

Unformed Feelings: Reading Affects in the Mid-Victorian Novel

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE	
Fictions of Feeling: Affect and Character After Charles Dickens's <i>David Copperfield</i>	34
CHAPTER TWO	
Anthony Trollope's Weak Plots: Narrative Enervation from <i>The Warden</i> to <i>The Fixed Period</i>	82
CHAPTER THREE	
Untimely Feelings: Tedium and Temporality in Anne Brontë's <i>The Tenant of Wildfell Hall</i>	139
CHAPTER FOUR	
George Eliot's Brevity: Narrative Length and Empathy in <i>Silas Marner</i>	189
CODA	
Affect in Brief	240
WORKS CITED	243

INTRODUCTION

[I]t is no credit to a man that he is not morbid or inaccurate in his perceptions, when he has no strength of feeling to warp them....

— John Ruskin, “The Pathetic Fallacy,” *Modern Painters*, Vol. III (1856)

Unformed Feelings

When John Ruskin defined the pathetic fallacy as a lapse in reason caused by a particularly affecting description—the slow crawl of sea foam, for example, or souls tumbling from Acheron like dead leaves—he conceptualized a relationship between feeling and reading that has characterized literary experience ever since. Overwhelming our faculties, perplexing our perceptions, the feelings we encounter when we read sometimes grow in shape and size before our eyes and can even exceed the boundaries of the body.¹ For Ruskin, these surplus feelings say more about the disposition of the person than the dimensions of the feeling: both the hapless reader who is overly susceptible to affective influence and the “second order poet” all too invested in emotional embellishment can invite these sensory distortions, allowing them to gain in intensity and proportion (117). “All violent feelings... produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things,” Ruskin writes, but the “temperament which admits the pathetic fallacy” is that of “a mind and body in some sort too weak to deal fully with what is before them or upon them”—“a morbid state of mind, and comparatively of a weak one” (117, 119, 128). Clouding the mind, making it less adroit in separating fact from fancy, these disruptive and unformed feelings—feelings, Ruskin finds, that spill out from the page and affect readers and writers alike by way of their amorphousness—distort our ability to distinguish the “real power or

¹ Here and elsewhere, I use the term “feeling” rather than “emotion” to refer to the durational nature of reading as an affective process. Rei Terada makes a similar distinction between “emotion” and “feeling”: “by *emotion* we usually mean a psychological, at least minimally interpretive experience whose physiological aspect is *affect*. *Feeling* is a capacious term that connotes both physiological sensations (affects) and psychological states (emotions)” (4). Like Terada, I too employ “feeling” in order “to emphasize the common ground of the physiological and the psychological” (4).

character in the object” from what we merely impute to it (116). But more significantly for Ruskin, they mark the peculiar susceptibility of certain bodies: a lower threshold for feeling or even (and perhaps worse) an inability to manage and control one’s affective responses. Although Ruskin concedes “emotions should be strong enough to vanquish, partly, the intellect, and make it believe what they choose,” he advocates against allowing feelings to take on an autonomy of their own, and ultimately concludes that it is best for the intellect “to assert its rule against, or together with, the utmost efforts of the passions”—to subdue them, give them stable forms, and resubmit them to the sovereignty of the subject (120).

Ruskin’s account of the affective dimensions of literary experience appeared at a time when novelists were wrestling with the formlessness of feeling(s), struggling to concretize the relationship between the feelings represented in their works and the feelings provoked in their readers. In an age when the body was increasingly tested and taxed by the industrialization of everyday life—the quantification of lived experience by way of alterations to the workday and workweek in concert with a prevailing *ethos* of productivity—its affective parameters became the focus of an array of social, scientific, and humanistic disciplines.² As the social sciences took to measuring and quantifying lived experience and as developments in the life sciences helped to make emotion legible by tracing its psychological and physiological roots, novelists also aimed to capture and lend weight to emotion in order to reify the ungainly affective terrain of the body. They did so by applying stricter formal measures: conventional plots, character types, and generic forms that did not allow for the mere caprice of readers but sought to anticipate and direct that caprice in advance. The careful management of the feelings of readers by way of modifications to literary form became essential for a successful novelist’s career: “a novel can

² See Anson Rabinbach, who examines how this *ethos*, diffused through the metaphor of “the human motor,” gradually metamorphoses from the subordination of human agents under capital into “the project of superseding class conflict and social disorganization through the rationalization of the body” (289).

hardly be made interesting or successful without love,” Anthony Trollope would discover, and by deftly manipulating the expectations of readers (the starts and stops that structure *The Moonstone*) or defying them (the shock of Little Nell’s death in *The Old Curiosity Shop*), novelists could curtail the possibility that readers might feel anything other than the intended response (*An Autobiography* 194).

Yet, just as often, feelings represented in a story do not correspond with the feelings raised in the course of reading. Literature can and does inspire feelings in readers; it can even augment these feelings, foster them, and encourage them to grow in intensity and duration. But other relationships between feeling and reading are possible, too: feelings can shrink in proportion with the attention that is given them in print; they can expand to include sentiments far afield from any detail set out by the novelist; and they can fall out of sync with readers altogether, taking on unfamiliar qualities and temporalities. We might ask Ruskin: How can we categorize the creeping fog that saturates dialogue and narration in *Bleak House*, a sense of atmosphere that seems almost to characterize the experience of reading the novel itself? Or begin to distinguish the strange resentment bubbling up from George Gissing’s prose in *The Nether World* from our own mounting frustration with the choices made by the novel’s characters? While the pathetic fallacy signals an unwarranted excess of feeling in moments of aesthetic appreciation, a more expansive version of the fallacy would include those sensations under-represented in narrative: the gradual enervation experienced turning page after page; or the exercise of the mind in arresting letters, grouping them into words, phrases, lines of thought and patterns of speech; even the wayward glance away from a sentence to a scene playing out in our peripheral vision. How can we understand the impact of these less powerful but no less pervasive feelings? How do they affect our reading, and how might they alter our understanding of literary

form? For every experience with being “borne away, or over-clouded, or over-dazzled by emotion,” there is a morass of feelings under-signified, but still present, in the process of reading (Ruskin 119).

In this dissertation, I look to understand a gradual alteration in the discourse of feeling in the Victorian novel. I do so by way of focusing on diminished affective responses like frustration, enervation, tedium, and confusion, all of which fail to find equal representation in literary form, but are nevertheless engendered through (if not often encouraged by) the process of reading. Drawing attention to the formal dimensions of these affective processes, I look to the novel as the medium in which feeling finds its most ambiguous representation in the period. Whereas the novel has been seen as a repository for ideology, its “weak form” a reflection of what Franco Moretti calls its “far from innocent” representation of everyday life, I regard this sense of weakness as itself a site of critical inquiry (12-13). What does it mean to think of novelistic form as weak, or insufficiently affective? I argue that, in accord with qualitative changes in the form of feeling throughout the nineteenth century—the standardization of time, the categorization and consolidation of lived experience by way of demographics and actuarial tables, and the emergence of a generalized, generalizable state of what George Henry Lewes called “common life”—writers experimented with literary form to better register these imperceptible shifts in the strength and cogency of feeling.³ Focusing on what I term *reading affects*—qualitatively impoverished, durational experiences that find articulation in the experience of reading—I trace the concurrences and coincidences, as well as the disjunctions, of reading and feeling as affective processes.

³ See Lewes’s *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859).

With the term “reading affects,” I do not intend a focus on the affective responses of readers. Nor, for that matter, do I restrict my understanding of these feelings to an investigation of social and cultural changes in readership that altered the relationship between literary form and feeling in the century.⁴ Rather, I look to understand how a reciprocal, seemingly tensile relationship between literary form and feeling developed in the nineteenth century, a relationship that led to the expansion and contraction, formation and deformation of novelistic feeling to meet lived experiences marked by uncanny duration, impalpable texture, and altogether less legible parameters. In the period stretching from the 1840s through the 1880s—a period I identify using the marker “mid-Victorian”—I explore how the efforts made by industry, the sciences, and statistical inquiries to quantify and measure affective response encountered the coeval impulse to qualify more minor, uncategorized, and potentially uncategorizable states of feeling by way of literary representation.⁵ The novelists on whom I focus in this study—Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, Anne Brontë, and George Eliot—all worked to test the limits of novelistic form as a means of lending size and shape to experiences increasingly difficult to commit to print but often only capable of representation by it.

My dissertation thus takes up a series of questions: How do novels capture the experience of affective impoverishment? What happens to the form of a novel when a novelist attempts to

⁴ It is no less important to recognize how changing venues of publication, improved means of access, and a rise in literacy contributed to the extension of literature’s affective reach. For exemplary histories of reading, see Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (1957) and Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader: 1837–1914* (1993). See too recent edited volumes by Juliet John and Matthew Bradley, *Reading and the Victorians* (2015), as well as Adelene Buckland and Beth Palmer, *A Return to the Common Reader: Print Culture and the Novel, 1850–1900* (2011).

⁵ My use of the term “mid-Victorian” follows from Caroline Levine and Mario Ortiz-Robles’s use in their introduction to the edited collection *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century Narrative* (2011). Levine and Ortiz-Robles draw attention to “the middle” as a space of suspension between beginnings and endings (novels, centuries, lives) and as a concept all too often overlooked in studies of nineteenth-century culture that attests to the in-process quality of historical experience.

represent minor affective responses and diffuse affective states? How do novels give form to feelings that are characteristically or experientially formless, in depth and duration alike? And how do our critical investments in subjectivity and historicism change when the affects we experience in the course of reading no longer fit our lived experiences or, for that matter, those described on the page?

I have organized the sections that follow to clarify both my methodology as well as the historical and critical stakes of the project. In the first section, I situate my study in the context of recent disputes related to affect theory—specifically, the challenge that affect theory poses to historicist accounts of emotion and embodiment in Victorian studies. In the second section, I provide a clearer account of how we might resolve these disputes by adopting a critical methodology for reading drawn from Jeremy Bentham’s writings on language and fictionality. Bentham’s attention to the linguistic dimensions of affect, I show, helps us distance affect from accounts of coercion and constrained agency often associated with the human subject produced by novel reading. In the third section, I clarify my use of the term “reading affects” in order to show how my usage departs from epistemological and ontological models of affect, as well as how this term relates to historical accounts of lived experience. The fourth and final section of the introduction provides an overview of the chapters and rationale for the structure of the project as a whole.

I. Affect Theory and Victorian Studies

The problems associated with an excess of feeling—an excess that, said Ruskin, swells until it ultimately spills beyond the confines of the body—prompt inquiry into the ways in which feelings exceed or escape measurement. These excesses are commonly referred to in criticism as “affects.” Unlike approaches more clearly associated with historicism, affect theory neither

produces a positivistic account of feeling nor seeks to index and delimit emotion within the logic of industrial capital.⁶ In this respect, I draw on affect theory throughout my study in order to produce a more reflexive account of the representation of diminished affective states in literature as well as a reflective approach to understanding critical reading practices in the present.

Affect theory derives from diverse philosophical and literary traditions.⁷ For concision and in order to provide context for the place of affect in Victorian studies, I will begin with an ongoing debate concerning the critical value of affect theory.

By most accounts, affects draw power from their resistance to intelligibility and nominalization. What make affects particularly impactful, according to a theorist like Brian Massumi, are their curious autonomy in migrating across situations and contexts, their means of violating clear distinctions between emotions, and their resistance to representation.⁸ “Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is,” Massumi states (35). Much like in Ruskin’s account of the pathetic fallacy, the discovery of feeling outside the body presents a paradox: it might find its initial ground and comprehension in a body but it reveals its intensity only beyond the body, in its “openness” to other persons and other feelings. Following Massumi, critics associate affect (or affects) with this strong sense of potentiality, a capacity for influencing others and, specifically, a capacity to do so in unanticipated, often unwanted ways: the shock of a political

⁶ I have in mind studies that set out to see how literature might be mined for accounts of emotion and embodiment. As I discuss in the third section, given the proliferation of terms related to emotion and embodiment, there is overlap amongst many scholarly fields looking to focus on feeling and reading in Victorian literature.

⁷ See Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth’s introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (2009) for distinctions amongst camps and a breakdown of philosophical traditions of affect. See too Leys, who distinguishes between a Freudian model of affect as embodied and intentional and a more recent model of affect (adapted from the work of Silvan Tomkins and Paul Ekman) as embodied but non-intentional.

⁸ See Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002).

event that reorients one's identity (William Connolly), the slow violence of an endemic health crisis (Lauren Berlant), or surreptitious waves of sorrow that crest and suddenly unseat a shared sense of calm (Ann Cvetkovich). All of these affects, critics claim, resist our efforts to link them to a specific source; affects exceed modes of interpretation that seek to fix their meaning, anticipate their arrival, or indefinitely arrest their form.

Yet as Ruth Leys finds, when critics align affect with what cannot be represented via existing means of representation, they grant affect undue explanatory power and in turn obfuscate the aims of critical inquiry. What unites these critics working on affect theory in various disciplines—and even with seemingly antithetical stances on the origin and nature of the affects—is a “*shared anti-intentionalism*,” what Leys critiques as a belief that affects are “independent of, and in an important sense prior to, ideology—that is, prior to intentions, meanings, reasons, and beliefs—because they are nonsignifying, autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning” (443, emphasis original, 437). Leys finds that this pervasive anti-intentionalism, in part a product of institutional backlash to the longevity of poststructuralism, ultimately enables affect to serve for critics as a tool for the critique of (and yet paradoxically a metonym for) power (440-441). More recently, Eugenie Brinkema has critiqued a similar tendency to draw on affect as a force altogether immune to any means of linguistic explication. “Critical positions that align affect with what generally and amorously resists (structure, form, textuality, signification, legibility),” she observes, “hold on to the notion of a transcendental signified, hold fast to the fantasy of something that predates the linguistic turn and that evades the slow, hard tussle of reading texts closely” (xiv). While Brinkema finds that affect is not always as blunt or monolithic a force as “power,” Leys sees

little difference between the two: both present absent referents, not grounded in any real (i.e. epistemic) claim to an object or even a measurable degree of force.

Affect's resistance to nomination and related indexical efforts raises questions for its representation in literature: are affects capable of partial representation via narration, character, and plot, or are they fundamentally inassimilable to these discrete literary devices and forms? Can literature lend form to otherwise unformed feelings and experiences, or does the act of constraining affect within particular formal parameters ultimately deform and misrepresent their experiential (i.e. temporal) qualities? Philip Fisher argues that, as an expressive medium, literature is perhaps best suited for representing affect precisely because literary form can expand (and seemingly indefinitely) to better represent feeling. Constraining affect to discrete, relatively stable, and interpretable genres that have historical and institutional duration, Fisher claims, aids us in retaining a sense of the temporal qualities of the affects.⁹ In Fisher's account, affects possess a certain power over literary form: they "legislate what we mean by genre and by form," and appear to govern those "large and ordered systems of aesthetic practices that generate the form of the whole" (10, 8). Similarly, Jonathan Flatley sees a more holistic relationship between affect and literary form, using the term "affective mapping" to describe any "aesthetic technology"—a novel, a painting—"that represents the historicity of one's affective experience" and enables "a feeling of orientation and... mobility" (4, 7).

Whereas Fisher and Flatley see correspondence if not accord between form and affect, Fredric Jameson has argued that affect emerges in the nineteenth-century novel largely in

⁹ Throughout his account, Fisher uses the term "passion" instead of "affect," but what he designates by the term "passion" is precisely the need for greater specificity and a shared critical vocabulary for discussing affects: "we need to regard passions, emotions, feelings, moods as different languages with overlapping but also strongly differing accounts of what might count as a typical, a central, or an excluded inner state," he asserts (7-8). Despite disagreements, virtually all accounts share an understanding of affect as resolutely temporal. See too Mark Hansen.

opposition to form and its concretizing practices—namely epistemology, which assumes affective states are identifiable as emotions, and narrative, which projects a causal chain of events into a gradually materializing future. Unlike narrative, affect has no *telos*: affects are not instrumentalized like emotions in the service of storytelling, they strive to remain in the “perpetual present” of sensation, a time similarly inhabited by the body (*Antinomies* 44). For Jameson, affect is thus an essential component of literary realism, operating as it does in tension with narrative and nomination: “the nomination of an experience makes it visible at the very moment that it transforms and reifies it,” Jameson observes, but affect promises a temporality unfettered to the forward march of time (34). Affect is a pause in the progress of narrative, a kind of lacuna to be inhabited—if only for a moment.

These different understandings of the relationship between affect and literary form— affect dictates form (Fisher, Flatley), affect resists it (Jameson)—have installed the novel as a key site for understanding how affect impacts the experience of reading. And because Victorian novels are particularly expansive forms and impact readers in a variety of ways, affect theory has consistently served as a touchstone in approaches that look to understand how novels condition or even construct their readers as embodied subjects. These accounts diverge in methodology and in aim, but with respect to their use of affect, they form patterns that can help us identify two opposed camps: 1) those who associate affect(s) in the novel with the production and enlistment of human subjects, typically by way of identification via race, gender, sex, or class and conscription through existing but barely discernible social norms; or 2) those who associate affects in the novel with less restricted identities and the quiddity of everyday life.

Critics in the first group have argued (and in quite different ways) that novels encourage the formation of a human subject produced in concert with the discourses routed through the

affects of the novel. In D.A. Miller's formative account, novel readers are interpellated by way of the affects encountered in the course of reading. Encountering characters defined and delimited by the affective constraints produced by a disciplinary society, Miller argues, enables readers to experience a tentative sense of freedom from their own subjection within the same system—and only “tentative,” given that an awareness of these affective constraints is itself the required precondition of being susceptible to them. For Miller and others, the novel instrumentalizes and advances various discourses by way of affect's indirect appeal to the reader, the subject who dis-identifies with the characters represented in their persecuted particularity and who fails to see their own conscription in similar if not more pervasive social restrictions.¹⁰ Conversely, Catherine Gallagher has argued that the *generality* of literary characters and fictionality of their feelings enables us to briefly inhabit a broad, seemingly universalized subject position. Inhabiting the position of a “nobody,” in Gallagher's term, temporarily frees us from the strictures of our own particularity.¹¹ Despite differences in the kind of subject produced, these two accounts are linked by the very *fact* of a subject: for Miller and Gallagher, novel reading produces a body that feels. Whether or not its parameters are clearly defined, it is a body equally defined by the fact of affective experience. The novel is itself enlisted in the production of subjectivity, and the subject is said to materialize from the affects engendered in the course of reading.

Since these formative accounts, other critics (those I place in the second group) have attempted to rethink the models of reading and the forms of subjectivity produced by the novel

¹⁰ See too Mary Poovey and James Eli Adams, who draw on Foucauldian and psychoanalytic traditions to consider the production of specific species of subject. Nancy Armstrong appears to bridge the two camps I identify here by ultimately finding agency in the production of novel readers as modern subjects. See, in particular, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900* (2005).

¹¹ See *Nobody's Story, The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (1995). I discuss Gallagher's claims at greater length in Chapter 1.

and its affects, finding greater range in possible categories of identification as well as a less strict divide between utter particularization or utter universality.¹² Mario Ortiz-Robles observes that the accounts of affect and novel reading presented by Miller et al. “rely on... the assumed representational efficacy of the novel,” the text producing “more or less compliant subjects”: “in however mediated and indirect a manner,” he writes, “the novel somehow exerts pressure on its readers who, unable to predict and much less control the effects of reading, fall under its influence” (210). The former group makes affect not just an agential force, but also an authoritative one, as “affect,” now newly nominalized as a noun-substantive, adopts an ability to overrun the human subject and dictate its affective coordinates, its capabilities and capacities. But as Ortiz-Robles suggests, this understanding of affect also assumes the human subject as the unwilling (and largely unwitting) vessel through which these forces pass unmitigated. This rejection of the constrained subject paradigm has also led to a subfield of work on affect and novel form interested in the representation of everyday life.¹³ These latter accounts typically associate affect with the domain of “lived experience,” the inchoate processes and habitual practices ranging across regions and social ranks that contribute to the consolidation of “everyday life” as a critical category, but processes and practices that nonetheless exceed their circumscription by “everyday life” as a discrete or stable point of reference.

While both camps depart from one another in focus and aim, they are joined by a prevalent rhetorical dependency on affect as what escapes—more often exceeds—measure. The critics in the first camp consolidate explanatory power in affect as itself the name for a constellation of forces—economic, social, biological, literary—that, taken together, wield a hazy

¹² For examples, see Caroline Levine on the distinctive pleasures produced in the operation of narrative suspense and John Plotz on the self-affirming sense of anti-sociability fostered by reading.

¹³ See Amanda Claybaugh, William Cohen, and Laurie Langbauer.

sense of influence over the will of the subject (hence the association of affect with discipline and coercion); in a similar gesture, the critics in the second protect the subject from interpellation under the auspices of an inaccessible domain called “interiority” or “everyday life,” inaccessible as if solely by virtue of our own historical distance from the century. These critical accounts all appear to treat “affect” as itself a distinct referent, be it the affective life of a particular body or life itself in the nineteenth century, and in reference to any and all affective forces otherwise unnamed as emotions. Indeed, like the critics above, I too have been using “affect” and “affects” almost interchangeably, as if the singular and plural forms alike referred to the same, unintelligible mass of feeling(s) or, conversely, even a singular shape snaking its way through dissimilar works. Affect is a term that constellates and bridges disparate categories, even those seemingly non-indexical, incommunicable, or broadly dispersed categories loosely associated with the experiential and the expressive. Yet here we return to the problems originally prompted by affect theory—the problems Leys and Brinkema raised with respect to affect’s purported resistance to language. When affect is treated as embodied yet independent and autonomous, wholly causal but still aleatory and unexpected in range of effects, we return to the *anti-intentionalism* Leys and Brinkema identified. In these accounts, affect inhabits the interstitial space between a given discourse and its object of analysis; in each case, affect represents a desire to set explanatory power outside of the operations of discourse, to leave unexplained what remains incapable of rationalization, resistant to indexing, or too amorphous for capture. We arrive, once more, at the sense of surplus Ruskin found exuding from subjects and objects like beads of perspiration on the flat face of a stone.

In the context of Victorian studies, then, affect theory exacerbates an ongoing critical divide between theory and history both by perpetuating terminological confusion and by setting

these two critical methods in strict contrast.¹⁴ The linguistic slipperiness of affect (or affects) marks a problem of terminology encountered in historical reference: to what do critics refer when they invoke affect in the context of historical objects or historical subjects? Is affect simply an unclaimed signifier, or is its usage meant to signal the inaccessibility of historical experience? Does affect refer to a kind of continuum of feeling along which readers have or have not felt in reading the Victorian novel, a consistency over the course of two centuries, or does it mark a shift in how we understand our own lived experiences in the present? And as previously noted, the naming of the emotions was already an issue in the Victorian era: the nineteenth century was itself a time in which multiple, often competing discourses developed to give voice to feeling, vocabularies interested in the vitality of matter, the mechanical operations of our musculature in tenuous orchestration with the nervous system, the animal-like tendencies towards expression and hereditary influences on disposition, and the unplumbed depths of cognition. More than just exacerbate this divide between past and present, affect theory appears to concretize it, to reify our historical distance from the nineteenth century as a means of justifying the obfuscation of critical method. In the next section, I reflect on how one might begin to provide a corrective to the terminological ambiguity surrounding affect theory.

II. Fictions of Theory: Jeremy Bentham's *Theory of Fictions*

To do this, I draw from an unlikely conceptual source for understanding affect: Jeremy Bentham. Although never explicitly framed in this manner, Bentham could be considered an opponent to affect. Indeed, in virtually all aspects of his work, Bentham fought to clarify the terms used to explain feeling: it is Bentham who spent most of his life developing an exhaustive table of motives for action; who gauged the value of any social pursuit according to its potential to

¹⁴ On this divide, see the special issue of *Victorian Studies* titled "The Ends of History," edited by Lauren Goodlad and Andrew Sartori. I engage with the V21 Collective's call for a "post-historicist reading" in the third section.

maximize pleasure and minimize pain; who invented the neologisms “maximize” and “minimize” to account for degrees of pleasure and pain; who, in Michel Foucault’s formative account, sought to transform panopticism, i.e. general visibility, into a principle underlying power in all of its manifestations; and who found poetry to be “no better than push-pin” in terms of the emotional value of either hobby (*Discipline and Punish* 194).¹⁵ In sum, Bentham would seem anathema to any account of affect.

Yet my treatment of Bentham departs from the Foucauldian tradition of disciplinarity and draws instead from a descriptivist account of Bentham’s project. Here I follow Frances Ferguson, whose work marks a critical turning point in this reconsideration of utilitarianism as a discourse focused on the description of action rather than (or exclusively on) prescriptions for behavior.¹⁶ In *Pornography, The Theory: What Utilitarianism Did to Action* (2004), Ferguson argues that utilitarianism sought “to give social groups the means to make themselves felt by individuals” (15, emphasis original). In Ferguson’s account, utilitarianism’s emphasis on functioning social structures might open up a more participatory and accommodating conception of culture and society, “freeing all of us from the requirement that we describe ourselves in terms of our beliefs and doctrines, and from the illusion that we can successfully drive out opposed beliefs and perfect the view of the world or of ourselves” (xiii). Following Ferguson, then, we can see how utilitarianism de-emphasizes individual will and subjectivity as determinants for action, but in doing so maintains that the visibility and intelligibility of actions matters more for assessing and evaluating others—and in turn, for introducing changes to and improving an

¹⁵ On Bentham’s development of the terms “maximize” and “minimize,” see Stephen Engelmann’s introduction to *Selected Writings: Jeremy Bentham* (2011) as well as C.K. Ogden’s introduction to *The Theory of Fictions*. For the comparison to “push-pin,” see Bentham’s *The Rationale of Reward* (1825).

¹⁶ See too the debate between Bernard Williams and J.J.C. Smart in *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (1973), which concerns the possibility of a distinction between act- and rule-utilitarianism.

existing social order.¹⁷ Foucault's understanding of Bentham *qua* discipline as a "system of control in the production of discourse" is still important to keep in mind, as any account that seeks to move from a prescriptive account of utilitarianism to a descriptive one still needs to consider the ramifications of panopticism when taken as a principle of governance (*Archaeology* 224). Yet staying at the level of description enables us to make use of Bentham's means for analyzing discourse from within it—specifically, to use his techniques for clarifying the operation of language and eliminating the grammatical and rhetorical ambiguities coalescing around terms like "power."

To this end, I am interested in Bentham's collected writings on language as an excursus on the very problems encountered elsewhere in his project when attempting to give names to feelings. Reflected in Bentham's desire to catalogue motives and to measure degrees of pleasure and pain is a concern for the amorphousness of affect—its anti-nominal and anti-indexical quality—and, at the same time, a solution to it: his insistence that affect, and feeling in general, has its real basis in language and not, as many contemporary critics claim, in a pre-linguistic or non-representational realm. In *The Theory of Fictions*, a posthumously published text that Bentham intended to underscore his legislative and philosophical writings alike, he investigates the obstacles we encounter in language when we invoke concepts like "affect" that are particularly difficult to assign stable formal features.¹⁸ Bentham thought that solving vagaries in

¹⁷ Marjorie Stone, Philip Schofield, and Kathleen Blake have been similarly formative in rethinking Bentham's legacy and application to Victorian fiction: rather than treat Bentham's conception of utility as a subjectively-impooverished means of discipline and social control, these scholars have shown its aim in making social relationality visible and quantifiable.

¹⁸ Collected and edited by philosopher C.K. Ogden in 1959, the text consists of a constellation of works composed throughout Bentham's life, which he intended to develop and publish as a single, systematic work before his death. Ogden undertook a great labor in bringing the volume together for the International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method edition, which, beyond this edition, is the only extant collection on Bentham's *Theory of Fictions*. Indeed, Ogden's Introduction and

language could help provide categorical distinctions entirely missing and sorely needed in everyday discourse and could help to demystify concepts from which we draw without understanding their grammatical functions and implications.

The target of Bentham's theory concerns our dependence in any discourse on *fiction*, a term he associates with its grammatical and linguistic functions rather than with literature. A "fiction," Bentham explains in his 1814 *Prolegomena*, is a product of nomination. When we name things as a means of making them "susceptible of arrangement" and thus comprehension, producing so many nouns for persons and things, we inevitably produce "names that are *not* names of *things*" (xxxiv). Here Bentham defines "things" as "portions of inanimate matter," but he is only partially interested in the metaphysical dimensions of "things" or in the distinction between "things" and "persons" (xxxiv). Instead, Bentham is much more interested in the linguistic process of nomination, a process by which we move from the name to an understanding of the thing: "wheresoever a word is seen, which, to appearance, is employed in the character of a *name*, a natural and abundantly extensive consequence is a propensity and disposition to suppose the existence, the real existence, of a correspondent object—of a correspondent thing, of the thing of which it is the name, of a thing to which it ministers in the character of a name" (xxxv).¹⁹ We typically take naming to confer reality to the very thing designated by the name. Yet some names are simply used for grammatical purposes and, upon further examination, yield little to no confirmation of their "real existence," whether said

notes on Bentham's manuscript nearly exceed it in length—the former numbering 152 pages, the latter 156. Most of Ogden's comments are drawn from Bentham's collected works, which makes his commentary extraordinarily useful beyond the biographical and historical context provided.

¹⁹ Bentham's stated aim is to clear up ambiguities that have plagued language and classification since Aristotle's link in *Categories* between words and things—the claim that words *are* things, or a species of things, "things that are said." Departing from Aristotelian method, Bentham advocates for a separate "verbal reality" to words and to their independent operation as grammatical units (lxvii). See Ogden's introduction.

existence can be founded on direct perception or by way of inference. Fictions, “names that are *not* names of *things*” but that nevertheless bear the grammatical properties and functions of noun-substantives, are thus inevitably produced in the process of ascertaining the material existence or reality of things in the world—“though by the grammatical form of the discourse employed in speaking of it, existence be ascribed, yet in truth and reality existence is not meant to be ascribed,” Bentham clarifies (12).

Bentham expands this definition of fiction—and introduces the term “fictitious entities”—both to clarify the creation of these fictions in the form of noun-substantives and to examine their use and misuse in everyday language:

By this term [fictitious entity] is here meant to be designated one of those sorts of objects which in every language must, for the purpose of discourse, be spoken of as existing—be spoken of in the like manner as those objects which really have existence, and to which existence is seriously meant to be ascribed, are spoken of; but without any such danger as that of producing any such persuasion as that of their possessing, each for itself, any separate, or strictly speaking, any real existence. (16)

As Bentham explains, fictitious entities “must... be spoken of as existing,” even if they do not have “any separate, or strictly speaking, any real existence.” The imperative here is largely transitive in aim. Without treating fictitious entities as if they were real, we would have no means to refer to abstractions like “right,” “power,” “quality,” “quantity,” “relation,” “matter,” or “form”—all of which are “names that are *not* names of *things*,” but are nevertheless treated grammatically as if they were things; and we would have no means of discussing these terms with one another, either. Yet according to Bentham, our most egregious linguistic problems (and in turn, our most egregious social and political ones, too) develop from our failure to distinguish fictitious entities from “real” or “fabulous entities.” “Real entities” ultimately point to real material objects, objects to which “existence is really meant to be ascribed” and which can be verified via perception or inference; “fabulous entities” point to “supposed material objects, of

which the separate existence is capable of becoming a subject of belief, and of which, accordingly, the same sort of picture is capable of being drawn in and preserved in the mind, as of any really existent object” (10, xxxv-xxxvi). Bentham is relatively uninterested in the distinction between real entities and fabulous entities: both can be pictured—which is to say, they can be perceived and imagined, thus represented—and easily referred to “whether a corresponding object had or had not been in existence” (xxxvi).

Unlike these two kinds of entities, fictitious entities are non-representational and should carry no function beyond their discursive use as what bridges—what helps to construct a relationship between—words and things. Thus, although they have no basis in material reality, they are nevertheless of vital importance for maintaining the reality we ascribe to other things and other persons: as Bentham argues, we grant “the supposition of a sort of *verbal* reality, so to speak, as belonging to these fictitious entities,” and we depend on this “verbal reality” in order to use language for transitive purposes (137). In this way, Bentham underscores just how much of our reality is *verbal*, and in both senses of the word: a reality in which we primarily use language for transitive or communicative purposes, and a reality where we readily attribute action and other properties of existence to words via *entification*, be they real, fabulous, or fictitious.

Bentham does not mean to suggest that fictitious entities do not (or should not) convey meaning in the same way that real or even fabulous entities convey meaning. Quite the opposite: we often confuse fictitious for real entities *precisely because* they facilitate meaning, and in virtually the same way, as their real and fabulous counterparts. Nevertheless, as a result of their non-representational status and evasion of reference, fictitious entities do pose problems for our transitive and intransitive uses of language alike: what, precisely, *do* these entities name? And of our names for things and persons, which names refer to real entities and which to fictitious

entities? Given Bentham's account, it may be surprising that we don't confuse the real, the fabulous, and the fictitious with greater frequency. Yet as Bentham explains, we actually do without recognizing how. Whenever we use words like "right," "quality," "quantity," "matter," "form," "relation," or "power," we draw on these words as fictitious entities to bear the function of ascription—that is, to serve in relation to a real entity and to help us ascribe action to a concept otherwise difficult to represent by ordinary (i.e. communicative) means. Indeed, whenever we use predicative language in any capacity, we are drawing on fictitious entities: "every sort of psychological description is fictional," Bentham writes; any assertion of a "quality" residing in a thing or a person can at best be spoken of as "relatively real"; and any discussion of "right" or "power" uses these names only as "mere heuristic conveniences" (lxxx). Operating as noun-substantives, fictitious entities lend an impression of agency and even materiality to words like "quality," "relation," and "power," enabling us to refer to these concepts with ease and to effect communication despite our having no immediate means of verifying their existence (lii).

Bentham's writings on the necessity of our creation and use of particularly vague fictitious entities like "power" and "right" for establishing and maintaining discourse helps us see that we are dependent on and even beholden to what we call "affect" in surprising ways. Affects enable us to make inferences regarding the feelings and thoughts of others by ascribing discernible forms to those feelings and thoughts; they enable us to assume the referential status of feelings even in the absence of any grounding in immediate perception; and they allow us to communicate with one another about abstract emotional states despite (indeed, because of) ambiguities in terminology. For Bentham, then, affect too could be classified as a fictitious entity, a word "to which... existence [is] ascribed, yet in truth and reality existence is not meant

to be ascribed” (12). Although fictitious entities can only be understood in relation to “real entities,” or objects and persons actually existing in the world, as argued above, they nevertheless possess a persuasive “verbal reality” that makes them indispensable to communication and ultimately integral to any discourse.

