suffering cry out from within the very grain of the wood. The kitchen is not only a memorial, then, to Sandy's pain, but a living (continued) embodiment of it. In "Po' Sandy," Chesnutt figures pain living on through time not only through memory but also in concrete material form. Through the figure of the kitchen, which still stands on the Marrabo plantation, Chesnutt represents Sandy's pain as persisting from the past into present and therefore solicits the (sympathetic) reader to act on behalf of the enduring pain of slavery. The final transformation of Sandy into a kitchen also represents a perverse inversion of the sentimental domestic ideal. Rather than the ideal domestic home imagined through

the goopher into a tree, Sandy is made into an edifice “rooted” in his constant pain rather than sentimental affection. What is more, Sandy is not even made into a perverse “home” but only the most utilitarian part of a home—the kitchen. In addition to the bodily pain inflicted on Sandy, Chesnutt suggests, the suffering of the African-American under the slavery system is also largely due to the perversion of (the possibility of) affection into pure utility. Slavery cripples the African-American’s experience of time by depriving him or her of the temporality of the (sentimental) home space, here represented by the figure of the tree. Instead, the body of the African-American is literally broken down to form the support of (forced) labor and its mechanical temporality, endlessly churning out food for the mouth of the master.

Chesnutt returns to the question of embodiment’s relation to time and pain in a later conjure tale, “Tobe’s Tribulations.” Similar to “Po’ Sandy,” this story explores a slave’s release from his particular embodiment under the slave system; however, unlike “Po’ Sandy,” the story of Tobe stresses the pleasure of a new form of embodiment as well as the transformed relation to temporality that comes with it. Spurred on by the news of a runaway slave who reaches freedom in the North, Tobe visits Aunt Peggy to ask her advice on the easiest method for running away. Chesnutt describes Tobe as a slow and lazy slave, who most of all likes to sleep and eat. He tells Aunt Peggy that if he were free he “wouldn’t wuk a-tall ‘less’n I felt lak it,” and he would also be able to eat “better vittles” and “sleep mo” if he were a freeman (114). Although Chesnutt is parodying the stereotype of the lazy slave here, more importantly he is stressing once again how the slave’s time is not his own (either to use or sell) as well as the various ways slavery impinges on very specific, basic bodily pleasures and needs (eating and

sleeping). Aunt Peggy suggests several basic courses for running away, all of which Tobe rejects because they seem either too dangerous or because they would deprive him of the few bodily pleasures he already possesses as a slave (i.e., he would sleep and eat less if on the run). Aunt Peggy becomes frustrated and tells Tobe that he “wants ter git free too easy” (115). She finally agrees to turn Tobe into an animal for a short duration, so that he can slink away unnoticed and by the time the goopher wears off he will have reached the North.

What follows is a series of comical mishaps that find Tobe right back where he started at the beginning of the story. Aunt Peggy first turns Tobe into a black bear:

Tobe sta'ted ou to'ds de Norf, en went fifteen er twenty miles wid-out stoppin'. Des befo' day in de mawnin' he come ter a 'tater patch, en bein' ez he wuz feelin' sorter hungry, he stop' fer a hour er so 'tel he got all de 'taters he could hol'. Den he sta'ted out ag'in, en bimeby he run 'cross a bee-tree en eat all de honey he could. 'Long to'ds ebenin' he come tor a holler tree, en bein' ez he felt kinder sleepy lak, he 'lowed he'd crawl in en take a nap. So he crawled in en went ter sleep. (116)

One month later, however, Tobe surprises Aunt Peggy by turning up in human form at her door. He tells her that there must be something wrong with the goopher, since he “des sta'ted fum heah yistiddy mawnin', en heah I is turnt back ter a nigger ag'in befo' I'd ha'dly got useter walkin' on all-fours” (116). Peggy quickly divines that, since she turned Tobe into a bear in the fall, he must have begun to hibernate when he crawled into the log to sleep. Aunt Peggy decides to change Tobe into a fox instead, but he fares little better. After stumbling upon a hen house, fox-Tobe decides to dig a hole nearby and fatten up for his journey North. Yet Tobe becomes “so comf'table, eatin' w'at he laked, en restin' w'en he wa'n't eatin', he des kinder los' track er de time, 'tel befo' he notice' it his th'ee weeks wuz mos' up” (117). Right before he turns back into human form,

though, the owner of the hen-house gives chase with his hounds, and Tobe races back to Aunt Peggy's house for help. Aunt Peggy mixes a new goopher to transform Tobe into a frog, but distracted by the hounds at her door she makes the duration of the conjure too long, and Tobe is condemned to live out the rest of his days as a bull-frog.

What do we make of this at first comical but ultimately tragic story, since Julius notes that Tobe (after eating his fill in the swamp) "nebber got ti'ed er wantin' ter be tu'nt back ter hiss'ef, en ter sump'n w'at could run erway ter de Norf'" (119)? While this tale does appear to have a tragic ending, what is significant about "Tobe's Tribulations" is the way it figures the temporality of different forms of embodiment in their relation to pleasure rather than pain. While in "Po' Sandy," Sandy's transformation into a tree enabled a new mode of temporality, it also ultimately lead to a more intense form of pain. Tobe's transformation into various animals, on the other hand, opens up new vistas of pleasure: he is able to eat all the honey or chickens he wants, sleep as much as he wants, run and frolic "on all-fours" for as long as he wants. Captivated by all these pleasures, Tobe simply "los' track er de time" and slowly ticks off the remaining weeks on his goopher as he enjoys the possibilities of his new body. In short, Tobe loses all sense of time amidst the pleasures of a different embodiment, so much so that he forgets all notions of making progress towards his goal of escaping to the North. Tobe quite simply forgets to run away because he is busy enjoying his new body (or bodies) so much.

Chesnutt appears in part to be exploring the tension between the temporality of pleasure and the standard form of progressive time. The time Tobe spends enjoying himself is contrasted with the limited duration of the conjure spell (around three to four weeks), so that each moment Tobe revels in a certain pleasure he is also "wasting" the

precious time he has left to run away. While Tobe is indeed wasting the time of the goopher by being distracted by pleasure, such a reading does not account for how “Tobe’s Tribulations” figures pleasure itself as overriding the form of progressive temporality that the goopher (with its limited duration) represents. In this tale, pleasure interrupts (even if only temporarily) the form as well as the imperatives of progressive time. Pleasure in this story is not only a bodily sensation but also a loss or alteration of time in the experience of one’s own embodiment. With a different form of embodiment comes a different mode of time. While Tobe is not able to escape the physical geography of the slave system, he is (at least momentarily) successful in escaping its mode of progressive temporality by losing himself in the pleasurable experience of his own embodiment.

We can relate this back to the issue of the body in pain’s relation to time by observing that in “Tobe’s Tribulations” pain is defined negatively as the lack of pleasure, and more specifically, the lack or foreclosure of the temporality that pleasure makes possible. While the slave is able to eat and sleep, these activities are undertaken in the service of subsistence rather than enjoyment—as Tobe implies, it is never quite enough. The slave system does not permit the slave such a loss of time in the pleasurable experience of one’s own body. As in Tobe’s case, this deprivation of pleasure has consequences for the slave’s experience of his own embodiment, so much so that when Tobe does gain access to pleasure and the temporality that comes with it he finds it so seductive he cannot relinquish it for all his desire to escape North.

Yet does even this pleasure become tiresome, since the conclusion of “Tobe’s Tribulations” finds Tobe yearning to be turned back into his human form? It is important

to note that Tobe not only wants to be “tu’nt back ter hiss’ef” but also “en ter sump’n w’at could run erway ter de Norf.” What must the (former) slave be transformed into, Chesnutt asks, in order to make it in (or to) the North? What must he become in order to survive as a free man? Chesnutt’s *Conjure Stories* imply that the answer is bound up with a new relation to time itself. For what is freedom if it does not involve a reconstruction of the slave’s crippled relation to time?

III. Reconstructing Time

Chesnutt’s *Conjure Stories* address not only the issue of the body in pain’s relation to temporality but also the larger question of what it may mean to reconstruct the African American’s crippled relation to time in the aftermath of slavery. Chesnutt’s answer to this question is advanced less at the level of the content of his stories than through their formal structure. Through their form, the conjure tales register both the passage of time and the persistence of the past. The resulting figure(s) of time that emerges from these tales is therefore less a tidy chronological arc than an involuted overlaying of past, present, and future temporalities. As Neill Matheson observes, “Chesnutt’s conjure fiction seems to imply that the violent past of slavery can only be part of a discontinuous history, not susceptible to linear chronological narratives—as if slavery warped time itself” (18).¹² In other words, Chesnutt’s *Conjure Stories* construct a complicated involution of temporalities in order to advance the question of how slavery’s “warping” of time can, if not be set straight, then at least be understood and reckoned with. As for the theory of crip time within disability studies, the question for Chesnutt

¹² Matheson, “History and Survival: Charles Chesnutt and the Time of Conjure.”

and African American scholars working on temporality in the nineteenth century is how slavery's warping of temporality can be reconstructed not in the sense of healed (i.e., eliminated) but rather brought into a new relation to time that does justice to (by emerging from) the continuing pain of slavery's aftermath. Chesnutt's final answer to this question represents a form of utopian sentimental nostalgia that is informed by (and informs) his own theory of aesthetic activity.

We have already noted in passing the framing device of Chesnutt's *Conjure Stories*. What is significant about the narrative framing of the tales is the complex view of time it constructs. The storytelling conceit allows Chesnutt to move through and operate on multiple temporal registers at once. Each tale is provoked by some event in the "present" which occasions an explanation through a return to the past; when this tale of the past is concluded, the narrative returns to the present. The cycle does not end here, however. Julius and his "auditors" (John and Annie) converse about the story, and through their conversation they reflect on the potential consequences or effects of the tale. Each conjure story, in other words, moves from present to past back to the present and then concludes with a look toward the future. This look toward the future can be thought of as the "moral" of the story: John and Annie learn something about the past of slavery that influences their future actions. But the Northerners are not the only ones who take away something as a result of the story; Julius also reaps a practical benefit from the telling of his tale. While John and Annie receive a practical moral lesson, Julius is often rewarded with something more readily at hand (food, drink, etc.). As Jennifer Fleissner notes, the conjure tales "represent very much an originary, creative act, one

with a pragmatic, present purpose: *feeding Julius*” (336, emphasis original).¹³ While this may cause certain problems at the level of content, since the white audience receives precious knowledge from the tale while the former slave only receives something to fill his stomach, at the level of their temporal application they are one and the same. Both storyteller and audience receive something for their immediate future, something they need to live on, as a consequence of the tale. As with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Chesnutt’s sentimental tales produce pragmatic effects in the present for the reader (or listener). What Chesnutt adds to Stowe’s sentimental pragmatics is a focus on how the sentimental tale also serves a practical function for the storyteller as well as the reader. Although this may appear at first to lend support to Douglas’ and others critique of the sentimental genre’s emotional manipulation of the reader, Chesnutt’s attention to the practicality of the genre for both the reader and the teller is meant to stress the power of sentimentalism to produce pragmatic effects in the present.

Julius’ role as storyteller or educator for his Northern audience (and new employers) is made possible by John and his wife’s ignorance of the history of the region they have come to exploit. As Julius’ tales reveal, the past lives on in the land all around them, sometimes on the very surface (such as the kitchen built from Sandy’s body) and sometimes buried deep in the ground (like the gnarled roots of the grapevine). Yet as Brodhead argues, John and Annie are not without their own past and historical specificity. Chesnutt characterizes the couple as not only Northern but educated, professional, and cognizant of the rest of the world (John debates trying his hand at grape culture in Spain or France before settling on the South). Brodhead notes that “these traits

¹³ Fleissner, “Earth-Eating, Addiction, Nostalgia: Charles Chesnutt’s Diasporic Regionalism.”

identify John as of the upper middle class stabilized in the North in the 1850s and after—a class which, as Chesnutt shows, is defined not by one or two traits but by a whole range of dispositions confirmed together” (198). As a result of Chesnutt’s careful characterization, John and Annie represent not “the march of a generalized ‘modernity’” but rather members of a “certain social group” that pursue “particular investment[s] and recreational interests” (198). The point here is that for Chesnutt John and Annie are not simply abstract figures for “modernity” but rather representatives of a specific historical social group. More importantly, this social group is defined by a particular notion of historical time, that of “progress” toward and investment in the future. As such, they are less attuned (though still receptive) to the persistence of the past within the present. It is Julius’ role to awaken them to the continuing existence of the past, and through that to a more complex understanding of temporality than that of modern progressive time. Julius’ tales complicate and effectively *cripple* John and Annie’s sense of time, since their concept of temporality as progressively linear must be warped in order to accommodate the continued pressure of the past on the present. In coaxing John and Annie to draw the past into relation to the present, Julius is in effect directing them into the position of the sentimental historian as represented by Brockden Brown’s Clara. Julius’s tales implicitly ask John and Annie to attend to the continuing pressure of the past on the present and to reformulate the narratives they tell of the nation’s history as well as their sense of the workings of time.

Chesnutt contrasts the Northerners’ orientation to time with Uncle Julius, and more specifically, with the historical origins of his conjure tales. In “Tobe’s

Tribulations,” Chesnutt uses John as a mouthpiece to provide a detailed historical sketch of the influences behind Julius’ tales:¹⁴

He had seen life from what was to us a new point of view—from the bottom, as it were; and there clung to his mind, like barnacles to the submerged portion of a ship, all sorts of extravagant beliefs. ... The source of these notions I never traced, though they doubtless could be easily accounted for. Some perhaps were dim reflections of ancestral fetishism; more were the superstitions, filtered through the Negro intellect, of the Scotch settlers who had founded their homes on Cape Fear at the time when a kelpie haunted every Highland glen, and witches, like bats, darkened the air as they flew by in their nocturnal wanderings. But from his own imagination, I take it—for I never heard quite the same stories from anyone else—he gave to the raw material of folk-lore and superstition a fancifulness of touch that truly made of it, to borrow a homely phrase, a silk purse out of a sow’s ear. (113)

In his final conjure story, “The Marked Tree” (1924), Chesnutt adds once again to this long list of Julius’ historical influences, including the “Sagas of Iceland” and “the primitive tales of ancient Greece” (133). He even has John reflect that “if Julius lived in a happier age for men of his complexion, the world might have had a black Aesop or Grimm or Hoffman” (133). While it is clear that Chesnutt took this historical account seriously, its factual accuracy is less important than the temporal heterogeneity of influences it imagines behind Julius’ tales. The conjure stories represent a fusion of (presumably African) “ancestral fetishisms” and Scotch fairy tales, modified by the “Negro intellect” as well as Julius’ own individual imagination. As such, the influences behind the literary form of the conjure tale do not conform to the narrative of progressive evolution but rather consist of temporally heterogeneous elements coexisting side by side in the same (narrative) space. Julius’ tales not only unfurl the unknown (or forgotten) past of slavery for his Northern audience, but they do so through a form that is itself a

¹⁴ It is clear that John is ventriloquizing Chesnutt’s own view of the cultural origins of conjure stories, since Chesnutt himself provides a similar account of Julius’ “superstitious” tales in his essay “Superstitions and Folk-Lore of the South” (1901).

heterogeneous mixture of various historical influences. This temporal mixing of historical forms represents a “new point of view” for John and his wife; Julius’ tales are such a departure from their own view of time and storytelling that they find them “a never-failing source of novelty and interest” (113). While Julius is arguably never quite successful in entirely changing their view of time, the narrative arc of *The Conjure Stories* taken together concerns John and Annie’s increasing ability to understand the import of Julius’ stories. In other words, *The Conjure Stories* are also tales of reading and interpreting, as John and Annie move from understanding Julius’ stories as (only) novelties to discerning the wisdom that lies within them.

The temporal heterogeneity of *The Conjure Stories* may be seen not only in Chesnutt’s description of the historical influences of the tales but also through the form in which they are presented: dialect. As Lloyd Pratt argues, dialect writing “implies a language that had to have come before it” because “one understands the dialect written on the page as a compromised declension of standard written language” (92).¹⁵ Dialect writing, in other words, registers both a present moment (the articulation of dialect) as well as a previous standard (written) language that the dialect “presupposes as its point of departure” (93). As such, dialect writing “requires its reader to engage two temporalities at once”: the present as well as the past of the statement (96). Therefore dialect writing simultaneously articulates and differentiates (at least) two different temporalities and requires the reader to “perceive both...in the single moment of reading” (97). Rather than the traditional reading of dialect in regionalist writing as representative of the archaic or pre-modern status of “local” populations, Pratt argues that “dialect writing

¹⁵ Pratt, *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*.

articulates at the level of form a temporality (or temporalities) being obscured at the level of statement” (98). That is, while dialect writing is often understood to represent an archaism (or declension) that is implicitly superseded by a more evolved or standard language, its temporally heterogeneous form belies this neat division between an archaic past and a modern present (or future). Its mobilization of two temporal moments at once gives the lie to a strict notion of progressive temporality that understands time as discarding the past as it moves inevitably toward the future. Julius’s dialect in *The Conjure Stories* therefore figures the coexistence of multiple forms of temporality at once. Combined with the mixture of historical elements that inform his tales, as well as the way these tales navigate a present moment through a return to a past one, Julius’ dialect registers yet another way that Chesnutt figures the fragmented and heterogeneous nature of time in *The Conjure Stories*.

How does this complex view of temporality (or temporalities) address the question of whether or not time can be reconstructed? How may the African American navigate the “warped” relation to the past, present, and future that persists as a consequence of slavery and the failure of Reconstruction? It is ultimately through his view of the heterogeneity of time that Chesnutt is able to address the question of the African American’s relation to temporality in a more hopeful manner. While Chesnutt’s tales are often tragic, his published writing on the future of African Americans appears much more (cautiously) optimistic. Indeed, if we turn to Chesnutt’s non-fiction writing and speeches, we first discover what appears to be a more progressive view of time than the form of temporality we encounter in his tales. As Matheson points out, Chesnutt’s essay “Superstition and Folk-Lore of the South” (1901) has long distressed his critics

because it appears that Chesnutt dismisses the conjure stories as mere fairy tales that are of interest only from a sociological perspective. Chesnutt argues that “the delusions connected with this belief in conjuration grow out of mere lack of enlightenment” (865) and proceeds to satirize various conjure stories he has heard in the South. Chesnutt’s assertion that education will eliminate the belief in conjuration appears to assume a progressive modern view of time that relegates “superstitions” to an unenlightened past. Without delving too deeply into Chesnutt’s vexed relation to his own source material and the way his subject matter was occasionally in tension with his aspiration to write “pure literature,”¹⁶ it is important to note that Chesnutt’s non-fiction writing during this period often represents his struggle to account for his chilly reception in the literary marketplace than a balanced evaluation of his own work. As a result, Chesnutt occasionally mobilizes the modern distinction between “pure” art and archaic superstition in order to defend his position of literary refinement or distance in regards to his own source material. With this, of course, comes a view of temporality that relies upon a division between the modern and the ancient, the present and the past, as well as a linear view of the progression of time.

However, Chesnutt’s apparent endorsement of a version of progressive time is not as straightforward as it seems. Matheson notes that the perspective on time (partly

¹⁶ Nowlin’s essay “‘The First Negro Novelist’” details in great length Chesnutt’s struggle to navigate the fine line between “art” and “propaganda,” and more generally between literature and the market, while adapting his specific source material for a predominately white audience. While Nowlin’s essay is useful, his argument that Chesnutt’s ultimate failure as a professional artist was his reversion to the sentimental mode in *The Marrow of Tradition* is problematic because, first, it overlooks the strain of sentimentalism running through *The Conjure Stories*, and second, because it does not interrogate the genre or aesthetic of sentimentalism at all but simply uses it as a shorthand for “propaganda” or any politically-motivated novel of purpose.

derived from a sociological model) Chesnutt advances in this essay entails a more uneven form of temporality than at first appears. This uneven temporality intrudes through enlightenment or sociological time's reliance upon the "survival": "The teleology of progress is both affirmed and potentially compromised by the intrusion of survivals from earlier cultural stages within the present: the recognition that a belief or practice is a survival provides a kind of tangible evidence for cultural evolution, but it may also suggest that evolutionary progress is incomplete, partial—that we are not finished with our past, in effect" (2). As a "survival," the conjure tale is both a piece of evidence from the past as well as the continuing presence of that past within the present. And as Chesnutt notes in his description of conjure tales in this essay, the stories are still evolving—they still have a life of their own, and so are not "relics" (dead objects). The vitality of the conjure tales may also account for Chesnutt's fascination with them, despite his efforts to categorize them as "delusion." For not only does a certain playful tone creep into Chesnutt's recounting of various conjure stories, but his own identification with (the artistic process of) Julius also comes into relief. After asserting that "creative talent" primarily involves the "power of rearrangement," he confesses that the tales in *The Conjure Stories* which he thought were his own original creations were "after all but dormant ideas, lodged in my childish mind by old Aunt This and old Uncle That, and awaiting only the spur of imagination to bring them again to the surface" (865). Chesnutt's description of the creative process as the reactivation of latent or old ideas by the imagination closely parallels his account of the source of Julius' tales as well as his creative talent. Chesnutt's own creative process, in other words, is dependent upon the legacy of the past and its continuing creative potential. The "survival," the continuing

presence of the past in the present, emerges as not only the source of sociological interest but also as the very inspiration for aesthetic activity. Chesnutt therefore conceives of the aesthetic imagination as the reactivation of materials from the past and their rearrangement in the present. The aesthetic imagination re-constructs the materials of the past in the present—it draws on old “ideas” and “brings them again to the surface” in slightly altered form. The imagination rearranges or reconstructs what appeared to be lost or forgotten but in reality was lying “dormant” in time. As in Brown’s version of sentimental historicism, Chesnutt’s view of the aesthetic imagination entails a folding of the past into a (new) relation to the present. His essays as well as his tales reveal an investment in reconstructing time through a form of imaginative activity in which reconstruction is understood not as repairing (i.e., harmonizing) time but rather as ensuring the past in all its (heterogeneous) complexity continues to live on, survive, in the present and into the future.

Chesnutt’s most refined view of how time may be reconstructed, and what relation the African American should adopt to the future, becomes clear in a series of essays he wrote that were collected under the title “The Future American” (1900). Here Chesnutt speculates on what the future ethnic type of the American people will become over a long period of time. He argues that “the future American ethnic type...will be formed of a mingling, in a yet to be ascertained proportion, of the various racial varieties which make up the present population of the United States; or, to extend the area a little farther, of the various peoples of the northern hemisphere of the western continent” (846-7). Chesnutt imagines the gradual intermixing of the various ethnic groups that make up the American nation (or northwestern hemisphere). The result, Chesnutt admits, will be

an ethnic type that appears predominantly white, but must necessarily give up any of its claims to “racial purity.” Chesnutt explains why any such notions of purity must be relinquished: “It is then in the three broad types—white, black, and Indian—that the future American race will find the material for its formation. Any dream of a pure white race, of the Anglo-Saxon type, for the United States, may as well be abandoned as impossible, even if desirable” (847). This final sentence is the polemical point of the entire series of “Future American” essays: Chesnutt is arguing less for the intermixing of American ethnic types than he is arguing against the logic behind the idea of a “pure race.” Refining the argument he first set forth in “What Is a White Man?” (1889), Chesnutt attacks the theory that over time the Anglo-Saxon race can purify itself from the “infusion” of “Negro blood.”

Chesnutt’s belief that in time the barriers between the races will crumble as they gradually intermingle and become one in a “racial fusion” (862) is often read as a naively optimistic hope, or at worst, what one critic calls a “utopian illusion.”¹⁷ Yet what is significant about this series of essays is not whether or not such a vision came to pass but rather the temporal logic that informs Chesnutt’s argument for racial fusion rather than racial purity. The logic behind the concept of racial purity is that of subtraction or elimination of undesirable elements (“blood”) over time. In order to reach the “perfection of type,” the Anglo-Saxon race must eliminate all “undesirable traits” over the course of several generations (845). In contrast to this subtractive model, Chesnutt’s vision of racial fusion is motivated by the temporal logic of aggregation or accretion. The concept of a fusing of the races represents an amalgamation of heterogeneous

¹⁷ Elder, “‘The Future American Race’: Charles W. Chesnutt’s Utopian Illusion.”

elements over time rather than their elimination. Like in his conjure tales, Chesnutt's image of the form of the future American race represents a compounding of (temporally) heterogeneous pieces—a reconstruction of elements into a simultaneously new and old form. Chesnutt's vision of the future, then, is one that imagines what it would mean to find a way to keep all of the diverse elements of the past and present together without leaving anything out of the mix. Both his essays and *The Conjure Stories* understand the issue of reconstructing time in the aftermath of slavery as driven by the question of the past's continuing relation to the present as it moves into the future. For Chesnutt, reconstructing time entails a recognition of time's heterogeneity since it requires a future-oriented acknowledgment of the past's relation to the present. In Chesnutt's view, the past is not subsumed into the present but rather *survives* in it (and into the future) in altered—reconstructed—form.

Chesnutt's view of the reconstruction of time may be read as a form of sentimental nostalgia informed by his concept of the aesthetic imagination. As noted above, sentimentalism in general and regionalist fiction in particular have been criticized for a form of naïve nostalgia that fetishizes a lost past that may or may not have ever existed. Sentimental regionalist fiction is often doubly guilty because its deployment of nostalgia appears to mourn the loss of the slavery system itself. While I do not deny these criticisms are important, I want to argue the form of sentimental nostalgia deployed by Chesnutt differs in significant respects. For Chesnutt, nostalgia is not driven by a mourning for a lost past or, even worse, a desire to return to it. This form of nostalgia is “naïve” since it expresses an impossible desire to return to a previous moment in time. It is also naïve, in the context of Chesnutt, since it represents merely a reversal of the linear

temporal form of modern progressive time. For Chesnutt, nostalgia represents a different temporal project intimately tied to his concept of the aesthetic imagination. Nostalgia (from *nostos*, “return home;” *algia*, “pain” [*OED*]) is often understood as a pain or longing to return home. For Chesnutt, however, I would suggest nostalgia represents the return home to (or of) pain. *The Conjure Stories* returns to the issue of the enduring pain inflicted on the African American by the slave system in order to show how this pain is always returning in the present. Chesnutt’s theory of the reconstruction of time is predicated on the survival rather than the erasure of this pain. Informed by his view of the aesthetic imagination, his theory of the “future America” and its racial composition raises the question of how this intractable pain may be rearranged or transformed in order that it not be forgotten. Chesnutt’s nostalgia, then, is as much about the future as it is about the past. As Svetlana Boym (2001) points out, “Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective” (xvi). Chesnutt’s nostalgia operates to compound time not through preserving the past but rather by drawing that painful past into creative relation to the present in order to give the past a (unpredictable) future. Much like Brockden Brown, Chesnutt’s nostalgia represents a form of sentimental historicism that seeks to fashion new histories out of the pain of the past. Chesnutt’s theory of the reconstruction of time as a form of creative, pragmatic nostalgia offers a way of thinking about temporality in African American literature that stresses the interrelation rather than the divide between antebellum and postbellum national periods as well as the more heterogeneous amalgamations of time embedded in the (sentimental) forms of literature produced by African American authors such as Chesnutt who were reckoning with the painful aftermath of slavery.

This vision of a form of time that collects and recollects all heterogeneous elements in its wake in order to forge them together into some unknown synthesis represents, finally, Chesnutt's vision for how time may be reconstructed. Who knows, indeed, how these elements—be they stories or ethnic types—will intermix, and what kind of offspring they may produce, but the hope for Chesnutt is that such a view of time can, if not heal the past, at least make sure it is not lost. To imagine a temporality that collects and holds together all the elements of the past as it stumbles (blindly) toward the future is perhaps a utopian way of addressing how the African American may reconstruct his damaged, painful relation to time without simply leaving it behind to move to a more “able” relation. Critics are not wrong to call such a view optimistic, but this term should not be read as it normally is with its connotation of naiveté or blind hope. For as we shall see in the next chapter, optimism has a much more complex relation to time than we have previously imagined.

CHAPTER 4: THE SHADOW (OUT) OF TIME: H.P. LOVECRAFT’S OPTIMISM

The reason why *time* plays a great part in so many of my tales is that this element looms up in my mind as the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe. *Conflict with time* seems to me the most potent and fruitful theme in all human expression.

– H.P. Lovecraft, “Notes on Writing Weird Fiction” (1933, italics original)

I. No Future?

Optimism may seem like a strange concept through which to read the “weird tales” of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. Born in 1890 and residing for most of his life in his native city of Providence, Rhode Island until his death in 1937,¹ Lovecraft is more commonly remembered as a weaver of dark, pessimistic stories of what he termed “cosmic outsideness”: the belief that man is an insignificant entity in a vast universe inhabited by cosmic beings indifferent if not hostile to his existence. Lovecraft explained the “outsideness” or “externality” of his fiction in a July 5, 1927 letter to the editor of *Weird Tales*, Farnsworth Wright:

Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-

¹ Lovecraft only spent two years outside of Providence, residing in Brooklyn, New York from 1924-6 following his marriage to Sonia Greene. Despite the common image of Lovecraft as a recluse or hermit, his interest in antiquarianism and architecture led him to travel often within the North American continent, including trips to such places as Quebec and Charleston, S.C. See Evans, “A Last Defense Against the Dark” (2005) for more on Lovecraft’s travel tours. His voluminous correspondence, which S.T. Joshi estimates exceeds 75,000 letters, also belies his popular image as a reclusive introvert.

large...To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all. (*SL* II.150)

The apparent pessimism of Lovecraft's style, as expressed in this letter, is his (re)contextualizing of all human affairs within a vast (if not infinite) framework of cosmic space and time. This context repositions human "interests and emotions" as the "local" concerns of a transient race. Most readers are more familiar with the bleak opening of Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928), which is often cited as a concise literary expression of the author's brand of cosmic horror as well as his "pessimism." The narrator Francis Wayland Thurston asserts that "[t]he most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far" (355). He speculates that "some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein," that humanity will either go insane or "flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age" (355). Thurston notes that only a few researchers into the esoteric have "guessed at the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle" and "hinted at strange survivals in terms which would freeze the blood if not masked by a bland optimism" (355). For the narrator of this tale, optimism as a response to the "grandeur of the cosmic cycle" is little more than a defense against the stark reality of time's infinite expanse, and a "bland" one at that. The "pessimism" of this story, then, as well as much of Lovecraft's other tales, is not the belief that humanity has no future or that all human values are mere illusions. Rather, it is a bracketing of humanity's future and values as

“local” so that Lovecraft may focus on his real concern: the space and time beyond the human.

Critics of the modern horror genre (and the Gothic tradition from which it emerged) often identify a strand of pessimism or cynicism as foundational to the genre’s form and function.² Most recently, Eugene Thacker’s *In the Dust of This Planet* (2011) defines the pessimism of the horror genre as arising from an effort to think through what he terms the “world-without-us” or the “subtraction of the human from the world” (5). For Thacker, “‘horror’ is a non-philosophical attempt to think about the world-without-us philosophically” (9, italics original). He traces the philosophical roots of the horror genre to Arthur Schopenhauer’s and Friedrich Nietzsche’s interrogation of the place of human values and existence within a universe devoid of ultimate meaning or teleology. Thacker positions the horror genre within this philosophical tradition of what he calls “Cosmic Pessimism” since it likewise poses “the difficult thought of the world as absolutely unhuman, and indifferent to the hopes, desires, and struggles of human individuals and groups” (17). According to Thacker, “Schopenhauer’s pessimism is less about a human pessimism (e.g. the all-too-human despair of an identity crisis or a lapse in faith), and more about the way in which thought in itself always devolves upon its own

² The Gothic is often understood as focusing on the irrational side of human nature and society left out of the more optimistic and rational portrayal of man in Enlightenment philosophy, and as such is often tentatively aligned with a form of pessimism. However, in drawing attention to what is excluded from “optimistic” philosophies, the Gothic genre also operates as a form of social critique. For more on the social and critical function of the Gothic novel, see Cathy Davidson (1986) and Julia Stern (1997). Many critics see a line of continuation between Gothic pessimism and Lovecraft’s “weird tales.” For instance, Dirk W. Mosig argues that “Lovecraft was pessimistic with respect to man’s ability to cope with the realization of his own meaninglessness and insignificance in an indifferent universe” (105). He then quotes the opening of “Cthulhu” to illustrate this point.

limits, the hinge through which positive knowledge turns into negative knowledge” (19). He notes that in order to locate “an equal to Schopenhauer” or Nietzsche “one would have to look not to philosophy but to writers of supernatural horror such as H.P. Lovecraft, whose stories evoke a sense of what he termed ‘cosmic outsidersness’...” (19). Thacker then quotes the beginning of “Cthulhu” to demonstrate how closely Schopenhauer’s bleak philosophy of cosmic pessimism is echoed in the grim opening words of the narrator Thurston.³

While Thacker’s argument that Lovecraft’s stories focus on the cosmic or the “world-without-us” rather than the local or human is difficult to deny, his reading of Lovecraft’s philosophy as a form of pessimism is ultimately reductive in scope. For there is more to Lovecraft’s fiction and his theory of time than his apparent cosmic pessimism or at best indifference toward the future of human affairs would suggest. It is through the “external” terrain of cosmological time, the terrain his tales work so elegantly to construct, that the question of Lovecraft’s optimism should be addressed. In philosophical usage, optimism represents the theory that the universe operates according to “optimal” conditions (from the Latin *optimus*, meaning “best” [*OED*]), while in colloquial terms optimism defines a personal perspective characterized by “hopefulness and confidence about the future or the successful outcome of something” (*OED*). I take optimism to mean an orientation toward time that interprets it as full rather than empty of

³ H.P. Lovecraft was familiar with the work of both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In 1921, he wrote several letters to Sonia H. Greene expounding the two philosophers’ thought in relation to politics and economics (among other things). Greene published the letters in *Rainbow* No. 1 (October 1921) with the title “Nietzscheism and Realism” (*CE* 5.69-72). As S.T. Joshi notes, the title is slightly misleading since Lovecraft’s comments are chiefly derived from the work of Schopenhauer. However, his correspondence and other essays clearly demonstrate his familiarity with the work of Nietzsche.

possibilities. A theory of or orientation toward time as devoid of potential would therefore be the meaning of pessimism in this context. What Lovecraft's work insists on in this register is the *impersonality* of these possibilities as well as the infinite expanse and complexity of time. I argue that Lovecraft's refusal to foreclose time's potentiality despite what it may bring to the fragile human ego is a form of optimism. I suggest that although Lovecraft's tales often enact a conflict with time that culminates in the narrator's (and reader's) experience of cosmic terror, these conflicts are not reducible to pessimism alone. Alongside this pessimism of the local, there is also a subtler form of cosmic optimism: a "weird" optimism that becomes readable if we shift focus from the perspective of the narrators to the theories of cosmic temporality developed conceptually in his narratives.

As the opening quotation to this chapter intimates, Lovecraft's stories are predominantly concerned with the conflicts brought about by time itself. Time may be "the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe," yet narratives constructed around a conflict with time represent "the most potent and fruitful theme in all human expression." Even more than the evocation of (cosmic) horror, time is the proper subject of Lovecraft's mature fiction. Indeed, Lovecraft indicates in his correspondence that time plays a pivotal role in his personal and literary philosophy as well as his emotional life. In an August 15, 1934 letter to E. Hoffman Price, he expresses his fascination with "broad pageants" and "historic streams," and confesses that "the only conflict which has any deep emotional significance to me is that of *the principle of freedom or irregularity or adventurous opportunity against the eternal and maddening rigidity of cosmic law...especially the laws of time*" (SL 5.19, italics original). Here we

already begin to register a facet of Lovecraft's fiction that complicates (or qualifies) both his "local" as well as his apparent cosmic pessimism. What resonates with Lovecraft, on an emotional level, is the "principle of freedom" or "adventurous opportunity" against seemingly rigid eternal laws—most of all, against the laws of time itself. The power of his stories resides in their imaginative defiance of the seeming rigidity of time in order to explore what it would mean to be free of this most "maddening" of laws. Through a dramatic conflict with time, Lovecraft's weird tales formulate a theory of temporality that ultimately represents a strange or "weird" form of (cosmic) optimism rather than a simplistic pessimism. Against Thacker's reading of Lovecraft's cosmic pessimism, my argument is that Lovecraft's cosmic philosophy represents a "local" pessimism bounded by a cosmic optimism easily mistaken for pessimism when evaluated from the limited perspective of local human values. What Lovecraft's fiction in general and late stories like "The Shadow Out of Time" (1936) in particular demonstrate is a weird form of cosmic optimism that relates more to the complex nature of time itself than to individual human aspirations. His correspondence, however, reveals Lovecraft understood his cosmic philosophy as offering consolation if not a strange form of hope to those struggling with the "local" problems of human existence.