Bentham’s understanding of fictitious entities can help to clarify current methodological assumptions carried forward in affect theory. First, as a concept, “fictitious entity” is particularly useful for seeing how the agency and autonomy that seems to inhere in affect is simply a product of its use in discourse—an unavoidable product, but nevertheless one we can look for and potentially mitigate through explication. Like “power” or “right,” “affect” is a grammatical form only known in relation to its proximity to real entities. It is susceptible to linguistic obfuscation and abuse because it enables us to facilitate a relationship between a subject and a subject, or a subject and an object, when a relationship is not immediate or perceptible, in either an epistemic or a grammatical sense. While the term “affect” is typically used in its verb form—“to aim at, aspire to, or make for (something)” —it takes on a different set of assumptions when treated as a noun.²⁰ When, nominalized, affect is “the manner in which one is inclined or disposed”; thus affect takes on the very qualities we would otherwise attribute to what is merely adjacent to it, to what it is used to describe.²¹ It becomes, in short, something like an entity. (For example: in the sentence “Bentham’s affect is disconcerting,” taking the term “affect” to ostensibly refer to Bentham in his person rather than to his state of mind or disposition would be to confuse two kinds of subject, one real, the other grammatical. Consider, too, Bentham’s example: we often blame “the law” for perpetuating forms of injustice, rather than “lawyers” [cxix]). Bentham claims that any willful use of a fictitious entity in discourse is itself “an assumption of arbitrary

²⁰ *OED*, “affect,” v., 1.1.a.

²¹ *OED*, “affect,” n., 1.1.a.

power,” an appeal to an external factor or force not immediately present or perceptible, and which could, on further analysis, be discovered as a fiction (xvii). As Bentham shows, an appeal to arbitrary power derives its efficacy—becomes verbally persuasive—through the very act of promoting linguistic ambiguity: the work of explicating the function of a word like “affect” requires much more energy and attention than what the word itself facilitates when invoked in its ordinary usage, what the word “affect” expedites in terms of meaning or makes simpler in terms of comprehension. It is easier, in other words, to assume the arbitrary power of a term like “power” or “affect” than to perform the labor of demystifying it, demonstrating its fictitious basis, and identifying a real origin. Thus, in using affect, we have to distinguish between invocations of affect that seek to effect a *grammatical* relationship between subjects and objects and those that seek to effect a *real* relationship between subjects and objects. In short, we must distinguish between the real explanatory power inhering in affect itself as grammatical and assumptions of explanatory power lurking beneath invocations of affect.

Second, Bentham draws into relief the ways in which we can (and do) confuse language’s transitive and intransitive functions in criticism—and especially in affect theory, where critics avoid the reification of affect as emotion in the interest of maintaining affect *qua* affect. C.K. Ogden, who collected and edited Bentham’s *The Theory of Fictions*, claims that what makes Bentham a particularly important figure in the history of ordinary language philosophy is the distinction he raises between the intransitive use of language—language as a notation system—and its transitive use—as a means of establishing and maintaining communication amongst persons. “Words may be used either to refer to ourselves and others to the things about which we are thinking, or to arouse emotions; to convey information, says Bentham, or for the purpose of excitation” (lxxi). On reflection, both transitive and intransitive uses of language are capable of

the conveyance of information *and* the excitation of emotion alike, but not, Bentham claims, to the same degree. As Bentham reasons, fictitious entities can, by virtue of their abstract and non-referential nature, lead much more readily to excitation: in their intransitive use, they can lead to the arousal of emotions that, as Ruskin found, ultimately cloud the information or the reality of the subject or object described; and in their transitive use, they can obfuscate communication by attributing emotions to non-existent subjects and objects. In the case of the latter, these emotions are not simply false. They are, grammatically and epistemically speaking, *superfluous*, produced in excess of the affective responses typically provoked by the apprehension of real subjects and objects. Bentham is thus adamant that these surplus feelings should not be seen as latent within a fictitious entity like “power” or “right,” nor should the capacity of these entities to excite our emotions persuade us of their reality and subsequently influence our understanding of their grammatical function in discourse.

Accenting the importance of clear language for the conveyance of information may seem like the interest of a stodgy grammarian; elsewhere, Bentham even advocates for the avoidance of “stale epigrams,” “figurative expressions,” and “sentimental conceits” in everyday language (lxxii-lxxiii). Indeed, the claim that there’s always a deeper meaning or import attached to any word, no matter how vague or difficult to define, certainly calls for hypervigilance on the part of readers; and Bentham does seem to suggest throughout *Theory of Fictions* that nomination should itself be treated as a fundamentally duplicitous or suspicious operation. But his emphasis on information over excitation is justified when we observe that fictitious entities like “power” and “right” are quite susceptible to linguistic obfuscation and abuse, and especially in literary criticism. Indeed, as Leys has shown, affect’s appeal for criticism is its resistance to explanation: inhabiting the interstitial space between transitive and intransitive uses of language, its existence

is impossible to verify solely by reference to orthographic marks on the page, because it is in excess of any discourse that seeks to contain it. When invoked, it is thus quite difficult to dispute. Bentham's treatment of fictitious entities as mere words subject to definition and demystification helps us see that the interstitial space inhabited by affect is just a product of language and not, as it were, a property of affect itself.

Applying Bentham to affect theory, we can see how different linguistic units—words, propositions, sentences—draw on our feelings in unexpected ways. In the first chapter, I will apply Bentham's *The Theory of Fictions* to a reading of Dickens's *David Copperfield*. But in the context of my Introduction, I take Bentham to underscore and unsettle our commonplace assumptions regarding the affective forms that typify literary analysis—their stability across literary genres, their cogency as discrete, bounded forms within a story, their autonomy, and especially the potency or intensity of the affects they purportedly engender in readers. As discovered in the context of novel reading, feelings are *processes*, not static indexes or unmoving points of reference; novels tend to enlarge and elongate feeling, protracting the dimensions of affects by way of formal representation (long chapters, digressions, or interminable dialogue); and what's more, the act of novel reading entails both an attention to the representation of feelings on the page as well as an awareness of the feelings engendered in the reader, two coeval (but not coextensive) processes. To the extent that feelings change over time and across a text—to the extent that naming neither confers reality on a particular affective response nor arrests it for analysis—the work of tracing these feelings as they change requires additional labors. Even more, the efforts to reconstruct affective processes largely encountered in the act of reading, *in situ*, is further complicated by the historical gap between the experiences of readers in the nineteenth century and readers encountering these works today: a gap that must be

acknowledged, if only to clarify my critical focus. In the next section, I return to the methodological divide within Victorian studies between theory and history to understand how Bentham's emphasis on affect as linguistic can lend a new vocabulary to these unformed feelings.

III. Reading Affects

Throughout my study, I look to read affects *as* forms; to see how affects, when understood as linguistic in composition, discursive in operation, and thus taken "as structures that work through formal means," develop unique forms of literary representation (Brinkema 37). My claim is that we treat affects in precisely this way whenever we engage in the act of reading a novel. When we read, we initiate separate affective processes: reading, on the one hand, and feeling, on the other. Although necessarily entwined, reading and feeling are neither coequal nor coextensive. Whereas New Criticism effectively consigned both to a shared affective domain deemed inappropriate for critical analysis, I look to understand the reciprocity between the two processes while maintaining their distinction.²² On the one hand, reading encourages us to chart our emotional responses as we read, feelings like surprise, anger, or sympathy that are linked to the form of the work. On the other hand, the minor feelings that accompany reading as itself an affective process, feelings like impatience and tedium, are similarly encouraged but ultimately superseded by stronger feelings gleaned from what is read. As a form that emerges between these two affective processes, a *reading affect* refers to a minimal or minor affective register: what might be palpable to us in the process of reading (and stubbornly so) but is subsequently

²² See Nicholas Dames for what he terms a "prehistory of novel theory." In his assessment, Lubbock et al. saw their method "as a purposeful evasion of response theory as a whole, of reading in particular, and specifically of the affective and cognitive dimensions of reading" (*Physiology* 35).

jettisoned in criticism as mechanical, unneeded, or uninteresting in the interest of focusing on legible, cogent, and *stronger* affective responses and states.

I employ the term “reading affects” in order to focus on the ways in which novels under-signify, rather than over-determine, the feelings encountered in the course of reading. My aim in using this term rather than “affect” or “affects” is to move beyond an understanding of feeling and reading as tied to subjectivity (in the sense of conditioning, if not wholly producing, a subject through the act of reading).²³ Reading affects eschew the epistemic aims of a critical approach that would otherwise tether affect to a claim regarding ideas of subjectivity and interiority, while they also avoid an ontology that would set them beyond the ken of analysis. Of course, reading can and does serve as a conduit for emotion rather than simply the occasion for its emergence: readers feel while they read, and feelings differ based on a number of factors and varying, as feelings do, in duration and impact depending on the particularities of the human subject. But in choosing the term “reading affects,” I look to see the possibilities that might emerge if we direct our attention to the impact of feelings on the form of novels instead of narrowly circumscribing such feelings by reference to a human subject. By seeing reading as an affective process located in but also independent of the subject, I attempt to see how a process largely thought to be external to and independent of novel form, situated as it is in the reader and not the text, becomes the thematic and formal focus of novels in the nineteenth century. In other words, I look to understand how the durational and dispositional qualities of reading, especially qualitatively impoverished responses like frustration or even fatigue, migrate into and come to shape novelistic form.

²³ Terada too critiques this sense of determinism between emotion and subject when she claims that subjectivity, like any ideology of emotion, is quite simply “a narrative about the discourse [of emotion] that underrepresents its complexity” (3-4). See too Adela Pinch and Dames, who I discuss in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, respectively.

My account of the minor affective qualities of novelistic form is in conversation with a growing field of scholarship loosely categorized under what Rachel Ablow has termed “Victorian emotion studies.”²⁴ Distinct from strictly scientific accounts of sensation or reception theories of reading, contributors to this field underscore the pervasiveness of “feeling” as a nineteenth-century discourse and the migration of accounts of emotion beyond the sphere of literary experience. In using this designation, I look to view these unformed feelings as a means of seeing “how we can reconstruct the alien historical circumstances of Victorian reading *and* [of seeing] how those distant reading experiences are restaged in attentive acts of reading in the present” (*Feeling* 4). To this end, my project follows from recent work by Elisha Cohn, Amy King, and Alicia Christoff on the diffuseness and dilatory presence of affect in literary experience. These critics do not necessarily treat affect as anti-intentional, but they do focus on how attending to affect’s representation can help us reach an anti-deterministic or non-teleological conception of novelistic form.

As suggested in the previous paragraphs, my sense of the underdetermined or “weak” nature of affects is also intended as a departure from the “strong affects” I identified above with Massumi in the first section of my Introduction. The treatment of affects as processual and grammatical phenomena—generated over time, mutable and miasmic—requires a different kind of attention in order to follow their dynamic but minimal affective qualities. Barthes identifies the difficulties in directing attention to these affective states when he speaks of a “hyperconsciousness of the affective minimal,” “an immediate and precise consciousness of the smallest shifts of affect that attack my body” (101). Seeing less determinacy, less force, and less cogency behind reading affects than in the camps outlined in the first section, the approach to

²⁴ See Ablow’s account of this distinction in “Victorian Feeling and the Victorian Novel” as well as the contributors to her edited collection *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature* (2010).

affect I take up might be better understood, then, with reference to “mood,” “atmosphere,” or “tone,” terms that suggest a distributed affective climate surrounding and anchored to particular aesthetic objects. Drawing from similar philosophical traditions, Charles Altieri, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Sianne Ngai use these terms—mood, atmosphere, and tone, respectively—to describe a sense of affective embeddedness emergent to our engagement with these objects. For Altieri, mood is “pervasive” and affords “immense psychological expansiveness” (55), atmosphere for Gumbrecht is immersive and immediate, “an environment with physical substance” (20), and tone, writes Ngai, is “global and hyperrelational” (43). Although the sense of coherence or unity produced varies across their accounts, these connotations all suggest treating feeling as a process produced by a sustained, temporal encounter with particular aesthetic objects.

Finally, by focusing on reading affects, I look to remain attentive to the history of emotions like frustration and tedium while at the same time seeking to understand the limitations of a strictly historicist approach to emotion in the mid-Victorian novel. I thus take the charge of practicing a “post-historicist reading,” recently invoked by scholars associated with the V21 Collective, as a way to be attentive to the formal dimensions of novels, as objects produced by and embedded in a historically-specific social and cultural milieu, while nevertheless resisting the emphasis historicism places on positivistic interpretation (V21 Collective). I see this charge as twofold. First, it enjoins us to practice an engaged historicism, one that seeks to complicate models of distance, reference, and temporality to better understand how we nominalize “everyday life” in Victorian studies, treating it less as a discrete historical reality we can access by virtue of the clarity of our methods and more of a sense of the ongoing nature of literary experience itself: what we produce in concert with what we read. My concern for reducing

ongoing historical processes can be traced back to Raymond Williams's term "structures of feeling," which he defines as "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt" and taken "as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension" (131–32). By the term, Williams means to critique the "habitual past tense" of criticism that reduces "forming and formative processes" into "formed wholes" and proposes instead a means of conceptualizing "emergent or pre-emergent" forms of experience as both specific to historical periods and yet exceeding or escaping complete codification (128, 131–32). While I think that much can still be gained from historical accounts of everyday life in the nineteenth century, what I trace is an affective response to novel reading that, because it is necessarily belated, pulls against historicity.

Second, it requires that we attend to how diminished affective responses in the Victorian era continue to take part in our present, to see their afterlives in the affective processes we typically overlook but nevertheless feel. Indeed, the problem of surplus feeling that Ruskin identified in the nineteenth century with the pathetic fallacy is clearly associated with the affective demands of the age, one in which new pressures were foisted onto the body and feeling came to describe and insist upon an extractive relationship between work and life, a relationship that oozed its way into all makes and modes of experience. Since capitalism demands an unceasing flow of labor power and can extract that power indefinitely, as long as bodies can provide it, it should not seem unusual that these low-intensity feelings in the Victorian era were viewed with suspicion. "The scandal of capitalism is that it depends on surplus labor and thus is unable to eliminate the exhaustion it produces," Anson Rabinbach writes (74). Dealing with our current realities of exhaustion and related aftereffects of labor means continuing to deal with the affective products of the past; for this past is still our present. Frustration, tedium, and confusion

all occur in relation to a body; no matter how minimal or unformed, each makes reference to conditions as they are lived and felt. For this reason, I do not intend for these diminished affective states to be construed as positive or potentially liberating. Instead, they are to be treated as ongoing, in formation. Thus, when Ruskin in his 1884 essay “The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century” sees the pestilent smog of industry hanging over London as a symbol for the deformation of life itself, we too see more than a simple metaphorization of the ills of his age: we see its trace in ours (8). Developing ways of reading what remains diffuse, of finding ways to treat these diffuse feelings in their unformed states without reducing them to discrete forms, can help us attend to historical changes as they underwrite our world and extend, seemingly indefinitely, over time.

IV. Overview of Chapters

This study begins with a conceptual problem: how the form of the novel changed in order to represent more nebulous affective states. It ends with a critical practice: how attention to these unformed feelings might enable us to practice a more engaged mode of post-historicist reading, a practice that builds on rather than eschews historicism.

To demonstrate how nineteenth-century conventions of the novel change to account for and integrate these minimal affective responses, I first look to formal experiments attempted by two canonical authors, Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope. Chapter one, “Fictions of Feeling: Affect and Character After Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield*,” opens by considering how the relationship between literary character and affect is challenged in Dickens’s diffuse and ungainly 1850 novel, a “personal history” distended by the amorphous feelings repeatedly announced by character and narrator, David Copperfield. Drawing from Bentham’s understanding of affect as a fictitious entity formed solely for the purposes of discourse, I

demonstrate how Copperfield's flagging efforts to represent and manage his formless affective responses over the course of the expansive three-volume novel underscore a larger effort in the period to lend stable parameters to literary character. We tend to treat literary character as itself a fictitious entity, a bundle of relations "entified" and ascribed agency much like affect; in doing so, we typically entertain a conception of literary character as integral to the affective operations of a novel as a whole—after all, we typically treat characters as the coordinates for feeling in a literary work. Yet Copperfield's tendency to focus excessively, sometimes exclusively on feeling *sans* character upsets the parameters of his character and of others by ostensibly adding too much detail, flooding the text with strange sentiments that appear to operate independent of his person and of the characters he looks to understand. Indeed, Copperfield's tendency to explain himself and others at length ultimately produces more affective ambiguities than it clarifies: as he describes and re-describes these feelings more and more, he moves farther away defining and delimiting persons in the text, his literary devices become less discrete and, ultimately, the novel loses its formal integrity. Applying Bentham's understanding of exposition, a process he treats as a means for clarifying grammatical and affective attribution by way of definition, I look to understand how we might instead re-center the novel around Rosa Dartle and her efforts to lend clearer boundaries to literary character and their affects.

The second chapter continues this investigation into the affective limits of novel form by considering the challenges posed by a different publication format—the extended series—for representing everyday life as an indefinitely prolonged affective process. In my second chapter, "Anthony Trollope's Weak Plots: Narrative Enervation from *The Warden* to *The Fixed Period*," I examine how Trollope represents this sense of everyday life not only through the diminishment of narrative energy and the attenuation of plot on the level of individual novels, but over the

length of many interconnected novels. I do so by reading two novels situated at the beginning and end of his productive literary career, *The Warden* (1855) and *The Fixed Period* (1882). Although separated by generic differences, the former a social problem novel and the latter a utopian narrative, both works dispense with Trollope's conventional, desire-driven marriage plots in favor of extended rumination on states of inaction and incapacity. These impoverished affective states uncannily reflect the weak yet sustained sense of energy underwriting his series novels and, indeed, his entire model of literary production. Focusing on the figures who fail to issue into action and the plots that similarly struggle to carry them, I argue that Trollope ultimately attempts to correlate the length of his series with the length of life itself—that is, with the gradual, depletive, yet ongoing quality of lived experience. In doing so, he struggles to find a form more hospitable to representing the diminished affective dimensions of everyday life and to maintaining a sense of the perpetuity of the present.

My third and fourth chapters consider whether these same experiments in form and affect might serve to encourage attentive reading practices. Chapter three, “Untimely Feelings: Tedium and Temporality in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,” treats the tedious nature of novel reading as a belated effect of formal digression. I argue that Brontë's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), renders everyday life as affectively draining through the prolonged excerption of a diary, which introduces recursive and dilatory temporalities into the very form of the work. By undermining the excitement of narrative progress, Brontë advocates for our tedious exposure to affect over time as a necessity of close reading. In doing so, she demonstrates how departing from linear time can mitigate issues of gender and social agency—specifically, how delaying the closure of the marriage plot can stave off, if only temporarily, Helen's conscription into social codes and the (narrative) expectations for unmarried women.

Chapter four, “George Eliot’s Brevity: Narrative Length and Empathy in *Silas Marner*,” closes the project by considering the aestheticization of affective diminution in Eliot’s 1861 novel *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe*. While Silas’s cataleptic spells defy the principles of omniscient narration explored elsewhere in Eliot’s work, I argue that these pauses in the narrative present a critique of the assumed link between narrative length and sympathetic development. Reading *Silas Marner* through theories of aesthetic experience and empathy developed by Vernon Lee, I show how Eliot amends the aesthetic features typically associated with her other novels—namely, expansiveness and complexity—to better represent the privative dimensions of life.

By ending with Eliot’s interest in brevity over bulk, I begin in the final chapter and in my coda to consider a critical practice of novel reading attentive to the changing parameters of novelistic form. Making use of the poverty of our affective responses to reading, Victorian novelists unsettled the formal categories we take for granted when we read and the feelings we are meant to form in turn. These unformed feelings force us to question and challenge the dispositions we assume are central to the experience of novel reading—frustration, enervation, tedium, and confusion—and help us instead to consider the importance of affective states we otherwise treat as deleterious.

CHAPTER ONE

Fictions of Feeling: Affect and Character After Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*

Dickens's only care was to represent the wonderful show that filled his hero's memory. The whole phantasmagoria is the subject of the book, a hundred men and women, populating David's past and keeping his pen at full speed in the single-minded effort to portray them. Alone among the assembly David himself is scarcely of the subject at all.

— Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (1921)

The intensely, stifling human quality of the novel is not to be avoided; the novel is sogged with humanity; there is no escaping the uplift or the downpour, nor can they be kept out of criticism. We may hate humanity, but if it is exorcised or even purified the novel wilts; little is left but a bunch of words.

— E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927)

Introduction: Fictions of Feeling

In the uneventful middle stretch of Charles Dickens's 1850 novel *David Copperfield*, readers encounter a passage describing Copperfield's difficulty in mastering stenography:

The changes that were rung upon dots, which in such a position meant such a thing, and in such another position something else, entirely different... not only troubled my waking hours, but reappeared before me in my sleep. When I had groped my way, blindly, through these difficulties, and had mastered the alphabet, which was an Egyptian Temple in itself, there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters; the most despotic characters I have ever known; who insisted, for instance, that a thing like the beginning of a cobweb, meant expectation, and that a pen and ink sky-rocket stood for disadvantageous. When I had fixed these wretches in my mind, I found that they had driven everything else out of it; then, beginning again, I forgot them; while I was picking them up, I dropped the other fragments of the system; in short, it was almost heart-breaking. (504)

The difficulty Copperfield has in mastering these “arbitrary characters” stems both from their curious autonomy—they “insist” on particular meanings, to the point that they appear “despotic”—as well as from their startling affective influence, as they disrupt his daily life and dreams alike. His struggle to make sense of the characters in the notation system clearly parallels

his flagging effort to manage the equally unpredictable affective lives of characters like Mr. Micawber, whose suicidal impulses distress the novelist-to-be in the frequency of their occurrence and suddenness of their remission; Dora Spenlow, who moves from gaiety to abjection at the mention of any household chore; and Rosa Dartle, whose impassioned outbursts are forecast by the momentary flash of her facial scar, which appears like “a mark in invisible ink brought to the fire” (278). Taken together, *Copperfield*’s struggle to master these characters on and off the page reflects an ambiguous relationship between feeling and form in the novel. Distended chapters like “Blissful,” “Enthusiasm,” and “Depression” abandon character and plot alike in favor of following amorphous moods through wide swathes of time; accounts of past emotional states quickly devolve into admissions of the narrator’s inability to render them in print (“The deep remembrance of the sense I had ... cannot be written”); and, most significantly, *Copperfield*’s representation of himself as a character in the narrative becomes increasingly formless, to the point of being mere “blank space” at times (154, 121).

At the heart of this strained relationship between affect and form in *David Copperfield* is a question concerning the nature of literary characters: are they mere marks on the page, or do they bear any relation to persons living or lived? As a narrator, *Copperfield* struggles to maintain this distinction between the purely fictional status of his characters and their status as referents, linked as they purported are in his story to real persons with real affective lives. E.M. Forster memorably casts this distinction between reality and representation, “the difference between people in life and people in books,” as itself only questioned due to what literary characters make accessible to and desired by readers: characters in novels can achieve “a reality of a kind we can never get in daily life,” Forster observes, because “in the novel we can know people perfectly,” whereas “we are people whose secret lives are invisible” (61, 63-64). What surprises us about the

non-referential status of literary characters, Forster and others argue, is ultimately how they reframe our own sense of the distinction between reality and representation.²⁵ Even underdeveloped or “flat” characters, those “constructed around a single idea,” can on occasion surprise readers with depth just like their “round” counterparts, characters in which “there is more than one factor in them” (67, 78). When we have the impression of the “incalculability” of a character in a novel, Forster claims, the “dimness in life” we encounter in our interactions with real people becomes excruciatingly apparent (63).

Critics have long examined the startling liveliness of Dickens’s characters and have sought to understand how the flattening of these characters within the confines of his novels reflects “the problematic elimination or functionalized compression of real persons in the actual world” (Woloch 20).²⁶ But of Dickens’s novels, *David Copperfield* is particularly unclear on the relationship it intends to maintain between the fictionality of its characters and their reference to real persons. As demonstrated above, he specifically struggles with treating characters as *only* characters, as discrete formal units simply operating within a larger, self-enclosed literary form. *Copperfield* might initially look to resist the compression of characters in his narrative, their reduction to the impress on his pen on the page, and yet, as demonstrated by the lively “arbitrary characters” peopling his work, he is taken aback when he discovers their capacity for

²⁵ See Dorrit Cohn, who draws on Forster: “If the real world becomes fiction only by revealing the hidden side of the human beings who inhabit it, the reverse is equally true: the most real, the ‘roundest’ characters of fiction are those we know most intimately, precisely in ways we could never know people in real life” (5). See too Deidre Lynch, who demonstrates how character is itself a composite of various discourses of character in the seventeenth century. I engage with Catherine Gallagher’s account of fictionality and literary character in the following section.

²⁶ Woloch draws from Forster when he argues that this tension between referent and representation in Dickens’s work reflects the nineteenth-century novel’s twin commitments to “depth psychology and social expansiveness,” to both the representation of a single character’s consciousness and the inclusion of many characters who, vying for attention and space, are “incompletely pulled into the narrative” (Woloch 19). See too Pam Morris.

decompression, to act and affect one another like real persons. Dickens's characters in *David Copperfield* are still governed by the laws of literary form, and a character "lives in accordance with such laws," as if it were simply drawn to the ground by a different kind of gravity (Forster 62). But with vagaries attending the affective capacities of his literary characters—without a strong claim to their basis in reality *or*, for that matter, to their pure fictionality—and with too much attention to their feelings, characters become *too* affective: their feelings become subject to diffusion and the more they diffuse throughout the novel, the more they challenge the affective integrity of the novel as a form. As a result of this diffusion, the formal dimensions of *David Copperfield* takes on a porous or spongy quality: the affects we associate with certain characters and the characters we typically associate with certain affects no longer show clear lines of possession or even firm borders, their forces spreading out through the medium, seeping unexpectedly into the corners and crevices of prose (23). In the absence of complex character-systems and intricate plots like the kind found in *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Our Mutual Friend*, affect and characters alike circulate in *David Copperfield* almost indiscriminately, ultimately invading and impacting the forms of sentences, paragraphs, and even entire chapters; and as a result, form itself becomes impossibly affective, overly saturated, so much so that it appears to soften the harder edges of character, episode or scene, dialogue, and narration.

By focusing on the diffusion of affect in *David Copperfield* and its corresponding impact on the form of the work, I question the affective integrity of literary character in Dickens and, by extension, the nineteenth-century novel. In doing so, I seek to understand how affects continue to impact form when severed from a claim to their status as representations of sensations lived and felt by real persons in the world. My approach derives in part from Adela Pinch, who has shown that, for aesthetic theorists and novelists at the end of the eighteenth-century and into the

nineteenth, the ontological and moral value of feelings—their authenticity—lay not in their physical causes but rather in “their force or liveliness” (33). Divorced from real persons, sensations no longer needed to be tethered to literary character to authorize or explain their presence. In fact, as Pinch finds in Jane Austen’s work, sensation often produces the individual character rather than vice versa. Pinch marks a gradual shift at this point in the historical relationship between affect and form, so that sensation is now decoupled from character and, in turn, character from subjectivity; and this because, as Pinch states, “the history of feeling and the history of the individual are not the same thing” (15). I thus treat *David Copperfield* as an example of what happens to literary character and to the form of the novel in the mid-nineteenth century after the decoupling of feeling and subjectivity Pinch describes: no longer bound to characters or, for that matter, real persons, affects test the representational limits of novel form, pushing its boundaries and straining any attempt to clarify the affective operations of specific literary devices or formal features. Indeed, in the impoverishment of character as a discrete literary device, *Copperfield* allows affects to swell and shape the work, at times occluding characters who are submerged in the feelings that appear to precede them and, just as often, underdetermining others, those who barely emerge as more than mere marks on the page.²⁷

²⁷ On the man-of-letters hero and *Copperfield*’s 18th-century predecessors, see Poovey. My selection of *David Copperfield* as an example also derives from its place in the canon as a novel representing the emergence of a distinctly modern subjectivity. In this respect, see D.A. Miller as well as James Buzard. I also engage the novel for its account of the professionalization of novel writing. As Lauren Goodlad and Jennifer Ruth have shown, British writers in the nineteenth century increasingly regarded their own place in this discourse of middle-class aspiration with ambivalence. On the circumstances in copyright and printing behind these broader ideological shifts in novel writing, see too Claire Pettitt and Richard Salmon who both show how changing legal conceptions of literature as authorial property in the 1830s and 1840s created economic conditions for the rise of professional writers. David Saunders demonstrates Dickens’s success in challenging and reforming these conditions in the 1840s and 1850s: “the exemplary denizen of the mid-century legal-cultural environment, disposed not only to governmental and social reform but also to commercial profit,” Saunders notes, “[Dickens] was actively concerned with the legal norms and practices bearing on authors and publishers, and on the relations between them” (135). See also Alexander Welsh.

Yet I also see the diffusion of affect and dissipation of form witnessed above in *David Copperfield*, the novel straining to accommodate sensations newly freed from figuration, as part of a broader shift in the century in the discourse of fiction and its relationship to feeling. In my Introduction, I discussed the term “fiction” in the context of Jeremy Bentham’s *The Theory of Fictions*. For Bentham, a “fiction” designates a linguistic placeholder within a particular discourse: as a name with no real (or at least proven) existence but with grammatical structures attached and indexed to it, it must “be spoken of in the like manner as those objects which really have existence,” yet “without any such danger as that of producing any such persuasion as that of their possessing... any real existence” (16). Avoiding this “persuasion” is essential for Bentham because the dangers of attributing existence and attaching feelings to fictions are surprisingly high. Fictions not only produce a host of moral, legal, and political vagaries and misunderstandings, but can also lead us to create “fictitious entities” to which we ascribe agency, attitudes or dispositions, even rights, effects, and emotions, without recognizing the ways in which we consistently do so in everyday language (and in doing so, how we subsequently fail to mitigate the injustices enacted on real entities or fight to uphold their rights, distracted as we are by an ever-increasing mass of fictions claiming equal attention).

Of course, fictions are formative to any discourse: fictions enable us to carry our beliefs and values, meanings and intentions, into language, which is a social environment shared with individuals with other (sometimes congruent, sometimes competing) beliefs, values, meanings, and intentions. “[N]o living word relates to its object in a *singular* way,” Mikhail Bakhtin observes, and when we attempt to circumscribe the relationship between a word and its object, we fail to see how “between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object,” a “tension-filled

environment of alien words, value judgments and accents”—in short, we fail to see that “[l]anguage is... populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others” (Bakhtin 276, 298). Bakhtin encourages readers to think of the novel—and possibly only Dickens’s novels—as the space in which this sense of dialogism becomes possible, where a word can “take on the nature of an internal polemic” and where we can approach “a deliberate feeling for the historical and social concreteness of living discourse, as well as its relativity” (278, 331). Yet Bentham is focused on tracking precisely how these affective dimensions of language, the “intentions and tones... glimmering behind the words and forms” are carried into, assimilated by, and ultimately prove damaging to the intransitive dimensions of a discourse, obfuscating the very source from which we draw to establish and maintain communication (298). Here we might change our perspective on the relationship between novels and fictionality in light of Bentham’s claims: the novel both presents the necessity of clarifying our everyday use of language (the project Bentham proposed in *The Theory of Fictions*, but that also underwrites his entire *oeuvre*) and serves as the only linguistic medium in which we can properly exercise the appropriate analytic methods for doing so.

While Bentham’s understanding of the term *fiction* may not immediately resonate with the sense in which we would refer to Dickens’s novel as *fiction*, and while the two have typically been seen as holding antithetical positions with respect to their respective social and political values, I read Bentham and Dickens for their shared investment in the relationship between affect and form.²⁸ This investment is twofold. Both want, on the one hand, to affirm the distinction between the real and the fictitious as a matter of language; and both, on the other, aim

²⁸ This account of the relationship between Dickens and Bentham derives from F.R. Leavis’s *The Great Tradition* (1948). See too Terry Eagleton, who in *Criticism and Ideology* (1978) points to the systemic, doctrinal character of utilitarianism in Dickens’s novels, most often affiliated with “Gradgrindery” in *Hard Times*.

to press against the limits of nomination to order to understand previously unformed states of feeling. Dickens, like Bentham, understood the degree to which any account of the feelings of other persons will encounter difficulties when such feelings are represented in language. *David Copperfield* dwells on these difficulties, pursuing them as a means to understand why, exactly, novels need clearly defined and delimited literary characters to avoid the misattribution of agency and affect to other formal devices. In this sense, challenging the affective integrity of character in his novel can be understood as a test, attempting to discover how similar linguistic misattributions affect—obfuscate, frustrate—our relationships to ourselves and to other persons. My account of the fictionality of literary character thus follows Catherine Gallagher who traces the emergence in the mid-eighteenth century of a “*disposition* of novelistic fictionality,” a transformation in understandings of reference wrought by the rise of the novel and after which one could “read a narrative as credible while thinking it affirms nothing” (345, emphasis original).²⁹ The diffuseness of *David Copperfield*, what appears to be both linguistic problem (the overproduction of prose via the production of and dependence on fictitious entities) *as well as* an affective one (the ways in which these elements prompt diffusion), dilates the work’s formal devices beyond their capacity to hold as agents of narrative. As a result, the novel diminishes in its capacity to affect or influence readers, to affirm anything beyond itself.

Moving forward in this account requires that I first temporarily set aside the social implications of Dickens’s novel and clarify how the novel pursues the experiment in affect and

²⁹ See Gallagher, who traces a shift in fictionality facilitated by the eighteenth-century novel—from an understanding of “fiction” as nonreferential and thus deceptive or false to “fiction” as nonreferential and thus provisionally true. Gallagher notes that critics today assume and abide by the former understanding, taking fiction to mean that which “somehow suspends, deflects, or otherwise disables normal referential truth claims about the world of ordinary experience,” when early novelists understood fiction as an elaborate play on reference (“The Rise of Fictionality” 338). “[T]he claims to truth and fiction were not in contradiction with each other,” Gallagher reasons, and the (contemporary) understanding of fiction as nonreferential only emerged as “the difference between fictions and lies became less obvious” (338, 342, 340). See too Dorrit Cohn.

character introduced above. I begin in the following section by clarifying the relationship between affect and character with reference to Forster's treatment of character as itself key to a novel's affective and formal cohesion. In the same section, I explore how Bentham's method for rooting out fictitious entities from discourse enables us to question the agency and autonomy lent to the affects while also enabling us to see the challenges posed by excising affects that have taken on the status of fictitious entities—in short, how excising elements of a discourse creates obstacles to its continued operation. In the second section, I apply Bentham's practice of exposition, the use of description to clarify meaning, to show how this affective incoherence might be understood in the context of a novel. My account of affect in this section is decidedly less forceful than other critical accounts of affect in Dickens, precisely because it focuses on what is inchoate, unformed, or "weak" in *David Copperfield*: a boundary, poorly maintained, between the real and the fictitious, categories through which his characters often pass without detection.³⁰ But the importance of focusing on fictionality becomes clearer when we consider how the diffuseness produced in Dickens's novel diminishes the formal integrity and thus the critical aegis of the affects in the work, too. As a result of their diminishment, other assumptions linking character to affect can be addressed—who (or perhaps what) literary characters are meant to represent, the boundaries of the sensations that cohere around literary forms (fictitious persons, certainly, as well as other units of representation), and the connections between social conditions affecting real people and those affecting literary characters. In the third section I discuss the implications of my argument for those issues of gender and domesticity brought to a

³⁰ As suggested in my introduction, the word "weak" invokes Moretti's description of the novel as a "weak form," "its contradictory, hybrid, and compromising nature" reflective of a weakness that is increasingly valorized as everyday life in nineteenth-century Western culture (13, emphasis original). See Moretti. If *David Copperfield* is a *bildungsroman*, it is the apotheosis of the form's failure to maintain an active tension between youth and maturity, a case of "weakness" taken to its formal limits within a single work.

focus in the character of Rosa Dartle who, not incidentally, has been quite misunderstood in her relation to affect and form.