To put it another way, the question is whether *all* forms of optimism are indeed "bland," as Thurston asserts in "Cthulhu." Lovecraft draws here upon the etymology of the word bland, from the Latin *blandus*, meaning "soft, smooth, caressing" (*OED*). To label optimism "bland" also implies it lacks any substance or taste; for the narrator, optimism is bland because it is made from mediocre materials, and therefore has no remarkable qualities. Furthermore, in Thurston's formulation, optimism is used to

“mask” a deeper reality that, if confronted directly, would “freeze the blood.” Optimism is therefore not simply a defense, but a soothing surface that conceals a difficult depth of truth. Bland optimism, in short, is (in) bad taste. Against this view of optimism as an uninteresting palliative that conceals a more remarkable (and painful) depth, this chapter will argue that Lovecraft’s fiction develops other forms of optimism which do not function as masks (ideological or otherwise) to conceal a horrible truth. Indeed, with true Lovecraftian irony, the forms of optimism his tales conceptualize may be precisely what the narrator wishes to *conceal* with a blander form of optimism. This is because, as we will see below, Lovecraft’s tales often develop a form of optimism that operates through a “nonhuman” or impersonal rather than a human register—that is, at the level of the *cosmic* rather than the individual or the social.

This chapter will therefore contest the reading of Lovecraft’s fiction as pessimistic, not by denying his local pessimism but rather by arguing that various forms of pessimism and optimism can coexist in the same literary framework and interact in interesting ways. Beyond a (re)reading of his pessimism, this chapter suggests that Lovecraft has something of note to contribute to the critical discussions of futurity taking place within a queer theory currently assessing its own theoretical and disciplinary future. To make this case, I will read “The Shadow Out of Time” in the context of the debates about futurity, negativity, and optimism that have taken place over the past decade in queer theory. In the wake of the so-called “antisocial thesis,” many queer theorists have sought to counter or at best qualify the argument that the queer is (only) a figure of negativity or pessimistic presentism by rethinking the (queer) subject’s relation to the future and a tentative form of optimism. I argue that, contrary to the majority of readings

of his work as representative of (literary) pessimism, Lovecraft's fiction also advances a form of "weird optimism" that resides in both an embodied, felt relation to time and a particular theory of temporality that transcends the individual body. This optimism is enacted at the formal level of Lovecraft's narratives, which proceed diegetically toward the revelation of truth, through the gradual transformation of the narrator's embodied relation to time, and finally through their specific theorization of time as simultaneously an inexhaustible *longue durée* and a complex of overlapping, embedded temporalities. The felt relation to time that Lovecraft's narratives enact represents a reimagining of the tradition of sentimental sympathy. Lovecraft's radical or "weird" sympathy leads to a different form of agency, one that frees the subject from the constraints of liberal subjectivity and its often narrow view of time. While this knowledge often drives his narrators mad, I argue there is an underlying optimism to Lovecraft's theorization of time as enduring and multiple: a weird optimism that resides in *knowing* and *feeling* the terrors of time which is not reducible to pessimism. As in Stowe's novel, intense affective experiences in Lovecraft orient the individual to new possibilities in (and of) time. The weird optimism of Lovecraft's tales, however, resides less in their transformation of the narrator (or subject) than in their theory of the infinite potentiality of time itself.

It should be noted that this definition of cosmic optimism does not include a specific affective or emotional stance (happy, content, anxious, etc.) and may therefore encompass many affects either singularly or in tandem. Nor does it identify the infinite possibilities of the cosmos as necessarily "happy" ones, since this would require a more contextual definition (happy for whom? And for how long?). Instead, this definition focuses on optimism as an orientation to or theory of time rather than a theory *for some*

one. As a result, it will certainly displease some; most notably, the narrators of Lovecraft's tales, who have their own interests at heart, as well as those who interpret optimism as the stance of (and for) a particular identity or community. What this weird (or queer) form of optimism offers, however, is the possibility of coexisting with or even refining various forms of pessimism or "negativity." It enables, in short, a reconsideration of the always fraught (and ultimately unsustainable) choice between *either* optimism *or* pessimism, however we choose to define these terms.

Finally, it has been the overarching argument of this work that contemporary queer theory owes much to (and therefore has much to learn from) the sentimental genre and its literary inheritors. I have argued that the sentimental tradition is vital to queer scholarship on temporality because it theorizes the complexity of the body's relation to the pleasures, pains, and above all uncertainties of time—whether the uncertainties of the past, as in Brown; of the future, as in the case of Stowe; or of the complex relation between the two, as in the fiction of Chesnutt.⁴ As with Brown, Lovecraft's tales engage with the sentimental tradition through the genre of the Gothic. Lovecraft's tales are likewise concerned with the individual's embodied response to the uncertainties of time and history. As in Brown's Romantic form of the Gothic, this uncertainly evokes both horror and pleasure or curiosity; in both Brown and Lovecraft indeterminacy also represents possibility or potential. For Lovecraft, however, these uncertainties play out on a grander scale than for Brown: rather than the terrain of early American and European history, the arena of uncertain possibility for Lovecraft is the infinite span of

⁴ As should be clear, these specific vectors of time are not the only temporal forms or modalities each author explores. These vectors may be said to be the initial orientation of each author's theorization of time, an orientation that inevitably opens out onto the more complex operations of temporality on the body.

the cosmos itself. Like in *Wieland*, Lovecraft's narrators mediate their responses to the uncertainties of time through the medium of the body. More importantly, Lovecraft's tales, especially his late fiction, imagine a weird form of sympathetic identification that pushes the boundaries of sentimentalism into cosmic terrain. Like some haunting relic from the past, the sentimental lurks deep and unnoticed within Lovecraft's fiction. As with Chesnutt's relationship to realism, Lovecraft's position within literary Gothic modernism remains informed by the tradition of sentimentalism, most of all when it comes to dealing with the interrelations between time, affect, and the body. It is precisely through this (Gothic) sentimentality that his tales forge a form of weird optimism, for it is no coincidence that "optimism" is often quickly correlated with (or rather critiqued as) the sentimental. Discourses of optimism and sentimentality have a deeply intertwined history.⁵

Through (and beyond) tracing the influence of sentimentalism on Lovecraft's fiction, this chapter also intends to explore how literary modernism, and more particularly Gothic modernism, is informed by sentimental traditions of affect and time. Therefore, while this chapter makes use of queer theory to (re)read the modernist Gothic's theories of time, it also employs Lovecraft's fiction to explore the limitations of contemporary (queer) theories of time that have yet to reckon with the influence of sentimental theories of affect and time on literary modernism. Lovecraft's work is particularly relevant in this

⁵ While it is beyond my scope here to trace the (literary) history of the relation between sentimentalism and optimism, we may note the formal features and narrative concerns of the sentimental novel that are intertwined with the more common definition of optimism as the belief in a happy or desired resolution: the privileging and forging of enduring human bonds, a generally uplifting tone (often presented in a hortatory mode), the resolution of negative affects and their replacement with positive ones, and the narrative's tendency to conclude with (at least one) happy marriage. It should be clear by now that this stereotyped image of the sentimental only tells half of the story.

context since his theory of “weird” fiction as exploring the ramifications of cosmic (i.e., modernist)⁶ time and space productively illuminates contemporary queer theories of time, and vice versa. More importantly, Lovecraft’s weird fiction reveals the lasting legacy of the sentimental tradition on literary (Gothic) modernism. For even though Lovecraft shifts the focus of the Gothic (weird) tale to the cosmic over the local, or to the nonhuman over the human, his cosmic fiction retains and even relies upon a remnant of the sentimental tradition’s theories of the relations among affect, the body, and time. Indeed, Lovecraft’s tales often develop their atmosphere of horror through the interplay between the cosmic and the local, and in so doing they activate the more “human” (and sentimental) temporalities of the body as foil or counterpart to more the more cosmic theories of temporality developed in his stories. The “weird” sentimental identification present in stories such as “The Shadow Out of Time” carries this dynamic one step further by intertwining the “local” temporality of the affective body with the forces of cosmic time itself. In short, as we will see, sentimental theories of the relation between the body and time remain crucial to the operation of Lovecraft’s cosmic modernist Gothic

⁶ Fritz Leiber, Jr. argues that Lovecraft was the “Copernicus of the horror story” because his work “shifted the focus of supernatural dread from man and his little world and his gods, to the stars and the black and unplumbed gulfs of intergalactic space” (“A Literary Copernicus,” 50). In other words, Lovecraft’s weird cosmic tales represented a new Modernist Gothic that diverged from the previous Romantic and Victorian forms by integrating “a new source of literary material”: “the terrifyingly vast and mysterious universe revealed by the swiftly developing sciences” (51). While I am not suggesting that “cosmic” is simply a synonym for “modernist,” it does represent Lovecraft’s (and others in his circle’s) fictional response to the larger intellectual, scientific, and aesthetic trends of the Modernist period. As Leiber argues, Lovecraft’s cosmic fiction is an outgrowth of his philosophy of scientific materialism, and as such explores both the horrors of an infinite universe in which man plays an insignificant role as well as “the one noble feeling scientific materialism grants man: intellectual curiosity” (55).

and as such speak to the need to reevaluate the influence of the sentimental tradition on literary modernism.

A displeasure with a certain form of optimism around sexuality and queer identity is originally what gave rise to the antisocial thesis in queer theory. In “Is the Rectum a Grave?” (1987), Leo Bersani argues that sexuality becomes the occasion for the ego’s “self-shattering,” wherein the boundaries of the ego are dissolved in the experience of a *jouissance* that reveals that sexuality is a “tautology for masochism” (24). Together with *Homos* (1995), this work forms the early bedrock of the antisocial thesis: the theory that sexuality is opposed to the social and its values, or, as Bersani puts it, is “anticommunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, antiloving” (“Rectum,” 22). In *No Future* (2004), Lee Edelman takes up Bersani’s view of sexuality as antisocial and makes his argument more resolutely polemical. According to Edelman, the animating fantasy of the normative heterosexual social order is one of “reproductive futurism” in which “the future...marks the impossible place of an Imaginary past exempt from the deferrals intrinsic to the operation of the signifying chain” (10). Against the driving force of futurism, Edelman juxtaposes the figure of the “queer.” According to Edelman, “queerness can never name an identity; it can only ever disturb one” (17). From within the logic of futurism, however, the queer is called on to represent, as a figure of “non-reproductive” sexuality, the negation of the redemptive meaning the promise of the future appears to hold. Edelman calls upon queers (and queer theorists) to embrace this position of negativity in order to interrupt the endless deferral to a future that never seems to arrive. Bersani and Edelman, in short, read optimism similarly to the narrator of “Cthulhu”: as a mask over

dark realities. Optimism for them represents an unjustified faith in the future and the belief that the fullness of meaning or sexuality shall save us.⁷

There is a growing dissatisfaction among queer theorists with the association between queerness and what they see as the passive and “presentist” negativity of the antisocial thesis. Often explicitly following Eve Sedgwick’s call for a move beyond paranoid to reparative reading (2003), much recent scholarship has contested the argument that queer theory should reject the “future” and theorized more hopeful or optimistic approaches to queer or alternative temporalities. Michael Snediker’s *Queer Optimism* (2009) is invested in reconsidering the blandness of concepts such as optimism and happiness. Against what he calls a “utopic optimism”⁸, Snediker posits a “queer optimism” that “is not promissory” (2). Instead, Snediker’s work “asks that optimism, embedded in its own immanent present, might be *interesting*. Queer optimism’s

⁷ Both Bersani and Edelman have more recently reconsidered their positions on negativity and the antisocial nature of (queer) sexuality. In “Shame on You” (2011), Bersani revises his “naïve and dangerous” claim for self-shattering in “Rectum,” arguing instead for a more nuanced “self-divestiture” (107-8). In *Sex, or the Unbearable* (2014), composed in dialogue with Lauren Berlant, Edelman attempts to “dislodge” the antisocial thesis “from a set of understandable anxieties that is has provoked among some queer thinkers” (xii). This amounts to an effort “to show that negativity, far from being reductively antisocial, is invariably an aspect of the social” (xiv). While both are offering reconsiderations of their theoretical paradigms, it is important to note the differences: while Bersani is qualifying if not reversing the “dangerousness” of his polemic, Edelman is clarifying while expanding his own.

⁸ Snediker traces the philosophical history of optimism to the work of Leibniz, since his writing “underpins many of the ways in which optimism has been thought (or more to the point, not thought) about” (26). He argues that Leibniz’s optimism is not at all “futurally oriented” since in Leibniz’s system faith “posits optimism not as a practice but as a given” (27). More importantly for his argument in *Queer Optimism*, Snediker traces the common opposition between optimism and knowledge back to Leibniz’s theodicy. He notes: “Leibnizian optimism lies beyond theorization not because it consigns determination or delight to a futural horizon, but because the faith that underwrites it looms beyond interrogation” (28). Snediker’s effort to make optimism *interesting* resides in the closing of this gap between optimism and knowledge.

interest...depends on its emphatic responsiveness to and solicitation of rigorous thinking” (2-3). As Snediker points out, much queer scholarship has focused primarily on negative affects such as shame, with the result that more positive affects have been rendered uninteresting if not the very target of queer critique. The goal of *Queer Optimism* is to counterbalance this trend by treating optimism and positive affects with the same theoretical complexity as pessimism and negative affects. He asks: “If the insights of the past few decades have mobilized shame, shattering, or melancholy as *interesting*...what if we could learn from those insights and critical practices, and imagine happiness [and optimism] as theoretically mobilizable, as conceptually difficult?” (30). The optimism of his argument, then, consists in its revaluation of positive affects as objects of critical interest and complexity. As he notes, it is an optimism regarding the content rather than the method of queer theory: “Queer optimism attends less to what motivates a project than to a project’s content” (2). *Queer Optimism* seeks to expand the range of affects under consideration: it aims to make positivity as interesting and complex a concept in queer theory as negativity has been. Snediker’s case for an informed (or interesting) optimism is an important one, since it argues powerfully against the idea that optimism is by definition directed toward naïve potentialities that will be disproved by a future actuality. *Queer Optimism* argues instead that optimism represents a complex concept with critical possibilities for literary study.

Aligned with Snediker’s effort to reevaluate optimism, Sara Ahmed’s *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) explores the concrete possibilities of a form of happiness or

optimism grounded in the unknowable potentiality of the future.⁹ Ahmed argues for a form of happiness that embraces the future as a site or horizon of potential rather than assurance. She points out that the etymology of the word “happiness,” from the Middle English *hap*, means “chance” or “fortune” (22). Ahmed argues that the “history of happiness could be described as the history of the removal of the hap from happiness” (207). To correct this erasure, Ahmed argues for a happiness or politics of the “hap,” that is, for the future as a horizon of potentialities or chance happenings. She suggests that this form of happiness “would be alive to chance, to chance arrivals, to the perhaps of a happening. ... We might remind ourselves that the ‘perhaps’ shares its ‘hap’ with ‘happiness.’ The happy future is the future of the perhaps” (198). To embrace this version of happiness requires a (re)orientation to time that interprets it as full of potentiality or chance. In other words, Ahmed’s “politics of the hap” appears at first glance to converge with my initial definition of optimism as an orientation toward the potentialities of time. Ahmed describes optimism and pessimism as orientations to objects that “are both evaluative and anticipatory; they are orientations toward the future as being empty or full, where emptiness and fullness have already been given affective value (it is always emptiness or fullness of something)” (173-4). However, as we will

⁹ Ahmed distinguishes her version of happiness from the “affirmative turn,” which she traces to Brian Massumi and other affect theorists influenced by Gilles Deleuze. For Massumi, positive affects (and positive affects alone) are the sites of “becoming and potentiality.” Ahmed notes that the exclusion of negative or “bad” affects takes for granted “what different affects will do to the body before we are affected in this or that way” (215). In short, the affirmative turn forecloses the potential of “bad affects” entirely: “The affirmative turn creates a distinction between good and bad feelings that presumes bad feelings are backward and conservative and good feelings are forward and progressive. Bad feelings are seen as oriented toward the past, as a kind of stubbornness that ‘stops’ the subject from embracing the future.” However, as Ahmed notes, “bad feelings are not simply reactive; they are creative responses to histories that are unfinished” (217). For more on the affirmative turn, see *Promise* 213-17.

see, this reduction of optimism (and pessimism) to the anticipation of some (specific) future object or event is more limited than Lovecraft's theory of optimism as an orientation toward time that interprets it as full rather than empty of possibilities. Nonetheless, Ahmed's attention to the potentialities of time is helpful for reinterpreting optimism as we normally understand it, as the future realization of a desire, to a theory of time itself that acknowledges rather than forecloses possibilities.

Ahmed's work shares many similarities with Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011). Both works present a polemic against a form of optimism or happiness which causes the subject more harm than good. Berlant defines optimism as "the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying *something* that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the way of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene" (1-2). Berlant's definition interprets optimism not as an affect but rather as a relation or structure of attachment to something in the external world.¹⁰ For her, all relations and attachments are inherently (and initially) optimistic because they draw the subject out of herself and into the world. Berlant clarifies that optimistic relations "are not inherently cruel" (1). They only become so "when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially" (1). In short, for Berlant a "relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (1). "Cruel" shares similarities with "bland," for the blockages created by a relation of cruel optimism transform the subject's desires into a dull and frustrating experience. Her theory of cruel

¹⁰ Like Bersani and Edelman, Berlant's definition of optimism owes much to psychoanalytic theories of desire as a structural attachment to an object. While *Cruel Optimism* effectively serves as an epilogue to her sentimental trilogy, it is more akin to Berlant's survey of theories of attachment in *Desire/Love* (2012).

optimism would be a form of pessimism in my definition: Berlant's text explores the cruelty of time when it is emptied of potential, when (the desire for) possibilities are blocked or foreclosed. Berlant analyzes how subjects survive the transition from optimism (a desire motivated by the belief in the fullness of time) to pessimism (the foreclosure of time's potential following the failure of that desire). Unlike Ahmed, Berlant's work on optimism focuses on the present rather than the future. As we saw in Chapter Two, Berlant's text is concerned with how people adjust to moments of (structural and affective) impasse; *Cruel Optimism* explores how people adapt (or don't) to the failure to achieve their optimistic desires in the present moment. *Cruel Optimism* is therefore useful for its reading of the interrelations and movement between optimism and pessimism, but, like Snediker's work, its localization of the optimism-pessimism dynamic to one vector of time limits what can be said about its complexity.

All of these contemporary revisions of the concept of optimism share a common feature: a reevaluation of the possibilities of time. Lovecraft's work anticipates this contemporary scholarship on optimism and "queer" forms of time while also revealing the limitations of its theories of potentiality. Lovecraft's tales interpret the infinite possibilities of time through an impersonal rather than a human register, and in so doing reveal contemporary theories of optimism and queer time to be limited to various "local" contexts as well as limited vectors of time (i.e. either the present or future). In other words, Lovecraft's weird fiction offers a critique of the reduction of (cosmic) time to the "local" register of human standards and aspirations by presenting a theory of temporality not confined to the context of human values or meaning. For Lovecraft, what time (and space) potentially holds is not necessarily what humanity hopes for or desires. Some

might define this impersonality as pessimism—bad things can (and will) happen. Others might define it, simply, as horror: it is indeed possible that there is a monster lurking under your bed, or, far worse, inside you. I argue that Lovecraft’s refusal to foreclose time’s potentiality despite the horrors it may hold is a weird form of optimism. What Lovecraft’s work also shows, which the critical literature on optimism often elides, is that optimism may be directed toward the past as well as the future, and more importantly, toward other more ambiguous vectors of time in excess of the linear past-present-future form. Cosmic in scope and traversing multiple temporal vectors, Lovecraft’s weird optimism offers a theory of the fullness of time that refines more local optimisms and pessimisms.

II. Shadows of Time

Composed over the winter of 1934-5 and published just a year before his death in 1937, “The Shadow Out of Time” (1936) marks a conscious shift in Lovecraft’s late style. Much of Lovecraft’s work before the 1930s depended upon or at least incorporated an element of the supernatural.¹¹ While composing *At the Mountains of Madness* (1931),

¹¹ A majority of Lovecraft’s supernatural tales fall within what is referred to as the “dream cycle” of his fiction. Briefly, these tales involve an encounter with an alternate or supernatural reality through the medium of dreams. This grouping of his fiction into cycles (another of which would be the “Cthulhu mythos”) can be traced back to Lovecraft’s friend and posthumous publisher August Derleth, who founded Arkham House in order to spread Lovecraft’s work after his death. In short, Lovecraft did not create these cycles; Derleth and subsequent scholars of Lovecraft invented and elaborated them. They are, at best, useful if porous sub-groupings of Lovecraft’s work, and at worst, part of a marketing strategy to package selections of Lovecraft’s vast oeuvre into digestible units. More importantly, these groupings imply a false coherence amongst the individual stories they bundle into a “cycle.” Efforts to make the various components and lore of these tales sync up with the larger cycle (including the numerous Lovecraft compendiums, encyclopedias, and “inspired tales”) often take for granted that Lovecraft

however, Lovecraft articulated the need for a new direction to his art in a February 22, 1931 letter to Frank Belknap Long:

The time has come when the normal revolt against time, space & matter must assume a form not overtly incompatible with what is known of reality—when it must be gratified by images forming *supplements* rather than *contradictions* of the visible & mensurable universe. And what, if not a form of *non-supernatural cosmic art*, is to pacify this sense of revolt—as well as gratify the cognate sense of curiosity? (*SL* 3.293-96, italics original)

Though this shift in style could be described as a generic change from supernatural horror or fantasy to science fiction, such a gloss would overlook how the earlier genre of the “weird tale” played with elements of all three before their segmentation into separate genres. For Lovecraft, the weird tale is defined by its orientation toward the cosmic rather than the human. Up until the composition of *Mountains*, this cosmic orientation often entailed or uncovered a frightening violation of natural law from beyond the known universe.¹² Here, however, Lovecraft redefines the function of the weird tale from the violation or contradiction of the “visible & mensurable universe” to elaborating a possible *supplement* to it. Rather than contradicting existing natural law or science (supernatural), the weird tale should present new *possibilities* that while strange remain in

was composing a systematic worldview or mythos, while in actuality his stories often contradicted or revised one another. These groupings also imply a false distinction *between* different cycles: the tales comprising the Cthulhu mythos, for example, transverse both Lovecraft’s supernatural and non-supernatural fiction. See Lovecraft (1995) for more on the dream cycle.

¹² It is of course possible to classify a handful of Lovecraft’s earlier tales as examples of “non-supernatural cosmic art,” such as “The Whisperer in Darkness,” written between February and September 1930 (though having its genesis in Lovecraft’s 1927 visit to Vermont), and “The Mound,” one of Lovecraft’s revision tales composed for Zelia Bishop in December 1929-January 1930. These stories, written shortly before *Mountains*, reveal Lovecraft beginning to explore the possibility of a non-supernatural cosmic art that would receive a more conscious development in his subsequent work. Other tales that anticipate Lovecraft’s late style include “The Call of Cthulhu” and “The Colour Out of Space.”

accordance with or revise the laws of the known universe (natural). As Fritz Leiber Jr. argues, the shift from a supernatural to a non-supernatural art represents a “Copernican” revolution that separates Lovecraft’s Gothic Modernism from the Romantic and Victorian gothic tales’ reliance on various forms of supernaturalism for effect. Lovecraft’s late art sought to align the weird tale with modern advances in science instead of presenting the (frightening) suspension of its laws. Rather than contradicting actualities, Lovecraft’s late art offers a vista of weird *potentialities* that expand or revise rather than violate the complexity of the known universe.

It is precisely this orientation toward strange possibilities that makes Lovecraft so critical of “bland” optimism, for, as in Ahmed’s case, his aversion to this form of optimism hinges on its uncritical faith in the known universe as well as an assured future. In *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927),¹³ Lovecraft defends the weird tale against the charge that fiction must adhere to the conditions of the known universe—that is, to actuality rather than possibility: “Against it [the weird tale] are discharged all the shafts of a materialistic sophistication which clings to frequently felt emotions and external events, and of a naively inspired idealism which deprecates the aesthetic motive and calls for a didactic literature to ‘uplift’ the reader toward a suitable degree of smirking optimism” (12). It is this bland and “smirking” optimism that Lovecraft’s late tales

¹³ *Supernatural Horror in Literature* was written before *Mountains*, and as such still adheres to Lovecraft’s earlier model of the weird tale as primarily supernatural. Even here, however, Lovecraft is heavily reliant upon the “natural” as a necessary counterpoint or foil for the supernatural: “Serious weird stories are either made realistically intense by close consistency and perfect fidelity to Nature except in the one supernatural direction which the author allows himself, or else cast altogether in the realm of phantasy...” (87). The insight of Lovecraft’s later weird stories, beginning with *Mountains*, is simply that the “one...direction which the author allows himself” may also take the form of an unexpected *revision* of what is included in the category of the “natural.”

contest, for the “revolt” in his new approach to cosmic art rests precisely in its argument that the natural universe contains a vast arena of possibilities which are impossible to predict. Against the smirking assurance of a bland optimism, Lovecraft’s late tales assert that finite human beings cannot imagine the vast possibilities the universe may contain until confronted with them. The non-supernatural style of these tales functions in service of this revolt against the assurance in actuality, since it frames the strange possibilities of the tales within a natural rather than fantastical framework—as a previously unknown component rather than a contradiction of nature. As S.T. Joshi puts it in *The Weird Tale* (1990), Lovecraft’s later stories are a form of “*quasi science fiction*” in which “the ‘supernatural’ is not *ontological* but *epistemological*: it is only our ignorance of certain ‘natural laws’ that creates the illusion of supernaturalism” (7, italics original). In short, in revolt against the stasis of the actual, the weird tale confronts the reader with the unknown. Lovecraft identifies the “one test of the really weird” as “whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers” (16). For Lovecraft, however, the unknown possibilities represented by the weird tale inspire not only dread but also “curiosity;” the ultimate “test” of the weird tale is its ability to inspire “a subtle attitude of awed listening” (16). The reader of the weird tale listens in awe for what may potentially be lurking in the shadows of the infinite expanse of cosmic space and time.

As one of Lovecraft’s most “cosmic” tales in scope,¹⁴ “The Shadow Out of Time” seeks to elicit a sense of awe at man’s place in the “seething vortex of time” while

¹⁴ S.T. Joshi calls “Shadow” the “most cosmic of Lovecraft’s tales aside from *At the Mountains of Madness*” (Lovecraft 2008, 948). While Joshi points out the temporal *span* of *Mountains* is more expansive than “Shadow,” I have chosen to read “Shadow” as

remaining firmly grounded in the natural world (948). The tale is told from the perspective of Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee, Professor of Political Economy at Miskatonic University. In the middle of a lecture on May 14, 1908, Peaslee has a “singular feeling” that a force is attempting to take possession of his thoughts before losing consciousness (950). Peaslee falls into a “queer amnesia” that lasts for five years, awaking on September 26, 1913 in the midst of the sentence he was speaking during his economics lecture (949). Upon recovering, he learns from others that on the morning following his collapse he opened his eyes and began to speak in an “awkward and foreign” way (950). Stranger still, during the interval of his amnesia, “Peaslee” traveled extensively to conduct research into esoteric texts and materials before showing signs of “ennui and flagging interest” in the summer of 1913 (952). Awaking to himself shortly thereafter, Peaslee is haunted by strange recollections as well as a distorted sense of time. He dreams of travelling through cyclopean cities and conversing with massive “cone-like” beings in a labyrinthine library of stone. To convince himself that his dreams and “pseudo-memories” are the result of the research he performed in his amnesiac state, Peaslee retraces “his” travels, visiting the same libraries and consulting the same texts his shadowy other had.

What he discovers horrifies him: the texts relate the myth of a lost Precambrian city as well as of the alien civilization that inhabited it. Peaslee quickly realizes that these texts describe the same cyclopean city he sees in his dreams as well as the strange beings that inhabit it. Known as the “Great Race” because they had “conquered the secret of time,” these entities (also known as the Yith) are capable of travelling through

the most mature of Lovecraft’s tales concerning the potentiality of (cosmic) time because the temporal *complexity* of this tale far exceeds that of *Mountains*.

time by exchanging consciousness with beings in another era (961). The Great Race sends exploring minds through time to compile all the knowledge of the universe for their library, while the captive mind inhabiting the Yith's body is tasked with recording its own history for their archives during the duration of the swap. Attempting to explain away the similarities between the texts and his dreams as pseudo-memories, Peaslee publishes articles on these esoteric texts as well as his own experience in the *Journal of the American Psychological Society*. Shortly thereafter, he is contacted by an archaeologist who has unearthed ruins similar to those described by Peaslee's articles in the Australian desert. With a research expedition that includes Professor Dyer (narrator of *Mountains*), Peaslee travels to Australia to explore these ruins and, separated from the group by a strange wind storm, stumbles upon a passage to a buried city. Instinctively navigating the city to the central archive, Peaslee there discovers an ancient text "amidst the undisturbed dust of a million centuries" written in "the letters of our familiar alphabet, spelling out the words of the English language in my own handwriting" before fleeing in terror from a nameless being his exploration had awakened (998).

The plot of this tale follows the typical structure of many of Lovecraft's stories, which are often constructed around the narrator's gradual discovery of a truth beyond his comprehension (or rather the steady erosion of his "rational" resistance to this truth), ending in terror, madness, or death (or a mix of the three).¹⁵ This unraveling of the

¹⁵ Lovecraft, of course, did not originate this plot structure; he inherited it from Poe. More importantly for my argument here, Lovecraft also attributed to Poe an insight into the "impersonality of the real artist" which Lovecraft clearly sought to emulate in his own fiction (*Supernatural Horror* 53). For him, Poe was the first writer of weird fiction who realized "that the function of creative fiction is merely to express and interpret events and sensations as they are, regardless of how they tend or what they prove—good or evil, attractive or repulsive, stimulating or depressing, with the author always acting as

narrator's sanity is one of the features often pointed to as evidence of Lovecraft's "pessimism." As Berlant would say, the narrative arc represents the conversion of the narrator's optimistic attachment to scientific truth to a relation of cruel optimism or pessimism. However, beyond the local plot details of the narrator's fate, the narrative form of Lovecraft's stories tells a different story. There is a kind of inevitability to many of Lovecraft's tales, which proceed irresistibly toward the revelation of some new truth despite the narrator's unwillingness to face it. The narrator often protests against the telling of the tale and warns the reader of the consequences attending the knowledge his account will reveal—and then tells it regardless. Lovecraft's narrators also (attempt to) undercut themselves by expressing their own doubts in the course of their narrative account. Framed as a retrospective account of his experience for his son Wingate, Peaslee's tale opens with him desperately clinging to sanity by attempting to ground himself in concrete facts (a specific place and time): "After twenty-two years of nightmare and terror, saved only by a desperate conviction of the mythical source of certain impression, I am unwilling to vouch for the truth of that which I think I found in Western Australia on the night of July 17-18, 1935" (948). Despite this professed doubt over the veracity of his account, Peaslee remains driven to relate his story to others despite the consequences.¹⁶ Yet it is the power of the narrative itself that appears to pull Peaslee through toward the fateful revelation, despite his hesitations. More significantly,

a vivid and detached chronicler rather than as a teacher, sympathizer, or vender of opinion" (53).

¹⁶ Lovecraft's narrators also often break their silence or overcome their resistance in order to call for a stop to the investigations their own research has set in motion. Hence in addition to providing his son with a record, Peaslee also writes his account in order to urge "a final abandonment of all attempts at unearthing those fragments of unknown, primordial masonry which my expedition set out to investigate" (948).

the narrative arc of this tale represents a movement from the firm temporal and spatial grounding of the opening (Western Australia, night, July 17-18, 1935) to a conclusion where time and space are in perpetual flux if not confusion—to a moment, that is, wherein the firm grounding of the natural or local opens onto the supplement of a more cosmic vista of time and its shadowy potentials.

In other words, what is significant for Lovecraft is not the fate of his individual narrators but rather the temporal possibilities his narratives ineluctably reveal. The irresistible pull toward the revelation of these possibilities is part of the “weirdness” of Lovecraft’s tales. From the Old English *wyrd* meaning “fate” or “destiny” (*OED*), the weird tale operates as a harbinger of fate; the tale gradually erodes the narrator’s resistance to the revelation of new possibilities, bringing him to the brink of accepting their fateful consequences. The narrator finds himself beset by a weird force that pulls him through the temporal arc of the narrative to the inevitable or destined conclusion.

Of course, this movement through time toward a conclusion or revelation represents the definitive temporal form of all narrative. Lovecraft’s tales are particularly invested in the form of the written narrative as a structure for the revelation of potential supplements to the natural world. His narrators often share in this investment, albeit reluctantly. Peaslee explains that he “did not enlighten him [his son] orally before sailing [from Australia], because I think he had better have the revelation in written form” (949). The written form will allow Wingate the time to process the material as well as enable its distribution to interested parties: “Reading and re-reading at leisure will leave him with a more convincing picture than my confused tongue could hope to convey. He can do as he thinks best with this account—shewing it, with suitable comment, to any quarters

where it will be likely to accomplish its good” (949). Aside from providing some insight into the habits of his own desired readership, Lovecraft expresses through Peaslee a theory of reading written texts that is both recursive and social. Lovecraft’s investment in the (individual and social) power and rewards of narrative texts is significant here because it helps redirect attention to his primary interest in narrative *form* rather than the fate of specific narrators. In brief, within the frame of the tale, the narrator is “local” while narrative itself represents the more “cosmic” temporal form. Both formally and conceptually, then, Lovecraft’s tales are above all concerned with (forms of) time: with the pull or force of time as it draws the narrator (and reader) toward the revelation of cosmic realities never thought possible.

This is not to imply that the narrator serves no function. In “Shadow,” Lovecraft explores the possibility of a transformed (bodily) relation to time through the character of Peaslee. Following the period of his “amnesia,” the narrator observes that his perception of time has become so troubled that he is unable to organize events into a typical linear pattern: “My conception of *time*—my ability to distinguish between consecutiveness and simultaneousness—seemed subtly disordered; so that I formed chimerical notions about living in one age and casting one’s mind all over eternity for knowledge of past and future ages” (954, italics original). The inability to distinguish between consecutiveness (diachronic time) and simultaneity (synchronic time) transforms Peaslee’s sense of different temporal modes (past, present, future). Rather than organizing time into a chronological sequence, he instead receives events as but a part of the “vertiginous cycles of time” (978). As a result, Peaslee finds himself out of sync with the linear progression of (human) history. When the Great War begins, for instance, Peaslee discovers that it

prompts “strange impressions of *remembering* some of its far-off *consequences*—as if I knew how it was coming out and could look *back* upon it in the light of future information” (954, italics original). This transformation of the future into the past, of emerging events into distant memories, leads to a temporal vertigo for the narrator in which time is registered affectively as a dizzying cycle rather than a linear line. His ensuing narrative is in part an attempt to quell this sense of vertigo by organizing his experience as well as what he learns about the Great Race into a typical chronological narrative, despite his admission that if his research and experience is true then “time and space had become a mockery” (994).