I. Affect and Character

In Forster's prefatory note to *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), he briefly discusses the decision, in adapting his 1927 Clark lectures at Trinity College into a book, to keep all of the words that signal the informal language of address, every quip and aside that acknowledges an audience of active listeners. This inclusion "not to mitigate the talk," Forster remarks, is both an effort to reflect the same lively language used in novels as well as a means to preempt his concern that, without these and other informal parts of speech, "nothing should be left at all" of his study:

Words such as "I," "you," "one," "we," "curiously enough," "so to speak," "only imagine," and "of course" will consequently occur on every page and will rightly distress the sensitive reader; but he is asked to remember that if these words were removed others, perhaps more distinguished, might escape through the orifices they left, and that since the novel is itself often colloquial it may possibly withhold some of its secrets from the graver and grander streams of criticism, and may reveal them to backwaters and shallows. (Prefatory Note)

Forster's decision to include words in his book that signal an audience is not interesting in itself.

As he remarks, the "colloquial" nature of the novel gives itself to such personal modes of address, without which the "backwaters and shallows" of its terrain would be impossible to navigate—itself "one of the moister areas of literature," he notes elsewhere, "irrigated by a hundred rills and occasionally degenerating into a swamp"—and which are often overlooked by the "graver and grander streams of criticism" (5) Yet Forster's note is interesting for how it speaks to his conception of the affective integrity of novels, what he describes repeatedly in the course of the lectures as something akin to a climate, atmosphere, or *milieu*—ostensibly, a lived environment populated first and foremost by characters (or "people"), and subsequently by all of the other "aspects" of a novel (story, plot, fantasy, prophecy, pattern and rhythm) that, taken

together, give formal and affective coherence to the work (24). While his text is not a novel, Forster's prefatory note suggests it is *almost* like one, and that any text adopts a novelistic quality when it is situated around persons: like a novel, his writing follows no "principles or systems"; "unscientific" and "vague," his text eschews apparatus and instead embraces *pathos*; and again, much like for a novel, Forster takes its "final test" to be "our affection for it, as it is the test of our friends, and of anything else which we cannot define" (23-4). Removing words that signal this personal mode of address might damage the affective integrity of the text, and understandably so, as "more distinguished" words—and more complicated ideas, only clarified because they are embedded in a more familiar context—would fall through the resulting mesh like water through a sieve.

Forster's interest in the amorphous affective dimensions of novels, the ways in which they invite a sense of immersion and, from that immersion, signal the cohesion of the work, can be seen in the imaginary activity with which he begins his study. Rather than provide a history of the novel, Forster instead asks the audience to picture "all the novelists writing their novels at once. They come from different ages and ranks, they have different temperaments and aims, but they all hold pens in their hands, and are in the process of creation" (14). Seated in a room shared by Richardson and James, Wells and Dickens, and Sterne and Woolf, not only can we better direct our attention to the medium ("look over their shoulders for a moment and see what they are writing"), but we can also fall into familiarity or even collegiality with the writers who, like us, are also "people." When seated amongst these novelists, gone are claims to chronology or literary tradition. Instead, what remains to link otherwise disparate writers is what they share: *form*, or the shape of the devices used within their respective novels; *affect*, or our embodied response(s) to the operations of these devices within a novel, what Forster pointedly identifies as

a “transmitting force” and alternatively yet consistently nominalizes as “sensitivity,” “sentimentality,” “incalculability,” and “vitality”; and *personhood* (72). Hence, even in the case of Wells, his characters being “as flat as a photograph,” Foster finds “the photographs are agitated with such vigour that we forget their complexities lie on the surface and would disappear if it were scratched or curled up” (72). Slight of hand or not, the test of a novel is its liveliness as a two-dimensional work, an impression facilitated only by a sense of a shared reality—of holding the photograph in our hand, mesmerized by its vibrancy and depth.

Yet the importance of the affective dimensions of novel form and the challenges posed to maintaining it are most clearly laid out when Forster clarifies the function of “people” in novels. Forster uses the term “people” rather than “literary characters” because of the lively, almost living quality the latter bear in and bring to a novel: although literary characters are “word-masses” at root, and Forster is adamant that characters are not people like you and I, they affect and are affected by their (textual) environs much like real people (44). This almost living quality is what characters, as formal devices that resemble the attributes of living people, bring to novels, by way of a process Forster refers to as “acclimatization”—what takes place once characters, when introduced in novels, “adapt themselves to other requirements of their creator” and in doing so, hold together the form of the work. If we were to take a character like Defoe’s Moll Flanders, Forster proposes, we would find on attending to her liveliness (“breathing and eating, ... doing many of the things that are usually missed out” in other novels) that “the form of his book proceeds naturally out of her character,” which is to say, without Moll—who, given her prominence in the novel, is hardly a character in the novel but the very form of the work itself—the novel itself would not exist (56-7). “Whatever she does gives us a slight shock—not the jolt of disillusionment, but the thrill that proceeds from a living being,” and our measure of the form

of the novel is exclusively a measure of her vitality (60). Conversely, a character like Caleb Balderstone might not carry the entirety of *The Bride of Lammermoor*, either in name or presence in plot, yet he is no less essential to maintaining the affective integrity (and thus the form) of the work: in more complicated novels, “characters are inter-dependent,” and because any one character “is connected with the principals, ... the result is a closely woven fabric from which nothing can be removed” (66).

Literary character is not the only active literary device in a work, nor is it always the most prominent: it “has to fit in with other aspects of fiction,” he remarks (62). But character, Forster claims, is precisely the place where form and affect meet, where the formal integrity of the work rests on the affective ambitions of its characters. Indeed, to the extent a literary character does not “fit” the fiction—which is to say, the extent to which a character seems to be real, resisting complete subordination to the machinations of a text—the larger affective dimensions of the form as a whole become apprehensible, vivid, the photograph gaining in liveliness. When a character like Balderstone, for example, operates in conflict with other characters in the story and vies with plot for space, he exhibits a sense of life that subsequently diffuses throughout the work: life “radiates from its [the character’s] edges and from the scintillations it strikes when other elements in the novel impinge” (66, 68).

I begin this section with Forster’s conception of the affective ambitions of literary characters and their role in maintaining the affective and formal integrity of novels in order to address prevalent critical assumptions linking affect and literary character. Forster’s account of character still underwrites many critical assumptions about the emotional labor we place on literary characters: they are nexuses of our social, cultural, and ideological investments (as Mary Poovey and Deidre Lynch have demonstrated); along with narrators, they are the form with

which we tend to seat our sense of self, what Dorrit Cohn calls an “articulate self” or “discursive intelligence”; and we tend to place the work’s ethical claims on them, too, as argued by Martha Nussbaum and Dorothy Hale alike (Cohn 25).³¹ But Forster’s treatment of literary character also introduces an aspect typically overlooked regarding the relationship between affect and form in these other accounts. We assume that we associate affect with the facets of novel form that bear the closest resemblance to us, to the literary characters who are capable of affecting and of being affected by each other much like living beings. A story, or even a plot can affect us, Forster acknowledges, but only because what affects us within said elements is itself linked to character. In short, we assume novels affect us because their characters affect us. Yet as Forster finds, all of the other elements of novel form become affective and impact us by virtue of the way characters diffuse life through the medium. Character does not simply serve as the lynchpin of feeling in a work; character *distributes* feeling, passing it into channels otherwise untouched by an affective charge.³² All novels have characters or, at least, characterization, what would come to be called, in narratology, *actants*.³³ In this respect, a novel *without* characters should not be confused with something like the subtitle to Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, “a novel without a hero,” or a novel with no central character. A novel without a hero can remain a novel by virtue of having other characters conduct the emotional labor of maintaining the affective integrity of the work as a

³¹ See Poovey and Lynch as well as Nussbaum’s *Poetic Justice* (1997) and Hale’s *Social Formalism* (1998).

³² See Elaine Freedgood’s sense of “poverty” as both material and subjective impoverishment, which underscores just how much our treatment of fictional characters depends upon their articulation within a larger narrative system of affective representation—for example, how a particular character’s knowledge, perhaps otherwise thought of as a mere facet of their social position, is not only corroborated but reified by their representation through the imagined or stated social position of a third-person narrator.

³³ See A.J. Greimas on actants, which are not always to be conflated with character yet nonetheless appear to operate as entities much in the sense that Bentham describes entification.

whole. But a novel without characters would not be a novel, or at least could not transmit affect in ways a novel could, could not cohere as the form designated by the name “novel.”

David Copperfield unseats literary character as the usual affective coordinates of novelistic form. Indeed, readers of *David Copperfield* would be hard-pressed to find examples of affect adhering to any particular character in the novel or, for that matter, of characters holding together the form of the work itself. This confusion of the affective role of literary character first appears in a host of linguistic problems pertaining to identification and reference that spot Copperfield’s narration: the recurring use of indicatives like “Here is a long passage” (22), “Here is our pew in the church” (22), and “Here we stand” (157), written as if pointing to the text from within it; or the shift from the use of “I” statements in chapter titles like “I am born,” “I observe,” “I have a Change,” to the more impersonal chapter titles in the second half like “A Loss,” “A greater Loss,” and “A Visitor”; or scenes plagued with pronoun confusion (“He was in his library (I mean Doctor Strong was),” “That good creature – I mean Peggotty”); or, most perplexingly, moments in which the resurgence of memory prompts Copperfield to lose a sense of the distinction between his role as a narrator removed from the form of the work and his role as a character situated within it, as when he writes of the looming deaths of Ham and Steerforth: “I now approach an event in my life, so indelible, so awful, so bound by an infinite variety of ties to all that has preceded it, in these pages, that, from the beginning of my narrative, I have seen it growing larger and larger as I advanced, like a great tower in a plain, and throwing its forecast shadow even on the incidents of my childish days,” continuing “I do not recall it, but see it done; for it happens again before me” (215, 426, 721). In the lattermost example, Copperfield suggests that the upcoming narrative event has shaped the formal parameters of the narrative all along: “growing larger and larger as I advanced,” the event purportedly expands as approached by

character and narrator alike. However, its placement in the novel reflects little sense of this distortion of form, suggesting its magnitude has been wholly on the side of character and narrator, not author or, for that matter, readers. Thus, while it is certain that affect impacts form in the novel, it is difficult to identify consistent, predictable ways in which it does so—to identify types or even potential coordinates of affective influence, and as a result, to understand the significance of these affects from our position as readers.

Criticism on *David Copperfield* has similarly struggled to make sense of the affects in the novel as well as the overall affective cohesion of the work itself. This affective ambiguity has produced a rift in interpretations of the general affective form that the novel takes, interpretations which revolve around the social implications of the nebulous affects ascribed to Dickens's novel and, by extension, the affects it might engender in its readers. Are we to treat *David Copperfield* as a meditation on appropriate measures of love and means of happiness, as Martha Nussbaum, Rachel Ablow, and Audrey Jaffe have argued to different ends?³⁴ Or is the novel a “vast resentment machine” that extols the benefits of cultivating suspicions and venting hatred, as Joseph Litvak has claimed, further evidence of Dickens's prevailing misanthropy and pessimism?³⁵ Given the gulf between these two interpretations, it is difficult to determine what single affect *David Copperfield* represents on the whole, let alone what it produces in readers with any consistency. And within these accounts, character remains the recurring source of

³⁴ See Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds* (2007). See too Federico, who characterizes the narrative for its oscillation between activity and torpidity, which she finds situated around questions of happiness: “Dickens's own instincts compel him to place such undisciplined desires over active volition, which disturbs the overt moral trajectory of the book and produces a kind of biphasic experience between languor and hysteria” (80-81).

³⁵ Christopher Lane shares Litvak's claim to a much less genial Dickens, one whose attention to the atomization that yields anti-sociality (for Dickens, an “understandable” but not “desirable” state) ultimately proves to be at odds with his drive to represent ideal forms of social reciprocity (74). See too John Kucich.

affect's uncertainty: with whom do we (or can we) identify in *David Copperfield*? For whom do we feel the effusive sense of sentimentality Dickens has in other works managed to wring from readers?

These ambiguities have led critics to question how *David Copperfield* conceives of the connection between the affective parameters of its narrator and those of its readers—or, to put this differently, how the murkiness of Copperfield's affective life is close in kind to the hazy affective parameters of real, living persons. D.A. Miller has persuasively described Copperfield's appeal to a “novel-reading subject,” a subject both conditioned and defined by “the immense amount of daydreaming that accompanies the ordinary reading of a novel” and who, like Copperfield, sees the formation of subjectivity closely tied to states of affective susceptibility (213, 215).³⁶ In making this claim, Miller points to the abstract affect represented in and engendered by the novel—“a powerful affect... evacuated of any substantial content,” he writes, which wherever it appears in text is “soon displaced in an experience of fiction” (198). The “experience of fiction” engendered by *David Copperfield*, Miller argues, cuts across narration and characterization, leading readers to relate to and even confuse themselves for the eponymous subject represented in the narrative. But more than that: this vague sense of “experience” submits any attestation to the depth, profundity, or uniqueness of feeling to investigation and treats claims of personhood as similarly suspect, premised as they are on a claim to an interiority

³⁶ While Miller argues that Dickens's characters “make manifest how safe we are from the possibility of actually imitating them,” he also claims that they reflect the constraints we place on our own subjectivities, the boundaries we police and oppositions we maintain, as a means of distinguishing ourselves from others (208). This concession is, for Miller, ultimately a sign in *David Copperfield* of “the subject's accommodation to a totalizing system that has obliterated the difference he would make” (207). The emptiness particular to the subject hailed in *David Copperfield* is a unique form of literary identification: unlike the “Nobody” who, as Catherine Gallagher argues, is invoked in eighteenth-century fiction as a general type with whom readers could identify despite their own particularities, Miller's “novel-reading subject” is defined by a kind of non-identification with oneself. See Frances Ferguson, who marks a similar distinction between Miller and Gallagher in “Now It's Personal: D.A. Miller and Too-Close Reading” (2015).

simultaneously shared by everyone and impossible to verify beyond oneself. For Miller, the kind of particularization we see reproduced again and again in *David Copperfield*'s characters enjoins readers to question our indoctrination in similar systems of disciplinary constraint: despite their "diverse armor," characters like Uriah Heep, the Micawbers, and Copperfield "simply overlay a formal similarity of character that they have not determined and are powerless to affect" (203). Against the sense of particularity assigned to characters, Miller claims, we find confirmation of our vague boundaries and porous borders while at the same time see the conditions for our own ideological co-production and powerlessness.

Conversely, if reference in the nineteenth-century novel depends, as Gallagher claims, on the "nonparticular referential status of their characters"—characters who, in their fictionality, present types ("nobody in particular") from which we derive a sense of universality—then in *David Copperfield* we encounter abstractions too far removed from the coordinates of the particular to tether us to any single character (344). For Gallagher, novels enlist readers to imagine themselves as much more expansive and much less delimited than we otherwise feel ourselves to be, constrained as we are by our bodies and identities. Rather than affirm our particularity, she argues, characters can help us escape it, finding a kind of shared humanness in the universality represented in literature by character types. Although Gallagher does not address *David Copperfield* directly, her argument inverts the affective appeals identified by Miller *qua* fictionality and particularity: whereas Miller sees the particularity of character engendering a vague sense of our own lack of dimensions (lost in the "experience of fiction") and an unsettling recognition of our possible subjugation to a similar system of constraints, Gallagher finds that the universality of character—typified, reproducible by virtue of its lack of discrete reference or

individuality—enables the loosening of the constraints that tie us to names and persons, and instead enable us to identify in stronger ways along the forces of a shared humanity.

Nonetheless, both Gallagher and Miller are united in treating the vague sense of recognition introduced in a novel like *David Copperfield* as a product of how the novel invites readers to make sense of their own affective parameters, be it through the vigilant maintenance of our boundaries in response to unsettling and challenging feelings engendered in the course of reading, or our resistance to blatant impositions on our feelings, or even our acknowledgment of altogether uncertain boundaries between what we feel and how we are expected to feel. The reader-character confusion Miller and Gallagher both describe (and describe differently) is signaled throughout Dickens's novel in the curious status of Copperfield as both character and narrator, a confusion memorably synopsized by the novel's opening line: "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show" (11).³⁷ Copperfield's speculation over his centrality to the novel is perplexing: is this ambiguity intended for narrative suspense? Is it an attempt to refuse the generic requirements associated with an autobiographical narrative or "personal history"? Or is it a genuine uncertainty, perhaps an inability to ascertain how the "I" in the opening sentence will come to function as a character in the narrative? As readers soon find, none of these interpretations are wholly satisfying. Indeed, Copperfield's admission in the first chapter that "I can make no claim therefore to have known, at that time, how matters stood; or to have any remembrance, founded on the evidence of my own senses, of what follows" appears to hold true for the entire narrative (13). Although Copperfield's accounts of sorrow and suffering in the first

³⁷ See again Ferguson, who accounts for the understanding of free-indirect style Miller develops in his later work on Jane Austen: "Not equivalences, then, narration and character, but two distinct ways of inhabiting the same circumstances—and a proleptic mourning for the consciousness that will inevitably be sacrificed" (530).

few chapters withhold the possibility that “anybody else” might come to occupy the role of main character, this indeterminacy lasts well through the novel, as a much older Copperfield similarly speaks to the trouble in taking an account of his personal feelings as a claim to his status as a character. “Between these two irreconcilable conclusions: the one, that what I felt, was general and unavoidable; the other, that it was particular to me, and might have been different: I balanced curiously, with no distinct sense of their opposition to each other” (642). By way of its diffuseness, the novel appears to elide any “distinct sense” of the difference between the universal (“what I felt, was general and unavoidable”) and the particular (“what I felt... was particular to me, and might have been different”). In remaining at the level of the abstract, Copperfield suggests that his feelings do not present “irreconcilable conclusions,” as they initially seem to do, but are potentially one and the same. The universal and the particular are collapsed into each other, “with no distinct sense of their opposition” (642).

Above, we can begin to see the ambiguity of the relationship between affect and character in *David Copperfield* as primarily a problem of language. Here, we might quickly reread the opening line of Dickens’s novel: “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show” (11). In the first line, Dickens suggests that neither character nor narrator will serve as a reliable index of personhood in the story. Character *and* narrator—in this case the narrating “I”—is neither a means of identification (“the hero of my own life”) nor, for that matter, grounds for dis-identification (how can the position “I” “be held by anybody else?”). Instead, meaning is thrust back onto the work, as what “these pages must show.” Indeed, whenever Copperfield attempts to ascertain another character’s emotional life or describe his own affective state, the very act of doing so not only changes the formal dimensions of the novel but challenges the language

Copperfield can use to account for these changes, too. This observation about language and affect is not to be confused with the claim that language breaks down completely in *David Copperfield*, as if failing to form any link between signifier and signified—recognizing, as Jeremy Tambling notes, that the novel does present a deconstructive approach to this very relationship.³⁸ Nor, for that matter, do I take umbrage with the strained relationship between reality and reference in Dickens's novel. My observation instead concerns how the language of literary character can itself be made excessively unclear by affect, the formal dimensions of a novel expanding to accommodate and account for these ambiguities—or in Forster's more fitting image, become *saturated* with feeling—once the boundaries of character no longer adhere.

It is this challenge posed to language by affect that Bentham seeks to mitigate in *The Theory of Fictions* by way of understanding how we mistakenly attribute affective force to “fictitious entities.” As discussed in my Introduction, Bentham defines a fictitious entity as a grammatical unit that assumes a sense of real existence in its everyday use (a “nominal existence”) when, upon further examination, it bears no concrete existence beyond its inferential relationship to real entities (25). Most fictitious entities are noun-substantives like “quality,” “power,” or “right.” As Bentham finds, their hazy nature fosters the mistaken attribution of form and space to these otherwise imperceptible concepts as well as creates our dependence on them to make any given discourse operate. “To be spoken of at all, every fictitious entity must be spoken of as if it were real”; as a result, we speak of “quality,” “power,” and “right” as if they were indeed perceptible, and as if the only obstacle to pinning these words to real objects and real subjects was a lack of a commensurate effort on our part to properly discover and confirm their existence (13).

³⁸ See Tambling's introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel.

Yet these fictitious entities add an additional complication when we begin to attribute feelings to them. Bentham finds that fictitious entities take on different properties and propensities, new grammatical associations and linguistic relations, and in general appear incapable of extrication from discourse itself, when we task them with conveying emotion. The transitive nature of language invites, even breeds these emotional errors, as to speak of our emotions depends on the attribution of affective states to grammatical units that are non-identical with our persons. Consider first, Bentham asks, the distinction between the subject of the statement “*I am weary*” and the subject of the statement “*Apples are sweet*”:

In both these cases, an object other than the state of my own mind is the subject of the discourse held by me, but in neither of them is it the immediate subject. In both of them the immediate subject is no other than the state of my own mind—an opinion entertained by me in relation to the ulterior object or subject. In the one case [the former] it is an opinion of which the subject is the state of my own body. In the other it is an opinion concerning the state of a body exterior to my own body. (71)

In considering the implied person beneath these assertions, the subject of communication shifts from a real, living subject to a state of mind or condition—in the case of the apple, a subject external to the living subject. “The immediate subject of a communication made by language is always the state of the speaker’s mind,” Bentham writes (70). Bentham’s rationale for introducing these “ulterior” objects and subjects, then, is to show how we attribute not only grammatical coherence but also object or subject status, even agency, to names ultimately removed from verifiable claims. “Common to all discourse in the composition of which an assertion of the state of the speaker’s mind intervenes, precedes, introduces, and weakens the ulterior assertion which lies beyond it,” this ulterior assertion not only becomes occluded but *entified*, in Bentham’s phrasing, producing an “infirmity” and preventing verification of its existence (72). How might we know that “*weary*,” to take Bentham’s example, is a bundle of sensations within the mind or body and not simply an “assemblage of entities” exterior to us?

Might we instead see that these same qualities could very well be independent of and exterior to our body, like in the case of the quality of apples? “[I]f I undertake to pronounce an opinion relative to the cause of any of those sensations, from that moment I am liable to fall. I here launch into the ocean of art and science. I here commence physician; and, in the field of the physician the dominion of error is but too severely felt” (71). Falling on speculative claims to the existence of entities exterior to our person, we construct and maintain an elaborate discourse hinging on the fictions we produce solely for the conveyance of ideas and facilitation of communication.

Bentham appears to practice a form of Humean skepticism in his questioning of a reality beyond the bounds of the body. Yet Bentham is ultimately not interested in the real material existence of terms like “quality” or “power.” Rather, Bentham wants to understand how we use these names to support communication, and how problems attending the expressive dimensions of language emerge and seem to lend a sense of reality, liveliness, to these words. I thus take his project as a vital link to the affective transformation of novel form in the nineteenth century and in two ways. First, Bentham sees affect as product of language, not as a pre-linguistic force incapable of figuration, and in this sense, he ultimately wants to dismiss its explanatory power as, in Eugenie Brinkema’s phrasing, a “transcendental signified” (xiv). Indeed, affects emerge in Bentham’s account as a kind of residue of nominalization, the by-products of language taken as a natural process: “Words may be considered as the result of a sort of analysis—a chemicological process for which, till at a comparatively much later period than that which gave birth to propositions, the powers of the mind were not ripe,” he writes (68). Figuration emerges from language, the latter understood as the effort to achieve communication and then subsequently to arrest words by way of increasingly complicated forms of figuration: signs, images, written

symbols and, eventually, entire alphabets. “In the earlier stages of society, all conceptions, and consequently, all expressions, were generally indistinct; it is only by long-continued courses of attention that directness in conception and expression have been produced,” and as “words were formed by the decomposition of propositions, so were letters by the decomposition of words” (73-74). In Bentham’s long view of the history of language, a fictitious entity is but an obstacle to taking language to its apex as an indexical system, the goal being for any discourse that only the names of entities “universally employed in the conveyance of the import intended to be conveyed” should be present (74).

Second, Bentham’s efforts to eliminate general vagaries prompted by fictions in a given discourse—what he refers to as “seats of unclearness”—prompt us to think through his methods for clarifying a linguistic problem like affect (76). Affect is conventionally treated in criticism as an autonomous force resistant to nominalization and therefore immune to critique. Yet Bentham demonstrates how analysis can aid in clarifying and demystifying claims regarding the reality of fictitious entities like affects. As Bentham observes, real entities and fabulous entities are subject to reality testing through *exposition*. Bentham defines exposition as “the designation of every operation which has for its object, or end in view, the exclusion or expulsion of unclearness in any shape; to the operation, and thereby... to the portion of discourse by which the end is endeavoured to be accomplished” (76). Under “exposition,” Bentham groups individuation, representation, translation, etymologization, definition, paraphrasis and, under paraphrasis, phraseoplerosis and archetypation. Each method helps to expose the linguistic relationships amongst terms through further explication and explanation. However, only paraphrasis reveals the pliancy of language and its true capabilities as an indexical system. Bentham finds that individuation, representation, and definition only hold as exhaustive methods “[i]f all words were

significative of real entities” which could “at all times be brought within the reach of... perception”; similarly, translation only works when “a word [is] already known to and understood by the learner... [and] expressive of the same idea or image as the one represented by the word to be expounded”; and etymologization when we understand roots and can thus make sense of inflected words and cognates (79, 81-2). Unlike these methods, paraphrasis stays within the bounds of a given discourse and entails “transmuting into a proposition, having for its subject some real entity, proposition which has not for its subject any other than a fictitious entity” (86). We can begin to do so, Bentham finds, by recasting and redescribing a word in a new grammatical context and constructing a complete proposition (via phraseoplerosis, adding “the name of the predicate, together with some sign performing the office of the copula”) in order to confirm its real existence; or through invocation (via archetypation) of “the image of some real action or state of things,” a “physical idea” or origin obscured but nonetheless underlying a psychological effect (88, 86).

For the clarity and efficiency of any given discourse, Bentham wants for no obstacles to remain, what he refers to as “dark spots,” which “have the effect of casting a damp upon the mind, by presenting to it the idea of its ignorance, and thence of its weakness” (cxxxviii). To be certain, this is Bentham’s panopticism applied to language itself: to eliminate these dark spots in language would be to form a discourse in which, Ogden explains, drawing from Bentham’s collected works, the “‘ideas, more or less clear, correct, and complete,’ would be ‘radiated to the surveying eye.’” It is these “dark spots” which seem to permit a kind of affective seepage, spots “‘to which no eye... can turn itself without giving entrance to sentiments of humiliation and disgust’” (cxxxviii). There are even some forms of entification that prove so complicated and distant from whatever real entity forms their relation that they prove immune to exposition.

Bentham's term for a particularly difficult fictitious entity is an "elliptical fiction," a word that produces "a certain degree of complexity" and "may be made to have the effect, and thus, as it were, comprise the import, of an indefinite number of other words" (67-68). Implicating a host of related and unrelated words, drawing together a vast web of propositions, each "elliptical fiction" poses obstacles to direct analysis: "much clearness, correctness, or advance to completeness could not naturally be expected" without much effort to analyze all of its extant connections, Bentham notes (69).

Thinking of the difficulties accompanying the extraction of just one element in a vast web of propositions, tempting the collapse of a discourse that runs by virtue of its fictions, Bentham brings us back to Forster and the affective integrity of the novel. Here, the gap between our two definitions of "fiction," the first grammatical, the second literary, finally appears to narrow. Fictitious entities produce obscurities in a given discourse when we grant words living properties beyond their transitive functions, and while we must work to eliminate unnecessary obscurities, we might arrive at "dark spots," places where we can no more attribute real existence yet no further question the entity itself. Fictitious entities create similar obscurities in novels when we suddenly grant undue agency and autonomy not only to devices with purportedly clear boundaries (literary characters) but also to non-specific, indiscrete aspects of literary form (affects). We can think of this issue much like the confusion we generate when we make terms like "power" and "affect" grammatical agents, noun phrases that think, speak, feel, and altogether act as if they had the will and cogency of real entities—persons, for example. While we might look to exorcise these fictitious entities in novels, much like in our everyday language, in doing so, we run into difficulties pertaining to the operations of the form.

Thus, the relationship between affect and character in the novel seems to be clarified by Bentham's drive to root out fictitious entities: when we are unable to make sense of the affective boundaries of literary characters, as it seems to be the case in *David Copperfield*, we are unable to understand our confusion about the work's affective influence over our person. In turn, the devices with which we are most familiar as coordinates of affect no longer hold as discrete formal units, frustrating our sense of their function in a given work and leading us to instead grant character-status to feelings that, virtually unimpeded, drift through the text. Indeed, characters are discrete units only insofar as we can name them—we associate Pecksniff with the name "Pecksniff," and we understand that after Qulip dies, his character is consigned to what preceded him, and bars his name from bearing agency on the events that come after. This is not the case in *David Copperfield*, where characters—or more appropriately, their feelings—loom past the length of their life, as in the case of Steerforth's death, presaged yet unanticipated, haunting the text after his demise; or when feelings persist well beyond their chapters of origin, as remains the case of the Murdstones and Copperfield's ongoing sense of persecution. Focusing on these feelings, often in the absence of the characters they are purported linked to, leads to a vaguer sense of what characters can and cannot do. In the next two sections, I explore Dickens's struggle over the relationship between affect and character in his novel *David Copperfield* by both applying Bentham's account of exposition to literary character and by seeing how Copperfield as a narrator appears to practice similar methods of definition and linguistic clarification. The following section deals with the difficulties in treating David Copperfield as a discrete character.

II. Indiscrete Feelings: David Copperfield

David Copperfield is rife with problems of language: issues of pronoun confusion, vague shifts in narrative tense, and opaque references to feelings purportedly felt but oddly incommunicable via print. Yet these problems also orbit in the novel around characters who like the narrator wrestle with their words. Indeed, reading *David Copperfield*, one is struck by the number of characters who mirror Copperfield's struggle over affect in his telling. To identify just a few: Mr. Dick and his "Memorial," a giant paper kite "covered with manuscript, very closely and laboriously written" and used for "diffusing" facts; Doctor Strong and his dictionary, which Copperfield estimates "might be done in one thousand six hundred and forty-nine years, counting from the Doctor's last, or sixty-second, birthday"; and Mr. Micawber and his unending stream of personal correspondence, penned and posted "on all possible and impossible occasions" (195, 226, 647). These characters appear to derive not just their personal characteristics, but also their very status *as* characters from their struggles to gain control over their affective lives, which have become exacerbated and impossible to manage in relation to their textual labors as well as in relation to Copperfield's. Whether struggling "for upwards of ten years endeavouring to keep King Charles the First out of the Memorial," in the case of Mr. Dick, or attempting to advance beyond entries under "D," in the case of Doctor Strong, their persistent efforts speak to a larger theme in *David Copperfield*: how character appears to fight with its enlistment in the novel as the bearer of affect, as the site where the affects of the novel congregate, let alone cohere (197).

A great part of the difficulty in determining the relationship between affect and character in *David Copperfield* derives from the fact that the relationship between the two appears to change from one character to another. As indicated above, several characters bear frustrated, difficult relationships with their texts. However, other characters derive satisfaction, even great pleasure, from wrestling with them. Uriah Heep, for example, pores over Tidd's *Practice* "with

such demonstrative attention, that his lank forefinger... made clammy tracks along the page (or so I fully believed) like a snail”; and even Mr. Micawber, Copperfield notes, “had a relish in [the] formal piling up of words,” so that even while reading from a long list of injustices committed by Uriah, he nevertheless appears to be “almost smacking his lips” (222, 692-93). Other characters are simply impossible to distinguish from their affective relationships to their texts: Mr. Chilip appears “so extremely conciliatory in his manner that he seemed to apologise to the very newspaper for taking the liberty of reading it”; and it would be difficult to define Julia Mills as a character apart from the “sympathetic pages” she passes between Copperfield and Dora, seeming to exist only as a conduit for their affection (or as Copperfield speculates, their “afflictions,” remarking “[s]he petted them, as I may say, and made the most of them” (763, 519, 513). Although Copperfield may sometimes seem skeptical of the intensity of the pains or pleasures felt by others undergoing these struggles, he never dismisses these efforts as anything less than frustratingly difficult—perhaps because own his narrative, *David Copperfield*, is the product of a similar effort, and a difficult one at that.

To better understand how the difficulties of ascertaining affect uniquely impacts characterization in the novel, we can turn to a particular character: Mr. Micawber. Throughout the novel, it is difficult to distinguish between his underlying emotional disposition, which, typically genial, is frequently interrupted by episodes of uncharacteristic despair, and his momentary (and certainly momentous) outbursts of emotion, which appear with enough frequency to cloud our sense of his typical bearing. This difficulty also inheres in the contradiction between those emotions Micawber expresses in person and those which he conveys in print; for whenever he “turns up” in the plot, his subsequent departure routinely occasions a posthoc letter, happy or hopeless in content, which contradicts the hopeless or happy state of

feeling he had presented in person. Oscillations in his character yield other formal effects on the novel. His sudden appearance draws narrative attention to the immediate financial relief of his family, to the celebration of a new chapter in their lives, or both; his letters interrupt and punctuate moments in Copperfield's recollections, or they arrive in chapters exploring unrelated character arcs; and his reappearance in the narrative is only sometimes anticipated, and then only via reference to a vague "Somebody."

Yet the most surprising development in Mr. Micawber as a character, and the most pronounced impact he has on the novel's form, is the chapter he occasions near the end of the novel, titled "I assist at an Explosion" (681). Prior to these final chapters, *David Copperfield* presents little to suggest that any of its plots will intersect. Few overlap in ways typical of a Dickens novel; a handful of seemingly significant characters (the Murdstones, Mr. Mell) gradually fade from view as the narrative lurches forward; even the plots of the novel's "villains" remain relatively underdeveloped, their machinations exceedingly abstruse. (After all, there are no chapters focused solely on Uriah or Littimer, like corresponding chapters focused on Fagin in *Oliver Twist* or on Rigaud in *Little Dorrit*, and little sense, too, that either Uriah or Littimer has any real capacity to impact Copperfield by any direct means, focusing instead as they do on the persecution of Wickfield and the Peggottys, respectively.) As an effect of Copperfield's limited perspective as a first-person narrator, his myopic attention to "[t]he silent gliding on of my existence – the unseen, unfelt progress of my life" gives a sluggishness to the work as a whole and the impression that its various plots will simply fail to pan out (251).

Yet Chapter 52 presents the culmination of one such plot, as Copperfield and company find Mr. Micawber suddenly primed for an emotional outburst that will expose the extent of Uriah's corruption: "I'll partake of no one's hospitality," he begins, "'until I have – a – moved

Mount Vesuvius – to eruption – on – a – the abandoned rascal – HEEP!’” (654). Whereas in the past Mr. Micawber has been known for an oscillating temperament and his “roundabout communication”—i.e., an inability to direct his speech to discrete objects of immediate attention or concern—his employment by Wickfield and Heep mid-narrative finds him absorbing the “legal phraseology” of the firm and changing in character as a result. He thus appears in the narrative with less regularity and less emotional equivocation (647, 398). This sudden return to the unpredictable Micawber of the first thirty chapters prompts Copperfield to take his current affective condition much more seriously:

At another time I should have been amused by this; but I felt that we were all constrained and uneasy, and I watched Mr Micawber so anxiously, in his vacillations between an evident disposition to reveal something, and a counter-disposition to reveal nothing, that I was in a perfect fever. (653)

In the passage above, it is difficult for Copperfield to predict what form Mr. Micawber’s “explosion” will ultimately take—so difficult, in fact, that it makes Copperfield feverish himself, speculating much like his readers whether he will “reveal something” or, ultimately, “reveal nothing.” Not only does Copperfield struggle with understanding how Mr. Micawber’s presence impacts his own emotional state in this episode, but as a result, he struggles to understand the emotional states of other characters who are present, too: “I felt that we were all constrained and uneasy,” he writes, a statement either meant to report on an emotional atmosphere shared by all characters and observed by the narrator—what “we” felt—or meant to stand as simply an observation made by himself as a character—what “I” felt. The “we” and the “I” mark his dual status, and the form of the sentence “I felt that we...” allows both interpretations to be true. Arriving as we do with Copperfield, character, at the “explosion” so forecast by Micawber and finding Uriah and Littimer not just guilty, but surreptitiously conveyed to a penitentiary that has sprung up as if overnight between chapters, we feel like Copperfield as if we simply do not

possess the right tools for capturing, understanding, and subsequently conveying the fluctuating affects taking place in the novel. More than this: we feel as if any claim to feeling within the novel suddenly entails feeling as a whole, implicating the entire work in making sense of any singular feeling. As a result, measuring any one feeling makes it seem like feelings are, in general, impossible to extract and analyze independent of their embedded context within the work, incapable of describing as discrete, singular emotions.

This is true in *David Copperfield* as a whole: any assertion of feeling appears to threaten the stability of the form itself and question the means by which readers can make sense of the distinction between one feeling and the next. Although Mrs. Gummidge's seemingly harmless assertion "I feel more than other people do, and I show it more" can be treated as mere hyperbole, similar claims about the veracity or strength of feeling are tried out and found to be not just disingenuous, but altogether dangerous for maintaining a clear sense of character (46). Similarly, Uriah's incessant claims to being "umble" and repeated declaration "I have always liked you, Copperfield" leads the latter to instinctively doubt the feelings espoused by the former, to begin to develop "a perplexed suspicious anxiety as to what he might be going to say next" (354). In the ensuing scene, Copperfield struggles to hide his emotional response to Uriah's professions as the two hold an uncomfortable conversation over tea: "he fell into meek transports with the room," Copperfield remarks; "he professed so much emotion, that I could joyfully have scalded him" (352). "[U]nused to disguise what I so strongly felt," Copperfield finds Uriah's affect not just impossible to arrest but deeply upsetting to his own affective state, especially once Uriah declares his "pure affection" for Agnes (353, 355). Whether aggravated in the moment by Uriah's "deferential servility" or rekindled once more across the distance of narration, Copperfield attempts to describe the impact this disclosure has (or had) on him:

He seemed to swell and grow before my eyes; the room seemed full of the echoes of his voice; and the strange feeling (to which, perhaps, no one is quite a stranger) that all this had occurred before, at some indefinite time, and that I knew what he was going to say next, took possession of me. (355-356)

Reacting to the premonitory feeling “that all this had occurred before,” Copperfield the character appears strangely infused with Copperfield the narrator’s sense of foreshadowing as Uriah “seemed to swell and grow” almost in relation to his growing prominence within the narrative. Indeed, his encounters with Uriah following this episode find him paying greater and greater attention to precisely how the character conceals his true feelings through his slippery language: “You know what it is, Uriah, as well as I do” Copperfield states, confronting him on his designs over the Wickfields, to which Uriah replies, “You must put it into words... I couldn’t myself” (358).³⁹

As I note in the previous section, Miller’s enduring claim about the Victorian novel—that novels enable the personification of readers, not so much through hailing and enlisting but by *producing* them in relation to the act of novel reading—depends on an understanding of affect as primarily impacting readers and not characters. In other words, his is ultimately a claim about the affects *produced* by the form of the novel rather than forms of affect *in* the novel. However, much of *David Copperfield* focuses on the latter—specifically, on the need to hold fast to a conception of character as bounded, delimited, and defined by formal features precisely when affects seem to make their parameters hazy and indistinct, blurring the boundaries between the general and the particular. We can put this relationship between affect and character in other words: in *David Copperfield*, affects lend a sense of reality to characters like Emily, Steerforth, Uriah Heep, even Mr. Micawber, making them appear more like real persons—more rounded

³⁹ Much has been written on the Copperfield-Heep relationship. In particular, see Litvak. See too Miriam Bailin on the prominence of the “rivalry-renunciation plot” in nineteenth-century fiction.

and alive, more difficult to pin down and describe through distinct attributes and traits, more real by virtue of their affective ambiguity, their similarity to the diffuse form of the novel—than the narrator would ultimately like to suggest. In this way, Mr. Micawber “turns up” precisely because real entities operate according to principles alien to mere marks on the page: they surprise, they aggravate, they arrive and depart with more or less frequency than we as readers are capable of predicting, and at times they leave us wanting a more discrete means of understanding their wants and wishes. As *David Copperfield* finds, what is ultimately wanting explanation in any single character is what is invariably outside it, diffused amongst the other elements of the text: the relations drawn amongst characters, the feelings that lend clarity to each one only to the degree that they are shared, stirring, and animating each other by formal association, by their status as mere marks on the page.

David Copperfield’s interest in the fictionality of its characters and reluctance to clarify its relationship to a reality beyond the novel makes it unclear what relationship between social reality and literary representation it wants to assert—and, as Miller and others have demonstrated, the kind of reader it wants to affect. As a result, its characters appear to lack the kind of formal constraints often afforded to Dickens’s characters in his other works (limited narrative attention and narrative space), and the very constraints against which they would ordinarily struggle. This lack of cohesion around characters leads us to question what, precisely, *Copperfield* (or perhaps Dickens) takes “character” as a formal category to mean, or why he uses it at all for his narrative. If he intends his narrative as a “personal history,” as the extended title to the novel suggests, then the referential dimension of characterization—the claim that Emily, Steerforth, Dora, Mr. Micawber, David Copperfield, et al. are based on real persons and are not simply fictional characters—should be sought out as justification for the indiscernible,

unpredictable nature of the characters represented on the page, their fluctuations a welcome reminder of the indiscernible and unpredictable nature of real persons. Yet the novel appears to seek the opposite: it is the fictionality of its characters, the ways in which they *should* lack concrete reality and be capable of manipulation as mere marks on the page, that Dickens's narrator wishes he could maintain.

In this way, we can approach an analysis of *David Copperfield* by way of Bentham's approach for denaturing fictitious entities, discovering the fictional basis of entangled grammatical forms that take on the properties and propensities of real subjects. Of all of the characters in *David Copperfield*, it is particularly difficult to ascertain Copperfield's "characteristics," receding as he often does from actions otherwise typical to characters. For example, when Copperfield and Mr. Pegotty finally track down Emily with the assistance of Martha, Copperfield stumbles into a situation in which the distinction between his position as a narrator and role as a character becomes murky. Seeing Rosa threaten Emily's life, watching from the safety of an adjoining room, Copperfield is frozen in inaction, not just unable to come forward and take action, but seemingly bound by his position as a narrator to observe and transcribe from without:

I could only see, of the room beyond, that it was pretty large; that there was a bed in it; and that there were some common pictures of ships upon the walls. I could not see Miss Dartle, or the person whom we had heard her address. Certainly, my companion could not, for my position was the best. [...] I did not know what to do. Much as I desired to put an end to the interview, I felt that I had no right to present myself; that it was for Mr. Peggotty alone to see her and recover her. Would he never come? I thought impatiently. (659-660)

As this scene shows, Copperfield's inability to act attests to the divided role he occupies as both character and narrator, as an agent within the narrative and as a narrator (and presumably person)

from without.⁴⁰ As a character, he aspires to the knowledge of a narrator, to understand Rosa's motivations and to know "the person whom we had heard her address"; as a narrator, he finds himself drawn to intervene like a character, seeing Rosa about to strike Emily and noting "I had almost thrown myself between them" (662). The two positions, different as they purportedly are for the operation of narrative, have become oddly intertwined in this scene: unable to act and yet unable to observe, Copperfield simply waits for Mr. Peggotty to arrive, waiting for the resolution of a scene that has already taken place.

Copperfield appears similarly torn between these two roles, character and narrator, in chapters like "A Retrospect," "Another Retrospect," and "A Last Retrospect" which cover protracted periods of time during which Copperfield loses a sense of his discrete thoughts, feelings, even actions as a character and must draw instead on the narrator to fill in details when and where applicable. "Let me stand aside, to see the phantoms of those days go by me, accompanying the shadow of myself, in dim procession," the pages that follow slipping into a vague present perfect tense ("We have removed," "I am going to be married") to describe events already well past (577, 578). The protracted period covered in this chapter gives way to further grammatical indistinction, as even Copperfield the character, "the shadow of myself," fades from view and loses the pronouns that would attribute a clearer sense of action and agency. "The rest is all a more or less incoherent dream" he remarks, before a series of prepositional phrases takes center stage: "Of the clergyman and clerk appearing," "Of there being a breakfast," and "Of the pair of hired post-horses being ready" (582, 584). In these chapters, affect appears to overtake narrative, to issue into an unstructured flow of narration that seems to stall between tenses; here, character, it seems, no longer describes a particular formal feature, no longer holds discernible

⁴⁰ On Copperfield's inaction, see Jesse Rosenthal, who understands decisionism as a product of narrative options rather than exclusively individual will.

narrative space, but cedes attention to the fluctuations of mood stretched out over so many months and years, each “retrospect” virtually indistinguishable from the last.

Despite the suspicion with which the novel ultimately treats its characters, it does not manage to bring the same attention to an interrogation of affect. In this respect, the novel becomes less a narrative of personal formation than an investigation into how we personify literary forms like character, how we grant them the qualities that appear to inhere in real persons, and our own struggles to arrest, manage, and make sense of these qualities when they appear too diffuse for nomination. It should be no surprise then when, towards the end of the novel, Copperfield presents his wish that the very words on the page will rise up and refuse their linkage to real persons and events in the world, their subjugation to characters, or even their subordination to grammatical clauses. This refusal is suggested early in the novel, as when Copperfield observes during his lessons under Mr. Murdstone the unruliness of print: “I felt the words of my lessons slipping off, not one by one, or line by line, but by the entire page. I tried to lay hold of them; but they seemed, if I may so express it, to have put skates on, and to skim away from me with a smoothness there was no checking” (61). Early in the narrative, the agency given to the words on the page is a premonition of a slow yet steady uprising that takes place by its end:

We talk about the tyranny of words, but we like to tyrannise over them too; we are fond of having a largely superfluous establishment of words to wait upon us on great occasions; we think it looks important, and sounds well. As we are not particular about the meaning of our liveries on state occasions, if they be but fine and numerous enough, so, the meaning or necessity of our words is a secondary consideration, if there be but a great parade of them. And as individuals get into trouble by making too great a show of liveries, or as slaves when they are too numerous rise against their masters, so I think I could mention a nation that has got into many great difficulties, and will get into many greater, from maintaining too large a retinue of words. (692)

As if commenting here on the length of the novel, the demand for “[t]oo large a retinue of words,” *Copperfield* suggests, makes “the meaning or necessity of our words... a secondary consideration” (692). Throughout *David Copperfield*, Dickens underscores the fact that the agency we attribute to literary character is ultimately a byproduct of words and their construction of other formal features within the work, not a claim to the representation of a particular individual, particular kind of subject, or discrete form of feeling. But in the search for clarity and in his attempt to keep clear boundaries to characters, *Copperfield* ultimately reproduces the problem he sought to avoid in setting out to write his history: as the novel grows in length, the words and clauses piling up, it loses a sense of cohesion, of clear affective import, and its characters recede into an undifferentiated mass of feeling.

III. Elliptical Fiction: Rosa Dartle

In the previous section, I argued for treating the diffuseness and migration of affect in *David Copperfield* as a problem generated by the ambiguous parameters of literary character.

Throughout the novel, “character” appears to underperform as a formal category, as characters with particularly unpredictable dispositions fail to meet the parameters that would make them operate as predictable narrative agents or, as *Copperfield*’s narration illustrates with great frequency, even as legible orthographic marks on the page. Indeed, part of the unpredictability of character in *David Copperfield* stems from the startling ways in which characters evade or defy reference, at times strikingly aware of their fictionality, and in doing so, escape the distortion and compression typical in other works by the novelist. The formal parameters of character even fail to hold for *Copperfield* who, more and more in the novel, encounters an inability to attest to his past or present emotions or even account for his own unique characteristics. Yet to solve these

issues of diffusion would both eliminate the affective atmosphere maintained in the work and reduce it to a mere mass of words.

David Copperfield's emphasis on its fictionality makes it difficult to treat the novel as a site of explicit social critique. The novel appears to afford very little space to discrete social issues stemming from Dickens's historical moment or lived reality and, as a narrator, Copperfield does not issue into any direct address against existing persons or institutions, an element otherwise typical to Dickens's novels or, at very least, typical to their narrators. But, and perhaps unsurprisingly, it is difficult to abandon concerns for social reality when we consider that literary character typically entails (if not explicitly intends reference to) real persons. For this reason, it is impossible to ignore the representation of characters in the novel who fail to adhere to the narrator's (and by extension, the novelist's) idea of particular character types—specifically, female characters. This is especially true when considering, as critics have observed, that variations in Copperfield's affective disposition are closely tied to his domestic situation, to the prospects and responsibilities he imagines for himself as a husband and, at different points in the novel, the expectations he places on characters like Emily, Dora, and Agnes.⁴¹

Yet it is clear that female characters also introduce affective problems into the narrative, if not the very affective diffuseness that appears throughout the novel:

The old unhappy feeling pervaded my life. It was deepened, if it were changed at all; but it was as undefined as ever, and addressed me like a strain of sorrowful music faintly heard in the night. I loved my wife dearly, and I was happy; but the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting. [...] Sometimes, the speculation came into my thoughts, What might have happened, or what would have happened, if Dora and I had never known each

⁴¹ See Poovey, Armstrong, and Michael McKeon. Emily Rena-Dozier argues for seeing a more nuanced link between domesticity and genre in Dickens's novel. "What Dickens's engagement with the domestic novel in *David Copperfield* shows us," Rena-Dozier writes, "is that critics must come to terms with a new problem: how to understand domestic fiction and the domestic sphere without the habitual conflation of domesticity with femininity" (825).

other? But, she was so incorporated with my existence, that it was the idlest of all fancies, and would soon rise out of my reach and sight, like gossamer floating in the air. (642)

In the passage above, Copperfield's speculations on what his life might have looked like had he married another resemble his other attempts to make sense of affect in the narrative: "it was as undefined as ever," Copperfield notes, appearing as "it" does like a character, an affect, or both, entering and reentering his narrative and, as Copperfield notes, "[it] addressed me like a strain of sorrowful music faintly heard in the night." The diffuseness of Copperfield's "old unhappy feeling" in the final stretch of the novel is confusedly linked to Dora, the "child-wife" whose inability to keep house for Copperfield proves to be not just increasingly frustrating to the aspiring professional but, as her sudden sickness in the final quarter of the novel suggests, ultimately fatal to her character. Indeed, the passage above suggests that Dora and "[t]he old unhappy feeling" are ultimately separate entities in kind, albeit somehow linked via form. Although Copperfield places much of his affective hopes and aspirations into Dora—"I was steeped in Dora," he remarks after meeting her, "I was not merely over head and ears in love with her, but I was saturated through and through"—upon marriage, their affairs take on the same affective disorder present elsewhere in the novel (439). For example, after discovering that a page under their employment stole Dora's watch, Copperfield tries once more to broach the matter of improving their domestic disorganization. "'My love,' said I, 'it is very painful to me to think that our want of system and management, involves not only ourselves (which we have got used to), but other people,'" Copperfield states, continuing to remark "'there is contagion in us. We infect every one about us.'" (638). Copperfield's concern for the "contagion" their affective disorder breed draws from a chapter sequence earlier in the novel when the airy sentiments generated around their union are immediately grounded in the reality of domestic duty. The former "retrospect," which concerns the hazy events leading up to their marriage,

hovers between the simple past and the present tense, finding Copperfield loosened from the relationship he has otherwise struggled to establish between character and narrator: “I can’t check off my happiness as it takes place. I feel in a misty and unsettled kind of state; as if I had got up very early in the morning a week or two ago, and had never been to bed since.” (580). Unlike a financial ledger or, for that matter, a novel plot, happiness cannot be “check[ed] off... as it takes place.” It is precisely the “misty and unsettled” quality of this happiness that he intends to fix via literary form when, in the opening of the following chapter, “Our Housekeeping,” he resolves that marriage requires both persons to enter more stable and secure roles as characters—indeed, that it even requires discrete chapters with names like “Our Housekeeping” and “Domestic.”

Copperfield’s expectations for his marriage clearly reflect uneven gender roles and their corresponding character types encountered elsewhere in Dickens’s work.⁴² As a dutifully employed husband, Copperfield sees himself as securing the means to make Dora a diligent yet doting housekeeper; as a diligent yet doting housekeeper, Dora should provide the comforts needed to sustain and fulfill him as a dutifully employed husband. Looking to the novel’s treatment of other marital indiscretions—Annie’s want of supplication to Doctor Strong, Emily’s betrayal of Ham—the novel’s dependence on domestic ideology appears itself an appeal to a structural principle otherwise sorely lacking in the narrative.

In this sense, Copperfield’s expectations for his marriage also reflect his hazy understanding of his narrative and, in turn, for Dora’s capabilities as a character. These expectations fall asymmetrically on Dora who, as the aim and end of the marriage plot resolved midway through Copperfield’s “personal history” fails to hold up to these ideals past their

⁴² See Kate Flint.

honeymoon. “I did feel, sometimes, for a little while, that I could have wished my wife... had had more character and purpose, to sustain me and improve me by; had been endowed with power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me,” conclusively stating “I took upon myself the toils and cares of our life, and had no partner in them” (596-97). His wish for a wife “with power to fill up the void” is a wish for a stable kind of character who fits into this role in form and content alike: a wish for a kind of character wholly unlike any represented in the novel. Although Agnes’s adoption of this exact role following Dora’s death could be said to reflect an ideal character type defined almost wholly by gender, her ideality also reflects by contrast on the looseness of the very formal features he has found lacking in other characters, including himself.⁴³

Other female characters in the novel similarly defy the formal parameters expected of their respective character types. One can look to Betsey Trotwood and Miss Mowcher, who are both presented as exceptions to domestic ideology. Yet in concluding this chapter, I consider a character who most defies her character type and yet who nevertheless maintains formal qualities (who “is all edge,” as Steerforth remarks); who does not evaporate into the diffuseness of affect, like Dora, and instead manages to wield it with startling force (277). This is Rosa Dartle. As critics have shown, Rosa proves quite difficult to ascertain as a character: while her eccentricities put her in the company of Dickens’s other eccentrics whose actions and speech attest to their compression within the narrative, in the context of *David Copperfield*, she is one of the only characters who remains enigmatic and yet individual, remarkable for her habits of speech and

⁴³ Schor argues that Agnes ultimately challenges Copperfield’s position in the narrative as narrator: “Agnes’s story is also the narrative that most completely revises David’s, and puts into question his accounting of things; Agnes’s account of both their lives suggests the daughter has not only her own story, but her own version of his. [...] [A]ll this not only revises, and supplements, his novel, but suggests that he has been a lousy narrator, indeed, reader, of his own life; that he is hardly fit to write his own autobiography” (12). It may also be suggested that the two are an ideal match precisely because they are both relatively undefined as characters.

gesture and yet irreducible to them.⁴⁴ Indeed, part of the difficulty surrounding her character concerns the fact that, while she seems to initially pose a clear type to Copperfield—“not agreeable to look at, but with some appearance of good looks too ... about thirty years of age, and [who] wished to be married”—she elsewhere appears indecipherable to character and narrator alike, her position and influence in the Steerforth home unspecified, her daily operations and motives unclear (275). This mystery is similarly sustained by her interrogative mode, a habit of presenting incessant questions as a means of drawing out information from (and about) other characters. As Copperfield observes, “It appeared to me that she never said anything she wanted to say, outright; but hinted it, and made a great deal more of it by this practice” (276). While remaining indirect, she “ma[kes] a great deal more” of each insinuation, repeatedly asking “but isn’t it?” and, as Copperfield finds, challenging the authority he and other characters have over their assertions: “Her own views of every question, and her correction of everything that was said to which she was opposed, Miss Dartle insinuated in the same way; sometimes, I could not conceal from myself, with great power” (276).

Critics tend to link Rosa’s insinuations to her disfiguration—a long scar running across her lip, the lasting imprint of a hammer thrown by Steerforth that appears to stand apart from her face in moments of suppressed rage. As Copperfield finds, her scar seems to signal her interior strife, serving as a highly legible and individuating mark missing from other equally unpredictable characters:

I could not help glancing at the scar with a painful interest when we went in to tea. It was not long before I observed that it was the most susceptible part of her face, and that, when she turned pale, that mark altered first, and became a dull, lead-coloured streak, lengthening out to its full extent, like a mark in invisible ink brought to the fire. There

⁴⁴ The lack of consensus I’ve identified also draws from her absence in many critical accounts of Dickens’s novel. For notable exceptions, see Mary Ann O’Farrell’s chapter on Rosa, as well as Laura N. Hoffer. See too Rae Greiner, who treats the tics of Dickens’s eccentrics as “evidence of [their] partial subjectivity” (89).

was a littler altercation between her and Steerforth about a cast of the dice at backgammon – when I thought her, for one moment, in a storm of rage; and then I saw it start forth like the old writing on the wall. (278)

Rosa's lexical peculiarities are doubled by her scar. Critics too see this physical mark as a reflection of her patterns of speech, referring to her "vicious verbal scarification" or to her mode of questioning as "what flirts with legibility but eludes it" (96; 89).⁴⁵ Later, when the extent to which Steerforth has deceived his family is finally revealed, it appears as a tool of critical application: "when she suffered it to break loose, it was only for a moment," he writes, "[s]he had chained it up again, and however it might tear her within, she subdued it to herself" (663). Rosa's "undisguised rage," released "only for a moment" and then quickly "subdued," shows a pronounced capacity for affective self-regulation otherwise missing from *David Copperfield*. Her "mark" thus suggests a kind of kinship with the stenographic notations over which Copperfield continues to struggle in his narrative, and thus with the novel's demonstrated struggle over affect. At the same time, her mastery of it suggests it is no errant sign of secreted desire or merely suppressed rage.

Rosa thus presents competing, irreconcilable interpretations of her status as a character in *David Copperfield*. She maintains that her insinuations are mere questions when they actually feel like interrogations; she presents a directness lacking in schemers like Uriah and Littimer, and yet does not demonstrate a particular proclivity to deceit or coercion; and although her scar attests to emotional immediacy and transparency, she also appears to exceed the kinds of emotional reactions encountered in other characters. As an example of the latter, after Copperfield brings Mr. Peggotty to Mrs. Steerforth to inquire into the whereabouts of Emily,

⁴⁵ See Poovey and O'Farrell, respectively.

Rosa accosts the pair upon their exit and Copperfield describes her as follows: “Such a concentration of rage and scorn as darkened her face, and flashed into her jet-black eyes, I could not have thought compressible even into that face” (436). Copperfield’s surprise derives in part from Rosa’s ability to compress her feelings into her person, suggestive of an awareness of her formal dimensions as a character (and one missing from characters like Mr. Micawber or, for that matter, Copperfield). Yet his surprise also derives from the discrepancy between her actual expressions of passion and his failure to accurately render them on the page:

‘I would trample on them all,’ she answered. ‘I would have his house pulled down. I would have her branded on the face, drest in rags, and cast out in the streets to starve. If I had the power to sit in judgment on her, I would see it done. See it done? I would do it! I detest her. If I ever could reproach her with her infamous condition, I would go anywhere to do so. If I could hunt her to her grave, I would. If there was any word of comfort that would be a solace to her in her dying hour, and only I possessed it, I wouldn’t part with it for Life itself.’

The mere vehemence of her words can convey, I am sensible, but a weak impression of the passion by which she was possessed, and which made itself articulate in her whole figure, though her voice, instead of being raised, was lower than usual. No description I could give of her would do justice to my recollection of her or to her entire deliverance of herself to her anger. I have seen passion in many forms, but I have never seen it in such a form as that. (437)

In the passage above, Rosa appears to momentarily exceed the parameters that would make her legible as a character, attesting to a startling agency—“See it done?” she poses, “I would do it!” Yet interestingly, Rosa’s exclamation is the most direct statement of feeling and intent in the novel, leaving little doubt in Copperfield’s mind of the truth of her claim. Her clarity as a character is glimpsed all too briefly. “No description I could give of her would do justice to my recollection of her or to her entire deliverance of herself to her anger,” Copperfield remarks, continuing “I have seen passion in many forms, but I have never seen it in such a form as that.”

Ultimately, Rosa presents an alternative model of affect and character in *David Copperfield*. Her “lynx-like scrutiny” establishes her as a character particularly adept at reading

other characters, able to predict Steerforth's infatuation with Emily before anyone else, capable of unwinding the intentions of other characters and foreseeing the paths of their plots (400). Although her method appears circuitous, pursuing a line of questions that insinuate rather than merely ask, Rosa is adamant that her practice is, in a way, more direct by way of its elliptical path. "I am not suspicious" she later notes, stating plainly what readers, too, want from Copperfield's narration: "I want to found an opinion on what you tell me" (401). Rosa is thus a strong contrast to the other characters in *David Copperfield*, and other female characters in Dickens's work on the whole. Rather than vagueness and ambiguity, Rosa offers interpretation; rather than mere inference, she gets to the reality of what has only been implied or assumed by the narrator; and rather than fitting a form designed for her, she allows her "passion" to present its own form. And of the characters in the novel, she appears the most adept reader of affect and form alike.

It is worth considering, then, how *David Copperfield* ultimately fails to make adequate use of her reading method or fully grasp the import of her character. By the end of the novel she is reduced to mere eccentricities, maintaining dutiful watch over Mrs. Steerforth in her home where she "by turns caresses her, and quarrels with her" as "they wear their time away, from year to year"—reduced, in a way, to the kind of flat character usually found in a novel by Dickens (803-804). Whether deemed insufficiently dangerous to merit the re-formation of character offered to Uriah and Littimer by Creakle's penitentiary, or perhaps already too much of a character to be affected by the system, she is abandoned at the end of Copperfield's plot as a formal curiosity.

Rosa's state at the end of the novel might help us return to Forster's claims about character as the heart of the novel, where the form finds integrity. "[T]here are in the novel two

forces: human beings and a bundle of various things not human beings,” Forster conclusively states; “it is the novelist’s business to adjust these two forces and conciliate their claims” (105). In *David Copperfield*, it appears as if Dickens left this business to a character: as Copperfield attempts to manage the characters who, like himself, morph on the space of the page, stretching out, holding hostage passages, entire chapters, seeping into the margins and on the whole exceeding the space and shapes defined for them, he finds that his surrounds slowly lose in integrity, melting as it were into the ambiguous space between reality and representation. In a way, Dickens’s amorphous novel perfectly demonstrates the fine balance between “human beings” and “various things” Forster looks to find in novelistic form: taken too far, the “enlargement of human nature” prevents the operation of the other aspects, crowds them out of the space of the novel.

If we get in *David Copperfield* an image of character enlarged to the point of straining the integrity of the whole, we also get an impression of what a novel without character might look like, and gain a better view of the devices obscured by our attention to character. Plot, in Forster’s conception, at first appears little more than itself a minor character, what he imagines as “a sort of higher government official” conducting the chain of events and ensuring the operation of causality (85). “[T]he plot, instead of finding human beings more or less cut to its requirements... finds them enormous, shadowy and intractable, and three-quarters hidden like an iceberg” (85). Unlike character, however, plot does not threaten to overtake form, or at least not in the ways in which affect and character can grow. Plot is to be “aesthetically compact” and, as “a series of contrivances,” it has a kind of persistent artificiality to it, simply one of those elements of a novel that is not human, not a character (88). But when character is underutilized in a novel, when “a plot triumphs too completely,” the result is a novel without character, and in

turn, a novel with a sparse sense of affect (93). The following chapter considers how plot compensates for character when the latter fades from narrative attention.

CHAPTER TWO

Anthony Trollope's Weak Plots: Narrative Enervation from *The Warden* to *The Fixed Period*

That a man, as he grows old, should feel the labor of writing to be a fatigue is natural enough. But a man to whom writing has become a habit may write well though he be fatigued.

—Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (1883)

There came a moment in his vigorous career (it was even a good many years ago) when I renounced the effort to “keep up” with him. It ceased to seem obligatory to have read his last story; it ceased soon to be very possible to know which was his last. [...] The author... ceased to produce individual works; his activity became a huge “serial.” Here and there, in the vast fluidity, an organic particle detached itself.

—Henry James, “Anthony Trollope” (1883)

Introduction: Weak Plots

In *An Autobiography* (1883), Anthony Trollope expresses what appears at first to be a personal preference for the well-known subordination of plot to character in his fictions.⁴⁶ “I have never troubled myself much about the construction of plots,” he writes, channeling his preference into a prescription by suggesting that, for the successful novelist, “the elucidation of his plot” should be an afterthought to the elaboration of his characters (209). When considered in light of Trollope's exhaustive tabulation of his novel earnings, simple plots meant a faster rate of production, which in turn meant better yields from a market that demanded more and more print.⁴⁷ Yet Trollope's economical plotting extends beyond his drive for steady financial gain to describe an affective rationale, too: constructing simple plots means avoiding the dramatic and

⁴⁶ On Trollope's prioritization of character, see early revisionist accounts of the author by way of Ruth ApRoberts, *The Moral Trollope* (1971) and James Kincaid, *The Novels of Anthony Trollope* (1977). More recently, Amanda Anderson has demonstrated how Trollope's focus on character indicates a greater dialectical tension in his work between personal ethos and disinterested critique (517). See Anderson, “Trollope's Modernity” (2007).

⁴⁷ On Trollope's method of production and calculation of his earnings, see Mary Hamer, *Writing by Numbers: Trollope's Serial Fiction* (1987). See too Paul Delany, *Literature, Money and the Market: From Trollope to Amis* (2002).

disruptive sensations produced by complex plots, sensations that ultimately detract from maximizing attention to the thoughts and feelings of characters. Indeed, Walter M. Kendrick's conception of the author as "a machine for the production of novels" underscores the view of many critics concerning just how hard Trollope labored to make his plots as unobtrusive as possible, bereft of the excited sensations typically encountered in the novels of his contemporaries, Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, and enabling his works to better facilitate the direct conveyance of character.⁴⁸ It is as if Trollope took to heart Herbert Spencer's insistence that good prose economizes the attention and mental efforts of its readers: "as in a mechanical apparatus, the more simple and the better arranged its parts, the greater will be the effect produced," Spencer writes in his 1852 essay "The Philosophy of Style," observing that "the friction and inertia of the vehicle deduct from its efficiency" (22, 11-12). The *Chronicles of Barsetshire* series (1855-67) represents the achievement of Trollope's drive for narrative and affective economy: the six novels are focused on a delimited geographical region, linked by shared characters rather than an overarching plot, and without particularly strong elements like melodrama or suspense, each entry progresses with an effortlessness that belies the work put into its construction. If there is no strong sense of *telos* in any single entry in the *Barsetshire* series, or in the series as a whole—if there is a discernible lack of the drive and momentum common to other works of fiction—it is because there is rarely a strong sense of plot.

Typically cast as a symptom of the author's cost-benefit approach to novel writing, Trollope's series plots have created an impasse in criticism regarding the affective responses they solicit from readers. D.A. Miller argues that Trollope's "loose and casual plots" reflect and reproduce deeply entrenched social norms of nineteenth-century England, inculcating in his

⁴⁸ See Kendrick, *The Novel-Machine: The Theory and Fiction of Anthony Trollope* (1980).

audience affective states that, by virtue of their familiarity, afford complicity and transform “the energy of resistance” into “the compulsiveness of surrender” (122, 125). Following Miller’s account of Trollope’s plots, but departing from his critique of their affects, Laurie Langbauer argues that the underplotted nature of Trollope’s series novels is actually a facet of the author’s career-long interrogation of the everyday as a space for radical critique, a space through which Trollope enables us to feel “a tension... between a desire for fixity, closure, and totality”—a desire Langbauer and others associate with plot—“and a gesture to openness”—commonly associated with plotlessness (92, 88).⁴⁹ For both critics, the former casting Trollope’s work as ideologically suspect, the latter as impossibly utopian, his plots are responsible for generating a prevailing sense of enervation that not only pervades the county of Barsetshire, descending like a fog over its towns and parishes, cloisters and drawing rooms, infecting the actions, even thoughts, of his characters with a strange torpidity, but impacts readers, too. If we accept that plot is an organizing logic as well as a constitutive energy of the mid-Victorian novel, one of those “motor forces that drive the text forward” (Brooks xiii-xiv), then Trollope’s series novels should stall out when they reduce the function of plot to merely maximizing attention to character.⁵⁰ However, as Miller and Langbauer agree, Trollope’s series novels nonetheless maintain a steady sense of pace and remain interesting to readers despite their weak plots.

⁴⁹ See Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction, 1850-1930* (1999). Both Miller and Langbauer implicitly draw on Frank Kermode’s influential account of narrative closure as an eschatological drive. See Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1967).

⁵⁰ It is important to differentiate “series” from “seriality”: the former refers to interconnected novels in a larger narrative sequence, while the latter pertains to a production method, by which a narrative is written in increments, as well as a publication format, in which narrative segments are published gradually over a period of time. The terms share related but distinct temporalities: both operate on principles of recurrence and continuity, but a series may or may not be serially produced and released. Although published in different formats and at different intervals, Trollope composed all of his series works by serial means. See Hamer and Kendrick.