A “vertiginous” temporal sense does not, on the face of it, seem like a very pleasant transformation of the body’s affective relation to time. It certainly causes some horror on the part of Peaslee. However, Lovecraft subjects his narrator to this transformation not to torture him but rather to explore the effects of a more cosmic form of time on the human body and consciousness. Lovecraft represents this form of cosmic time not as a supernatural force (i.e., that of an alien race) but instead as the implication of modern scientific theory. Peaslee notes that when he describes his new experience of time to certain colleagues at Miskatonic University, some “looked uncomfortably at me, but men in the mathematics department spoke of new developments in those theories of relativity...which were later to become so famous. Dr. Albert Einstein, they said, was rapidly reducing *time* to the status of a mere dimension” (954, italics original). Here Lovecraft frames his narrator’s sense of time not as a supernatural consciousness but rather as the logical consequence of Einstein’s theory of relativity—as, in short, relativity made flesh. Through Peaslee, Lovecraft speculates about what it would be like to

conceptualize and affectively experience time as it exists throughout the cosmos rather than on the local scale of the human. If time is indeed a mutable dimension rather than a static line, then it may be traversable (and experienced) in more than one form—say, as a series of overlapping cycles rather than a straight line. While such a conception of time may indeed be “dizzying,” it is also vertiginous in the sense of being “unstable” or “apt to change quickly” (*OED*). The fluidity and complexity of time allows for more possibilities than imagined—not only the existence of alien forms of life but more importantly the potential for new modalities of time. Though this temporal fluidity removes the solid grounding of linearity (leading to the possibility of vertigo), it results in a perception of time as multiple and changeable that Lovecraft attempts to represent in embodied form through Peaslee. By sending his narrator whirling through these vertiginous cycles, Lovecraft speculates about the possibility of adapting humanity’s embodied relation to time in light of cosmic theories of relativity. Similar to Stowe’s theory of affective exhaustion, Lovecraft subjects his narrator to an intense affective experience in order to open him up to new temporal possibilities. More importantly, Lovecraft is able to suggest that there is more to time (and more forms of time) than previously thought possible.

Peaslee’s sense of vertigo extends to his perception of his own bodily form, since, as a result of his exchange with a mind from the Great Race, Peaslee becomes habituated to experiencing his body as a Yithian. However, as the narrative arc of “Shadow” follows Peaslee’s research into the Great Race, it also prominently entails an increasing familiarity with (inhabiting) their bodily form. Upon awaking from his amnesia at the beginning of the tale, Peaslee notes he “developed a queer fear of seeing my own form, as

if my eyes would find it something utterly alien.... When I did glance down and behold the familiar human shape...I always felt a curious relief, though in order to gain this relief I had to conquer an infinite dread” (956). The dread, of course, is that while awake he will find himself once again in the body of a Yithian, as he does each night in his dreams. This horror, though, begins to fade as the dreams go on: “Only after weeks of hideous repetition did I grow half-reconciled to these visions of myself in monstrous form. In the dreams I now moved bodily among the other unknown entities, reading terrible books from the endless shelves and writing for hours at the great table” (968). Peaslee’s habituation or reconciliation to this new bodily form becomes most prominent during his final excursion to the Great Race’s buried city in Australia. After observing the similarities between the city in his dreams and the one unearthed beneath the sand, he notes: “One thing only was unfamiliar, and that was my own size in relation to that monstrous masonry” (987). Peaslee feels “oppressed by a sense of unwonted smallness, as if the sight of these towering walls from a mere human body was something wholly new and abnormal. Again and again I looked nervously down at myself, vaguely disturbed by the human form I possessed” (987). By the conclusion of “Shadow,” Peaslee’s habituation to the Yithian form has become so familiar that his “mere human body” is experienced as a “disturbance” to his progress. Less an aversion to his own body than a growing sympathy for the Yithians and their form, “Shadow” traces the development of Peaslee’s *identification* with the Great Race—an identification that Peaslee is troubled to discover but ultimately cannot resist.

Aside from the narrator’s initial experience of horror at this identification, then, Peaslee’s exchange with a member of the Great Race registers Lovecraft’s most

substantial engagement with the sentimental tradition. If sentimentalism hinges upon a sympathetic act of identification (Hendler 3), this tale of an exchange of minds across an immeasurable gulf of temporal, spatial, and biological difference represents a form of *radical sympathy* that evokes strange possibilities as well as horrors. “Shadow” presents us with a perfect sympathetic identification or exchange of minds and bodies across the widest possible span(s) of distance. For Peaslee, the initial horror as well as fascination with this form of radical sympathy (or sympathy in general) is the possibility of its sliding from identification to *identity*—his fear that his vague remembrances of the Great Race will transform into his suddenly *becoming* them once again when he looks down at his body.¹⁷ For it is through the medium of the body and a heightened *affective* capacity that the Great Race conduct their research. Peaslee often describes the Great Race’s temporal exchange with the mind of another being as a form of *feeling* one’s way through time: “Had something been *groping blindly through time* from some unsuspected abyss in Nature?” (950, italics original). In other words, time travel in Lovecraft’s tale is less a scientific possibility (i.e., science fiction) than a radical sympathetic capacity that bridges immense distance through feeling. This is further evidenced by Lovecraft’s disinterest in explaining the technological aids the Great Race uses to facilitate this exchange, describing it only as a “mechanism of the most curious aspect” composed of a “queer

¹⁷ In *Public Sentiments* (2001), Glenn Hendler warns that sympathetic identification or exchange is often troubled by the “conflation of two affective aspects of identification”: first, that sympathy involves feeling *like* someone (a subject or character), and second, that it involves feeling *with* them (5). Hendler clarifies that the first form (feeling like) represents an analogical exchange or comparison between the subject and object of sympathy, whereas the latter (feeling with) represents a coincidence or identity between subject and object. Hence, “Even as it produces an affective connection between individual subjects...sympathy threatens to negate their individuality by confusing the *analogy* it posits between subjects with a fictional and dangerous *coincidence* between them” (5).

mixture of rods, wheels, and mirrors” (952-3). Sympathetic rather than technological, this radical form of sentimental identification is capable of crossing time to forge physical, affective, and cognitive connections with members of other species and races.¹⁸ In short, “Shadow” supplements the natural world not (only) with the possibility of an advanced alien race (and their technology) but more importantly with the potential for a developed affective or sympathetic capacity able to traverse the shadowy lengths of time.

The exercise of this radical sympathy to explore the life of other beings similarly determines how the Yithians’ research is conducted as well as what they are capable of discovering. Radical sympathy, in other words, is not only the medium of their research but also its method and object. Though the primary task of the Great Race is the accumulation of (all) knowledge, their research is conducted not from the stance of a

¹⁸ “Race” is the term Lovecraft (or his narrators) often uses to describe weird new forms of life in his tales. In “Shadow,” for example, the narrator describes the alien life forms the Great Race supplanted in Australia as “a horrible elder race of half-polypous, utterly alien entities” which “were only partly material—as we understand matter—and their type of consciousness and media of perception differed wholly from those of terrestrial organisms” (973). Aside from whatever contemporary anthropological usage as a method of classification it may have had, Lovecraft’s use of the term and more importantly his views on the inherent difference between races has rightly been a source of much criticism. Lovecraft’s tales often reflect a marked horror as well as fascination with “alien” or “other” races, often expressed through the eyes of a New England, Anglo-Saxon narrator. Peaslee himself begins by noting that he is “the son of Jonathan and Hannah (Wingate) Peaslee, both of wholesome old Haverhill stock” (949). His later work, however, arguably represents a more liberal or at least less conservative perspective on race. Evans argues that “Lovecraft did present aliens sympathetically in several of his late stories, a movement which paralleled the abandonment of much of the racism and anti-immigrant xenophobia that marked his upbringing” (125). In tales such as “Shadow” and *Mountains*, for instance, the narrator comes to a growing appreciation and even admiration for the culture of the strange “races” his research uncovers, to the degree of sympathizing if not identifying with them. As we can see, Peaslee’s horror at the Great Race is often complicated by his growing identification with them. This is not, however, to excuse or deny the elements of racism that persist through Lovecraft’s writing. For a more critical reading of Lovecraft’s views on race, see Sorensen (2010), especially 510-514.

detached observer but rather through the vehicle of the native life form's body.

Momentarily inhabiting this body, the Yithian feels and experiences their world through that life form's bodily senses and capacities. The first thing the Yithian learns is how to inhabit and operate this strange new body. Peaslee relates that when his "shadowy other" awoke in his body the morning following his collapse, his bodily movements appeared "awkward and foreign": "the flexions of my facial muscles were altogether unfamiliar" and "I used my vocal chords clumsily and gropingly" (950). After feeling its way into this body, the Yithian proceeds to learn what it can of its world before returning to its own to transcribe the knowledge it collected. In "Shadow," Lovecraft appears to be arguing that it is not possible to learn all one can about another being or race without momentarily inhabiting their perspective and body; that is, without forging a sentimental sympathetic identification with the other. Though this radical form of identification or exchange does not immediately facilitate sympathizing with the host's emotions as traditional sympathetic identification does, the record composed by the native mind during the duration of this exchange (as it too learns to inhabit a new body and world) results in a portrait of its own emotions, senses, and knowledge that the Great Race can further learn from. This radical sympathy bridges immense gulfs, the most important of which is time, to facilitate a weird sympathetic bond amongst all the sentient life of the universe.

This weird sentimental bond is both facilitated and materially represented by the Great Race's central archive, which houses and protects all the knowledge they have accumulated. This archive represents an extreme version of Chesnutt's optimistic theory of time as the aggregation or collection rather than the elimination of the heterogeneous

elements of history. And as with the relation between Uncle Julius and his white interlocutors in *The Conjure Stories*, the archive also raises an issue implicit in the discussion of sympathy above which is often quite explicit in the narrator's own reflections on his experience: the possibility that the Great Race are not innocuous or beneficent researchers but rather malicious invaders of others' experience. One way to interpret "Shadow" is to read the Great Race as imperialists of time who colonize the knowledge and experience of the beings they inhabit; their immense library would represent the material spoils of this imperialism, upon which the Yithians draw in order to improve their own society. Weirdly enough, this reading also represents the typical critique of sentimentalism as colonizing rather than sympathizing with the other's (emotional) experience. As Hendler summarizes it, "Contemporary historians of sentimentalism tend to focus either on its potential to build bridges between people or its colonizing proclivity to collapse them. In recent years, the critical emphasis has been squarely on the latter tendency, sometimes at the expense of a full understanding of sentimentalism's internal logic" (8-9). The sympathetic exchange between Peaslee and the Great Race, as well as the knowledge it produces, represents Lovecraft's way of exploring the internal logic of sentimentalism—both its potentials horrors and pleasures or rewards. While not shying away from the horror represented by a (radical) identification with the other, the narrative of "Shadow" ultimately understands sympathetic exchange as a risky but productive temporary bond.

In "Shadow," Peaslee himself often vacillates between these two extremes of identifying or sympathizing with the Great Race and perceiving them as an invading force that has taken both his body and mind captive. However, as I have been arguing,

the pull toward sympathetic identification rather than horror at an invasive power appears to be the stronger force or emotion in Lovecraft's tale. Consider Peaslee's account (uncovered during his research) of the "captive's" experience of browsing the Great Race's archives:

When the captive mind's amazement and resentment had worn off, and when...it had lost its horror at its unfamiliar temporary form, it was permitted to study its new environment and experience a wonder and wisdom approximating that of its displacer. ...This reconciled many captive minds to their lot; since none were other than keen, and to such minds the unveiling of hidden mysteries of earth—closed chapters of inconceivable pasts and dizzying vortices of future time which included the years ahead of their own natural ages—forms always, despite the abysmal horrors often unveiled, the supreme experience of life. (962)

While horror and a sense of "resentment" or violation represents the captive mind's initial reaction to its displacement, the captive gradually adapts to his new surroundings and bodily form after learning that the exchange will only be a "temporary" one.

Admission to the archive allows the captive to "approximate" the "wisdom" acquired by the Great Race through reading their records, so that the captive mind shares not only in the Yithians' body but also their collective knowledge. As would have appealed to authors such as Brockden Brown, Peaslee's sympathetic exchange with the Great Race provides insight into the uncertainties of time—into the history of the past as well as the future. Like Clara, Peaslee cannot resist the seduction of this insight into time even though its pleasures are mixed with horror.

As in the sentimental tradition, sympathy is here facilitated through the act of reading and writing: in addition to gaining access to the Yithians' library, the displaced mind also transcribes its own account of its life and historical period for inclusion in the archive. Upon his return, Peaslee continues this practice of reading and recording by creating an account of the Great Race's world as they did of his—the text of "Shadow"

itself, which he intends to circulate for others to read. The captive's identification with the Yithians is also helped by the fact that the Great Race only selects "keen" minds from other life forms that share their investment in intellectual culture and history (professors, scientists, artists, etc.). The common bond or identification between the displaced mind and the Great Race is therefore built upon a shared *intellectual curiosity*. The fulfillment of this curiosity for the displaced mind makes its "captivity" not an act of colonization but rather the means of a mutual exchange that enriches both the displaced mind and the Great Race alike.

In addition to this radical sympathy's traversal of an immense spatial and temporal distance, Lovecraft also allows this exchange to continue for a prolonged duration: five years. This may appear at first to validate the argument that sympathetic exchange or identification is indeed a form of colonization, since the Great Race takes hold of Peaslee's body for such an extended period of time. However, read through the "internal logic" of sentimentalism, Lovecraft also seems to be suggesting that sentimental exchange takes time to foster and develop. Both Peaslee and the member of the Great Race who inhabits his body on Earth require an extended period of time to learn about the other's culture and history, and even then Peaslee only scratches the surface. In "Shadow," Lovecraft appears to be arguing that if sentimental identification is to work it cannot be superficial or brief; he imagines a form of sympathetic exchange that entails a radical exchange of the interiority of two individuals that lasts for several years and which, in its wake, still leaves many mysteries behind. The product of this exchange is an increased knowledge of the other's experience (for the Great Race, the history of Earth; for Peaslee, the customs and knowledge of the Yithians) that evokes a pleasure

mixed with an awe bordering on horror. “Shadow” therefore argues that while there is always a kind of (invasive) horror lurking beneath sympathetic identification, it also has the potential to form productive bonds between those who consent to its temporary terms.

Framing this mutual and “personal” exchange, this passage also registers the *impersonality* of Lovecraft’s view of time. The “horrors” unveiled by the archive are not only new forms of life but more importantly a revelation of man’s finite place within the infinite span of cosmic time (and space).¹⁹ Peaslee recalls that his “own history was assigned a specific place in the vaults of the lowest or vertebrate level—the section devoted to the culture of mankind and of the furry and reptilian races immediately preceding it in terrestrial dominance” (969). Within the archive, humanity has its place amidst all of the possible life in the temporal-spatial span of the cosmos—on the lowest shelf, filed under the category of “vertebrate,” wedged between the records of those life forms that both precede and follow it. Peaslee comes to know this place well. Upon his return to the buried city, his record “came vividly into my consciousness. How often had I gone through that intricate routine of varied turns and pressures [to unlock the shelves] in the terrestrial vertebrate section on the lowest level!” (987). Along with his intimate remembrance of the place of his own account, Lovecraft’s placement of Peaslee’s (and mankind’s) record on the “lowest level” between those biological entities immediately

¹⁹ Sorensen similarly reads “Shadow” as “a horrific tale of the archive” (502). For him, however, the “horror” evoked registers Lovecraft’s distaste for other ethnographic groups and cultures, as well as the “weird agency” exerted by the archive, rather than to the perspective on time constructed by the archive. For Sorensen, Lovecraft’s tale “illustrates the crucial importance of cultural archives in the modernist moment and offers a cautionary tale for contemporary scholars working in the archive. The archive comes alive in this weird story, reaching forward in time to act on those who attempt to use it. Through this image of an archive possessed of disturbing agency, Lovecraft’s work challenges the tendency of high modernist writers to present themselves as authorities who control the archive and its meanings” (502).

preceding and following it is designed to highlight the smallness of the human species and individual ego within the cosmos. Does Peaslee's fascination with locating his own record register an acceptance or denial of his place within this cosmic archive, since while intimately familiar with the records in this section it is only his own he appears to value? The answer, of course, is ambiguous, since as with other things Peaslee vacillates between a tentative acceptance of his own (record's) place and a revolt against the "horror" attending it. For the Great Race, however, Peaslee's (and mankind's) record has clear value as a representative account of a specific class of organic life (vertebrate, etc.). The horror for Peaslee is that this value is both contextual and *impersonal*: in the archive, humanity suffers the "indignity" of being placed on the lowest shelf because of its relatively late and, Lovecraft hints, brief emergence into recorded time. On a basic level, the archive is impersonal because the majority of its volumes (most of which remain unopened by Peaslee) represent records of non-human life. More importantly, the impersonality of the archive is the result of the decidedly non-anthropocentric value system ordering its classification. This classification is predicated upon a non-human perspective of time as infinite in expanse and duration. The above passages note that the Great Race orders their records according to relative placement (persistence or duration) in time as well as biological composition. Within such a system, humanity is a slim set of volumes amidst infinite others across time and space.²⁰ The impersonal archive in

²⁰ Interestingly, Lovecraft does not suggest that the Great Race's archive possesses a system for correlating volumes *in* time as well as *through* time—that is, for synchronic as well as diachronic classification. For example, the shelf which houses Peaslee's record orders volumes according to life forms existing before and after humanity but not *at the same time* as it, either upon Earth or elsewhere. This may, however, be a function of the shelving systems, which Lovecraft implies are sorted according to location in the universe (i.e., "terrestrial").

“Shadow” insists that from a cosmological perspective the human tendency to order time around the emergence of one particular species (*homo sapiens*) represents a decidedly narrow or “local” view of time, if not a form of hubris.