To different ends, both Miller and Langbauer—and more broadly, the critical tradition that supports Trollope’s polemic in favor of character over plot—claim that the sense of enervation commonly encountered in Trollope’s series novels is a product of their “weak” plots. Yet in this chapter, I argue that Trollope’s sense of enervation cuts across the character-plot distinction, pervading the atmosphere in which Trollope’s novels are set, propelling them forward with a minor, almost muted sense of persistence. Unlike the viscous medium in which Dickens’s characters and literary devices were ensnared in *David Copperfield*, Trollope’s series novels present this atmosphere of enervation as a kind of device unto itself, an ambient affective force that manages to triage character, plot, and narration. Unlike stronger kinds of novelistic affect, which are typically understood by critics to originate from the complexities of plot and to have a disruptive impact on narrative, Trollope’s narrative enervation is different in both impact and form: it is diffuse and miasmic, stretched across the length of multiple novels, and predicated on accretive or incremental changes over time rather than an immediate, transformative impact on the course of a narrative, on the lives of its characters, or on readers.⁵¹

By focusing on Trollope’s sense of enervation in his series novels, this chapter pushes against the prioritization of character over plot—and by association, the distinction between realism and sensation—in Trollope’s project and in Victorianist scholarship. With their distributed attention to many characters yet persistent sense of drive—what I will discuss at greater length in my first section in relation to the author’s theory of narrative enervation—Trollope’s series novels appear particularly attuned to the affects Fredric Jameson identifies with

⁵¹ On the difficulty of holding attention to interstitial affects, see Hansen. Amy M. King suggests that Trollope and other mid-century realists understood “the value of positively inflected lingering in protracted description and observation of the local and the quotidian,” an affective experience intimately tied to novelistic length (166). Dames refers to Trollope’s linear, progressive series as “the career-narrative,” both a “spatial narrative procedure” and an aesthetic form that privileges gradual, carefully informed decisionism (“Trollope and the Career” 253-254).

the ascendancy of realism in the mid-nineteenth century, a period during which “the isolated body [began] to know more global waves of generalized sensations” (*Antinomies* 28).⁵² The novels in the *Barsetshire* series appear to progress only by virtue of a tension between narrative and non-narrative impulses, what Jameson has treated as fundamental antinomies of realism and Trollope, in his own theory of realism carried forward in *An Autobiography*, establishes as the necessary tension between the elaboration of plot and the liveliness of character.

But as I argue, the narrative enervation sustain throughout Trollope’s series novels appears to bypass plot and character, almost gaining cogency as its own literary device. Accordingly, it disrupts the generic distinction in Victorianist scholarship between realism and sensation, and their respective avatars in character and plot. Trollope elaborates on this alignment of narrative elements and genres in *An Autobiography*, in which he identifies his character-driven novels as “realistic” and refers to any excessively plotted novel as “sensational” (204).⁵³ This distinction, in which realism is associated with character and autonomy, and sensation is associated with plot and coercion, has informed much scholarship on the emotionally duplicitous nature of sensation fiction.⁵⁴ Yet to call Trollope’s series novels “character-driven”

⁵² See Kent Puckett on the ambiguity of this historical dimension in Jameson’s account: for Jameson, affect could be either “a fact of human existence, or [...] a structural effect of a moment when society begins to change faster than emotions can manage” (110).

⁵³ To be certain, Trollope doesn’t adhere to a strict categorical distinction between realism and sensation fiction—he concedes that the best novelists achieve a balance between the two approaches, stating in his autobiography that “[a] good novel should be both, and both in the highest degree”—nor was the generic distinction clearly defined in the period (204). Nor, in his usage, do “sensational” and “realistic” do not neatly map onto “sensation fiction” and “realism”: “sensational” refers to an emphasis on narrative events, “the continuation and gradual development of a plot,” while “realistic” primarily means an emphasis on “the elucidation of character” (204). In this sense, a predominantly “realistic” work can be “sensational” in degree rather than kind. However, as I explore below, Trollope’s distinction continues to inform criticism on sensation fiction.

⁵⁴ For critics who see sensation fiction as instrumental and coercive, see Miller and Nicholas Daly. Unlike these critics, Ortiz-Robles demonstrates how sensation fiction operates on the principal of shared

when they focus too on the (seemingly indefinite) extension of plot and enjoin readers in a similarly protracted and enervating effort to “keep up” with the author is to neglect both the subtle energy that manages to sustain his project despite its protraction over time and the experiential dimensions of narrative form itself.

In these respects, I demonstrate how the representational priority Trollope gives to interiority and psychology via character inevitably yields sustained attention to the depleted or weak affective states represented throughout his works, states that protract if not gradually attenuate the operation of narrative as if it were coextensive with life.⁵⁵ And in Trollope’s case, his literary production *was* virtually coextensive with his life: in many ways, his concept of narrative enervation is inseparable from his own account of literary production. My approach is thus informed in part by Jesse Oak Taylor, who has argued for “a return to a kind of new materialist biographical criticism,” one in which we attend to the material circumstances behind an author’s work in order to better understand how their practices are reflected in the text and their text embedded in history; in short, it is to remind ourselves that “composition is an embodied process” (5, 2). The sense of enervation encountered in Trollope’s project on thematic and formal levels alike requires that we draw from biographical detail for reference: Trollope’s unchecked rate of publication in a virtually unprecedented and subsequently unmatched literary career demonstrates that enervation counterintuitively maintains rather than impedes the production of his narratives, enabling the attenuation of plot over so many novels. Trollope’s

responses between readers and characters, both “having been exposed to the same order of events.” In this way, sensation for Ortiz Robles does not identify emotional coercion in narrative, but instead figures as affect, “a disruption in the very order of representation” (190-1). See too Levine, who demonstrates in *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (2003) how English realism in the midcentury came to be understood as a form of “epistemological training,” closely associated with the narrative devices and plots germane to sensation fiction—namely, the suspension of judgment.

⁵⁵ Carolyn Dever calls this structuration of progressive movement a “*micropolitics* of suspense” (863, emphasis original). I engage with Dever’s account of Trollope in the concluding section of the chapter.

sense of enervation thus challenges our critical terminology and the strong categorical distinctions we make when we try to describe affects represented in novels that fall somewhere between the stative and the dynamic, the inactive and the active, situated between resolutely negative or wholly positive valences, as well as the ways in which we typically conceptualize narrative progress in energetic terms.⁵⁶ By intentionally focusing on enervation, Trollope gives greater attention to the vicissitudes of everyday life and slower temporalities of lived experience, an attention that engenders in readers a similar sense of the body's expendability and finitude.

I look to two novels that span the length of Trollope's literary career and make legible the long-form efforts taken to represent the affective dimensions of expendability and finitude in his project. In the second section, I focus on *The Warden* (1855), Trollope's first entry in the *Chronicles of Barsetshire* series and, as critics attest, the origin of his interest in character and psychology as the shared *habitus* of individualism.⁵⁷ Yet *The Warden* also appears particularly invested in the function of plot—specifically, in what happens to plot when characters are unable to take action and drive a narrative forward. In part a critique of Dickens's social reform novels and the instrumentalization of readers' emotions effected by their plots, Trollope's novel instead focuses on states of ambivalence, to the point that narrative progress almost grinds to a halt. These affective obstructions on the level of form—characters are unable to act according to their feelings and readers similarly enervated, deterred from advancing in the narrative—also create a problem for content. The social reform issue on which the novel is framed too happens to be a matter of expendability: support for poor, elderly laborers who are no longer able to work for a

⁵⁶ Specifically, the concept of “narrative dynamics” and drive understood via Peter Brooks, who, situated in the psychoanalytic tradition, is indebted to early vitalist theories of prose by way of Herbert Spencer and Viktor Shklovsky.

⁵⁷ See Bo Earle, who casts this dual interest in *The Warden* as, by way of Harding and his violoncello, performative and deeply ambivalent rather than calcified and hegemonic. See too Elaine Hadley.

living and have aged out of social use. Rather than resolve this social issue at the end of *The Warden*, Trollope perpetuates and sustains it by way of the presence of elderly characters like Harding throughout *Chronicles* and Plantagenet Palliser in the *Palliser* series (1864-79) who, in the near-absence of overarching plots, lend continuity, structure, and a sense of the slow progression of lived time to his works.

In the third section, I turn to an unlikely work as a means of illustrating the persistence of plot beyond Trollope's series fictions: his late novel, *The Fixed Period* (1882). Rather than treat this text as an anomaly within Trollope's larger body of work, as critics tend to do, I demonstrate how the novel struggles to capture the affective and thematic concerns of the series through the adoption of a particularly "weak" literary form, the utopian novel.⁵⁸ Using the plotlessness of utopian fiction, *The Fixed Period* explicitly deals with the affective paradox required to bring a utopia into being: the creation of Utopia requires a kind of (narrative) energy quite unlike the affective calm its achievement ultimately seeks to install. However, the novel ultimately fails to maintain the peaceful perpetuity it promises once stronger affective influences emerge and incite narrative action. Trollope's penultimate novel not only serves as the apotheosis of his project, which effectively begins with *The Warden*, but it also demonstrates the difficulty with which we attempt to articulate the impact of the body's expendability on narrative. In the concluding section, I reflect on how Trollope's sense of enervation might broaden the range of novelistic affects and narrative forms critics associate with everyday life.

I. A Personal History of Narrative Enervation: Trollope's *An Autobiography*

To begin to conceive of narrative enervation in the context of Trollope's series fictions, we can turn to the opening of Trollope's 1858 novel *Doctor Thorne*:

⁵⁸ See, for example, A.O.J. Cockshut's reflections on *The Fixed Period* in *Anthony Trollope: A Critical Study* (1968).

Before the reader is introduced to the modest country medical practitioner who is to be the chief personage of the following tale, it will be well that he should be made acquainted with some particulars as to the locality in which, and the neighbours among whom, our doctor followed his profession. (5)

The need to establish context is, in part, understandable. *Doctor Thorne* is the third novel in what would become Trollope's first series, *Chronicles of Barsetshire*, the series to which he will attribute his success as a novelist and in which he will begin to develop a form that (as any critic who looks to pick selectively from Trollope's works will attest) makes it difficult to address a single Trollope novel without making reference to others. For indeed, the characters who live in the locality identified in the first chapter of *Doctor Thorne*—East Barsetshire—*also* live, so Trollope would have it, in the other novels of the series, and possibly beyond. This shared reality is the case even if recurring characters are not visited or, for that matter, if they fail to find mention by the narrator, as if neglecting to cross at a shared intersection. For these reasons, new readers require context to understand the place of this novel within the series and the world in which it professes to immerse them; old readers simply need a reminder.

However, what is less understandable in the introductory chapter to *Doctor Thorne*, for new and old readers alike, is the amount of time Trollope spends providing this context and, in turn, the attention he pays to the plotting of his narrative before it has properly begun. Although by the end of chapter one, Trollope has effectively situated readers in the locality and has even suggested an alternative character to treat as his protagonist, he opens chapter two with a similar delay in the arrival of narrative:

I quite feel that an apology is due for beginning a novel with two long dull chapters full of description. I am perfectly aware of the danger of such a course. In so doing I sin against the golden rule which requires us all to put our best foot foremost, the wisdom of which is fully recognised by novelists, myself among the number. It can hardly be expected that any one will consent to go through with a fiction that offers so little of allurements in its first pages; but twist it as I will I cannot do otherwise. I find that I cannot make poor Mr. Gresham hem and haw and turn himself uneasily in his arm-chair in a

natural manner till I have said why he is uneasy. I cannot bring in my doctor speaking his mind freely among the big-wigs till I have explained that it is in accordance with his usual character to do so. (19)

Trollope's concern for beginning the novel "with two long dull chapters full of description" is offset by his much more pressing need to provide enough description to contextualize his world and carry readers into it. "I cannot do otherwise," he writes. If we think of Trollope's excessive use of description here like Heather Love does by way of "thick description," those "layers of human significance, including attributions of intention, emotion, cognition, and depth, as well as cultural context and display" produced by sociologists and anthropologists in their observations of human behavioral interactions, we might treat these opening chapters like a field study (403).⁵⁹ We might even think of these pages as a kind of preface to the real story, the terms to be understood as prerequisites for understanding what Trollope's study will look to accomplish. However, as signaled by his apologetic stance, Trollope explicitly sees these chapters as part of the story, no less its introduction. While he acknowledges the "golden rule" of novel writing—no reader "will consent to go through with a fiction that offers so little of allurement in its first pages"—he sees no alternative beyond exercising description in order to provide an account of the customary, everyday thoughts and actions of his characters, what he identifies in Frank Gresham as his "natural manner" and associates with the "usual character" of Doctor Thorne (*DT* 19). Acknowledging the responses of readers who might miss the "allurement" of a more exciting opening (and who might close the book in response), Trollope nevertheless stresses that these "two long dull" chapters are nonetheless necessary for understanding what is "natural" or "usual" for his characters.

⁵⁹ See too Sharon Marcus, Heather Love, and Stephen Best in their introduction to the special issue of *Representations*, "Description Across Disciplines."

The matter of the delay at the beginning of *Doctor Thorne*, then, brings us clarity on a vital dimension of Trollope's series novels: their emphasis on the steady progression of everyday life, which requires both a sustained familiarity with the narrative world as well as, in the absence of an overarching and exciting plot linking the entries, a self-igniting, self-renewing kind of narrative energy at the start of each new novel. Indeed, for each book in the series to gain traction as a narrative, it requires context (reference to past volumes) and interest (purpose for its continued perusal). This sense of embedded familiarity has been described by Amanda Anderson in connection with the "affective immediacy" Trollope affords his readers via narration; and in the following two sections, I will speak to the sense of everyday life Trollope looks to sustain across his project (510).⁶⁰

But to theorize the persistence of plot and peculiar sense of narrative energy in Trollope's novels—specifically, the kind of enervation he paradoxically seeks to capture while nonetheless driving his characters and plots forward—I turn to Trollope himself. Trollope looked to understand the material or biological impetus underwriting narrative: What maintains a reader's interest in a narrative? What checks or misdirects a reader's interest? And how does one sustain the interests of readers over an indeterminate period of time? For Trollope, the industry of the author is what will supply this interest, as if metamorphosed or transmuted from the work of writing into the labor of reading. We can see this concept develop throughout Trollope's *An Autobiography*, a posthumously-published primer on Trollope's method in which the author displays a combination of self-deprecation and pride whenever he accounts for the modest efforts behind the production of his novels and by no means meager sums earned as a result: "I have never found myself thinking much about the work that I had to do till I was doing it. I have

⁶⁰ See Anderson, "Trollope's Modernity."

indeed for many years almost abandoned the effort to think, trusting myself, with the narrowest thread of a plot, to work the matter out when the pen is in my hand” (99). Given the ease with which novel writing can be undertaken—like talking or breathing, it is unthinking in its execution, set in the perpetuity of the present perfect—Trollope suggests that the process itself needs very little theorizing. It is a form of work that “should be going on not only when he [the novelist] is at his desk, but in all his walks abroad, in all his movements through the world, in all his intercourse with his fellow-creatures” (101). The logic goes then that, naturally, the person who “has become a novelist” and produced a novel is ostensibly the one who “has... been drawing in matter from all that he has seen and heard” and managed to press pen to paper (144).

Trollope’s account of novel writing might begin to feel like casuistry, an impression that derives from the conflict between his repeated assertions to the simplicity of the method throughout *An Autobiography* and from the accumulation of evidence proving the physical difficulty of its repeated application. If novel writing does not require theorizing for Trollope, by extension, then, his novels might not require much theorizing, either: as the product of labor issuing naturally from an author, a “good novel” is “good” (to Trollope) because it derives from good efforts undertaken by the author to produce the novel. (Excepting, of course, *The Bertrams*, *Castle Richmond*, and a handful of other “bad” novels nonetheless derived from good efforts.)

While Trollope affirms a literary practice that places production over reception and industry over inspiration, I am particularly interested in how his account of novel writing as a process of naturally, unthinkingly drawing from life, comes to stand in for a claim about the affective experience of novel reading, too. Trollope’s working diaries, which he kept while composing his novels, reveal an author obsessed with productivity and plagued by concerns for his gradual decline. As Mary Hamer finds, the diaries reveal a “habit of regular application”:

“People who have never read a line of his novels are aware that Trollope was a prodigious worker. They know that he rose early to write before carrying out a day’s work as a civil servant—even that he kept a scrupulous record of his daily output” (41, 40). They also “make clear the importance of the formal element in Trollope’s work,” the fact that Trollope wanted readers to not only know *how* he worked, but how *hard* he worked, too; to this end, his autobiography is a rationale for the form of his fiction and proof that the work of arranging said form is, indeed, work (45). The effort of producing a novel, Trollope insists, must be both visible to readers and yet unfelt in the effort of reading the novel; it must inform the reader of what the author has expended in composing a novel, while remaining careful not tax the reader to the same degree to which its production taxed the author.

But despite the attention Trollope gives to the writing process in *An Autobiography*, he seems to have little recourse to describing the actual labor of novel writing or the formal composition of his novels beyond opaque analogies to other forms of labor. One can find these analogies scattered throughout Trollope’s text, and all to a single effect: the analogy he draws between novel writing and cobbling, for example, or novel writing and tart-making (borrowing an analogy from Thackeray) amount to the fact that, despite the comparison, the novel writing process actually is not quite like shoemaking or baking—again, it is “natural” rather than learning, like talking or breathing—even if, like these trades, it is an applied skill and one that yields a marketable product. For Trollope, novel writing is not an activity borne from inspiration but adopted, like these other professions, from need: that it can be a profitable profession only adds to its appeal as a form of work that, at least for a writer like Trollope, “comes naturally.” Each analogy looks to affect this minimal difference yet ultimately shows that what Trollope encounters is a difficulty in providing an autobiography of his labor, of assigning the same series

form to the very work that gives form to his novels. Recall an analogy that appears early in the text when Trollope speculates that, in respect to the “remuneration for the time” he put into writing *The Warden*, “stone-breaking would have done better.” Here it would seem that Trollope simply ignores the possibility that “stone-breaking,” while it might pay more per hour, is *qualitatively* different from writing. On the one hand, Trollope seems to suggest that dedication and determination will help make novel writing a habitual activity, and therefore one that gradually becomes akin in its affective dimensions and duration to life. On the other, it also seems as if he simply does not understand the ways in which other occupations can really be more strenuous, or more demanding, than sitting at a desk and writing, or even that novel writing produces something different from broken stones (88-9).

What we find in Trollope’s autobiography, then, is both highly specific to the author’s embodied process of composition—we know how his novels were made, often where, and irrefutably when—and yet frustratingly opaque about the body or *bios* of the author behind the process—opaque enough for his conception of novel writing to apply almost equally to any novelist.⁶¹ There is an odd elision throughout Trollope’s autobiography of the very specificity of the novels that, for Trollope, mark off discrete periods of his life—composed in conjunction with particular events in his life, yet part of an ongoing process of routinized, almost automatic composition, practiced each and every day. We can take as an example of this elision the recurring phrase, “The novel of which I am now speaking,” which appears throughout *An Autobiography*. As if it were a reminder for readers (or the author) of the novel presently under discussion, the phrase signals a shift in talking about one novel to talking about another, and a shift that may not be noticed—or may not be important—were it not for the insertion of the

⁶¹ Trollope anticipates both Pierre Macherey and Roland Barthes, in this sense, finding the disappearance of the author in the production of the determinate literary work. See Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (1978) and Barthes, “The Death of the Author” (1967).

phrase itself. (And indeed, sometimes it remains unclear in his autobiography when, exactly, Trollope passes from an account of one novel to the next, despite the insertion of the phrase.)

Trollope does not consider his novels to be interchangeable. Rather, he provides an account of the production of each novel despite the fact that the process, in each case, is virtually the same, despite the fact that the proof of a novel's success lies in profit, because it is the affective sense of process as depletive and enervating he actually looks to capture. In short, Trollope's attention in *An Autobiography* is on lived experience itself *as a process*, one that links the experiential dimensions of novel writing to the experiential dimensions of novel reading. Trollope's sense of lived experience as a shared process—embodied in writers and in readers, capable of representation only by drawing attention to the process itself in its very duration—underscores his efforts to develop a literary form capable of engendering a similar sense of everyday in any reader: a body extended over long stretches of incessant work, over the routines and habits that structure lived experience yet fade into obscurity upon closer analysis. If Trollope finds that this sense of energy is hard to illustrate in an individual novel—for readers to see in each work his profound effort to refine language, to provide characters discrete and easily discernible motives, to grant plot presence in his novels, and to represent the process of episodes, chapters, and novels as, like life, gradual and accretive—it is easier to convey to readers through a similar sense of enervation over multiple novels.

I understand this narrative enervation as a unique means of accomplishing the narrativization of everyday life, of representing life as a process minimally dynamic, sluggish yet incessant, a form of persistence that does not rise to the level of conscious motivation or impress with a sense of drive. Indeed, it is the enervation of the author that is ultimately developed in the series form and, as we will see in the following two sections, mirrored in the efforts of readers to

read along with Trollope—in Henry James’s phrase, to ““keep up”” with the author. Trollope’s dependence on weak plots, sequences of events that appear designed to slow and protract narrative rather than accelerate it, is in service of the narrative enervation he looks to engender in readers. Whereas it might be taken as an operation that effaces lived experience, like Miller associates with “the usual,” this enervation is ultimately descriptive. For indeed, Trollope wants to represent his enervation as a process that fades into the background of novels as simply lived experience, a process temporal and indefinite, yet different in composition and duration for each individual.

The closest connection to Trollope’s concept of narrative enervation and its specific function in prose as an affective process can be found in the work of Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky. For Shklovsky, art provides us with a means of seeing and understanding automatization and routine, forcing us to see our creative products again from the perspective of “sight” rather than “recognition” (6). In poetry, for example, our renewed attention to “the arrangement of words and the semantic structures based on them” affords us “the transfer of an object from its customary sphere of perception to a new one” (12). Extracting the poetic object, seeing it “removed from the domain of automatized perception,” we are made acutely aware of the creation of the object as itself a means of escaping automatization. But Shklovsky is much more interested in this automatization, and specifically, how it enables our attention to the “perceptual character of the prose word,” to the very process in which we unthinkingly engage, than in charting a new course for artistic production:

If we exaxime the general laws of perception, we see that as it becomes habitual, it also becomes automatic. So eventually all of our skills and experiences function unconsciously—automatically. If someone were to compare the sensation of holding a pen in his hand or speaking a foreign tongue for the very first time with the sensation of performing this same operation for the ten thousandth time, then he would no doubt agree

with us. It is this process of automatization that explains the laws of our prose speech with its fragmentary phrases and half-articulated words. (5)

Artistic production might enable a return to seeing the object unmediated by its production, “to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition” (6). But Shklovsky is not interested in how this might enable us to see the object anew. Rather, he wants us to understand how this helps us see our perceptual processes anew. “The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest,” he asserts. “*Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant*” (6). In these respects, the account of “defamilization” (or “enstrangement”) usually connected with Shklovsky misreads the object of Shklovsky’s text, and fails to see that it is not in search of an object at all, but rather a living process.⁶² Without attention to this process, it fades from our experiences altogether. “If the complex life of many people takes place entirely on the level of the unconscious, then it’s as if this life had never been,” he writes (5).

In the case of seeing this living process in prose, Shklovsky proposes paying attention to plot—specifically, by way of “stepped construction and deceleration,” seeing in both a means of breaking down “the imagistic mass... and... [seeing] its arrangement in the form of distinct steps” (24). Trollope’s own careful—we might say belabored—attention to these steps in his novels affords a means of seeing this experiential character emerge over the course of the series. Indeed, Trollope will focus in each work on pausing over scenes of decision, of centering on the minor actions and inactions that attend daily life, what Shklovsky sees as “the fulfillment of tasks,” and on the framing of action within the work (34). Trollope’s series novels thus possess a diminished means for and narrower range of affective influence precisely because they look to capture an

⁶² See Gerald L. Bruns’s introduction to the Dalkey Press edition of Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose*, “Toward a Random Theory of Prose.”

understanding of life as itself structured on enervation rather than energization, on the gradual decline in potency pulled over a lifetime and irreducible to discrete steps, tasks, or moments. Contrary to a model of narrative in which plot is structured on rising action, Trollope's plots look to afford incremental movement over time, a sense of progress tied to the slow decay of the body and steadily accrued sense of its expendability. In the next section, I look to how Trollope enlists plot to achieve this sense of expendability.

II. *The Warden*

Perhaps the most salient feature of Trollope's first critical and financial success, his 1855 novel *The Warden*, is its uneventfulness.⁶³ The opening description of Barchester, "a quiet town in the West of England," with its rolling hills and solemn cathedral, at first suggests to readers that the placidity simply derives from the novel's pastoral setting (5). Yet as the narrative progresses, it becomes clearer that this uneventfulness extends to other *topoi*. The lack of action resonates with the unassuming social lives of the novel's central characters—the Reverend Septimus Harding and the twelve elderly laborers at Hiram's Hospital under his care—as well the political, moral, and emotional conflicts that structure its otherwise threadbare plot: the public's growing concern for the stipends of idle church dignitaries; Harding's increasing doubt concerning the rightness of his appointed positions, serving as both precentor of Barchester Cathedral and warden of Hiram's Hospital; and a romance between John Bold, who raises the case against Harding, and Eleanor, Harding's daughter. In the course of the narrative, readers discover that these conflicts are not so easy to resolve. Harding's care for the retired bedesmen and contributions to his

⁶³ *The Warden* opens Trollope's *Chronicles of Barsetshire*, beginning the popular series format for which he is now well known; however, the novel was only designated the first entry in the series retroactively, after its proven success encouraged Trollope to extend the narrative world. Unlike later entries in *Chronicles*, *The Warden* was not serially published, but was released as a single volume novel in 1855. On the publication history of the novel, see Nicholas Shrimpton's introduction to the Oxford UP edition of *The Warden*, as well as Trollope's remarks on writing the novel in *An Autobiography*, Chapter 5, "My First Success."

community are too difficult to quantify and value according to metrics of productive labor, and ultimately, they cannot be held to its financial standards; in turn, Hiram's will affords a variety of readings as to the value that the property has steadily accrued over centuries, absolving Harding of any legal responsibility relating to his stipend; and, as a byproduct of the case against Harding, Bold and Eleanor are prevented from pursuing their feelings for one another. While Bold ambitiously seeks "the reform of all abuses," he is unable to acknowledge that "old customs need not necessarily be evil, and that changes may possibly be dangerous"—in other words, that challenging the terms of Harding's wardenship will not mitigate the larger wrongs besetting the Church of England or improve social support for almshouses, and may negatively impact those directly under Harding's care, including Eleanor (13). Beyond what should be done, it is unclear what, if anything, *could* be done to bring a satisfying resolution to all interested parties.

Critics typically associate the uneventful nature of *The Warden*—its focus on everyday life in a small town, its unhurried pace, its lack of action—with Trollope's emphasis on psychological interiority over physical action, character over plot.⁶⁴ After all, the narrator focuses extensively on what his characters think and feel, dwelling on their reflections in lengthy passages that describe states of acute cogitation, and often pays little heed to the progression and pace of the narrative. As readers, we may associate this uneventfulness with the trappings of description, what Georg Lukács casts as the "ideological weakness" of realist novelists like Balzac and Zola, their complacency in merely documenting without performing the work of "relating characters to the action" (146, 135).⁶⁵ But throughout *The Warden*, something else seems to impact the relationship amongst narrative elements. The narrative appears unable to

⁶⁴ For example, Patrick Fessenbecker, who considers inactivity and indecision from the standpoint of nineteenth-century moral psychology.

⁶⁵ See Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?"

build momentum despite the growing urgency and scale of the conflict at hand; in turn, characters routinely appear wracked with the difficulty of determining the best criteria—moral, ethical, political, sometimes personal—for a particular course of action, frozen in states of indecision that appear to belong as much to their psychological condition as to the absence of a strong, guiding plot.

It is not Trollope's lack of interest in plot that produces this narrative enervation, nor is it solely a product of his attention to character; as demonstrated above, the distinction between character and plot does not hold when neither device operates according to the basic conventions of narrative, when an author seems to check rather than facilitate their joint operation. Rather, by making the vicissitudes of everyday life both a central theme of his series and an ambition for its form, Trollope must sustain an atmosphere of weakness, a sense of progression ungirding narrative itself meant to look like—indeed *feel like*—a byproduct of labor over time. In the novel's most prominent and prolonged instance of this sense of weakness impacting character and plot, after Harding confers with the Bishop and Archdeacon Grantly on the best course of action to take when the *Jupiter* brings the Hiram's Hospital case before the public, he discovers that no course of action is possible. As a result of this mental and physical bind, Harding simply stays at home, where Eleanor finds him “doing nothing, thinking of nothing, looking at nothing,” “having hardly moved a limb” for the entirety of a chapter, one bearing the all-too-appropriate title, “Tribulation” (78, 81).

These sustained passages might appear to attenuate the agency that Trollope's characters, as if by virtue of their interiority, otherwise appear to possess, and stifle the power of plot to resolve the conflict. In the example above, Harding's inability to act on his convictions produces mental and physical duress, as he is found to be “merely suffering,” unable to eat or maintain

conversation (78). But as readers discover in *The Warden*, the impoverishment of narrative elements proves beneficial to the form of the novel. Here, the uneventfulness of the preceding narrative suddenly appears conducive to achieving the novel's desired resolution:

Our tale is now done, and it only remains to us to collect the scattered threads of our little story, and to tie them into a seemly knot. This will not be a work of labour, either to the author or to his readers. We have not to deal with many personages, or with stirring events, and were it not for the custom of the thing, we might leave it to the imagination of all concerned to conceive how affairs at Barchester arranged themselves. (165-66)

Unlike the conclusions to Dickens's multi-plot novels, which typically require readers's (and/or the author's) efforts to untangle and rethread waylaid plots at the end of the text in order to achieve narrative closure, the conclusion to *The Warden* poses no such difficulty: it "will not be a work of labour, either to the author or to his readers," a tale so simple that it could almost close by sheer force of imagination, without the work of the author to resolve outstanding conflicts or the strained attempts of readers to supply missing details or to bridge events.⁶⁶ This invocation of effortlessness brings to mind Trollope's remark in *An Autobiography* on the creation of *The Warden* as the "simple result of an effort of my moral consciousness"—an easy effort, and now one that will not require the laborious production of additional pages, or the strenuous untangling of plot lines, to bring it to a close (83-4). Yet the narrator's remarks also suggest that these states of affective indetermination and ambivalence, periods of prolonged reflection in which judgment is confused and action is suspended, are precisely what the novel seeks to engender in its readers, too.

Although each novel in the *Barsetshire* series abides by the law of plot—narratives end when plots do—each also promises a return to the same shared social reality and same affective atmosphere in the following entry. Yet the peculiar sense of weakness contained and produced in

⁶⁶ On Dickens's valuation of complex plotting, see Peter K. Garrett.

miniature within *The Warden*, a single novel rather than an entire series, raises questions for the strength of the novel's affective influence as well as the larger formal and social aims of Trollope's fiction: how does a novel draw to a close when its formal and thematic emphasis has fallen on weakness, on the protraction of experience? And if enervation is the product of multiple narratives, not just one, how is this long-form affect produced within a single narrative, no less a relatively short, single-volume novel? Taking a few steps back from the final chapter and reapproaching the seemingly effortless conclusion of *The Warden*, we can establish just how the otherwise inertial narrative is suddenly propelled forward and finally drawn to its "seemly knot." Stretched out over three chapters, Harding's trip to London to visit attorney-general Abraham Haphazard and resign his wardenship brings into relief just how little action has taken place in the preceding narrative. In order to avoid Grantly's emotional manipulation and the potential morass of feelings incited by his conflicting moral, religious, and personal commitments, Harding escapes Barchester by early-morning train (126). However, even with Harding's "sudden resolve" to act, the narrative does not issue into eventfulness: while Harding has carefully plotted to make it to London without Grantly's knowledge, "us[ing] of all his very moderate powers of intrigue" to reduce the possibility of his son-in-law's intervention, an element of contingency enters the narrative once Harding finds it difficult to arrange a conference with Haphazard, who is booked until late the following day (126). With the appointment delayed, Harding attempts to expend as little energy as possible as he moves between locations in the city—from the Chapter Hotel to Westminster Abbey, to a shellfish shop in the Strand, and to a cigar and coffee lounge—waiting for his fateful appointment with Haphazard. Harding's actions paradoxically decelerate the pace of the narrative at the very moment it appears to issue into something close to urgency: "sit[ting] still meditating on the

same stone step, hour after hour” in the Abbey, falling asleep on the divan, his actions are all preservative and preventative, reprieves that anticipate a future expenditure of energy, a means of “guarding against the coming fatigues of the day” (134, 131).

The purposiveness that has brought Harding to London is further undercut by the contingencies encountered upon his arrival: Haphazard’s limited availability, the possibility that Grantly may arrive by the next mail-train, lingering doubts concerning the efficacy of his upcoming act, and an unanticipated state of slumber that almost makes him miss the late-night appointment altogether. This undercutting even extends to the climactic scene of Harding’s resignation. When he finally manages to meet with Haphazard and explain the purpose of his visit, Harding is greeted with the news that Bold has withdrawn his case, effectively requiring, in legalese, “no action” from the distraught clergyman (141). Here, too, readers are prepared for this formal impasse well in advance: in a preceding chapter, Bold’s meeting with Grantly to announce the end of his campaign is undercut by information Grantly has just received from Haphazard regarding the soundness of the Church’s position, effectively preempting the significance of Bold’s withdrawal. Subsequently, Bold’s attempt to dissuade Tom Towers from publishing more columns against Harding and Hiram’s Hospital in the *Jupiter* is defeated when Towers shows him the wildly popular pamphlet “Modern Charity” by Dr. Pessimist Anticant and the new series *The Almshouse* by Mr. Popular Sentiment, which have together made the case widely known across the country and impossible to abandon.⁶⁷ Happening simultaneously with Harding’s trip to London, Bold’s course of action both augments and at the same time deflates the narrative’s newfound sense of urgency and purpose.

⁶⁷ Anticant and Sentiment represent Carlyle and Dickens, respectively. On the debates concerning institutional and individual charity surrounding these two figures, see Daniel Hack.

Harding's delayed course of action is particularly significant to the novel for two reasons. First, Harding's action follows an earlier, explicit charge from his peers not to act, a charge that registers on social and formal levels. "[H]ow odd it is that you will not see that all we are to do is to do nothing," Grantly states midway through the narrative, attempting to impress upon Harding that their present legal stalemate with Bold's party requires neither defense nor offense (72). While issued to Harding as the central figure in this conflict, Grantly's charge also appears to be directed to him in his fictive capacity to act as a character in a novel—"all we are to do is to do nothing," he says, as if reporting on the state of the plot. This narrative injunction blurs the line between a character's decided, willful inaction, on the one hand, and inaction conditioned by social (and formal) constraint, on the other. Whereas the former species of inaction imputes agency to character, the latter kind, which appears throughout Trollope's series, casts suspicion on actions that appear directed or conditioned from without. *The Warden* thus intentionally centers on a quandary in which inaction often seems the only just course of action and, at times, the only kind of action available to characters.⁶⁸

Second, Harding's action is the only action represented in the novel that directly impacts the course of the narrative. The preceding events have suggested to readers that no character is capable of pursuing any determinate action based on personal conviction or feeling, especially Harding: "he was anxious beyond measure to avoid even a semblance of rupture with any of his order, and was painfully fearful of having to come to an open quarrel with any person on any subject," the narrator remarks, his "passive fortitude" and lack of "active cares" construed as "signs of weakness" by the other characters (44-5, 75). As the narrator observes, Harding is placed in a position in which "he neither knew how to assent or to differ," a position that

⁶⁸ See Jesse Rosenthal, who challenges the assumption that agency need to correspond with narrative action by turning instead to the philosophical tradition of moral intuitionism and context-based decision making.

suggests his complicity is as much a matter of weak will as of the restrictions placed on action under his current circumstances (76).⁶⁹ Understandably, Harding bears a fraught affective stance towards this “false position,” one in which he feels “bound with iron, fettered with adamant,” “in no respect a free agent,” expected by the Bishop and Grantly to simply endure the bad press and maintain his stance on behalf of the Church (77, 83). But even with—or perhaps because of—the intensity of his affective constraints, Harding manages to act on his personal conviction.

Harding’s resignation, despite the social, formal, and affective conditions that have conspired to nullify the significance of the act, represents an impactful—and thus unfamiliar—kind of action in *The Warden*. This action produces a surprising effect on the plot, which has appeared uneventful up to the moment of Harding’s departure in “A Long Day in London,” and, most dramatically, on character. The following chapter, in which Harding confronts Haphazard, culminates in a crescendo of energetic physical gesticulations, as Harding spontaneously breaks into an imaginative performance that impresses his resolve upon the attorney:

[A]s he finished what he had to say, he played up such a tune as never before had graced the chambers of any attorney-general. He was standing up, gallantly fronting Sir Abraham, and his right arm passed with bold and rapid sweeps before him, as though he were embracing some huge instrument, which allowed him to stand thus erect; and with the fingers of his left hand he stopped, with preternatural velocity, a multitude of strings, which ranged from the top of his collar to the bottom of the lappet of his coat. Sir Abraham listened and looked in wonder. As he had never before seen Mr Harding, the meaning of these wild gesticulations was lost upon him; but he perceived that the gentleman who had a few minutes since been so subdued as to be unable to speak without hesitation, was now impassioned,—nay, almost violent. (142)

⁶⁹ On the proliferation of discourses of the will and willing in the nineteenth-century novel, see Sara Ahmed’s *Willful Subjects* (2015). It is interesting to consider the problem of the will in *The Warden* from the perspective of plot, as the novel opens with a plot point by which most mid-Victorian novels would otherwise find resolution: the uncovering of the terms of Hiram’s will and its eventual ramifications on the lives of the novel’s characters. Rather than a momentous discovery that, in a Dickens novel, would alter the fortune of a protagonist, the will is what *The Warden* delineates from the outset, establishing a kind of formal involution of narrative drive and *telos*.

Propped on an invisible violoncello, uncharacteristically animated, Harding is suddenly energized as if from without, his motions not only “impassioned,” but “almost violent.” Appearing as it does at the end of the longest and most trying physical performance of the text, Harding’s action resonates with Haphazard, who is subsequently beset by the very affective indeterminacy that has plagued Harding and most of the residents of Barchester. “The attorney-general had no answer to make” the narrator notes, “so he expressed a quiet hope that whatever settlement was finally made would be satisfactory” (142). While the impact of Harding’s action on the narrative is certain—Harding’s decision to opt out effectively dissipates the central conflict of the narrative, as Haphazard withdraws the Church’s defense—the effects it yields on his character are dwindling and temporary: Harding finds it increasingly difficult to hold his ground when finally confronted by Grantly, responding to his attacks “very, very, meekly” (146). Although the title of this successive chapter, “The Warden is Very Obstinate,” supposes a radical change in Harding’s constitution, the return to a superlative weakness, “very, very mee[k],” suggests that these affective changes require ongoing effort to sustain, and their returns are only residual.

The relative ease with which the novel is brought to a close after Harding’s dramatic resignation presents a problem for the evaluative criteria we bring to bear on *The Warden*. Novels typically culminate in a form of judgment, if not from within, by way of explicit moralization by a narrator, then from without, by providing the means through which readers can support an independent, evaluative claim about the text. As Frances Ferguson argues, “[t]he very formlessness of the novel creates the demand for the evaluation and ranking of characters,” putting more, not less, pressure on their plots to present a kind of closure with a discernible

(moral, ethical, and/or political) outcome (30).⁷⁰ *The Warden* anticipates the eventuality of judgment—in fact, it is what most concerns Harding, that, after the case is made public by the political grandstanding of the *Jupiter*, “he was now to be dragged forth into the glaring day, gibbeted before ferocious multitudes” (78). In the tradition of reading Trollope for his emphasis on psychological interiority, critics typically focus wholly on the ramifications of Harding’s resignation on his character, and usually following the assumption that his action, opting out of further scrutiny, is in conflict with its potential political consequences.⁷¹ Yet in considering the values lauded within this particular narrative—namely, moderation and gradualism—are principled on development over time, we can see that the evaluative criteria is not to be brought to bear on the end of *The Warden*. Rather, it is to be suspended and delayed until the end of the series, when Harding’s actions and inactions can be considered in full.

It is worth pausing here to consider the scope of Trollope’s investment in narrative enervation. Enervating the narrative of *The Warden*, pulling its pace to a steady trot, facilitates a deliberate attention to the protracted nature of lived experience throughout the *Barsetshire* series. Indeed, the work of establishing this constant in the first entry of the series assumes a value that will be yielded in time—in Trollope’s case, over many years and after the incremental accumulation of characters and plots that will amount to a sustained, immersive literary world.

Trollope affirms this long perspective throughout the content of his novels, valuing as he does

⁷⁰ See Ferguson, *Pornography*. Fergusons’ account enables us to see how narrative outcomes, even when they appear to defer or withhold judgment (as in Levine’s reading of the realist novel), nevertheless endorse a particular evaluative schema.

⁷¹ The divide between the moral and the political is not as sharp as it may seem: imagining a kind of politics in which there is no separation of moral duty from political (here: legal, institutional) responsibility, Harding uses his moral position to enjoin the political in self-standards of equity, fairness, and respect. In this way, he shows how the two are intractable in their conflation, and can actually prove powerful when aligned. For considerations of the relationship between the moral and the political, see Anderson, who writes on *Barchester Towers* and *The Way We Live Now*, as well as Earle, who focuses exclusively on *The Warden*.

principles of moral constancy and conscientious thought on the level of individuals. Yet he conveys a much more immediate sense of what this kind of constancy *feels like* on the level of plotting: slowed to the measure of everyday life, a unique sense of change over time and steady persistence despite continual wear emerges from his interconnected narratives by virtue of their uneventful nature. In this sense, Trollope has imported a narrative principle, one that will only become legible when produced by the series as a whole and in the long term, and applied it to an individual narrative.

It is important, then, to reconsider character and plot in *The Warden* after seeing their valuation on the level of the series. First, Trollope's attention to enervation allows readers to reflect on the inattention paid within the novel to the physically- and politically-incapacitated characters who are otherwise meant to be at the very heart of the conflict—the twelve bedesmen of Hiram's Hospital, for whom the (in)decisions of Harding, Grantly, and Bold matter most. For a novel centering on an issue of social reform—how can society better support the elderly poor, those who are no longer able to work for living wages?—it might be expected that the elderly bedesmen take representational priority in the narrative. Although Trollope pays attention to the psychological states of characters like Harding, Bold, and Eleanor, he spends little time representing the lives of the elderly laborers, and dedicates no space to their thoughts. This inattention is encountered early in the narrative when, in response to Bold's case and at the encouragement of the attorney Finney, the bedesmen collectively decide to produce a document to be “taken as representing the feeling of the men” (30). The difficulty arises, however, when the abettors cannot extract signatures from all of the parties—equally due to a division between supporters of Harding (like Bunce) and detractors (like Abel Handy), as well as to their sheer physical inability to sign their names to a document. Only “Bunce himself could write his name

legibly,” the narrator notes; “a faint, wandering, meaningless sign was made, betokening such sanction and authority as Jonathan Crumple was able to convey”; and similarly, Skulpit “made little flourishes with [the pen] in the air,” finally consigning a cross to the document (34). The inability of the elderly men to produce signs of their names is reproduced in their illegibility to the novel as a whole, once the social issue widens in scope. The fact that smudges serve just as well as signatures for the petition—as Handy indicates, “name or mark, it’s all one”—suggests that the impulsive drive for large-scale social reform taken up by Bold (and the narrative) on their behalf will ultimately obscure the laborers as characters in a novel and as subjects of reform. Beyond this chapter, the bedesmen remain virtually absent from the events represented in the narrative, usually figured as an aggregate, “twelve.”

Beyond pushing these characters to the periphery, *The Warden*’s attention to enervation also creates a concern for the legibility of its overarching plot and, as a result, the genre of the novel. A symptom of this generic ambiguity is the subordination of the novel’s marriage plot between Bold and Eleanor, which is pushed aside in the novel’s detours through satire and social critique. Like in many other Victorian novels, the marriage plot in *The Warden* is where the novel’s affects are meant to be strongest: by setting desire against reason, marriage plots typically sustain tension within a narrative and drive it to resolution through a series of incremental developments.⁷² In *The Warden*, this affective tension comes from the fact that, while Eleanor and Bold feel strongly for one another, reason dictates that neither should pursue the relationship. Bold sees a clear conflict of interests in pursuing Eleanor and yet advocating for her father’s financial ruin; at the same time, Eleanor cannot take the hand of her father’s legal

⁷² Taking an alternative approach, Daniel Wright shows how Trollope’s heroines use the tautological language of erotic desire to fight against instrumental reason and coercive propositional logic; in doing so, they resist the asymmetries of marriage, “asserting the force of an erotic desire that has no language of logic available to it” (1125).

assailant, despite Harding's expressed permission. Yet as Trollope develops the marriage plot in the course of this novel, it quickly becomes ancillary rather than central to the narrative as a whole, to the degree that Bold's feelings for Eleanor become instrumental to bringing about the dismissal of the case against Hiram's Hospital. After consulting with her father on his incapacity to act in his own self-interest, Eleanor suddenly realizes how she may convince Bold to withdraw the case. At first, she intends to appeal to Bold's sympathies: "[t]o his mercy, to his generosity, she could appeal; but as a pure maiden, hitherto even unsolicited, she could not appeal to his love" (85). Although she intends to bracket and sacrifice her desires, thinking of herself as a "modern Iphigenia," she ultimately draws on desire to accomplish her intended aim. With Mary's aid, Eleanor surprises Bold in his home and physically confronts him:

"Promise me, promise me," said Eleanor; "say that my father is safe. One word will do. I know how true you are; say one word, and I will let you go."

She still held him, and looked eagerly into his face, with her hair dishevelled, and her eyes all bloodshot. She had no thought now of herself, no care now for her appearance; and yet he thought he had never seen her half so lovely; he was amazed at the intensity of her beauty, and could hardly believe that it was she whom he had dared to love. "Promise me," said she. "I will not leave you till you have promised me."

"I will," said he at length; "I do. All I can do, I will do." (92-3)

Eleanor unintentionally deploys desire to influence Bold's decision to withdraw the case, which inevitably produces his impassioned confession and proposal, too, as evidenced by the pre-marital promise extracted from him, "I do," and soon after, the "volley of impassioned love" in which he "poured forth the feelings of his heart" (94). Much like earlier scenes depicting Harding's imaginative physical performances, this passage similarly slips into a space between cognition and embodiment. Eleanor "had no thought now of herself" in confronting Bold, and yet after this exertion, finds it again difficult to summon the fortitude to resist him, as Bold too sets reason aside for passion: "[a]ll her 'No, no, no's' were met with counter asseverations, and at last were overpowered," "vanquished evidently, palpably vanquished" (94-5). Reflecting on

this achievement as if it were only for the direction of the narrative, the narrator comments at the beginning of the following chapter, “[e]verything would run smooth now” (95).

It is not unusual for a marriage plot to bear such a subordinated role in Trollope’s fiction. Trollope, Sharon Marcus observes, is “one of Victorian Literature’s most assiduous and complacent manufacturers of marriage plots,” and the relative ease with which they are repeatedly deployed demonstrates their pure economic function (227).⁷³ The fact that the union between Eleanor and Bold effected mid-novel appears to privilege utility over desire poses no overt critique of the marriage plot itself: the adequation of Eleanor and Bold as partners places their pairing firmly in a traditional schema of a marriage of means over minds.⁷⁴ Yet it is unusual for a marriage plot to signal the middle rather than the end of a novel. The resolution of the marriage plot mid-narrative—and most significantly, to no real effect on the campaign against Harding nor to the benefit of the bedesmen—draws *The Warden* to a deliberate formal impasse: what can be done when the culmination of the marriage plot fails to resolve narrative conflict, when desire is no longer the central source of narrative drive, or, as in this example, is revealed to have little to do with the focus of the narrative?

This impasse confronts the novel with a formal problem it has otherwise meticulously developed: the actions taken by characters that would afford the resolution of the narrative only further reveal that the narrative could truly continue despite the actions of any character—in fact, that the very stalemate achieved in terms of narrative inaction yields a potentially endless

⁷³ See Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007). Recent work on Trollope’s marriage plots has turned to anthropology as a heuristic for understanding its structural presence in his novels. For example, Kathy Alexis Psomiades argues that the strength of heterosexual exchange as an organizing principle in Trollope, and as a structural logic in the Victorian novel more broadly, is “more a function of its effectiveness and elasticity as a fantasy than of the persistence of the ‘reality’ it describes” (112). See Psomiades. See too Elsie B. Michie.

⁷⁴ See Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds*.

narrative, the continual checks and balances that would drag the novel into an unending cold war between seemingly fundamental oppositions like the stubborn conversation of tradition and the radical reformation of society. What Trollope's narrator pictures here as a formative, potentially endless human conflict between "small desires and grave duties" once more reflects on the larger, fundamental narrative oppositions that *The Warden* and other mid-Victorian novels produce and struggle to maintain: cognition or embodiment, character or plot, realism or sensation (134). Yet *The Warden* does more than simply reflect on this tension: it instrumentalizes it as a means of generating a quiet momentum for the narrative, for beginning a series of novels that will make this tension its thematic as well as formal focus.

Given that *The Warden* has focused extensively, almost exclusively, on weakness and enervation, it should not be surprising then that, for the series to continue, Trollope has to find a new source of narrative drive. In *Barchester Towers*, the second novel in the *Barsetshire* series, Trollope reopens the marriage plot: in the first few pages of that novel, Bold is reported to have died shortly after the events in *The Warden*, and Eleanor is once more marriageable. This move could be said to critique the very reproducibility of the marriage plot, for which he is well known: ending with a bleak vision of comfortless survival rather than the optimism of marriage and progress, Trollope reworks the (re)productive logic of plot that otherwise sets marriage as its end point by, instead, refocusing on life's remainders, the characters who are left out of marriage, desire, production, and other teleological forms of development.⁷⁵ But its reproducibility also demonstrates the familiarity and relative ubiquity of the marriage plot as a source of familiar narrative drive and readerly interest—and the affective ambiguity that results

⁷⁵ As Jacob Jewusiak argues, elderly characters show how Victorian novels struggle to represent "the temporal continuity of an individual life," but also, by figuring as remainders at the end of developmental plots, present "an unplotted energy that threatens to nullify the very structures—of development, of modernity—that [they have] helped to realize" (196). See too Karen Chase, who argues that Trollope's elderly characters push us to understand and value other, non-teleological forms of narrative plotting.

when the strong affects associated with the marriage plot are made peripheral rather than central to a novel.

It is significant that Trollope's first series novel ends not with a scene of dramatic transformation, understood in an array of registers (social, moral, political, or personal), or a cliffhanger to compel readers to pick up the next entry in the series, but with a return to stasis. In the final chapter, the narrator observes that Harding's own life has not measurably improved or, for that matter, deteriorated—" [h]e is neither a discontented nor an unhappy man," the narrator reports—and the financial impact his family incurs as a result of the resignation is insistently minor (168). Although the Church will now need to appoint a new warden, it has already identified a worthy candidate in advance, here extending the very problem that originally occasioned the conflict in this novel into the next (168). However, the affective equilibrium achieved at the end of the narrative reveals a partial loss, as evidenced by the death of half of the twelve bedesmen:

Old Bell has died, and Billy Gazy; the one-eyed Spriggs has drunk himself to death, and three others of the twelve have been gathered into the churchyard mould. Six have gone, and the six vacancies remain unfilled! Nor were those who remained better off than those who died. Dissensions rose among them, and contests for pre-eminence; and then they began to understand that soon one among them would be the last,—some one wretched being would be alone there in that now comfortless hospital,—the miserable relic of what had once been so good and so comfortable. (167)

As if suddenly aware of how the conclusion to the novel will impact the characters on which it has ostensibly centered, the narrator refocuses at the end of the novel on how they will fare without Harding's care. The tension stretched out over the pages of *The Warden* is reproduced in miniature in these final pages in the "now comfortless hospital," as the narrator suggests the endless infighting will only end when one member has finally outlived his peers.

At the same time that Trollope inaugurates a series that, in its attention to the steady, uneventful progression of everyday life, would make the continual progress of life itself appear coextensive with the formal structure of the series itself, he demonstrates that, in order to capture the vicissitudes of life as it changes over time, enervation must not only be narrativized but thematized, too. As a result, these elderly characters will remain a fixture for Trollope, so much so that they will not only persist in the plots to follow *The Warden*, but will mount a challenge, at the end of the author's career, to the narrativization of everyday life as a discrete length of time. Indeed, while the series format may ultimately make enervation legible, it only does so by perpetuating and protracting the affective problems that produce it: the middling struggles of daily life. To return to Langbauer's claim regarding the seeming plotlessness of Trollope's series, the utopian "gesture to openness" that appears to emerge from the unresolved form of these works only underscores the incessant energy needed to maintain, let alone change or improve, the conditions of everyday life (88). The following section considers this challenge.

III. *The Fixed Period*

Given Trollope's interest in reducing plot to its core function as a vehicle for narrative, perhaps it is not surprising that by the end of his life he attempted to abandon plot altogether, or that he looked to a virtually plotless narrative form, the utopian novel, as a means to do so.⁷⁶ Serialized in *Blackwood's* from 1881 to 1882, *The Fixed Period* at first seems radically different from Trollope's "usual" fictions. Taking place a full century in the future on a fictional island nation named "Britannula," the novel follows the events that unfold after a British ex-colony votes into law the titular "Fixed Period." The Fixed Period standardizes the span of human life at sixty-seven and a half years: exactly one year prior to term, law-abiding citizens are to enter a state-

⁷⁶ I am drawing my account of the utopian novel from Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005). I engage with utopia and everyday affects in the following section.

subsidized college (bearing the unfortunate name “Necropolis”) where they will spend their final year under the supervision of attendants before, on the date of their “departure,” they are euthanized with an overdose of morphine and subsequently cremated. The primary purpose of the Fixed Period law is to remedy the social and economic burdens faced by the nation. But Trollope’s narrator, President Neverbend, also intends to initiate a large-scale transformation in the affective conditions of everyday life. The Fixed Period law, he insists, “consists altogether of the abolition of the miseries, weakness, and *fainéant* imbecility of old age, by the prearranged ceasing to live of those who would otherwise become old” (6). Neverbend identifies the kinds of widespread social relief the Fixed Period law will yield by referring to its emotional relief on the individual level—“no senile weakness, no slippered selfishness, no ugly whinings of undefined want”—as well as, secondary in his mind, the economic relief brought to the nation: “[i]t would keep us out of debt, make for us our railways, render all our rivers navigable, construct our bridges, and leave us shortly the richest people on God’s earth!” (91, 8). By enforcing a Malthusian logic of self-selective extinction that will “correct” for overpopulation, Neverbend hopes to eliminate the fear of death and engender a sense of responsibility to the future of humanity in every citizen.⁷⁷

Few critics have written on *The Fixed Period*, but those who have focus almost exclusively on the novel’s departure from Trollope’s traditional themes and narrative devices.⁷⁸ Indeed, it may seem odd to compare Trollope’s first successful realist novel, *The Warden*, to his only work of science fiction, and perverse to suggest that Trollope seriously considered

⁷⁷ For how we can read Malthus’s writings on population with and against novelistic form, see Emily Steinlight.

⁷⁸ Criticism on *The Fixed Period* is quite limited, and even reviews of the novel at its time of publication are scant. This dearth in critical assessments of the novel may be attributed to its anomalous appearance at the end of the novelist’s career and its oddity when read against his familiar works of realist and historical fiction. For critical perspectives on the novel, see Blythe, Cockshut, Chase, and Rogers.

compulsory euthanasia a solution to overcrowded almshouses. Unlike the meek and tactful Harding, Neverbend presents a blunt obduracy and “inflexible will” that is thought to have commanded consensus on the Fixed Period statute (145). Unlike the legislative obstacles to improving social support encountered in *The Warden*, no immediate obstacles appear in *The Fixed Period*: prior to the events of Neverbend’s retrospective narrative, the Fixed Period law is passed with a near-unanimous vote in Britannula’s parliament and with strong, almost enthusiastic support from the public. Unlike the reforms proposed in *The Warden*, which become ungainly as soon as they appear in the pages of the *Jupiter*, the law in *The Fixed Period* has been passed without conflict or complaint—it simply has yet to be put into practice. In terms of formal devices, the differences between the two are similarly stark. Unlike any other novel-length work in Trollope’s career, *The Fixed Period* is told in first-person through a character lacking the omniscience and relative disinterestedness of his third-person narrators. As a result of this shift in perspective, the narrator of *The Fixed Period* can only speculate on the thoughts and feelings of other characters and focuses almost exclusively on his personal interests—primarily, the efficacy of the Fixed Period law. Most significantly, the narrative takes place far beyond the usual demesne of Trollope’s fictions, a full century in the future on a different island nation, a “rising empire in the South Pacific” near New Zealand (11).⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Trollope had tested out a first-person narrator elsewhere, in his 1860 short story, “The Banks of the Jordan.” Inspiration for the setting of *The Fixed Period* (and its first-person perspective, too) may have also come from Trollope’s travel narrative *Australia and New Zealand* (1873). While Trollope dismisses the role of context on his writing process—he infamously notes in his *Autobiography* that *The Warden* was based on no familiarity with provincial clerical matters—it is impossible to consider Trollope’s interest in population control independent of contemporaneous, well-publicized debates concerning the genocide of aboriginal peoples in New Zealand and Australia. This is especially the case when Trollope’s own advocacy of a moderate position excuses violence against these peoples. See Helen Lucy Blythe, who demonstrates how Trollope’s travelogues voice justification regarding the colonization and genocide of the indigenous Maori people.

At first glance, then, *The Fixed Period* could not appear more different from *The Warden*. Yet despite these differences, I propose to read *The Fixed Period* for precisely the ways in which the novel reiterates Trollope's sustained narrative project—specifically, the narrative enervation that *The Warden*, and the entries that followed, look to trace and engender in readers through their protracted impact on character and plot. At the end of this long line of literary production, *The Fixed Period* contains a particularly undermotivated, almost plotless narrative, focusing extensively on the conditions under which its utopia will function and, in several chapters, merely enumerating the idyllic features conducive to bringing it into being—its rolling hills, steam-powered vehicles, and the pristine capital city of Britannula, Gladstonopolis. Yet *The Fixed Period* also shares a formal problem with its series predecessors: what happens to novelistic form when it doesn't have a clear drive for resolution or closure, when the underdetermination of affect imparts a pervasive sense of torpidity and belies the transformative energy needed to bring widespread social change to pass?

The Warden and *The Fixed Period* share a diffuse affective atmosphere that, stretching like a membrane across his entire body of work, ultimately challenges the normal operation of narrative elements like character and plot. Even in a literary form that might afford transformations that would transcend the placidity encountered in Trollope's earlier works by way of its speculative futurism, the utopia he imagines is positively ordinary, remarkably similar to the conditions of everyday life in Barchester. Neverbend imagines that the Fixed Period law will solve all existing social problems, but he also understands that it can only do so by generating an atmosphere more conducive, more congenial, to living a rich, full, and productive life—indeed, in eliminating the sense of trepidation and hesitation with which one approaches the end of life. Although he makes use of oblique statistics and vague historical precedent to

corroborate his aims, and at one point recognizes that the Fixed Period law would only work “for a republic in which there were no classes violently distinguished from their inferior brethren,” the benefits of this law are not grounded in rationality alone (178). Rather, the strongest claim to its benefits concerns the affective lives of generations to come: “All the existing ideas of the grave would be absent. There would be no further struggles to prolong the time of misery which nature had herself produced” (9). Although he acknowledges the objection that, at the present moment, “the old themselves would not like it,” Neverbend projects that the emotional benefits will be paid out to future populations, for whom the fear of death will no longer mar their enjoyment of life (7).

As in his series novels, placidity betrays a fervent struggle underneath its calm surface; as in *The Warden*, the product of this obstructive affective atmosphere in *The Fixed Period* is a tension between action and inaction seemingly originating from the failings of plot and character. As Neverbend recounts in the opening chapter of the novel, the largest obstacle encountered in the process of implementing the Fixed Period comes not from the legislative barriers to the law’s practice, but rather from the affective indeterminacy surrounding the elderly subject of the inaugural deposition, Gabriel Crasweller, who is Neverbend’s colleague and close friend. As Neverbend is eager to remind readers, the success of the system is wholly premised on the first example and the “willing obedience” of the first party: it “should be effected with some *éclat* of voluntary glory,” so as to demonstrate its beneficence and to encourage subsequent electors (40). As the narrative progresses, Neverbend repeatedly attributes the public’s growing uncertainty concerning the Fixed Period law to Crasweller’s “personal feeling,” which, despite his hand in shaping the law, now prevents the soon-to-be depositor from advocating for the doctrine. Instead, Crasweller attempts to dupe Neverbend into believing that he is a year younger than his

records indicate, and publicly advocates for a postponement. In Neverbend's estimation, Crasweller's weakness to commit to his death pales in significance when compared to the widespread, potentially global developments the Fixed Period statute will inevitably yield, developments that will not only alleviate the socio-economic burden of citizens who are beyond social use and who now require "maintenance," that "third of the population [...] with which the labour of the world is thus saddled," but will re-imagine the very terrain of human feeling: "to [the elderly] there would be no degraded feeling that they were the recipients of charity," he muses, continuing to claim that the "temptation to the young to begrudge to the old the costly comforts which they could not earn would be no longer fostered" (7, 9). "[T]hat which vexed me most was that Gabriel Crasweller [...] should be anxious to throw over the whole system to preserve the poor remnant of his life," Neverbend writes, scrutinizing Crasweller's inability to properly measure his significance against furthering the aims of the new system (26). But when later considering whether or not he himself could serve as the first deposittee, Neverbend similarly shies away from the affectively freighted responsibility, writing "[t]he natural weakness incidental to my feelings would have prevailed" (179). The difficulty, it seems, is the emotional and psychological strength required to effectively commit suicide, no matter its greater social, ethical, or affective aims. Lieutenant Crosstrees, an English officer on the gunboat that interrupts the first deposition and deports Neverbend back to England to await trial, engages the disgraced ex-President in a debate on precisely the limits of self-abnegation. "Strength is very strong," Crosstrees flatly states, "but it is not half so powerful as weakness" (175). When expressed after Neverbend's public defeat and subsequent internment, this platitude suggests that no law could ever coerce an individual to act against his or her will—in Crosstrees's example, "The Parliament in England might order a three-months-old baby to be slain, but could not possibly

get the deed done” (175). But in its position at the close of the novel, the claim that strength “is not half so powerful as weakness” reflects the inverted affective rationale of the narrative itself, in which individual moral weakness overrides the “strength” of social coercion.

Most of Neverbend’s narrative engages with this tension between compulsive weakness, or “personal feeling,” and the nascent drive to take action in the interest of the world at large. Chapters alternate between Neverbend’s articulation of the Fixed Period law and protracted episodes in which he contemplates the courses of action set before him. At his most uncertain, Neverbend ruminates on the immediate rather than long-term impact of his actions, as when Eva confronts him on the day of Crasweller’s deposition:

I sat for some time motionless, trying to turn over in my mind all that she had said to me; but it seemed as though my faculties were utterly obliterated in despair. Eva had been to me almost as a daughter, and yet I was compelled to refuse her request for her father’s life. [...] I had flattered myself that I did it for the public good; but was I sure that obduracy did not come from my anxiety to be counted with Columbus and Galileo? or if not that, was there not something personal to myself in my desire that I should be known as one who had benefited my species? (111).

Neverbend’s first-person account of indecision dwells on the physical incapacitation that accompanies prolonged reflection. Despite the generic differences, Trollope here provides an attentiveness to interiority and psychology similar to that in *The Warden*—compare, for example, Neverbend’s “faculties... utterly obliterated in despair” with Harding’s “doing nothing, thinking of nothing, looking at nothing” (*The Warden* 78). But as the quotation above demonstrates, unlike Harding, Neverbend’s indecision stems from a kind of conflation of his personal beliefs with the larger social and political system in which he is now enmeshed. “[W]as there not something personal to myself in my desire that I should be known as one who has benefited my species?” Neverbend asks. The problem appears to be that his personal feelings are congruent with the social project he has successfully engineered. Neverbend often describes the operations

of the Fixed Period law as a kind of “loving work,” language borrowed from the well-meaning sentiments for social reform in *The Warden*, yet appearing here under the auspices of the narrator’s utilitarian perspective on the management of life (*TFP* 17). Very early in the narrative, Crasweller claims Neverbend “[has] come to be in love with deposition and departure”; shortly after, even Neverbend’s wife attests to the President’s love for the law and subsequent failure to see beyond his aims and recognize the public’s growing opposition to it (36, 55). Compared with *The Warden* and the rest of the *Barsetshire* series, the perspective of the narrator in *The Fixed Period* is reversed: unlike *The Warden*’s omniscient narrator, who has a wide field of vision over Barchester but is curiously unable to peer into minds in moments of excited physical performance, in *The Fixed Period*, other characters provide insight into what the narrator, by way of his anchored subjectivity, affective ambiguity, and perverse social aims, cannot realize. Judging from the perspectives presented by the other characters in the novel, it is transparent that Neverbend’s inaction stems from a refusal to see the dangers of the Fixed Period law; from his own perspective, it appears as a genuine inability to feel them, a form of hardness won from years of advocacy and the potential of the current socio-political moment in which the Fixed Period doctrine might finally, at long last, come to pass.

However, Neverbend gradually encounters greater, external obstacles to taking action as the public appeals to the pressing matter of Crasweller’s family and the security of their future livelihood: the Little Christchurch acreage he will bestow upon his daughter, Eva, upon his death (26). Crasweller soon finds that Abraham Grundle, who has proposed and contracted to marry Eva for the sole purpose of securing the property, now jeopardizes the family’s inheritance. Grundle aligns himself with the Fixed Periodists and thus draws greater attention from the public to the heinousness of the Fixed Period law. Neverbend begins to sympathize with Crasweller:

he too has a family and is concerned for their financial well-being after his demise, and in moments of doubt, he laments the “sad” rather than “loving work” of the Fixed Period law and the “unfeeling pertinacity” by which he continues to pursue the project, especially when the “first martyr” is his closest friend (93, 100). Neverbend struggles with himself, trying to marshal the courage of conviction to persuade the reluctant deposittee, as well as with affective forces beyond his control:

Eva and Little Christchurch, ... and all my wife’s longings, must be laid on one side, and my whole energy must be devoted to the literal carrying out of the law. It was a great world’s movement that had been projected, and if it were to fail now, just at its commencement, when everything had been arranged for the work, when again would there be hope? It was a matter which required legislative sanction in whatever country might adopt it. No despot could attempt it, let his power be ever so confirmed. The whole country would rise against him when informed, in its ignorance, of the contemplated intention. [...] I had seen enough of human nature to understand its weakness in this respect. All circumstances had combined to make it practicable in Britannula, but all these circumstances might never be combined again. And it seemed to me to depend now entirely on the power which I might exert in creating courage in the heart of the poor timid creature who sat before me. (35)

In the confluence of forces that have finally enabled his fellow citizens to accept the practicality of the Fixed Period, Neverbend sees firsthand an unprecedented opportunity to alter the course of human history, as well as tremendous obstacles at the level of the individual. First, while the citizens see the law as a rational and just measure, Crasweller demonstrates that the affective barrier to willing one’s own death becomes more intense the closer one gets to the fatal act. Neverbend goes to great lengths to bridge the utopian ideal and its reality by way of frequent appeals to the courage and heroism of the first deposittee. But the second obstacle comes too from Neverbend’s own struggle to act on his ideals, to convince Crasweller and the public at large that the Fixed Period will institute a veritable utopia in Britannula, and after will quickly expand, as he constantly claims, to become an “absolutely benevolent project for the governance of the world” (123). It would seem, then, that part of enacting the law comes from becoming

swept up in a larger current of its promised affective transformation: “I could easily let the law die away,” he comments regarding Crasweller’s upcoming day of deposition, “but it was not in my power to decide that it should fall into partial abeyance,” suggesting that the possibility of its passage is now a facet of inevitable historical development rather than mere individual tenacity (101).

As indicated above, the success of the Fixed Period system depends wholly on the first subject, the individual who submits willingly not only to the law but to the idealism of a future without the burden of death—a future in which the natural fear of one’s own death has been eradicated and in which giving up “the continued maintenance of those whose cares should have been made to cease” has finally yielded immense socio-economic gains (6). In this sense, the largest obstacle to the Fixed Period law comes from the passage from law to norm, the imperceptible historical process through which the legislation of a set term of life is no longer imposed from without but felt from within and followed without hesitation or question. This alteration in human norms, which must take place at the level of feeling and which Neverbend imagines as a sea-change after the first deposition, invokes the gradual transformation of global affect that Foucault situates at the emergence of biopolitics. Foucault’s formulation has been used to articulate how a global transformation in the conditions of life in the nineteenth century—most notably, via overpopulation—produced political strategies capable of managing life, a historical moment “when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies” (143).⁸⁰ This imperceptible shift in affect is facilitated by a change in the status and function of law itself: no longer concerned with taking life, “display[ing] itself in its murderous splendor” as

⁸⁰ See Foucault’s formative articulation of “biopolitics” in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (1978).

a means of upholding sovereignty, the law has the power “of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility,” impacting how individuals feel in relation to their own worth (144).

The Fixed Period law is similarly charged with effecting the regulation and management of life rather than authorizing death, which it ostensibly achieves by blending the management of life with the authorization of death. While Neverbend is less interested in the “politico-economical view,” the critical distinction between “brutal modern invention” and “beneficent modern theory” depends on it: the law is difficult to justify when deposition looks like a death sentence, a means of simply eliminating “the old and effete,” rather than a redefinition of the terms of life itself to ensure “the welfare of those who were to remain” (7, 117, 171). In order to stress its character as the management of life rather than consignment to death, Neverbend provides readers with a guided tour of the Necropolis to demonstrate the humane dimensions of the process.⁸¹ The beatific “hamlet” is described in detail over the course of a chapter titled “The College,” a title referring to Neverbend’s intention to “make the spot cheerful, rather than sad,” associating it with collegiality and community despite its namesake. (“Young Grundle has suggested Cremation Hall, because such was the ultimate end to which the mere husks and hulls of the citizens were destined,” Neverbend notes. “But there was something undignified in the sound,—as though we were talking of a dancing saloon or a music hall...” (82).⁸² While Neverbend intends to represent the Necropolis as a pastoral retreat, little can take away from the furnaces and smokestacks, or the smell of burnt pig flesh produced by an unfortunate experiment meant to demonstrate the odorless dissolution of human life (83).