The Yithians themselves represent only a part of this vast universal archive. In “Shadow,” the Great Race functions primarily as Lovecraft’s avatar for imagining the possibilities inherent in the *longue durée* of cosmic time. Peaslee’s research into the Great Race first hints at what may potentially be lurking within the vastness of time. The overall “assumption” of the texts he consults is that:

mankind was only one—perhaps the latest—of the highly evolved and dominant races of this planet’s long and largely unknown career. Things of inconceivable shape, they implied, had reared towers to the sky and delved into every secret of Nature before the first amphibian forbear of man had crawled out of the hot sea three hundred million years ago. Some had come down from the stars; a few were as old as the cosmos itself; others had arisen swiftly from terrene germs as far behind the first germs of our life-cycle as those germs are behind ourselves. Spans of thousands of millions of years, and linkages with other galaxies and universes, were freely spoken of. Indeed, there was no such thing as time in its humanly accepted sense. (961)

Once again “Shadow” frames mankind as “only one” of the species to dominate the planet; the tale situates humanity as a temporary species that dominates its “local” terrain (the Earth) for a brief duration—it is “the latest” but not the last. More importantly, this passage is representative of the style of Lovecraft’s tales, which often proceed by implying or hinting at dizzying cosmic possibilities beyond the narrator’s knowledge and comprehension. For as much as Lovecraft’s tales reveal, their weird power lies primarily in their gesturing toward strange possibilities that remain forever within the shadows. Here we have a history of “some” beings who came “down from the stars,” others “as old as the cosmos itself,” and still more that arose “from terrene germs.” At times, these

beings will correlate with those described in Lovecraft's other weird tales.²¹ Just as frequently, though, these terse descriptions function only as vague hints of the possible life forms that may inhabit the cosmos.

For Lovecraft, the purpose of the weird tale is to bring the reader into "contact with unknown spheres and powers;" it is not to reveal or explain (away) the secrets of these unknown spheres and powers.²² In order to evoke "a subtle attitude of awed listening," "Shadow" simultaneously imagines new truths about nature and time *and* implies that a vast realm of possibility remains unrevealed beyond this. As detailed or in-depth as "Shadow" may be about the history of the Great Race, Lovecraft (or his narrators) always present their tales as only scratching the surface. It is precisely for this reason that critics such as Graham Harman misread Lovecraft's late (non-supernatural) tales as revealing "too much." Though Harman heralds Lovecraft as the "poet laureate of object-oriented philosophy" in *Weird Realism* (2012) because of the way his stories produce "gaps in the heart of objects," he faults tales such as "Shadow" and *Mountains* for supposedly destroying the weird tale's atmosphere by providing extensive details about the Great Race (32, 44). For Harman, the Great Race "ought to remain basically unknown; just palpable enough to seem physically present, but not grasped down to the minutest details" (223). Harman's verdict on these two tales is surprising, for he is otherwise an adept reader of Lovecraft's style. He astutely identifies the "allusive aspect

²¹ For example, during his time with the Great Race the narrator converses with a member of the "star-headed vegetable carnivores of Antarctica," a race of "Elder Things" Lovecraft first introduced in *At the Mountains of Madness* (986).

²² In "Notes On Writing Weird Fiction," Lovecraft clarifies that "[p]rime emphasis should be given to *subtle suggestion*—imperceptible hints and touches of selective associative detail which express shadings of moods and build up a vague illusion of the strange reality of the unreal" (177-8, *italics original*).

of Lovecraft's style" which resides in "the gap he produces between an ungraspable thing and the vaguely relevant descriptions that the narrator is able to attempt" (24). What Harman appears to miss in the later tales is how Lovecraft's shift to a "non-supernatural cosmic art" required a revision of this "allusive style": in order to supplement rather than contradict the natural world, Lovecraft must first ground his tales in descriptive and realistic detail of the "visible & measurable universe" before alluding to what still resides beyond the narrator's knowledge (i.e., the gap Harman refers to). Harman therefore overlooks the double-movement of Lovecraft's late style, where each new revelation serves also (if not primarily) to clarify what remains concealed.²³ Hence while Peaslee comes to intimately know (some of) the history of the Great Race, his research into the Yithians also yields intimations of even stranger possibilities that remain forever beyond his reach. In Lovecraft's tales, an advance in knowledge always *expands* rather than reduces the terrain of the unknown; every discovery Peaslee makes only displaces or relocates the "gap" in (his) knowledge rather than eliminating it. It could hardly be otherwise, since for Lovecraft the infinite possibilities of the cosmos are not capable of being fully grasped by the finite mind of man. These possibilities remain forever on the edge of his consciousness, to continually frighten, intrigue, and awe him.

²³ Another way of understanding the style of "Shadow" and *Mountains* is through Fritz Leiber, Jr.'s argument about Lovecraft's use of the "device of *confirmation*" ("A Literary Copernicus," 56). Leiber argues that in Lovecraft's tales "the story-ending does not come as a surprise, but as a final, long-anticipated 'convincer.'" The reader knows, and is supposed to know, what is coming, but this only prepares and adds to his shivers when the narrator supplies the last and incontrovertible piece of evidence" (56). In other words, the relation between what is revealed and concealed in these two tales (and the rest of Lovecraft's fiction) is more complex than Harman allows for, and simply because the reader knows "too much" does not necessarily lessen the overall weird or "shivering" atmosphere of the tales.

In addition to the myriad beings only hinted at by the passage, there is also the implication of a temporality beyond the local human system of ordering time. For though the narrator speaks of the “spans of thousands of millions of years,” he notes the temporality these texts assume exceeds any “humanly accepted sense” of the term. How is time measured or ordered? Lovecraft does not say. He only reveals that there is “no such thing as [human] time” within the *longue durée* of the cosmos. Moreover, cosmic time confounds human temporality not only due to its infinite duration but also because of its non-linear structure. As in his other weird tales, “time” in this passage and throughout “Shadow” represents a complex of embedded temporalities rather than a unitary (i.e., linear) vector. Peaslee mentions “linkages” with other “galaxies and universes” which traverse not only the expanse of space but also forge connections across the distance of time. Peaslee’s previous intuition into the “vertiginous cycles of time” is represented in this passage by an overlaying of multiple temporalities: the length of thousands of millions of years (which despite its immense span is still strictly speaking “measurable”) and a temporality outside any “human sense” are both operative temporal markers in this passage. These two temporal modes represent supplemental rather than contradictory forms of temporality in “Shadow”: an immense if not infinite *longue durée* is woven together with a form of (cosmic) time beyond human measurement. In the Lovecraftian universe, time is irreducibly multiple.

As we have seen, Peaslee can only partially represent this multiplicity in human terms as a “cycle.” This figure does not imply that time is simply cyclical (which would still be a linear form). Rather, it represents a theory of time as a complex of multiple temporalities turning and acting upon one another to the point of confusion (from

Peaslee's perspective). Another example of this temporal overlay or embedding in "Shadow" is Peaslee's discovery of the ancient city beneath modern day Australia. Buried or embedded within "normal," modern human time is a timeless city once inhabited by beings who themselves traversed time. Doubting his experience at the end of his narrative, Peaslee remarks: "If that abyss and what it held were real, there is no hope. Then, all too truly, there lies upon this world of man a mocking and incredible shadow out of time" (998). Peaslee concludes that if the Great Race is real then there is "no hope" for the future; however, Lovecraft's choice of the image of the shadow tells a slightly different story. This shadow that emerges "out of time" does not destroy or elide "the world of man." Instead, the shadow "mocks" man and his (local) perspective of time by overlaying it with its own form. The shadow casts the world of man in a different (dimmer) light, complicating man's linear version of time by making its boundaries less distinct. In this twilight, the "humanly accepted sense" of time becomes hazier, but it does not disappear. Instead this sense of time, previously believed to be Time Itself, is re-contextualized as one form of temporality among other operative forms. Peaslee's own retrospective narrative demonstrates he is still capable of working within linear temporal forms if he so chooses. As the narrative of "Shadow" shows, the only difference is that this temporal form is now intertwined with (the possibility of) multiple others into a complex cycle of overlapping temporalities. The shadow cast over the world does not darken Peaslee's vision of time but rather forces him to adjust his perception to the "shadowy" or subtler operation(s) of temporality.

It is at the conclusion of "Shadow" that Peaslee has his most significant encounter with the vertiginous depths of this shadow (out) of time. While fleeing from the

“polypous” being awakened by his exploration (the ancient antagonists of the Great Race who remain dormant within the city), Peaslee tumbles into a vast chasm of “materially tangible darkness”:

There was a hideous fall through incalculable leagues of viscous, sentient darkness, and a babel of noises utterly alien to all that we know of the earth and its organic life. Dormant, rudimentary senses seemed to start into vitality within me, telling of pits and voids peopled by floating horrors and leading to sunless crags and oceans and teeming cities of windowless basalt towers upon which no light ever shone. (996-7)

Here the shadowy darkness is represented as both “viscous” and “sentient.” The depths of time take on a material form that Peaslee is able to *feel*, not only with his normal (human) senses but also through the vague medium of a “dormant, rudimentary” sensory apparatus awoken in him. Similar to the Great Race’s affective traversal of time, this darkness appears to transfer its own capacity to feel or perceive (“sentience”) to Peaslee through physical contact. Peaslee *sympathizes* (“feels with”) this material shadow, experiencing the cosmos through its senses and perceiving the depths of time it traverses. Once again, time is not so much consciously perceived as it is vaguely *felt* as a whirling fall through indistinct cycles of time. Despite the “floating horrors” revealed by this new perception of (or through) time, Peaslee describes the experience as awakening a “vitality” in him. Like Peaslee’s browsing of the archive, this encounter with the viscous, sentient shadow of time represents a “supreme experience” despite the horror it reveals.

As he continues to fall, Peaslee “senses” even more of the possibilities concealed within the cosmos: “Secrets of the primal planet and its immemorial aeons flashed through my brain without the aid of sight or sound, and there were known to me things which not even the wildest of my former dreams had ever suggested” (997). In proper Lovecraftian fashion, Peaslee only hints at the existence of the “secrets of the primal

planet” that transcend the “wildest” of his dreams. It is possible Peaslee is simply sparing the reader from even further horrors. More likely, however, is that these secrets, which “flash” through Peaslee’s mind “without the aid of sight or sound,” are incapable of being communicated through human language. They can only be “felt” through the same sensory apparatus momentarily awakened in Peaslee during his fall. As if to ground him, one of Peaslee’s final visions returns him to himself through the experience of his identification with the Great Race: “Afterward there were visions of the Cyclopean city of my dreams—not in ruins, but just as I had dreamed it. I was in my conical, non-human body again, and mingled with crowd of the Great Race and the captive minds who carried books up and down the lofty corridors and vast inclines” (997). Rather than the horror it was at the beginning of “Shadow,” at the conclusion of Peaslee’s narrative his identification with the Great Race has become so familiar he refers to “*my* conical, non-human body.” Beyond even what he has seen in his own research and experience among the Great Race, Peaslee’s final fall into the inky abyss offers his most significant glimpse into the shadowy potentials of the cosmos through a strange affective experience of the multiplicity of time. Though the tale concludes with Peaslee doubting the veracity of these visions, his narrative reveals how deeply he has been touched or affected by his experience of these “reachings and seizures in the cosmos-wide vortex of time” (998).

In the context of his fiction, “The Shadow Out of Time” represents Lovecraft’s most sustained attempt to think through the complexity and possibilities of time. As S.T. Joshi and David E. Schultz note in their edition of the tale, “the story is the culmination of Lovecraft’s fictional career, and by no means an unfitting capstone to a twenty-year attempt to capture the sense of wonder and awe he felt at the boundless reaches of space

and time” (Lovecraft 2003, 25).²⁴ For Lovecraft, this sense of awe and wonder is always mixed with horror or fear; or rather, wonder and horror represent intimately related affective responses to the unknown possibilities of space and time. As Lovecraft succinctly expresses it in the opening sentence of *Supernatural Horror*: “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (12). There will therefore always be a need for “a literature of cosmic fear” because “[c]hildren will always be afraid of the dark, and men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse [i.e., a fear of the unknown] will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars...” (1043). Yet the unknown, as we have seen in “Shadow,” not only frightens but also evokes an “inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity” (1043); Peaslee “trembles” in horror *and* wonder at what “may pulsate in the gulfs” beyond man’s small (local) place in the cosmos. The “fathomless worlds of strange life” cast their shadow over man from the boundless reaches of time and space, evoking both fear and awe at their unknown possibilities. It is out of the depth or fullness of these shadowy possibilities that Lovecraft’s tale(s) and his weird optimism are formed.

²⁴ Of course, Lovecraft did not cease writing after the composition of “Shadow.” He published one more tale in 1936 (the same year as “Shadow”), “The Haunter of the Dark,” though the latter tale was composed after “Shadow” in November of 1935. However, Joshi argues that though “Lovecraft would write one more original tale and work on several additional revisions and collaborations with colleagues, his life as a fiction writer ends, and ends fittingly, with ‘The Shadow Out of Time’” (25). Joshi appears to lump “Haunter” together with Lovecraft’s late collaborative writing, since the tale is in part a response to a story written by Robert Bloch. Moreover, in terms of representative examples of the “wonder and awe” Lovecraft “felt at the boundless reaches of time and space,” Joshi is correct that “Haunter” represents a falling off from “Shadow.” However, “Haunter” deserves more consideration as a refined example of Lovecraft’s revision of the weird tale than Joshi affords it.

III. Weird Consolation

What does Lovecraft's theory of the time's potential and its effects on the body contribute to queer theory's rethinking of optimism? Is "weird" simply another word for "queer"? Of course, "queer" ("strange, odd, peculiar" [*OED*]) is a synonym for the most common definition of "weird" ("out of the ordinary course, strange, unusual" [*OED*]), and Lovecraft himself often used the term "queer" to signal the weird in his fiction. Yet this similarity in definition belies the important differences between the two. Weird optimism exists in productive tension with queer optimism rather than as another instance of or replacement for it. The impersonality of Lovecraft's weird optimism is often at odds with queer theory's more subject-oriented reevaluation of optimism. For instance, the aim of Ahmed's politics of the hap "is about opening up possibilities for being in other ways, of being perhaps" (223). Though like Lovecraft her optimism is also concerned with potential, the possibilities opened up by Ahmed's politics of the hap remain of and for the subject. Certainly, Lovecraft's weird optimism treats of the possibilities time holds for the subject and as such is not directly opposed to Ahmed's theory of potential. The difference resides in the starting point: while Ahmed starts with the subject and builds outward, Lovecraft begins from the perspective of the cosmos and scales backward. It is this difference in point of origin that separates Lovecraft's theory of optimism from current queer reformulations; it is also this difference that makes Lovecraft's theories of (the body in) time so valuable to reevaluations of queer optimism(s). Lovecraft's weird optimism operates as a productive critique of other (queer) optimisms' reduction of time to the local context of specific human standards.

His focus on the impersonal potentials of (cosmic) time functions as a counterpoint to forms of optimism that settle too easily into locked subject positions and vectors of time. As we have seen in his fiction and will see below in his letters, Lovecraft's weird impersonal optimism provides a critical perspective on specific (personal) queer optimisms and prevents the reduction or foreclosure of the potentials of time.

As Thacker argues, Lovecraft's (and horror's) point of origin is "the world-without-us." Following Thacker, we could say Lovecraft's fiction presents an "optimism-without-us" whereas queer theory tends to offer an "optimism-for-us." However, this does not mean that the subject has no place in Lovecraft's weird optimism. A more accurate way to translate Thacker after reading "Shadow" is to say that Lovecraft's optimism is not subject- but "world-" or cosmos-oriented. Lovecraft bases his temporal perspective on the world-without-us rather than the subject, and therein lies both the horror and the potential of his optimism. For though Lovecraft's optimism is grounded in a theory of the world-without-us, the subject enters into an intimate and horrifying relation to this world in his fiction. The tension between these two poles of the individual and the cosmic form the crux of Lovecraft's weird fiction. His tales explore the horror and awe produced by the dialectic between the cosmic and the most "local" of human contexts—the body. As we saw with Peaslee, the cosmic and the subject intersect (or collide) in the affective body. Lovecraft's weird optimism therefore appears to involve a paradox, since it entails the subject's intimate involvement in the world-without-us, or what happens when the world-without-us becomes indistinguishable from what Thacker calls the "world-for-us." In other words, his optimism is grounded in an impersonality that intimately involves the personal. Lovecraft's weird optimism resides

at precisely this point where the personal comes into tension (and even threatens to collapse into) the impersonal. Through this tension Lovecraft keeps the dynamic between the individual and the world, between the body and (cosmic) time, open rather than closed.

Another way to explain this seeming paradox is to trace it to the strand of sentimentalism running through Lovecraft's work. Though Lovecraft's theory of non-supernatural cosmic art intends to "forget" the local concerns of the human, his weird fiction needs a personal and human register in order to produce the affective moods Lovecraft desires—wonder, horror, and awe. He needs a Peaslee to react in horror to the discovery of the Great Race; to feel the "vertiginous" cycles of time; to wonder at the knowledge revealed by the archive. The cosmic or impersonal must still be mediated by the personal in Lovecraft's late art, and in "Shadow" this occurs through the affective medium of the body. Lovecraft draws on the sentimental tradition of the feeling body to describe Peaslee's mediation of the cosmic wonders and horrors he uncovers. Even Lovecraft's exploration of a radical form of sympathy spanning the gulfs of cosmic space and time takes place between two specific bodies. This reliance on the affective body creates the tension in Lovecraft's work between sentimentalism's focus on the personal and (modernist) Gothic horror's focus on the impersonal or non-human. We might even say this tension between the personal and the impersonal is central to the sentimental tradition itself, specifically its theory of sympathy's ability to navigate difference (otherness or impersonality), and that this partly explains the appeal of sentimental techniques within the Gothic horror genre. Of course, as we saw above, "Shadow" makes a similar but reversed argument in suggesting the possible horror at the heart of

sentimentalism's desire to bring the unknown close. In either case, it is the feeling body engaged in a sympathetic relation that moves between these two poles of the personal and the impersonal, the known and the unknown, without necessarily settling on either. Peaslee identifies with the Great Race at one moment and recoils in the next. Thus the relation between the personal and the impersonal, between the world-for-us and the world-without-us, remains open and unsettled in "Shadow." As we have seen, this dynamic or tension is also a temporal one; "Shadow" explores what transpires when the affective body is caught up in the flux of cosmic time and Lovecraft draws upon the sentimental tradition to flesh this out. This tension between the body in time and cosmic time in Lovecraft's weird optimism is productive both for its own complex theory of time and the way it provides perspective on queer optimism(s)' more local focus on the individual body in time.

This intertwining of the personal and the impersonal, of the body in time and cosmic time, at the heart of Lovecraft's weird optimism meets even more intimately in what is arguably (according to S.T. Joshi) his greatest achievement: his personal correspondence. Of special interest here is a specific genre of letter that appears with relative frequency among (and within) Lovecraft's voluminous correspondence, the consolation letter. In brief, the consolation letter as a genre operates as an offering of sympathy to someone (the reader) experiencing suffering, pain, or loss. This sympathy is often offered not only through consoling words (of affection or advice) but primarily by forging an identification between the writer and the reader. The author of the consolation letter narrates his own pain or losses and thereby identifies his experiences with those of the reader. The consolation letter is thus a genre that shares and relieves pain through

descriptive narrative. In this function, it also serves as an occasion for a meditation on pain and its place in human life. In addition to (or by way of) sympathizing with the reader's suffering, the consolation letter attempts to draw the reader out of the isolation of their pain and back to the (social) world. In short, the consolation letter is a sentimental genre that extends sympathy across a distance to forge an identification between the writer and reader through a shared suffering.

Lovecraft's weird optimism is therefore also notable in his letters, particularly in those he wrote to console others experiencing pain or bereavement. In Lovecraft's hands, the consolation letter often operates as an occasion to elaborate his views on the place of human suffering and life within cosmic time. In his correspondence, Lovecraft often spoke of cosmic time to those struggling with the very human problems of distress, illness, and loss. Lovecraft's elaboration of his philosophy of cosmic time in the context of a consolation letter is revealing. It shows he conceived of the intersection between the cosmic and the local (the impersonal and the personal) as productive of more complex relations than just horror. It seems odd at first that Lovecraft would reference the very cosmic time he believes renders human suffering "insignificant" in these moments, but it is clear from his letters that he understands his cosmic philosophy as offering real consolation. Thus while Lovecraft's optimism may appear to reside out of reach in the "cosmos-wide vortex of time," it is also possible this weird optimism may "come down from the stars" to cast its shadow over the "local" concerns of the human race. Against those who argue Lovecraft was not concerned with individuals,²⁵ his correspondence

²⁵ S.T. Joshi suggests that Lovecraft had a "profound unconcern for individuals" (*WT* 207). He quotes one instance from his letters as proof: "Individuals and their fortunes within natural law move me very little. They are all momentary trifles bound

reveals Lovecraft applying his theories of cosmic time as a form of personal consolation and extending his sympathetic identification to those suffering.

Lovecraft explained his particular method of consolation in a March 11, 1936 letter to Robert H. Barlow after one of their mutual acquaintances had a death in her social circle:

Despite my upheaved programme I at once started a letter of what I thought to be the most consoling and useful sort—with sympathetic remarks (and citations of others who have bravely pulled out of similar bereavements) gradually giving place to cheerful discussion of general and impersonal topics in which long time-stretches (thus placing local and individual sorrows at the small end of the telescope) are concerned—answering a letter received early in February. History was the main theme—the dominant topic being Roman Britain and its long decline.... That, I find, is the kind of stuff a bereaved person likes to get from the outside world—sincere sympathy not rubbed in, and a selection of general topics attuned to his interests and quietly reminding him that there is a world which has always gone on and which still goes on despite personal losses. I used this tone—apparently with good results—to Klarkash-Ton last September when his mother died....²⁶

Like Chesnutt, Lovecraft is here engaging with the formal techniques for communicating (with) pain and suffering. The main contours of his approach to the consolation letter largely conform to the outline of the genre provided above. He offers sympathetic remarks and narrative examples of others who survived similar forms of bereavement as

from a common nothingness toward another common nothingness. Only the cosmic framework itself—or such individuals as symbolize principles (or defiances of principles) of the cosmic framework—can gain a deep grip on my imagination and set it to work creating. In other words, the only ‘heroes’ I write about are *phenomena*” (SL 5.19, italics original). To be fair, Joshi (and Lovecraft) are making an argument about the place of individuals within his fiction; yet the implications toward individuals in general that Joshi draws from this are fairly clear. However, as we have seen, the relation between the cosmic and the local expressed in this letter and throughout Lovecraft’s work is much more complex than a simple disregard of the local or the personal. Even more importantly, as we will see, it is often this very same argument about the individual’s “nothingness” as a “trifle” that Lovecraft uses as part of his weird form of consolation.

²⁶ Quoted from the Ms. H.P. Lovecraft Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University.

well as a cheerful discussion of the general topics that interest the specific reader.

Lovecraft's observation that this type of discourse "from the outside world" is welcome registers that he understands how pain and loss can isolate the individual from the rest of the world. He notes the expression of sympathy must be "sincere" and "not rubbed in," which implies that for Lovecraft the emotional component of the consolation letter should be heartfelt but brief. The purpose of the letter in Lovecraft's view is to bring the reader back to himself and the world, both through a treatment of topics the reader cares about and "quiet reminders" that "there is a world which has always gone on and which still goes on." As Lovecraft notes, he has used this particular form of consolation before with "good results" in a letter to Klarkash-Ton (Clark Ashton Smith),²⁷ and it details the general form of the consolation letters Lovecraft penned throughout his life.

The unique feature that distinguishes Lovecraft's consolation letters from the genre formula is the way he invariably brings his theories of cosmic time to bear on the question of pain and consolation. There is a hint of this already in the letter above, specifically when Lovecraft refers to his discussion of history or "long time-stretches" in the consolation letter. For Lovecraft, the discussion of time is an effective tool of consolation because it places "local and individual sorrows at the small end of the telescope." This "telescoping" of "local and individual sorrows" (and indeed all human affairs) is precisely how Lovecraft's weird form of consolation operates. As a tool, the telescope aids in shifting perspective from the near to the far— or, conversely, in bringing things far away up close. To help relieve pain, make it more endurable, or

²⁷ This particular letter, composed sometime in September 1935, does not appear to survive. It was not included in the bulk of letters Smith provided to Arkham House following their request for Lovecraft's letters after his death. Smith either did not keep the letter, lost it, or (most likely) did not wish to share it.

simply put it in perspective, Lovecraft contextualizes the reader's local suffering within a larger framework of time. Here it is the context of "Roman history and its long decline," but even more frequently in these letters it is the framework of cosmic time (within which Lovecraft would consider Roman history "local"). The purpose of both is to draw the reader's attention to the infinite span and operation of time itself, which colors how we read the seemingly stereotypical advice in this letter that life "goes on." For Lovecraft, life and human history goes on...from a local standpoint, though within the context of cosmic time it is but a brief moment "bound from a common nothingness toward another common nothingness" (*SL* 5.19). It is a chilling thought, but Lovecraft deploys it as a source of consolation rather than horror in his letters in order to "telescope" the pain felt by his reader during a period of suffering.

The technique Lovecraft calls "telescoping" in his letters is familiar by now: it is also the technique of his weird fiction. What is curious, then, is that Lovecraft applies the same technique he uses in his fiction to produce horror (the dwarfing of humanity's local concerns by the infinite cosmos) to provide consolation in his letters. In "Shadow," we saw that humanity's realization of its small place within the cosmos caused not only horror but also awe, curiosity, and even pleasure. Yet what is it about the change in genre from fiction to (consolation) letter that allows this cosmic perspective to console rather than to horrify, at least for Lovecraft?

The best way to answer this is to look closer at Lovecraft's elaboration of this weirdly consoling theme in his letters, particularly as it develops through an extended

correspondence with one particular recipient: Helen Sully.²⁸ Sully does not figure very largely in Lovecraft scholarship; most mentions of her occur in passing and often in a dismissive tone. Speaking of Lovecraft's correspondence with Sully, Joshi argues that "it becomes readily apparent that Sully was a high-strung, hypersensitive woman who was experiencing a series of disappointments (among them unfortunate love affairs) and was looking for Lovecraft to lend her some fortitude and encouragement" (*IAP*, 935). Joshi is able to confidently make this pronouncement on Sully's character right after acknowledging that her side of the correspondence does not survive. He also notes this correspondence has generated some controversy; it sparked a debate over whether Lovecraft suffered from depression because of the darker portrait of the author it often revealed. Lovecraft frequently discussed his bouts of melancholia and thoughts of suicide with Sully in these letters. Joshi concludes that the contextual evidence suggests Lovecraft did not suffer from depression and "the passages in his letters to her cannot be taken straightforwardly" (936). Yet what Joshi doesn't ask is: why did Lovecraft choose to reveal these intimate details to Sully, and for what purpose? He does observe that Lovecraft's "tactics" in these letters "was two-pronged: first, suggest that 'happiness' as such was a relatively little-realised goal among human beings; and second, suggest that he was in a far worse position than herself, so that if *he* could be tolerably contented, so much more should she be" (935). Yet he does not draw the clear connection between Lovecraft's admission of melancholic thoughts and his "tactics" in these letters.

Lovecraft wishes to console Sully, and he does so by drawing on an old sentimental

²⁸ Lovecraft came into contact with Sully through their mutual friend, Clark Ashton Smith. Sully visited Lovecraft in Providence in 1933, and after spent time with Lovecraft's circle of friends in New York City (Frank Belknap Long, Donald Wandrei, etc.). The two kept in contact until Lovecraft's death.

technique: he forges a sympathetic identification between himself and his reader. I have felt this way too, he tells Sully, and I have survived it. So can you. This quick dismissal of Sully and protection of Lovecraft's genteel masculine image is part of a notable gender bias in Lovecraft scholarship that treats the women in his life—either his family members, wife, or correspondents—as negligible at best and as victimizers or distractions at worst.²⁹

More than any of his other correspondents, Lovecraft's correspondence with Sully predominantly takes the form of the consolation letter. For instance, from March to September 1935 Lovecraft wrote a series of letters to Sully intended to cheer her up during a period of despondency. Because Sully had expressed a debilitating concern with how others perceive her, Lovecraft attempts to provide a consoling perspective by framing the life of human beings within the context of cosmic space and time: "The people on Mars will never know that any human race exists—the people on Neptune can never know that the Earth exists—the people on the planets of Alpha Centauri can never know that the solar planets exist—the people of trans-galactic systems can never know that the sun exists...." (*SL* 5.114). Lovecraft reframes Sully's concern for the opinions of those in her social circle in the larger context of the cosmos in order to stress both the futility and absurdity of harping on the opinions of others.³⁰ He finishes by expanding

²⁹ W. Scott Poole's (2016) recent research into the role of women (and sexuality) in Lovecraft's life has gone far to correct this misconception, but it's only the beginning. See *In the Mountains of Madness*.

³⁰ It should go without saying that Lovecraft is not suggesting there are indeed "people" on Mars, Neptune, Alpha Centauri, etc. The tone of this passage is indicative of the humor Lovecraft sprinkles into his letters with Sully, also in an effort to cheer her mood. For example, Lovecraft ends the section of the letter discussing cosmic time with a blend of humor and his typical self-deprecating tone: "With which typical flourish Grandpa concludes an equally characteristic ream of sententious senile meandering" (6).

the temporal frame from Sully's (and his) own life span to the infinite time of the cosmos: "A few trillion years hence there will be no consciousness in existence that can know of the former existence of such a thing as a human race. The universe will be just as it would have been had no Earth existed" (114). This is certainly a weird form of consolation, but one that is deeply informed by Lovecraft's cosmic optimism about the infinite and vast potentials of time and space. Lest Sully believe he is encouraging a form of cynicism when it comes to dealing with others, he assures her, "It is certainly not necessary to be a misanthrope" (113). Lovecraft counsels Sully "not to expect too much" and "to enjoy each [person] for his own specialty & expect no more" while supplementing her life with "non-human objects of beauty" and "significance" (114). Though this sounds like a form of philosophical resignation, and though Lovecraft himself often refers to it as such, his consoling advice to Sully is best understood as a form of his weird cosmic optimism since it positions human life within a cosmic context while allowing for the possibility of enjoyment, surprise, and even (cautious) hope.

Lovecraft directly addresses the place of hope within his cosmic philosophy in his letters to Sully. He specifically positions his consoling advice to her as distinct from traditional forms of optimism and pessimism, which as we have seen are colloquially understood as different perspectives on what the future holds—i.e., on hope. In an August 15, 1935 letter, he tells Sully that his advice to her is "*not irresponsible and platitudinous optimism*."³¹ Like the "bland" optimism pilloried in "Cthulhu," Lovecraft distinguishes his weird optimism from "irresponsible" forms because his does not seek to hide the harsh truths of cosmic space and time. In a September 23, 1935 letter, Lovecraft

³¹ Quoted from the Ms. H.P. Lovecraft Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University. Italics original.

likewise differentiates his cosmic philosophy from traditional forms of pessimism: “I hope that my preceding epistle did not sound too unrelievedly pessimistic. I am not a *pessimist*, but merely a realistic *indifferentist*” (SL 5.195, italics original). Lovecraft’s identification of himself as an “indifferentist” does not mean he does not value human life in the cosmos, but rather that he believes the cosmos is indifferent to human life and values. He tells Sully, “It is just as childishly romantic to postulate an actively hostile & malignant cosmos...as to postulate a friendly, ‘just’, & beneficent one. The truth is that the cosmos is blind & unconscious—not giving a hang about any of its denizens, nor even knowing that they exist” (195). Although the cosmos is indifferent to its “denizens,” it does not follow for Lovecraft that all of human existence is for naught: “It [the cosmos] doesn’t try to pain them any more than it tries to help or please them—& if any of them can manage to have a good time somehow, in spite of the chaotic jumble of conditions & emotions around & within them, that’s quite all right with the universal powers that be” (195). Nor does it rule out the possibility of an informed hope or guarded optimism: “It would seem to be the part of good sense to harbour great hopes in a sort of light, indefinite way—extracting from them whatever bracing power their imaginative associations may possess, but keeping also in mind the ineluctable natural laws & probabilities which actually prevail” (196). The only danger Lovecraft foresees is allowing this hope or optimism to become illogical, so he cautions Sully to avoid its “extremes”: “Naturally such a course is for many difficult, but almost anyone can probably—with suitable effort & the exercise of coherent logic—approach it in a degree sufficient to remove at least some of the pains & shocks of unrestrained romanticism. In any case it is worth trying” (195).

As his advice to Sully beings to indicate, Lovecraft's philosophy of weird optimism entails a form of pragmatism in daily life. United with his primarily aesthetic outlook on life, Lovecraft's weird optimism leads to a utilitarian pragmatism that seeks to maximize (artistic and intellectual) pleasure while minimizing (physical and emotional) pain. As he advises Sully in the same letter: "The highest consistent and practicable goal of mankind is simply an absence of *acute and unendurable suffering*—a sensible compromise with an indifferent cosmos which was never built for mankind and in which mankind is only a microscopic, negligible, and temporary accident."³² As Lovecraft suggests here, the highest goal of mankind is to minimize humanity's suffering during the "negligible" period it inhabits the earth—a sentiment that in large part informed his political conversion to socialism in the 1930s. For Lovecraft once humanity acknowledges it inhabits an "indifferent cosmos" that was "never built for mankind," the rational consequence is to maximize pleasure and minimize all forms of pain during the brief and "temporary" period of life. For Lovecraft dwelling on the cosmically insignificant span of human life only leads to a brooding distraction at best or melancholy at worst, both of which increase (emotional) pain and detract from possible pleasures. Though he often admits in his letters to suffering from periods of melancholy himself, his theories of cosmic time entail a more optimistic and pragmatic approach to humanity's insignificance. As he writes Sully in a December 4, 1935 letter, "So the voice of sound reason would seem to be saying, 'cheer up!' There aren't any phenomena in the cosmos

³² Quoted from the Ms. H.P. Lovecraft Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University. Italics original.

really worth being mournful or depressed about.”³³ Once again he advises her to adopt a more pragmatic approach to living that makes use of the brief time allotted to humanity within cosmic time: “What...is of any real use or significance except planning for a sensible future? And how can anybody plan sensibly except by ditching all myth-born sentimentalities; studying the scientific mechanics of human thought, feeling, and behaviour; and steering a realistic course based on phenomena as they are rather than as one would like them to be....” Like Stowe’s theory of exhaustion, for Lovecraft negative affects such as melancholy have to be moved through to open up the pragmatic potential for a “sensible future.” Much of Lovecraft’s consolation amounts to offering pragmatic advice on how to alleviate pain and suffering so his reader can resume a “realistic course” of action in a cosmos devoid of absolute values. As he tells Sully in the same letter, “The only criteria of conduct, thought, and feeling which one can logically envisage are purely *relative* and *proximate* ones, utilitarian and aesthetic in their nature. Human impulses and behaviour are simply *what they are*—wholly outside any *absolute* realm of approval or disapproval.”³⁴ Reminding his reader about the insignificance and ephemerality of mankind within cosmic time functions not as an occasion for melancholy but rather as a reminder to make pragmatic use of what limited time is available.

Lovecraft’s comment that “myth-born sentimentalities” need to be discarded refers specifically to his materialist critique of the theories of immorality promulgated by organized religion. For Lovecraft, such theories are harmful (in addition to rationally indefensible) inasmuch as they lead to irrational expectations and distract the individual

³³ Quoted from the Ms. H.P. Lovecraft Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University.

³⁴ Quoted from the Ms. H.P. Lovecraft Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University. Italics original.

from the pleasures possible in life. In other words, Lovecraft rejects religious “sentimentalities” as a form of consolation; his theory of weird optimism grounded in a materialist account of cosmic time offers enough to console without the addition of an immortal soul. This does not mean, however, that Lovecraft did not employ sentimental techniques in his correspondence.