⁸¹ The “guided tour” is a convention of utopian fiction, the accumulation of descriptions and details that amount to a blueprint of the social project. See Jameson in *Archaeologies*.

⁸² Concerning the satirical dimensions of *The Fixed Period*, see Henry N. Rogers III.

Fredric Jameson argues that utopian fiction represents a tension “between the timeless placidity of... achieved Utopias and the enormity of the social ills and evils that lends the Utopian solution its urgency and passion” (*Archaeologies* 188). In *The Fixed Period*, Neverbend’s intended utopia—a world unburdened by the elderly—is consigned to enervation and impossibility for a similar, but qualitatively, different reason: the kind of transformation in everyday life Neverbend seeks to create for the citizens of Britannula, a transformation that would eliminate old age as a “social ill,” can only come to pass from an “urgency and passion” otherwise missing from the proposed solution, for which no amount of energy on the part of the public can be summoned. Yet utopia also presents, as Jameson maintains, a problem for the relationship between affect and narrative form. The sense of “timeless placidity” that utopia seeks to create is not immediate or momentous in impact, but diffuse and durational, a matter of subtle alterations in public feeling over time; these alterations can only be represented as diffuse and durational by way of a similar narrative form. *The Fixed Period* recasts this existential problem of utopia—the radical energy required to create a particular utopia is in conflict with the low-intensity, ordinary energy utopia strives to install in its place—as a formal problem: the one-volume novel is too short to effectively inculcate anything close to the durational affects encountered in Trollope’s series fiction. Neverbend’s brief retrospective narrative fails to provide a sense of the urgency behind the struggle itself, at times challenging the very uniformity of sentiment he seeks to institute by way of the law. (To note, the only real advocates of the law represented in the novel are Neverbend, whose frequent self-comparisons to Columbus and Galileo undermine the professed modesty of his aims, and Grundle, whose self-interest in Crasweller’s deposition is thoroughly exhibited.) It is impossible to make this uniform placidity felt, in part because it is difficult to imagine such a radical transformation occurring all at once,

and in part because the kind of affective transformation intended—incremental and futural, an opaque sense of one’s life as a known period of time—is premised on a gradual shift that can only be effected with consensus over time.

The Fixed Period, like *The Warden*, is premised on brevity, while necessarily linked to the long-term form in which Trollope worked. But unlike Trollope’s first successful novel, *The Fixed Period* promises no continuation of its narrative beyond its close. As Jameson attests, this formal impasse, the drive to produce a form that is continuous and endless, on the one hand, and yet comprehensive, complete, and total, on the other, is foundational to representing utopia. The obstacle to Neverbend’s utopia, then, is not solely a matter of form. This prospective transformation in feeling is particularly difficult to realize, too diffuse or too large in terms of scale, to execute. It is a problem of incommensurable affective scales: the weak global affect Neverbend intends to promulgate is not just imperceptible on the level of the individual, but in direct opposition to the “strong” affects encountered when facing prearranged death, and to the kinds of affects that can be represented in an isolated, self-contained literary work. The law is intended to produce a veritable sea change in social feelings towards death, to the extent that Neverbend attempts to police the use of terms like “murder” and “slaughter,” but it is difficult to justify on the level of the individual. “I had no right to be angry with Crasweller,” Neverbend writes, “because Crasweller, when tried, proved himself to be no stronger than the world at large” (157). What Neverbend describes as Crasweller’s failure of “personal feeling,” his inability to rationalize his death as an aid to future generations, is an uncharacteristically “strong” feeling in a novel that depends upon a weaker range of affective influence—especially when Crasweller, after managing to resist Neverbend’s call for most of the novel, finally submits out of deference rather than weakness:

There was no high feeling as to future generations of his fellow-creatures, no grand idea that he was about to perform a great duty for the benefit of mankind in general, but simply the notion that as he had always advocated my theory as my friend, he would not now depart from it, let the cost to himself be what it might. (100)

In a novel focused on one leader's aims to remap the terrain of human feeling, to eliminate the kinds of weakness that make subjects cling to life long after their lives hold social value, Crasweller's submission, despite his demonstrated health and vigor, represents a profound reversal. Unlike Neverbend, Crasweller has "no high feeling as to future generations," but a lower kind of feeling of loyalty and commitment to family and tradition. Like his namesake, Neverbend remains obdurate in the face of Crasweller's humble submission, although in a moment of weakness, he confronts his own inability to force his friend to commit to death: "I have none of that steel and fibre which will enable a really strong man to stand firm by convictions even when opposed by his affections," Neverbend observes, continuing "To have liberated Crasweller at this moment, I would have walked off myself, oh, so willingly, to the college!" (99).

The affective dilemma presented in *The Fixed Period* emerges out of the long-term project of an author known for his stubborn remainders, the elderly characters who fail to fit in the ordinary *telos* of developmental or marriage plots, and who persist long after those plots have been brought to a close. These figures, who linger on from novel to novel as emblems of the peculiar longevity of the *Barsetshire* series, now appear in *The Fixed Period* under the guise of a familiar formal problem: the elderly pose an obstacle to the legislation of life as a discrete, fixed period of time by outliving the standard length of developmental plots, underscoring the difficulty with which novelistic form attempts to represent—and in doing so, potentially normalize—the duration of a life. Trollope's penultimate novel is peopled with these characters: Graybody, the curator of Neverbend's Necropolis, Old Barnes and Tallowax, who are second

and third in line after Crasweller, and of course Neverbend himself, whose own ruminations on the efficacy of the Fixed Period law push him to question his ideological commitment when facing the fact that he, too, will soon need to submit. *The Fixed Period* is invested in figuring out what to do with its elderly characters, and one can almost picture the island populated by the remainders of Trollope's series.

The Fixed Period is unflinching in its attention to the characters pushed to the periphery of his series plots and the issues of expendability and survival that beset them. Despite Neverbend's limited capacity to assess the psychological states of others, one could not imagine a more fitting formal development for an author who has consistently focused on character than the turn to the direct, unmediated representation of interiority. It is all the more interesting, then, when plot is suddenly reprioritized in this utopian novel, and a particularly familiar form of plot: the marriage plot. The change in public feeling towards the law that develops around Crasweller draws in characters who have otherwise been occluded in the narrative—namely, two young lovers, Jack Neverbend and Eva Crasweller. While Neverbend begins to investigate rumors of Crasweller's defection, his son Jack becomes interested in Crasweller's daughter, who vocally denounces the Fixed Period law and her father's eminent deposition. Eva makes it explicit to Neverbend that Jack can only marry her if her father's deposition is postponed: "I do love him better than any one in the world," Eva states, "But as things are, I can never marry him if papa is to be shut up in that wretched City of the Dead" (109). Jack becomes an "anti-Fixed-Periodist," publically advocating for Crasweller's freedom and seeking, in turn, Eva's trust and affection. Quite suddenly, Neverbend, who is otherwise focused on the plans, procedures, and policies of his utopia, is now distracted by a more familiar form of feeling and narrative drive: desire.

Appearing midway through the novel, the marriage plot overtakes Neverbend's narrative. Despite himself, Neverbend wanders into passages explaining developments in an emerging web of desire: Eva, who is no longer betrothed to Grundle, becomes the love interest of Sir Kennington Oval, a British cricketeer who has arrived on the island to prepare for the upcoming international match against Jack and the Britannulists. A palpable tension develops in the novel between the plotlessness of Neverbend's narration and the emergence of a very familiar novel plot, to the extent that Neverbend openly remarks on the disruptions as impositions on his narration: "I don't think that we need bring Jack and his love into this dispute," Neverbend states when attempting to discuss the matter of Crasweller's deposition, insisting that all parties "keep these two things separate... in discussing the momentous question of the Fixed Period, let us forget the loves of a boy and a girl" (38-39). Failing to heed Neverbend, the people of Britannula turn their attention to Eva and Jack, rallying behind a stronger kind of affective bond that in turn underscores how little they can sympathize with the aims of the Fixed Period. "It grieved me greatly to be told that the inhabitants of Gladstonopolis would rise in tumult and destroy the college merely to favour the views of a pretty girl," Neverbend remarks, unable to see early in his narrative that it has become inadvertently infused with the dynamics of desire, too (47). The co-optation of the utopian narrative by the marriage plot is dramatized most clearly when Neverbend discusses the subject with Ruggles, "a man whom I regarded as indifferent to length of life," yet who nevertheless articulates how the sentiments surrounding Eva will disrupt the Fixed Period. "'Do you suppose that her opinion will be allowed to interrupt the laws of the whole community, and oppose the progress of civilisation?'" Neverbend asks, to which Ruggles simply replies, "[h]er feelings will" (46). Ruggles's suggestion, that the strength of personal feeling will override "the progress of civilisation," holds true as Neverbend becomes

preoccupied with persuading Jack to decouple his feelings for Eva from a defense of her father and a public campaign against the Fixed Period.

The sudden appearance of the marriage plot may seem incidental, especially in Trollope's most experimental novel. However, the marriage plot completely overwhelms Neverbend's narrative, initially crowding out concerns for the Fixed Period law and quickly leading to the collapse of his utopian project. In the most dramatic moment of plot reasserting itself in the narrative, Trollope's novel takes a sustained digression for an entire chapter to describe the international cricket match in great detail. Initially developed in the background of Neverbend's guided tour, the cricket match serves as England's first encounter with Britannula since its defection; as the date of the cricket match looms closer, the excitement generated around the monumental event overtakes Neverbend's descriptions of public policy. The effects on the narrative are self-evident, as when Neverbend himself announces the digression from his guided tour: "I had been of late so absorbed in the affairs of the Fixed Period, that I had altogether forgotten the cricket-match and the noble strangers who were about to come to our shores" (58). In this, the longest chapter in the novel, Neverbend finds himself compelled to put aside discussion of the Fixed Period law, if only to avoid bringing attention to the subject "within hearing and speaking of the crowd of thoroughly old-fashioned, prejudiced, aristocratic young Englishmen" (59). Indeed, unlike everything else around it in the novel, England's arrival and the ensuing cricket match are actual *events* and represent a progression in the narrative rather than an idling pause over the enumeration of legislative details or Neverbend's familiar self-questioning and rumination on the impossible task set before him. Neverbend almost forgets his role as a narrator, focusing the whole of his attention to Jack's performance in the match: "Let him make what orations he might against the Fixed Period, all Gladstonopolis would follow him

if he won this game of cricket for them” Neverbend states, later remarking “they regarded it as though a great national combat had been fought” (75, 78). Driven by his love for Eva, Jack single-handedly crushes England in the competition. His victory changes the tenor of the narrative, injecting it with an unfamiliar energy, vitalizing it; as a result, he changes the very atmosphere on the island by introducing something other than the anxious expectancy of Crasweller’s upcoming deposition. While the contest establishes the point of contact with another nation, the outside force that always signals an end to utopia, the immediate revolution in feeling that takes place on the island suggests that Neverbend’s plan would have inevitably collapsed from within.⁸³

Spontaneously appearing in the middle of the novel, the marriage plot quickly brings Neverbend’s utopian plan to a close. “I felt that there was creeping up, as it were in the very atmosphere, a feeling [that] England should be again asked to annex us,” Neverbend bitterly notes, “so as to save our old people from the wise decision to which our own Assembly had come” (68). After Britannula’s victory, the English cricketers remain to do exactly that: for an unspecified interim period, the island is recolonized by England’s “Secretary of Benevolence,” Sir Ferdinando; immediately, the Fixed Period law is dismantled and the nation is brought once again under English rule; and Neverbend, now a solemn and disgraced ex-President, is sent off on a steamship back to England. All of the excitement that amounted to bringing Eva and Jack together, indeed, all of the narrative action and eventfulness intruding upon an otherwise plotless text, produces a very different narrative from the low-intensity, affectively diminished original.

Although Neverbend’s narrative does not continue, the return of the marriage plot preempting his utopian vision of perpetual plotlessness, Trollope nevertheless manages to render

⁸³ On this convention, see Jameson in *Archaeologies*. For a similar observation on cricket and imperialism, see Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (2000).

this work relatively open-ended. Departing on a vessel to England, Neverbend plans to advocate for the Fixed Period abroad, unclear on whether he will be welcomed in England as an esteemed guest or as their political prisoner, an eerie parallel to becoming “deposited.” In this capacity, he reflects on how best to present the Fixed Period in order to advocate for the affective transformation he envisions for the future, and ultimately settles on the very narrative he has produced: “What shall I do with my book? Who will publish it? How shall I create an interest for it? Is there one who will believe, at any rate, that I believe in the Fixed Period?” Neverbend asks (180). This concern for presenting his utopia as a literary form is premised in part on generic ambiguity. As Jameson writes, utopias speculate on their futurity as if on the “future of a literary genre”: because utopias require a “resolutely formalist” solution to come into being, “an absolute formalism, in which the new content emerges itself from the form and is a projection of it,” the founding of a utopia is always a question of how best to represent it, given that it is unlike any form that has preceded it (211-212). At the outset of his narrative, Neverbend demonstrates an understanding of these formal barriers to representing utopia as a non-narrative form. Yet the end of his narrative, he reveals that he sought to circumvent these formal barriers by way of introducing feeling: “I have put it into the shape of a story, because I think that I may so best depict the feelings of the people around me as I made my great endeavour to carry out the Fixed Period in Britannula” (176). Yet as Neverbend has found, the act of making it a story has effectively de-formed the utopian affects—plotlessness and perpetuity, the absence of exciting (and thereby disruptive) emotions, the alleviation of ill will and want—he initially sought to represent in his narrative and in doing so, instantiate in reality.

Unlike Trollope’s series fiction, *The Fixed Period* is not linked to a shared literary world, and in its enclosed plotlessness, it does not strive to become connected with his earlier works.

But arriving at the end of his career, *The Fixed Period* does represent the culmination of their affective aims. Albeit a brief and flawed work, it reflects on the enervation of the all-too-familiar characters and kinds of plots on which his extensive literary project was built. In short, *The Fixed Period* demonstrates how a contained narrative form can ultimately project a sense of seriality, of extension and affective duration, by way of its position at the end of an unprecedented career of literary production. The concluding chapters of *The Fixed Period* issue into scenes of extended deliberation and debate over the Fixed Period law, as Neverbend is permitted a final town-hall meeting to explain his departure and, then aboard the steamship to England, brought into open debate with his shipmates. Yet the focus of these debates is not over the efficacy of the Fixed Period law, but on how best to affect the kind of transformation in feeling required to achieve utopia:

I confess that my belief in the efficacy of spoken words, of words running like an electric spark from the lips of the speaker right into the heart of him who heard them, was stronger than my trust in written arguments. They must lack a warmth which the others possess; and they enter only on the minds of the studious, whereas the others touch the feelings of the world at large. (172)

Although it occurs to Neverbend quite late that speech may ultimately serve as a better medium for presenting the Fixed Period, he suggests here that utopia cannot be narrated by conventional (re: novelistic) means. Rather, it must take the form of a polemic, a dramatic and affecting presentation that strongly impresses recipients with the force of the charge and an imperative to change, “touch[ing] the feelings of the world at large” rather than the minds of a select few. As Neverbend states at the outset of the novel, and repeats throughout his narrative, “feelings are changeable” (8). But what *The Fixed Period* is unable to define is exactly how long it will take for feelings to change and for such a wide-scale transformation to occur. Nor can it lend clarity

to an affective transformation that must, by virtue of its dispersion and muted impact, remain impalpable.

IV. The Utopian or the Usual?

What Henry James articulates as his difficulty in “keeping up” with Trollope’s nearly continuous rate of production and publication is also an expression of the difficulty in understanding what, precisely, sustains the tireless performance of Trollope’s narratives, their persistence despite the barriers repeatedly raised to character and plot. As critics like Miller and Langbauer have argued to different ends, Trollope looks to expose the operations of everyday life as unceasing, drawing attention to our own fatiguing efforts to “keep up” and our dwindling affective resources for doing so. “In presenting the everyday as everything, and that everything as more than we can ever take in,” Langbauer reasons, “Trollope’s series shows us the site and mode of our engagement with the social system—its performance, not its end” (127). This sense of everyday life as irreducible yet endlessly performative similarly informs Miller’s critique of Trollope’s “usualness,” how his novels make the sensations we associate with political moderation and religious tolerance, and the seemingly inviolable institutions that uphold them, appear positively ordinary, unshakeable edifices of historical progress. Although Miller claims that the formal consistency of Trollope’s series effectively concretize and consecrate this flux as inevitable and unchangeable, Langbauer understands Trollopian form to mitigate it, enabling readers to understand our embeddedness in society and everyday engagement with its affective future.

However, both Miller and Langbauer assume that the affective norms Trollope tracks in his series—the dull, the ordinary, the usual—are synecdochally linked to their historical reality. In other words, they appear in agreement that the sense of enervation represented in Trollope’s fiction corresponds with Trollope’s own historical moment—and, by extension, that this

enervation impacts contemporary readers in similar ways because of their striking resemblance to the vicissitudes of our own everyday lives. Carolyn Dever agrees that this sense of historical verisimilitude and contiguity is an epistemic product of the series form:

[I]n the Barsetshire series Trollope attempts to produce [...] a post-1848 narrative epistemology: it may be true that everyone knows how *novels* end, but Trollope underscores the point that in the modern social logic of the 1850s, the social order itself is uncontainable within the conventions of narrative form. [...] In this world, the immanence of possibility burdens even casual social transactions with the thrill of the mysterious. Trollope puts immanent possibility to strategic use and subtly redirects formal tensions from the global to the local, from the narrative to the individual psyche. (863)

Dever locates historical contingency in Trollope's undeveloped plot lines that, while they flounder or fail in the larger schema of the series, produce a sense of agency when facing the seemingly stable, conventional, predictable course of events in individual entries like *The Warden*. For Dever, like Langbauer, these "embryo plots" allow Trollope to produce "the cumulative appearance of social stability against a backdrop of dramatic and even revolutionary social change," a sense of history as open to radical alteration, incrementally influenced by our everyday thoughts and feelings, and a guarantee that the social world is not containable and resolvable, like narrative, but ongoing, and therein capable of transformation by individual means (864).

As encountered in the attenuation of conventional narrative elements like character and plot in *The Warden* and *The Fixed Period*, Trollope's narrative enervation may convey a sense of history's ongoing, unceasing development, but it presents clear obstacles to the assumed stability of formal categories of the novel. The kind of narrative that could best represent the endless progression of time would be endless yet self-enclosed, expansive yet delimited, an impossibly self-sustaining literary world; yet as discovered in the case of *The Fixed Period*, the attempt to bring about utopia requires a form of energy in violation of the calm it seeks to establish in its

wake. To put it another way: there is a persistent tension in Trollope's series, and a residual tension left unresolved in his penultimate, single-volume novel, between his ongoing attempts to describe a historical condition as it develops and to develop a literary form truly capable of capturing mutability without consecrating it as "History." This is a tension shared by utopia, as "a representation which has become a closure, as far as possible (and it is of course impossible) autonomous and self-referential" (*Archaeologies* 39-40). Trollope's *Barsetshire* series does not represent Barchester as an actual utopia, nor does the author intend for it to come across as one. The conflicts and tensions that open and reopen his series novels works, sustaining them through what Miller identifies as a kind of perpetual warfare fueled by personal strife, suggest that it is far from a static vision of society. And as evidenced by challenged posed to utopia *The Fixed Period*, establishing utopia is contrary to narrative and novel form itself.

However, Trollope's attempts to resolve this ongoing struggle in *The Fixed Period* reflects a desire to invest narrative with the means of capturing our ability to question, recalibrate, and redirect our "ordinary" or "usual" affective states. By underscoring the inchoate and interstitial sensations that make up what we come to think of as "everyday life" through the impoverishment of character and plot, Trollope uses narrative enervation to make time's passage seem less monumental. Treating this sense of affective impoverishment produced in reading affects as "suspicious"—for Miller, the fervent masked by boredom—comes at the expense of understanding how enervation might help us rethink social and historical progress as an extension of lived experience. Seemingly aware of this tendency for reading affects to mask the larger aims of a narrative, Trollope acknowledges in his autobiography that the worst an author can do is produce tedium in readers, to which Trollope suggests the only possible check is "the

feeling of the writer himself,” “the sense that the thing is becoming long” (*Autobiography* 217-18).

While Trollope’s sparing use of plot may have sustained the author’s steady rate of production, enabling him to develop his long-form narratives, its underdetermined presence in his individual novels brings to light how enervation not only migrate beyond the confines of the series, but bear a similar influence on form in self-enclosed novels with contained narratives. The narrative enervation represented in Trollope’s individual novels invokes something close to an unbroken continuum between enervation felt by readers in the mid-nineteenth century, the work of continually making sense of everyday life, and enervation felt today, as readers of these works embedded in our own everyday struggles. There is, of course, a vital distinction between the two, and not merely a historical one. “Self-continuity and self-extension are different things,” writes Lauren Berlant, continuing “[a]nother way to say this might be that lives are not novels—or maybe they are, as no critic has ever accounted for all the acts and details in a novel either” (99). To think of Trollope’s narrative project as one of self-extension rather than self-continuity is to consider how isolated narratives can come to represent, no less than to endow life with, a sense of affective duration as itself a process, to think of our finitude and expendability as similar to, but not coextensive with, the length of a novel. In this respect, it is also to consider a real concern for the formal difficulties a novel encounters when attempting to represent characters who violate its affective economy. It is no wonder that it is difficult for Trollope to mobilize, or get rid of, elderly characters who linger beyond his plots, who refuse to die and who cast their long shadows over his future work(s). Trollope demonstrates that against the atomizing effects of reading in the mid-nineteenth-century novel, narrative enervation enjoins readers to think beyond the present tense and to consider how these feelings contribute to our life over time.

CHAPTER THREE

Untimely Feelings: Tedium and Temporality in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

To believe that we are done with the time of fiction... is to believe that the only time conceivable is precisely chronological time. It is to doubt that fiction has its own resources for inventing temporal measurements proper to it.

- Paul Ricoeur, "The Metamorphoses of Plot"

Introduction: Untimely Fictions

In *Agnes Grey* (1847), Anne Brontë's eponymous heroine routinely voices a concern for how her narrative may affect her readers: "I have not enumerated half the vexatious propensities of my pupils, or half the troubles resulting from my heavy responsibilities," Agnes states, "for fear of trespassing too much upon the reader's patience, as, perhaps, I have already done" (36). Despite the brevity of the single-volume novel, as a narrator, Agnes herself is anything but brief: her sustained attention to the "vexatious propensities" of her young charges and oft-expressed boredom with life at Wellwood and Horton Lodge lend torpidity to her narrative and diminish its transformative potential for any "unfortunate governess" perusing its pages (37). Although conscious of its impact, Agnes finds a peculiar satisfaction in the diminution of feeling that has resulted from her daily trials and the state of inattention she has cultivated to ward off recurring impositions on her time: "I gave myself no little trouble in my endeavours... to appear perfectly unconscious or regardless of their presence," Agnes writes, "as if I were wholly absorbed in my own reflections or the contemplation of surrounding objects" (111). Agnes's feigned inattentiveness and impassivity constitute conscious strategies for shielding herself against the weary progression of time—the incessant activity and inexorable momentum of the present tense, when all thought and sensation are shuttled from one pressing duty to the next. However, they also reveal a resonance between the tedious nature of Agnes's lived experience and the

tedium her narrative produces in readers. Agnes's boredom is a product of the time she has spent as a governess in successive yet unsuccessful service positions, and considering the original title for the novel, *Passages in the Life of an Individual*, Brontë may have thought the narrative's account of depleted and dissimulated feeling generally applicable to any reader.⁸⁴ But conscious of the sense of tedium her materially short narrative engenders, Agnes leads readers to question the merits of what she chooses to represent and to wonder with her, towards the end of the novel, "Well! what is there remarkable in all this?" (163).

Critics have questioned the historicity of Anne Brontë's fiction along the lines of this problem of readerly interest: what *is* remarkable about Agnes's life? Does her narrative simply reflect the socio-historical conditions that consigned women to domestic labor? Or is Agnes's boredom, and the acuity with which it is reproduced in her narrative, particular to her lived experience? Terry Eagleton concludes his 1975 work on the Brontës, *Myths of Power*, with the charge that Anne Brontë presents "no historical life" in her characters, arguing that they are "too abstractly individuated, too internally unpressured by the strains and frictions of their social world" to be "linked by capillary fibres to the central nerves of history" (136-37). In one of the few studies to focus solely on Anne Brontë, Elizabeth Langland argues the opposite, claiming that the success of Brontë's novel comes from Agnes's typicality and, in turn, from what she conveys to readers about everyday life in the 1840s: "She communicates the lassitude, the emptiness, the boredom. She makes us experience the significance of social rank.... No one has communicated better than Anne Brontë the sheer physical demands of the period" (114). The difficulty of reading Anne Brontë today, it seems, is that both critical perspectives hold true: like Eagleton claims, Brontë's works do not depict the harried sensations typically associated with

⁸⁴ See Hilda Marsden's introduction to the Clarendon Edition of *Agnes Grey*, which makes note of the working title. See too Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (1994).

life in mid-century England at the moment of the acceleration of industrial capitalism; similarly, as Langland argues, Brontë's novels stress historical context and verisimilitude in their struggle to represent everyday life.

In debating the historicity of Brontë's works, critics tend to rely on assumptions about readerly interest. For Eagleton and Langland alike, a sense of excitement is curiously (if not dangerously) absent from Brontë's writing: the experience of reading her novels comes unbearably close to the very historical conditions her novels represent, as if reading Brontë's novels amounted to experiencing the same historical conditions undergone by her characters. Yet by pursuing this strong connection between a certain mode of historicity and readerly interest, a connection that Brontë's narrators insist upon within their narratives, critics overlook how the tedium engendered by reading Brontë is actually in service of an alternative mode of temporality and model of novel reading. In this chapter, I argue that the tedium of reading Anne Brontë's novels is instrumental to the sense of untimeliness her works seek to represent, an experience of being out of sync with one's historical moment and its temporally contingent strategies for interpretation. By wedding the durational experience of novel reading to the diminution of feeling undergone by her protagonists as they are stretched out over so much time and so much text, Brontë reveals an affinity between the sense of time represented in her narratives and the time of novel reading.⁸⁵ Brontë understands novel reading as a time-bound, form-inducing

⁸⁵ Duration is a particularly difficult category for narrative. Gérard Genette understands duration as an experiential measure of time ("the time needed for reading"), a category that encounters a problem when understood in reference to a spatial measure (a length of text) (86). Given that no narrative can form an absolute correspondence between the time of narrative and the time of its reading, duration is always an approximation, but one that nonetheless draws attention to the speeds and rhythms unique to a particular narrative. See Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980). See too Gallagher in "Formalism and Time," where she distinguishes between "duration" and "length" and who argues instead for renewed appreciation of the latter as "extended temporal sequence." See too Dames, who defines "duration" as the "prolonged but nonetheless directed time" encountered by novel readers in the

practice, one that measures, proportions, and regulates the feelings of readers by way of their responses to narrative form. But unlike the works of Charlotte and Emily, which stress temporalities associated with contingency, urgency, and progress, Anne Brontë's novels prolong and attenuate the experience of reading over time, straining the causal chain from the durational, protracted time of reading to the epiphenomenal time of affective response and interpretation.

My reading focuses on the link between tedium and temporality in Brontë's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). In the novel, Brontë draws attention to the process of reading through the prolonged excerption, mid-narrative, of Helen Graham's diary, a text tracing Helen's distention during time's slow passage over the course of six years. Following the abuses Helen continues to report with unusual forbearance page after page, year after year, the emotional impoverishment that results from the extension of her perseverance over time becomes almost quotidian and, stranger still, oddly intertwined with our own experience reading the novel. Unlike Agnes, Helen is not concerned with trying the patience of her readers, in large part because it is our patience she wants to tax: the tedious, drawn-out delivery of Helen's diary shows how a lack of feeling enables her to endure the time of her suffering and its interminable extension into an undesirable future. While critics typically see this as a place where a reformist sentiment briefly takes hold, a reading that establishes *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as a failed attempt at temperance fiction, we should not see Brontë's novel as engaging with discrete issues of social reform.⁸⁶ Rather, her novel models strategies for reading that enable less causally

unmarked gaps between narrative events as well as periods of waiting, listening, and other seemingly inattentive states (*Physiology* 157).

⁸⁶ Pointing to the early short stories of Charles Dickens, the conduct books of Sarah Stickney Ellis, and other mid-century literary reformers—Anne Brontë among them—Claybaugh argues that the narrative devices used in temperance fiction during this period made a fortuitous although incidental impact on the representation of reform in the mid-nineteenth-century novel. Popular social reform issues like temperance appealed to novelists not necessarily as a means to advocate for or mobilize reform but to

determined, less functional—and as evidenced by *Agnes Grey*, less compelling—relationships to lived time.

The aims of this chapter are thus twofold. First, I seek to resituate Anne Brontë alongside critical accounts of time and temporality in the mid-Victorian novel as well as in relation to work on the affective experience of novel reading.⁸⁷ Whereas criticism of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* tends to treat everyday life as an ahistorical, homogeneous category, collapsing into it the necessary distinction between the affective experience of reading the novel and the affective experiences of reading represented within it, I see instead a conscious effort in the novel to undermine the act of reading as a timely measure of affective response, making Brontë's interest in the act of reading in *Tenant* more motivated. Brontë achieves this effect by drawing attention to the incongruence between the time of reading Helen's novel-length but unnovelistic narrative and the distinct feelings it engenders in her readers both within and beyond the novel. To that end, she uses Helen's diary to engender a different sense of lived time in readers, a temporality that seems ordinary or "everyday" despite the extraordinary circumstances behind its textual production and that, in turn, introduces an "alterity of the ordinary" into the act of reading the

increase the likelihood of an audience for their fictions. However, as Claybaugh reasons, the subject of temperance reform was less interesting to these authors than the "tropes and plots" that could help them represent particularly difficult topics for the novel: in the case of Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), "drunkenness provided a way of describing the more general sufferings of marriage and sobriety," a means for depicting the ordinary character of life after marriage and in turn for considering "what it would mean for the marriage vow to be no longer closural, whether formally or ideologically" (88, 105). See Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (2007).

⁸⁷ A partial list would include: Langbauer, Levine, Dames, and recent work by Ablow, Plotz, Catherine Robson, Herbert Tucker, Garrett Stewart, and Stephen Arata in *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature* (2010).

novel (Christoff 150).⁸⁸ This “alterity” is conveyed through the unstructured time of the novel’s middle as well as by a series of false endings that, after the unexpected length of the diary, put off the inevitable consummation of the marriage plot in the novel’s diegetic frame. The sense of tedium engendered through Helen’s diary—and by extension, Brontë’s novel—provides an alternative to the time-discipline that traditionally governs the experience of narrative time.⁸⁹

Second, I seek to demonstrate how Anne Brontë helps us question a tradition of criticism that assimilates durational affective responses into synchronic interpretations of historical reality and enlists readers to do the same, without accounting for divergent temporalities of novel reading and response.⁹⁰ This tradition is difficult to associate with specific approaches or particular proponents because it is so pervasive, akin to what Nicholas Dames in the edited collection *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature* has called a “protocol,” a “set of habitual, deeply characteristic, and unexamined operations that express, while not explicitly formulating, a ‘theory’ of the literary,” an array of historically-situated critical practices “too embedded, and too innocuous” to amount to a discrete or conscious

⁸⁸ Critics tend to overlook the constructedness of the everyday as a narrative form premised on verisimilitude. Paul Ricoeur discusses this tendency to homogenize “everyday life” as itself an aftereffect of the emergence of verisimilitude as a criterion of the novel: “Today it is said that only a novel without a plot or characters or any discernible temporal organization is more genuinely faithful to experience, which is itself fragmented and inconsistent, than was the traditional novel of the nineteenth century. But this plea for a fragmented, inconsistent fiction is not justified any differently than was the plea for naturalistic literature. The argument for verisimilitude has merely been displaced” (13-14). See Ricoeur, “The Metamorphoses of the Plot” in volume II of *Time and Narrative* (1990).

⁸⁹ I use the term “narrative time” here with reference to Ricoeur who ultimately considers it to be “nonchronometric” (5). By this usage, I mean to draw attention both to the traditional understanding of narrative as a measure of temporal sequence and to a kind of work distinct from its role in treating time as purely chronological. See *Time and Narrative*, vol. II. as well as Ricoeur, “Narrative Time” (1980). See too Peter Brooks, who defines plot as “a structuring operation peculiar to those messages that are developed through temporal succession” and narratives as “temporal syllogisms” in which “time in the representing is felt to be a necessary analogue of time represented” (10, 21).

⁹⁰ See my discussion of “post-historicist reading” in my Introduction.

method (“On Not Close Reading” 14, 16). Nevertheless, the tendency towards synchronic interpretation in literary studies reflects historical, ideological, and formal assumptions about tedium’s experiential value: by transforming the tedium engendered in the process of reading *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* into either a cipher for the novel’s historicity or a sign of the text’s complicity with its socio-historical moment, critics reduce an affective process to a static product. Reflecting on this as well as recent alternative reading practices that emphasize affective process over historical product, I argue that the tedium represented in and engendered by Brontë’s second novel, an experience of reading characteristic of all novels but exacerbated in Brontë’s work, poses a necessary corrective to synchronic interpretation.⁹¹ The untimeliness of Anne Brontë—not simply the appearance of her novels in a period of industrial fiction, when progress accelerated lived time as well as novel plots, but the failures of timely interpretation methodically staged in her narratives in prolonged scenes of reading—upsets the status of novel reading as itself a timely interpretive practice. However, Brontë also presents the possibility of an alternative model of reading for the delays, detours, and digressions in feeling—the very tedium—novels produce.

In the next section, I show how the prolonged act of reading set in the middle of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* provides a means for readers to experience the gradual impoverishment of Helen’s feelings over time, as well as compare this attenuation of feeling to the distinct affective response of another reader: her suitor, Gilbert Markham. Whether or not she intended to

⁹¹ On alternatives to the synchronic approach, see the edited collection *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*. In her introduction to the collection, Rachel Ablow observes that the contributors model modes of criticism “neither paranoid nor reparative,” both of which tend to constrain readers to particular subject positions and ethical stances, and instead offer practices attentive to reading as a process, “a site of bodily response and affective experimentation” informed but not wholly delimited by material or historical circumstances (3, 4). In short, the critics in *The Feeling of Reading* treat the very historical distance from Victorian reading practices as a means for questioning assumptions behind our contemporary interpretive strategies for novel reading.

write a work of temperance fiction, Brontë borrowed from the genre in order to engage with the effects of time-discipline on narrative.⁹² This engagement is staged on two levels: for Helen, it is represented in her attempts to organize and direct the lived time of her domestic life when lacking the external means to do so; for readers, it is reflected in the struggle to remain attentive to the representation of empty stretches of time in Helen's diary despite the tedium such reading engenders. After demonstrating this link between temperance and time in the expansive middle portion of the novel, in the second section, I focus on how Helen's strategies of dissimulation—feigning indifference in the face of emotional abuse and concealing her true feelings by busying herself with reading—complicate the assumed link between reading and feeling in the overarching narrative by demonstrating the peculiar affordances of feeling less for enduring the conditions of lived experience. In the fourth section, I consider the timeliness of these enervated states of feeling for narrative closure—specifically, how Helen's strategies subsequently impact Gilbert's attempt to abide by standards of narrative time and ultimately delay the resolution of the marriage plot. My conclusion returns to the question of the historicity of everyday life in the mid-Victorian novel and to the diminished affects engendered by novel reading.