In addition to elaborating his theory of cosmic time and the pragmatism it implies, Lovecraft also extended his sympathetic identification to those suffering in his consolation letters. Referring to his letter to Clark Ashton Smith after the death of Smith’s mother, Lovecraft writes Sully in a September 23, 1935 letter: “Whenever such a link with early days is broken—such a focus of childhood memories & tender associations removed—a certain amount of irreparable *loss* occurs. Having sustained a similar bereavement in 1921—and one nearly like it in 1932 when my elder aunt died—I can sympathize very acutely with CAS...& have dropped him a line to that effect” (SL 5.194). In addition to providing more insight into what the letter to Smith contained, this passage is notable for the sympathetic identification Lovecraft forges between himself and Smith over the figure of the lost mother. In condensed form, Lovecraft’s recounting of the loss of his mother recapitulates the affective core of domestic sentimentality while extending sympathy to someone in mourning through identification. In domestic sentimentalism, the mother-child bond serves as the model and progenitor of all future affective relations; it forms and anchors the sentimental subject as he or she navigates the social world. Here Lovecraft calls the mother-child bond a “link with early days” and “a focus of childhood memories & tender associations.” The most that can be done is to

share the pain of this “irreparable” loss through sympathetic identification, which Lovecraft here extends to Smith in consolation.

Lovecraft elaborates his thoughts on loss at length in a June 28-9, 1934 letter to Sully. Sully had expressed a feeling of “oppression at the thought of inevitable human losses,” and Lovecraft responds with the advice that Sully should attempt to cultivate “an increased sense of *objectivity* and a heightened realisation of the true proportions of the universe and of the insignificance of mankind and all its affairs therein.”³⁵ While once again this does not appear consoling to someone feeling oppressed by the transience of time, Lovecraft offers this remark to frame his more pragmatic advice to Sully to accept and prepare for the inevitability of loss in life: “There is no reason why anyone *should* be sure of retaining all the landmarks—either human or non-human—to which one has grown used and of which one has grown fond; so that the realistic analyst accustomed himself from the very first to the idea of tantalising impermanence in every department of life.” Acknowledging Sully’s sense that life is defined by loss, Lovecraft notes: “Parents and friends die; beloved houses and landscapes become hopelessly altered or destroyed; social milieux and other environmental supports decay and become metamorphosed; and one’s self grows old, exiled from the beauty, vividness, and adventurous expectancy of youth.” While agreeing with Sully that these are “the basic and inescapable conditions of life,” Lovecraft suggests that “*because* they are basic and inescapable we can build certain palliatives or defences against them. Knowing that nothing and nobody is certain of lasting, we can wisely refrain from pinning too much of our hold on life to any one object—human or otherwise—or limited range of objects.” For Lovecraft, accepting that

³⁵ Quoted from the Ms. H.P. Lovecraft Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University. Italics original.

loss is inescapable within (cosmic) time helps prepare one for its inevitable occurrence and softens the pain of loss when it does occur. Though he is advising a form of pragmatic detachment that refrains from investing too much in people and places, Lovecraft stresses to Sully that he is not saying that “we need to abandon all kindness and affection toward individuals” but rather that “we ought to remember how transient and infinitesimal all individuals are, and to avoid making our entire sense of equilibrium and contentment dependent upon the life and proximity of a few definite persons.” For Lovecraft, time heals all wounds. Not because it places distance between the bereaved and what they have lost, but rather because time constantly reminds us to adjust ourselves to the reality that all things are “transient and infinitesimal.”

Once again, Lovecraft’s consolation operates through a telescoping of human affairs within cosmic time that leads to a pragmatic course of action. What is most remarkable about this letter, though, are Lovecraft’s peculiar comments on human existence and non-existence within the frame of cosmic time. Lovecraft first tells Sully that “[m]emory and objectivity join hands in making existence a little more tolerable,” by which he means that preparing for and remembering loss helps alleviate the sense of oppression at human impermanence. He then goes on:

When we bring ourselves to realize that *time* is only one element in an infinitely complex cosmos, we tend to protest less when something that *is* becomes something that *has been*. The difference between ‘is-ness’ and ‘has been-ness’ tends to vanish—we feel that the mere quality of duration does not amount to so much after all. Why should a thing be ‘immortal’ in time, when the basic fact of its *having existed* is virtually equivalent so far as the larger universe is concerned.

This is a curious and perplexing statement. At first it seems Lovecraft is saying the universe does not care if a particular entity (human or otherwise) existed or not, an opinion he often voices in his correspondence. Yet given the context it appears Lovecraft

is suggesting something more complex. Lovecraft argues that “having existed” is “equivalent” to a form of immortality in time “as far as the universe is concerned.” How so? There is a further clue in Lovecraft’s proceeding words to Sully, where he tells her the difference between a living and a deceased friend is “not as vast as one might imagine” since “[b]oth exist as images in the mind.” While Lovecraft admits there are differences and that the “change is unfortunate,” the persistence of the lost object’s image in the mind and in memory amounts to a form of immortality. Framed by his comments to Sully on the retention of the lost in memory, the above passage appears to be suggesting that the universe itself retains some form of “memory” of the entities that have existed and perished within it. What this “immortality in time” amounts to, or where this memory resides, is less certain. What is clear is that Lovecraft seems to be arguing that having existed amounts to a kind of (materialistic) immortality within the context of cosmic time—something was rather than was not in time, and that is good enough.

The argument is once again based on Lovecraft’s telescopic perspective on time. Within the context of time in an “infinitely complex cosmos,” the distinction “between ‘is-ness’ and ‘has been-ness’ tends to vanish.” By this Lovecraft means that within infinite time the span of a human being’s life is so miniscule it vanishes. Hence the comment that “duration does not amount to so much after all.” From the perspective of “the universe,” then, all that is left is whether something existed or not rather than how long it existed or whether it continues to exist. How this existence then equates to a form of immortality within cosmic time remains opaque. It does not seem like much of a stretch, however, to observe how eerily this passage recalls (or anticipates) humanity’s record in the Great

Race's archive in "Shadow." In this letter as in the later story, humanity's existence is somehow recorded and preserved in time, even if on the "lowest shelf."

At this point, it must be asked: just how consoling is Lovecraft's consolation? Lovecraft's technique of evoking the telescopic effect of cosmic time to alleviate the sting of suffering reads as alternately effective (in terms of the potential perspective it provides) and, well, weird. Shifting the reader's focus to the fluctuations of cosmic time risks coming off as unsympathetic to the reader's (local) pain and even increasing the reader's suffering by rendering it meaningless from a cosmic perspective. Of course, as he indicated in his letter to Barlow, Lovecraft did not see it this way. For Lovecraft, the impersonality of cosmic time represents a relief to the intense personality—the physical and affective strain and exhaustion—of human pain and suffering. And there is indication his correspondents agreed with him. Sully often sought recourse for her suffering in her correspondence with Lovecraft, so her continual solicitation of his advice serves as indirect evidence of its consolatory effect (at least for her). Certainly, it is quite possible that his lengthy discussions of cosmic time in these letters have a self-serving function and that the only one consoled by this advice is Lovecraft himself.

Nevertheless, there does appear to be a weird consoling power in the perspective provided by contextualizing human suffering in the grander scheme of the cosmos. What makes Lovecraft's consolation effective is how this telescopic view adjusts the reader's perspective of the interrelations between time and pain or suffering. This is a technique often employed in the consolation genre (i.e., "The world goes on") though not to the weird extent that Lovecraft develops it. Whether or not this weird consolation is effective in a general sense remains an open question; this form of consolation is

particular to Lovecraft and was crafted specifically for a circle of devoted correspondents.

The issue remains how the same technique Lovecraft uses to evoke horror in his fiction (and which always threatens to evoke a similar response in his letters) can serve a consolatory effect in his correspondence. Lovecraft offers up to his grieving or suffering correspondents the same knowledge that drives the narrators in his stories mad—the insignificance of the human race within the “black seas of infinity” (2008, “Cthulhu,” 355). The answer resides precisely in the different function and manner of address between the two genres. Whereas Lovecraft’s tales are meant to evoke a mood for an imagined audience,³⁶ his letters are written for a specific reader already entrenched in an intense affective experience. Lovecraft’s technique of drawing the personal into relation with the impersonal, or the local into relation to the cosmic, therefore functions in a more intimate and direct fashion in these letters than in his tales. As Lovecraft often noted in his correspondence,³⁷ his fiction is not concerned with individuals but with “phenomena.” As much as Lovecraft fleshes out Peaslee’s bodily and affective responses to his discovery of the Great Race, he remains a narrative foil meant to explore Lovecraft’s theories of the relation between the cosmic and the local. His letters, though, provide insight into how Lovecraft perceived the potential range of responses to an actual individual’s encounter with the impersonality of time. For Lovecraft this encounter held

³⁶ The contours of this imagined audience shrank as Lovecraft’s writing career went on. After a series of rejections, Lovecraft increasingly wrote for himself and a circle of devoted friends and followers. He would often not even attempt to publish his stories, especially if they had met with any criticism from his correspondents. Lovecraft was also temperamentally opposed to the commercial and marketing side of publication, so he did little to promote and distribute his work. He would, for example, often give up on a piece of writing after it had been rejected from one magazine.

³⁷ See n25 above.

the potential to console as well as to horrify, and it is this former possibility that Lovecraft fleshes out in his correspondence when he writes to those in pain. In his consolation letters, he also has to work to break down or at least alleviate a mood over time rather than building one up. As we have seen, he does so by offering pragmatic advice on how to turn back to “the outside world,” as he calls it in his letter to Barlow, mixed with disquisitions on his weird optimism regarding the infinity of cosmic time. In a sense, then, though they operate according to the same technique, Lovecraft’s consolation letters represent an inversion of his weird fiction: his tales focus on phenomena rather than individuals to build up an intense mood of horror over time, while his letters break down an intense mood for a specific individual. Both do so by focusing on the phenomena of cosmic time and space, with the difference that in the consolation letter these impersonal phenomena are drawn into more intimate relation with the personal. The versatility of Lovecraft’s weird optimism in performing both of these textual functions is surprising at first, but becomes less so when we remember his theory of time as containing the potential for both terror and awe, pain and pleasure, madness and curiosity—in short, for horror and consolation.

This intimate meeting between the personal and impersonal in Lovecraft’s consolation letters registers the contribution his weird optimism represents for queer theory. Lovecraft’s focus on the impersonality of time may seem at first to anticipate the form of quietism or resignation often associated with the antisocial thesis and theorists such as Edelman and Bersani. However, as his consolation letters to Sully and others indicate, Lovecraft’s theory of time entails and even encourages the possibility of pragmatic action on the “local” scale of human affairs. Indeed, it is the very shifting of

perspective away from the local to the impersonal cosmos that facilitates action for Lovecraft. In other words, Lovecraft's optimism represents an intimate impersonality that enables rather than forecloses action in time; his consolation letters stress the unknowable potentials awaiting the body in time within cosmic time. More importantly, in focusing attention on the cosmic while intimately involving the human, Lovecraft's weird optimism operates as a critique of queer optimisms' reduction of time to the temporality of the local. As Lovecraft shows in his consolation letters, such a focus prevents forms of optimism from settling too easily into locked subject positions and vectors of time while also according them their place within the larger cosmic perspective. His optimism does not promise the individual something wonderful waiting over the horizon, but neither does it discount the potential for such a thing existing within an infinite universe. In refusing to offer such promises, Lovecraft carves out a theory of time that takes nothing for granted and requires constant, vigilant, pragmatic action on the local scale. Therein lies his weird form of optimism, which offers to queer optimisms (as it did to Lovecraft's correspondents) a challenging perspective on their more local concerns that takes into account the vast potentials of time and thereby (hopefully) opens up more programs of productive action than it closes down.

Some of Lovecraft's final thoughts on time, uncertainty, and optimism appear in a letter written just a few months before his death on March 15, 1937. In a November 18, 1936 letter to Fritz Leiber Jr., he tells Leiber he "see[s] existence filled with an infinity of *unrecognized* (not supernatural) and *incalculable* factors—factors involving the relationship of everything we know to the totality of space-time—whereby all supposed certainties and long-term calculations must be called into question so far as any absolute

sense is concerned” (SL 5.356-57, *italics original*).³⁸ The hopeful predictions that typify both everyday (“bland”) and some queer optimisms are anathema to Lovecraft because they obscure the unknowable potentials of time that inform his particular brand of optimism. He explains to Leiber: “We don’t know what we are in time and space, or what will happen to us before our kind of matter and energy will cease to exist. Organic life is only a momentary incident—whether a local and unique accident or a widespread cosmic principle often repeated, we can never know.” For Lovecraft, we “can never know how far our kind of natural law holds good in the gulfs of space and time, or when some manifestation of it will change. Nor can we interpret it well enough to calculate the future of life and of the universe even if it does not change.” Lovecraft’s optimism operates (and consoles) by holding open the potentials of time rather than filling them with supposed (consoling) certainties. It does not offer predictions or traditional forms of hope. As Lovecraft declares to Leiber, “So far as future history is concerned, I’m damned if I know what lies ahead.” All that is certain for Lovecraft is uncertainty and what it entails—a program of pragmatic action, a refusal to hide behind supposed certainties, and, as he tells Sully, a guarded, realistic, weird optimism.

³⁸ Lovecraft’s critique of all “supposed certainties and long-term calculations” also provides insight into why he made Peaslee an instructor of “political economy” whose final lecture was on the link between “the commercial cycle of prosperity and depression with the physical cycle of the solar spots” (2008, 953). For Lovecraft such a theory represents an absurd attempt to render the uncertain fluctuations of the economy into a “supposed certainty” by tying it to the natural “long-term” cycle of solar spots. As Lovecraft also tells Leiber in the same letter, “Certainly I have nothing but rueful and sardonic laughter for the political economist who insists that future history *must* necessarily follow this or that course (no two agree, but each one is sure of himself!), or for the biologist who...maps out a certain line of marvelous upward development for the race. I don’t believe in any ‘cosmic consciousness’ or purpose or direction, nor in any ‘spiritual’ order of entity coexisting with the universe of electrons.”

All of the topics touched on above—Lovecraft’s theory of cosmic time, his weird and consoling optimism, his pragmatism, his intense curiosity and sense of humor—are captured in one of the most remarkable letters in Lovecraft’s vast correspondence, his February 4, 1934 letter to J. Vernon Shea. The occasion of this letter is not strictly consolation. Shea had asked Lovecraft about his childhood memories, and he responds with such a detailed recollection of his early childhood and adolescence that it amounts to an extensive autobiography. However, Lovecraft often drew on the experiences detailed in this letter when offering consolation to his correspondents. It deserves to be quoted at length as representative of Lovecraft’s view of humanity’s place within the cosmos, beginning with his contemplation of suicide after the death of his grandfather which required his family to move out of Lovecraft’s childhood home at 454 Angell Street:

I felt that I had lost my entire adjustment to the cosmos—for what indeed was HPL without the remembered rooms & hallways & hangings & staircases & statuary & paintings...& all the rest?... It seemed like a damned futile business to keep on living. ... Oh, hell! Why not slough of consciousness altogether? The whole life of man & of the planet was a mere cosmic second—so I couldn’t be missing much. ... Well—what tempted me most was the warm, shallow, reed-grown Barrington River down the east shore of the bay. I used to go there on my bicycle & look speculatively at it. ... How easy it would be to wade out among the rushes & lie face down in the warm water till oblivion came. There would be a certain gurgling or choking unpleasantness at first—but it would soon be over. Then the long peaceful night of non-existence... what I had enjoyed from the mythical start of eternity till the 20th of August, 1890. More & more I looked at the river on drowsy, sun-golden summer afternoons. I liked to think of the beauty of the sun & blue river & green shore & distant white steeple as enfolding me at the last—it would be as if the element of mystical cosmic beauty were dissolving me. And yet certain elements—notably scientific curiosity & a sense of world drama—held me back. Much in the universe baffled me, yet I knew I could pry the answers out of books if I lived & studied longer. ... I knew that many things which were mysteries to me were not such to others. I had not resented my lack of solution as long as I expected to know *some day*—but now that the idea of *never knowing* presented itself the circumstance of frustrated curiosity became galling to me. ... So in the end I decided to postpone my exit till the following summer. I would do a little curiosity-satisfying at first; filling certain gaps of scientific & historical knowledge, & attaining a greater sense of *completeness*

before merging with the infinite blackness. ... Well—that fall I found high school a delight & stimulus instead of a bore, & the next spring I resumed publication of the *R.I. Journal of Astronomy*, which I had allowed to lapse. Possibly I would wait till '06 before making my exit...one could drown in '06 just as well as in '05 or '04! But *new* questions demanding answers were always springing up. ... What a world! Why, good god, a man might keep busy forever, even in an uncongenial environment, learning new things...pleasantly busy, too, for each new point of satisfied curiosity gave a hell of a kick. Then there was the kick of writing out a mood on paper so that it could be recaptured.... So I've let matters slide for thirty years...although I still intend to bump myself off when I get too broke to live on my present reduced scale. But so great is the pleasure of satisfied scientific curiosity & aesthetic experience, that I think a person of tastes like mine is better off (at least slightly) alive than dead as long as he can get his hands on ten bucks a week. (SL 5.357-360)

There is not much to add to this letter, since it speaks for itself as an expression of the lifelong curiosity and wonder Lovecraft felt in the face of the unknown and unknowable cosmos. Uncertainty and the unknown in a very real sense kept Lovecraft alive, if this letter is to be believed. And ultimately, at its heart, this is perhaps the secret to the consolation and call to action of his weird optimism. For Lovecraft humanity's uncertainty and insignificance within cosmic time is not cause for despair. Quite the opposite. It is cause to go on living, to learn, to act, and to create. Lovecraft's correspondence therefore offers an insightful elaboration of the theories of cosmic time developed within his fiction. His consolation letters help clarify that his philosophy does not represent a form of cosmic pessimism, nor does it necessitate a more "local" (human) stance of pessimism or resignation. Rather, Lovecraft's cosmic philosophy, grounded in the unpredictable potentials of time, is best understood as a form of weird optimism operating on both the level of the "local" and the cosmic.

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