I. Bad Timing

Like industrial reform, temperance was a timely topic for the mid-Victorian novel.⁹³ First, as a popular social issue, it factionalized readers and writers around a legible, divisive platform of

⁹² Temperance writers typically followed one of two sequential forms: the cautionary tale or the conversion narrative. Cautionary tales focus on relating narratives of debasement and humiliation, stories in which drinking in any capacity led to financial ruin, domestic violence, and, often, death; on the other hand, conversion narratives demonstrate the consequences of drinking while insisting on the possibility of moral redemption (and often, spiritual salvation) after the teetotal pledge. See John Crowley, ed., *Drunkard's Progress: Narratives of Addiction, Despair, and Recovery* (1999). See too Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose*.

⁹³ By most accounts, the temperance movement came by way of industrialization and its impact on lived time. As E.P. Thompson argues, the steady development of industrial society in England from the

political debate and, in turn, significantly bolstered print culture. This can be seen in the sheer volume of literature produced by temperance societies in England and abroad—popular lectures published as tracts, temperance journals—which also helped to facilitate a dramatic rise in literacy in the 1830s and 1840s (Shiman 14).⁹⁴ But second, as a narrative form, temperance constructed the quotidian backdrop of regularity and routine against which the dramatic effects of excessive drinking took place. Indeed, temperance fiction made the routinization of everyday life legible by appropriating other means of (and forms for) representing lived experience and their particular structures of feeling—for example, novelistic conventions like melodrama and sentimentality, which stressed narrative suspense and affective susceptibility.⁹⁵ Rather than draw attention to the constancy that one could achieve through practicing temperance, temperance fiction showed the invariable consequences of intemperance on the constancy of everyday life and the discrete emotions engendered by routine. In doing so, these works not only threw ordinary time into stark relief, but also defined and valued the ordinariness of time's progression by its sequential orderliness—that is, as a linear narrative.

eighteenth century well into the mid-nineteenth was facilitated by an appreciable shift in the means of apprehending and feeling time, or “time-sense.” Thompson demonstrates how changes wrought by advances in manufacturing in the eighteenth century, piecemeal as they were, gradually contributed to the increasing need for the large-scale synchronization of labor, the dissolution of other, asynchronous approaches to organizing and measuring time, and the imposition of new standards of measurement—namely, clock time. These new standards of efficiency and punctuality coalesced in the pervasive “time-discipline” Thompson sees emerging from the early nineteenth century, a wedding of internal and external regulatory measures over the body that sought to induce routine in working-class laborers. See Thompson (1967). On the temperance movement in England, see Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (1971) and Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade against Drink in Victorian England* (1988).

⁹⁴ For the broader scale of this transformation, see David Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe* (2000).

⁹⁵ See Claybaugh in “Everyday Life.” On the contemporary rhetoric of addiction attribution and creeds like “one day at a time” that grew from the temperance movement, see Eve Sedgwick, “Epidemics of the Will” (1993). As Sedgwick argues, out of this eager deployment of the will developed the pervasive (and persuasive) “propaganda of free will” which colors any voluntary action with the possibility of an unwilling “compulsion” lurking behind its operation (133).

Yet time does not follow a linear path in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: instead, it is elided without warning, as when dates are included or omitted at whim, or its movement is temporarily suspended, a particular moment strangely extended over a disproportionate number of pages. Whereas temperance and temporality are typically thought to have a constrained relationship—temperance is prescriptive and requires submission to a specific temporal routine while temporality is descriptive and entails no specific or rigid orientation towards time—Brontë’s novel demonstrates a more capacious understanding of their connection. The novel reveals how their shared conception of time as form-inducing—measuring, proportioning and regulating—affords a broader understanding of how narratives represent and shape lived time.⁹⁶

Brontë opens *Tenant* with a disruption to mid-century conventions of narrative time. The first letter from Gilbert Markham to Jack Halford, sent on an undisclosed date, plainly establishes that the following story will be unhurried in its telling: “my patience and leisure shall be my only limits” Gilbert writes, preparing his reader(s) for “an old-world story” and “a long story” at that (34). Gilbert appears to narrate from a period of leisure, during which he remains partially attentive to his task, “alone in my library... and musing on past times,” and has the uninterrupted time to relay a story of such length to his companion (34). However, Gilbert’s implicit promise of a relaxed pace is broken on the following page, as the second letter (now first chapter) of his narrative opens with a command issued to readers: “You must go back with me to the autumn of 1827” (34-5). In contrast to the casual tone and timelessness of the first letter, Gilbert’s sudden injunction as well as accompanying timestamp on the second signal the ways in

⁹⁶ “Temperance” and “temporality” meet in *temper*, “to divide or proportion duly, to mingle in due proportion, to combine properly; to qualify, temper; to arrange or keep in due measure or proportion, to keep within limits, to regulate, rule.” See entry for “temper,” *OED*, n. pag. “Temper” comes from the Latin *temperāre*, which is “generally held to be a derivative of *tempus*, *tempor-*,” meaning “a space or point of time,” and is otherwise defined as “a time or season, the proper time or season; but the sense history of both words is prehistoric and obscure.” See entry for “temporal,” *OED*, n.pag.

which the following chapter—and the entirety of the novel—will yield abrupt alterations in narrated time, moments when Gilbert’s tale intermittently and unexpectedly slips further and further from its timeless present into an increasingly remote past.

Following in strange succession, these alterations in time cast doubts on the reported events in the narrative as well as accompany descriptions of inattentive states, glimpses of the indolence lurking underneath the passive—what Garrett Stewart calls the “undermotivated”—exchange of letters between Gilbert and Halford (95). The mysterious tenant of Wildfell Hall, Helen Graham, is introduced in these first few chapters by way of uninteresting gossip, as Gilbert’s family “discuss[ed] the apparent, or non-apparent circumstances, and probable, or improbable history of the mysterious lady,” information “all set before me, with rather more clearness and precision than I cared to see them; but, as I was not a very attentive listener, I could not repeat the description if I would” (39-40). Helen is presented as background noise to Gilbert’s non-descript (and here, oddly reluctant) narration. However, when properly encountered only a few lines later, seeing her unfamiliar face during an otherwise ordinary Sunday morning mass, his attention is duly arrested: “clad in black,” with “a style of coiffure rather unusual in those days” and “a slight hollowness about the cheeks and eyes,” Helen appears singularly out of time, seated on “faded crimson cushions... unpreserved and unrenewed so many years” beneath the “grim escutcheons” adorning the walls of the church (40-1). Helen’s residence is described in similar terms: “a superannuated mansion of the Elizabethan era, built of dark grey stone, – venerable and picturesque to look at, but, doubtless, cold and gloomy enough to inhabit, with its thin stone mullions and little latticed panes, its time-eaten airholes, and its too lonely, too unsheltered situation,” Wildfell Hall rises unexpectedly from the familiar rural territory and casual tone identified in the previous chapter (45). “[T]ime-eaten,” “untilled and

untrimmed,” Gilbert’s description of the house signals that its hermetic occupant will not only “harmon[ize] well with the ghostly legends and dark traditions our old nurse had told us respecting the haunted hall and its departed occupants,” but in the recurrent appearance of the prefix “*un-*,” will also serve to undo the common and familiar circumstances behind narration that he has otherwise sought to establish (45-46).

Yet it is not just that Helen appears preternatural that makes her arrival in Linden-Car seem, in Gilbert’s phrase, “unusual,” but that she directly violates the societal conventions of the landed gentry in the 1820s—and by extension, novelistic expectations of character in the 1840s.⁹⁷ More than her pallid demeanor and lack of effusion, the material conditions behind Helen’s arrival in a small country town and her bare occupancy in a magisterial estate sustain the mystery stretched between the timestamps 1827 (the date of Gilbert’s “old-world story”) and 1848 (the appearance of Brontë’s book) (38). Stewart claims that the purpose of Gilbert’s frame narrative is not only to verify Helen’s harrowing tale, surrounding it with “a *cordon sanitaire* of reporting script,” but also to “translat[e] her story more openly into its own condition as a written narrative” (97, 99). Here, Gilbert’s reader Halford serves as “the site of the story’s accessibility as such,” the conditions under which Helen, a female widower and moneyed proprietor of real estate in the 1820s, appears comprehensible to a generalized “book-buying as well as story-reading public” in the 1840s (102). In this way, Brontë sets Helen’s untimely appearance against the more measured and patently real production of Gilbert’s frame narrative in order to draw attention to her heroine—and her novel—as an object singularly out of time.

In casting Helen as a conduit of exchange between Gilbert and Halford, Brontë establishes a double rationale for the strained hermeneutic investigation Gilbert undertakes in the

⁹⁷ On financial conventions in the 1820s, see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (1987).

following chapters to uncover the alluring financial source of her sheltered secret and, in turn, to fulfill the promise of a story which will provide “a full and faithful account of certain circumstances connected with the most important event of [his] life” (34). Gilbert’s preoccupation with Helen’s peculiarity, her depleted appearance and unseemly wealth, and her unfamiliarity with “the common observances of civilized life” preemptively aligns his work with efforts to bring Helen into order with the behavioral conventions of marriage (51). Indeed, Gilbert views his work as humanizing Helen, intervening in town gossip (“I could not bear to hear her name aspersed”) and conducting her to be more sociable in the company of others.⁹⁸ More than any material secret lurking within the walls of Wildfell Hall, then, Gilbert is plainly invested in holding Helen to a particular standard of domestic femininity. Helen’s unusually withdrawn feelings and their refractory tendency when touched upon in conversation demonstrate this struggle to bring Helen into the ordinary, linear time of the marriage plot: “the moment I touched upon the sentimental or the complimentary, or made the slightest approach to tenderness in word or look, I was not only punished by an immediate change in her manner at the time, but doomed to find her more cold and distant, if not entirely inaccessible, when next I sought her company” (92). Allergic to “tenderness” of any kind, the reactive quality of Helen’s affection makes each meeting a potential setback to Gilbert’s (narrative) progress, and cues him to focus on reading Helen more closely in each subsequent encounter.

Proper to the admittedly duplicitous nature of Gilbert’s narration, in which he will casually erect false structures of anticipation in order to maintain interest in a story with an outcome he knows well in advance, Gilbert’s sustained readerly suspicion towards the tenant inevitably feels forced, affecting the anticipated scene of full disclosure and the eventual

⁹⁸ See Jan B. Gordon, who makes the case that the gothic in Gilbert’s narrative operates on the persistence of gossip carried out by absent parties.

resolution of the narrative in their union.⁹⁹ Yet whereas Stewart suggests that Gilbert serves as a stand-in for “something like the institutional reader’s own sublimated fascination with a novel’s leading lady and her hair-raising tale,” Gilbert routinely assumes the fascination of his reader(s): “you desire the continuation of my story,” he remarks after the first letter, “therefore, without more ado, you shall have it” (Stewart 94-5; Brontë 45). In turn, the introduction of Helen’s diary in Chapter 16, midway through the first volume, troubles the steady progression of Gilbert’s narration and the assumed link between his fascination and that of his audience. Helen gives the diary to Gilbert after his repeated, failed attempts to get past “her usual asperity and reserve” and prove the true depth of his affection; after confronting her once more on the nature of his “unutterable feelings,” he is provided with “what seemed a thick album or manuscript volume,” a text produced from Helen’s desk as explanation for her recent rejection of his advances (73). As his narrative is so far structured with an attention to the forward movement of time (as revealed in time-oriented chapter titles like “Progression,” “A Tête-à-Tête and a Discovery,” and “An Encounter and Its Consequences”), Gilbert’s sudden introduction of Helen’s diary draws attention to the formal and temporal features that will influence its reading:

I have it now before me; and though you could not, of course, peruse it with half the interest that I did, I know you would not be satisfied with an abbreviation of its contents, and you shall have the whole, save, perhaps, a few passages here and there of merely temporal interest to the writer, or such as would serve to encumber the story rather than elucidate it. (147)

⁹⁹ The layers of disclosure in the novel—Helen gives her diary to Gilbert who swears secrecy, yet Gilbert gives it to Halford in strict “confidence”—further complicate readers’ trust in Gilbert as a reliable narrator. See too Stewart’s *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (1996) on the performative function of readerly solicitation.

Gilbert's decision to present the diary in his correspondence to Halford without Helen's expressed consent has been discussed at great length.¹⁰⁰ Yet what is particularly remarkable in this act of prolonged excerption is how it distorts the sense of the time it will presumably take to "peruse" Helen's diary. Rather than simply serve as unconditional proof of the events it records, Helen presents the diary in order to immerse her reader, Gilbert, in a particular scene of reading, as if the sheer length of the text itself could relay the feelings stretched over its pages better than a direct confession.¹⁰¹

Although Gilbert suggests that passages of "merely temporal interest to the writer" have been removed in advance, because "such [passages]... would serve to encumber the story rather than elucidate it," the remaining text proves exceedingly "temporal" in content: many of Helen's entries describe periods of waiting, with attention to the exact number of days and months that have transpired between successive passages. In turn, Gilbert's modifications appear to extend beyond what he briefly mentions here: titles are (presumably) appended to Helen's entries, making them more properly "chapters" in a story grouped under the heading, "The Warnings of Experience." Chapters titled "First Quarrel" and "First Absence" suppose selective attention to details pertaining to Helen's widowhood, whereas a chapter like "Domestic Scenes," which includes multiple diary entries, suggests an almost curatorial process. Without a sense of the original (despite Gilbert's insistence that "you shall have the whole"), we have no means to

¹⁰⁰ In particular, see McMaster, Jacobs, as well as Carol Senf.

¹⁰¹ See Dames, who in "On Not Close Reading" (2010) identifies prolonged excerption as a means "to bridge the gap between a critic's 'reading' and the cultural habit of 'reading' that it reflects on and yet also mirrors" (14, 17). Inasmuch as prolonged excerption was germane to reviews in the Victorian era, it demonstrated "an interest in the temporality of affect: what *kinds* of feelings a novel produces, and *how long* those feelings persist" but was not to be seen as a substitute for context, "the temporal (and informational) flow of a novel [that] implies a context to every such extract, a context impossible to fully reconstruct" in excerption (19, 21).

determine the original form of the text now before us.¹⁰² We are not only led to doubt the editorial justifications for these “abbreviations,” but the very inclusion of the diary and its payoff for Gilbert’s plot.¹⁰³

By embedding Helen’s diary in Gilbert’s epistolary narrative, Brontë sets off an irrecoverable temporal shift, pulling the already distempered chronology of the novel into a deeper lacuna, distending the time of its telling, and skewing the authority of the two narratives presented here by way of (dis)proportionality.¹⁰⁴ Helen’s diary issues from the date stamped at the top of its first entry: “JUNE 1st, 1821,” even further removed from Gilbert’s “old-world story” in 1827 (and his as-of-yet undisclosed scene of narration in 1847) (148). Yet this regression in time is registered not only by date—a full six years prior to the date provided at the start of Gilbert’s narrative—but by way of the plain, remissive quality of Helen’s narration. Indeed, the conventional trappings of plot quickly fall away as her diary gradually moves into the

¹⁰² It remains unclear how, exactly, Helen’s diary is sent from Gilbert to Halford. Stewart suggests that the uncertainty of its medium—as either laboriously rewritten by Gilbert over a series of letters or simply included as complete parcel—effectively blunts the force of its transmission from one reader to another. On the other hand, Rachel K. Carnell argues that the epistolary frame assumes the novel’s legibility as product of the literary public sphere, i.e., letters exchanged between men. Although the non-specificity of the diary’s mediacy within the novel is fixed in its appearance for Brontë’s readers *as a novel*, this ambiguity is central to the dissimulation of reading I describe in the next section.

¹⁰³ Gilbert’s intimation that material is left out of Helen’s diary blurs the boundary between *fabula* and *sjuzet*, what Brooks (by way of the Russian Formalists) defines respectively as “the order of events referred to by the narrative” and “the order of events presented in the narrative discourse” (12). Whereas plot “cut[s] across the *fabula/sjuzet* distinction,” the presentation of Helen’s diary mid-plot introduces another degree of mediation between a referred and a represented order of events (13). This blurring in turn makes suspicion seem *doubly suspect* as a hermeneutic operation within and beyond the novel: we may suspect that Gilbert, possessing the entire diary but proceeding as if he doesn’t, amends (or worse, alters) her narrative; yet the length of Helen’s diary supposes that, regardless of edits, its presentation as a durational form is more important than the inclusion or exclusion of particular details.

¹⁰⁴ I use the term “proportionality” here (as elsewhere) to refer to both a spatial and temporal configuration of form, defined and delimited textually (by way of chapters, pagination) and experientially (readerly time and attention). Woloch argues for this dual consideration of proportion as “character-space” in the nineteenth-century novel, “the narrative’s continual apportioning of attention to different characters who jostle for limited space within the same fictive universe” (14).

simple reporting of time's uneventful passage. Rather than explicitly plotted, Helen's writing is entirely incidental—she not only writes when time permits, but when something occurs, when life seems worth narrating—and as a result, her habits of “irregular composition” amount to a sporadic, plodding time, one that runs counter to the quicker, calculated pacing of Gilbert's narrative (215).

Helen's diary also marks its distinction from Gilbert's novelistic story by inverting the order of the marriage plot. Interrupting an existence “so tedious and dull,” “so insipid and unprofitable,” Arthur Huntingdon's arrival two “chapters” into Helen's diary would presumably serve to mitigate her provincial boredom by way of a husband, one certainly more appealing than immediate prospects like “Mr Boarham” (“Boarham, by name, Bore'em as I prefer spelling it, for a terrible bore he was”) (152). Like Heathcliff and Rochester before him, Arthur could potentially serve to “arrest [her] attention” as Helen's other amusements fail to do. However, Arthur's introduction in the following pages fails to upset the relative quiet of Helen's country life. Helen's marriage to Arthur early in the diary (and comparatively, early in the novel too) only prolongs her sense of boredom, extending it beyond the time of their union into the everyday life of husband and wife (183). As Amanda Claybaugh notes, Brontë's novel unexpectedly issues into territory typically uncharted in a mid-Victorian novel, representing what comes after marriage—“the crushing boredom of country house life when it rains, when hunting season is over, when the guests have stayed too long”—and in doing so, showing “what it would mean for the marriage vow to be no longer closural, whether formally or ideologically” (*The Novel of Purpose* 102, 105). While Helen greets the time she now faces with Arthur as itself an experiment in time, trying to domesticate Arthur and settle him into a strict routine, as her entries

wear on, living with Arthur takes on an oppressive sameness that seems merely an extension of her experience of time before marriage:

March 25th. – Arthur is getting tired – not of me, I trust, but of the idle, quiet life he leads – and no wonder, for he has so few sources of amusement; he never reads anything but newspapers and sporting magazines; and when he sees me occupied with a book, he won't let me rest till I close it. In fine weather he generally manages to get through the time pretty well; but on rainy days, of which we have had a good many of late, it is quite painful to witness his ennui. (221)

This “idle, quiet life” is strikingly similar to what Helen felt in her first entry, a mere ten months (and eight chapters) prior. In these unbearable moments of cohabitation, Arthur actively prevents Helen from engaging in the activities and amusements that might otherwise help her pass the time: “when he sees me occupied with a book, he won't let me rest till I close it.” In this way, Helen signals that, while she is attempting to impose order over her domestic life, Arthur routinely violates it. Helen's boredom and frustration are not only products of the ordinariness and uneventful nature of what she has to report, but her repeated, flagging attempts to impose order on the unanticipated unevenness of her everyday life.

In this sense, what E.P. Thompson terms “time-discipline” fails to take hold in the inner narrative of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and not only in consideration of the absence of working-class labor: without the means to establish a discernible daily routine, Helen has trouble conducting time in her diary despite her best efforts to do so.¹⁰⁵ Instead, time is irregularly meted out, reported by way of timestamps extending over periods of isolation, as in the chapter “First Absence”—“June 29th,” “July 3rd,” “5th,” “Saturday, 13th,” the ordinals gradually dropping month and year and reporting instead a mere progression of days (233-4, 236) Within Helen's

¹⁰⁵ It is important to note that Thompson does not attribute this transformation of time and labor at the onset of industrial capitalism to a uniform social cause or a singular moment of transition. As he observes, different occupations and localities throughout England continued to depend on traditional, inherited measures and valuations of time, and other factors—Methodism, charity schools—played different roles in advancing time-discipline. See too Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963).

diary, Brontë's emphasizes how intemperance—understood here simply as undirected, “untempered” time—affects the linearity of narrative and, in conjunction, a sense of order in lived experience. To be sure, Arthur's steady descent into alcoholism occupies very little space in the course of Helen's diary, but when it is depicted, it is strictly in the service of marking the tedium of time's passage rather than (as per conventions of temperance fiction) the inevitably fatal outcome of intemperance itself. When intemperance is implied rather than represented on page, the effects are even greater on Helen's attempts to narrate daily life, as when Arthur travels to London on matters of “business” and leaves Helen to dwell in isolation for impossibly long stretches of time. Often constituting entire chapters or spanning several, these successive absences affect Helen's ability to measure her time alone, lending a hypersensitivity to her perception of the ongoing march of days without word from her partner. Arthur's absence diminishes Helen's capacity to represent their affective bond over an unstructured period of time: “the greater the bliss we might enjoy together, the more I feel our present wretchedness apart (yes, ours; he must be wretched, though he may not know it); and the more my senses are pleased, the more my heart is oppressed” (236-37). At this point in her diary, Helen understands her “present wretchedness” not as a product of Arthur's drinking but more truly of her own protraction over time and text. In this way, Helen's feelings are directly linked to Arthur's intemperance of time: as Helen observes in later entries, the more time Arthur spends away, the more Helen feels his absence; yet the more time Arthur wastes in her presence, the more she must work “in proportion” to “suppress [her] feelings.”

At the close of the chapter “First Absence,” when Arthur arrives at long last, months later than anticipated, Helen directly sees the impact of their time apart, making an observation on his appearance that neatly renders the account of time's passage over the preceding pages into a

physical ledger of its debilitating effects on his person: “23rd. Thank Heaven, he is come at last! But how altered! – flushed and feverish, listless and languid, his beauty strangely diminished, his vigour and vivacity quite departed” (237). This attention to Arthur’s physical diminution, which leaves him now barely able to conduct his own affairs in timely fashion (“He lies on the sofa nearly all day long,” “I write his letters for him, and get him everything he wants”), emphasizes the time of his absence rather than the abuses that have presumably wrought these physical effects—so far, Helen and her readers have yet to see a cup pressed to his lips or the immediate impact alcohol has on his character and conduct (237). Instead, the causes of his languor take second stage to how long the languor lasts. Shortly after his return, Helen soon finds that time feels relatively the same; its passage in Arthur’s presence is no different than it is in his absence. In fact, the next entry in the diary (on the very next day) draws attention to the extension of his languor into hers: “I wish he had something to do, some useful trade, or profession, or employment – anything to occupy his head or his hands for a few hours a day and give him something besides his own pleasure to think about” (238). Listless and immovable, Arthur’s lassitude doubles back on the time of Helen’s isolation just a few pages prior.

Later episodes of intemperance in the diary take shape in scenes when the expectation of being social, which would otherwise interrupt idle, unstructured time, appears unbearable for Helen. When Arthur begins to indulge at home and in the company of others, Helen’s judgment often falls on the temporal aftereffects of his intoxication, his disruptions of the familiar rhythms of domestic routine. Here Brontë overlays the temperance plot with the marriage plot, extending intemperance to any and every disruption of the orderly arrangements of ordinary time and thereby, as Claybaugh ascertains, “enabl[ing] a range of criticisms that goes much further than drinking” (*The Novel of Purpose* 102). Arthur’s intemperance introduces irregularities into their

domestic schedule: “breakfasting at twelve o’clock on a bottle of soda-water and a cup of strong coffee, and lunching at two on another bottle of soda-water mingled with brandy,” his drinking disrupts any order or pattern Helen attempts to establish (265). Arthur also insists on housing his guests for weeks, sometimes months at a time, occasions that prolong her exposure to company she already finds intolerable and that further depart from a discernible domestic schedule. “At last, they came; but not till after ten, when tea, which had been delayed for more than half an hour, was nearly over” (285). In this way, scenes of intemperance signify time wasted, expended, or stretched into an unendurable period—when Arthur and his company indulge in or take too much time, failing to adhere to Helen’s modest itinerary, and ultimately necessitating Helen’s emotional withdrawal.

Arthur’s temporality is gradually yet radically dislocated from the slow sense of time established by Helen’s successive diary entries. “This time he announced it his intention to make but a short stay in London ... but I shall not expect him till after the lapse of many weeks; I now know that, with him, days signify weeks, and weeks months,” a statement confirmed by reference to the timestamps spanning his absence—“March 20th” to “July 30th” (278-79). Arthur prides himself on this accelerated pace—“days signify weeks, and weeks months”—and on the physical exhaustion he sustains through activities neither Helen nor her readers directly observe in their lived duration:

“If you knew all, my girl, you’d say rather, ‘What a wonder it is you can bear it so well as you do!’ I’ve lived more in these four months, Helen, than you have in the whole course of your existence, or will to the end of your days, if they number a hundred years; – so I must expect to pay for it in some shape.” (269)

Arthur’s claim to having “lived more in ... four months” than Helen will “in the whole course of [her] existence” does the comparative work of measuring their divergent accounts of time’s passage and its effects side by side. According to Arthur, Helen’s adherence to ordinary time, the

slow plotting of those “four months” and her emphasis on the number of days spent awaiting his return, is quantitatively identically but *qualitatively distinct* when compared to what Arthur has purportedly “lived” in the same period of time.

Arthur’s boasts to Helen not only point to their distinct approaches to inhabiting time but to their incompatible timescales as well: whereas Arthur wants to live a life full of feeling, expending his physical, psychical, and spiritual means to live more, Helen intends to have a life after life, an eternal time for which a lifetime of suffering is mere preparation. For Helen, the time she has accrued as so many pages in her diary constitutes a different, non-secular understanding of duration: a believer in the doctrine of universal salvation, Helen’s endurance proves to be in the interest of emotional as well as spiritual longevity, a matter of securing more time in this life and beyond. “I ought to think of this,” Helen writes: “if there be nothing but sorrow for me in this world, what is the longest life of misery to a whole eternity of peace?” (374). The reflexive quality of Helen’s writing shows active speculation on what her present state of suffering will yield for her future and positions her impassivity as a hard-won result of this prolonged self-reflection on how, exactly, her feelings will measure against an infinite, homogenous category of time, “the longest life of misery” held against “a whole eternity of peace.” Although this vision of eternal time supposes that Helen’s role is to bring Arthur back into sync with the preparatory time of marriage and domesticity, for which her religious moralism also serves (Helen remarks) “to shame him into virtue,” it also reflects on the monumental task of reforming Arthur through incremental means (280, 237).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Marianne Thormählen discusses Anne Brontë’s controversial subscription to the doctrine of universal salvation, which conflicted with her Protestant upbringing and, as Thormählen notes, “will have upset a good many readers.” Brontë provides an interesting account of eternal time that, in light of my focus on reading and temporality in the novel, appears quite familiar as a matter of textual interpretation. When Helen and her aunt discuss the length of the marriage vow, Helen speculates on the period of time that the bond itself secures: “the only difficulty is in the word which we translate ‘ever-lasting’ or ‘eternal’: I

Charting the slow violence of domestic abuse, the diary at the center of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has engendered particularly coarse feelings in more than one reader.¹⁰⁷ Brontë's most notable twentieth-century supporter George Moore criticized its appearance in lieu of a direct emotional confrontation between Helen and her unflagging suitor Gilbert, claiming that the lengthy inner narrative "broke the story in halves," quelling any possible "quality of heat" (218). As Helena Michie notes, even Charlotte Brontë dismissed Anne's novels for what Michie calls their "pedantic literalness," and the unexpressive stolidity of her heroines, which kept Charlotte from bringing Anne's second novel out in a new, one-volume edition in 1850 (37).¹⁰⁸ Yet the diary also poses an ongoing problem for critics concerning its presentation in the novel: while the diary occupies a disproportionate amount of space when measured against its thinner epistolary frame, it is nevertheless clear that a male interlocutor controls its means of distribution and potential range of influence. Early in the critical revaluation of the novel, Juliet McMaster argued that this imbalance actually serves to illustrate "dichotomies between... male and female worlds," worlds "exaggerated" in Helen's narrative and then resolved in Gilbert's epistolary frame, which "offer[s] the possibility of accommodation and reconciliation" by way of

don't know the Greek, but I believe it strictly means 'for ages,' and might signify either 'endless' or 'long-enduring' (191-92). Helen's argument for universal salvation hinges on a rather literalist account of time: that the term "for ever," translated from the Greek as "'ever-lasting' or 'eternal,'" actually ("strictly") designates "'for ages.'" Although I do not explore the significance of eternal time in greater detail here, Helen's speculative mood reminds here of Luciano's claim to the persistence of sacred time, "a redirection and partial retemporalization of attachment, supplanting the memory of past connection with assurance of a future reunion" (8).

¹⁰⁷ See an early, unsigned review of the novel on "coarseness of tone" in *The Spectator*, 8 July 1848.

¹⁰⁸ Michie draws her account of this posthumous decision from Charlotte Brontë's "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell" (19 Sept. 1850), which was composed for the 1850 editions of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*; this notice also settled speculation on the gender of the authors.

illustrating Helen's influence on Gilbert (363, 368).¹⁰⁹ Since McMaster, critics have emphasized the subversive quality of Helen's diary, either by situating her confessional text in relation to historical and legal precedents pertaining to divorce or by pointing to her moral superiority over Gilbert by the end of the novel.¹¹⁰ Responding to this strand of criticism, Rachel K. Carnell articulates the formal oddity of the inset diary when she refers to it as an atavistic "eighteenth-century novel of abduction" in the vein of Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-48) (16). Helen, like *Clarissa*, can be taken to represent the "affective humanism" of the literary public sphere, the potential for literature to engender softer sentiments in readers by way of formal intervention: revealed at the right moment to correct Gilbert's impulsiveness, Helen's account of her oppressive domestic life serves as a critique of the literary mores that subordinate women's voices to the affective bonds between men (Carnell 10, 11). Unlike *Clarissa*, however, Brontë's novel appears at the wrong time—a full century later, amidst transformations to the public sphere by way of working-class movements like Chartism, the time-discipline of temperance, and, significantly, changes to the novel form.

These accounts have produced a general consensus regarding the impact of the diary on the frame narrative—set in the middle of the novel, the diary displaces what comes before and after, splitting the plot as it does the very spine of the book. However, they also carry an implicit charge concerning how the hierarchy of feelings erected between Helen's diary and Gilbert's frame informs the affective transmission of her narrative—in other words, they underscore the fact that while it *should* engender more hospitable, humanizing feelings in her reader(s), yet, in

¹⁰⁹ See too N.M. Jacobs.

¹¹⁰ Tess O'Toole issues a corrective to this tendency in scholarship to focus on Helen and Gilbert by instead turning to the relationship between Helen and her brother Frederick, who Gilbert attacks earlier in the narrative and to whom he attempts to make amends for his misplaced violence shortly after reading Helen's diary (716).

the case of Gilbert (and by way of omission, Halford), it fails to do so. Time's tedious passage impacts Helen's affective state, distending her feelings as well as those of her audience.

However, this sense of tedium is not incidental, but intentional, a formal strategy to impart a different, irreducible sense of the duration of lived time and a means for exercising control over unruly feelings.

This intentionality comes through in Helen's diary as she begins to temper her emotional reactions to Arthur and his unbearable company. As time wears on in the diary, Helen fortifies herself against further emotional abuse by attempting to appear "utterly regardless" of Arthur's indiscretions, maintaining a stance of impassivity and yet continuing diligently to transcribe each incident. While this resolution gradually develops over the length of the text, it surfaces more explicitly in the diary after Helen finally witnesses firsthand the long-suspected affair between Arthur and Annabella Lowborough. The entry, titled "Dual Solitude," reflects on the time passed after the incident: "It is now two months since our guests left us to the enjoyment of each other's society; and I have had nine weeks' experience of this new phase of conjugal life," writes Helen, reporting Arthur's intimation that she will "kill him by inches" (328). Helen's lengthy commitment in print to feign indifference towards both parties, an act she intends as resistance rather than withdrawal from the social activities she is still pressed to participate in year after year, directs the time of her diary to a new end: preserving a capacity to feel. To do so, Helen confines the expression of her feelings to text in order to ensure their survival: "the more I show myself sensible of their wickedness, the more [Annabella] triumphs in her victory, and the more he flatters himself that I love him devotedly still, in spite of my pretended indifference ... I feel that they are turning my nature into gall" (323). This "pretended indifference" serves as a cover for what nevertheless remains "sensible" for Helen: while she feels every sting, the more she

reveals her true sensations to her torturers, the more they benefit from the guarantee that their actions are actually affecting her despite her pretension to indifference. Her indifference thus becomes a conscious strategy that strengthens over time, enabling Helen to navigate the divide between her pretension to indifference and the possibility of true emotional impassivity. Beyond serving as a means for controlling her emotions, then, the dissimulation of feeling enables Helen to organize and direct her lived time—"What a good thing it is to be able to command one's temper!" Helen observes, continuing "I must labor to cultivate this inestimable quality: God, only, knows how often I shall need it in this rough, dark road that lies before me" (326). Finding that Arthur responds to "every detection of relenting softness" on her part with "an unappeasable ill humour and a spirit of tyrannous exaction that increased with indulgence," she sets against any display of untempered, unmediated, feeling (332).

By the final stretch of the diary, Helen wholly commits to her impassivity in both person and print. "[N]othing moves you" remarks Lord Lowborough, having just come to the devastating knowledge of his wife Annabella's affair with Arthur and having seized up at the intelligence that he, unlike Helen, has been duped for years (346). However, Helen's self-proclaimed "aspect of stoical indifference" in these late entries is something distinct from her attempts to order time and propel it forward (227). Setting out to perfect the appearance of not feeling, Helen has become *incapable* of feeling as her entries have continued—"the petrification is so completely effected at last, that nothing can melt me again"; "hardness such as this is taught by rough experience and despair alone" (332, 367). By its close six years, twenty-eight chapters, and roughly 252 pages later, this incapacity to feel appears coextensive with the derealized, interminable sense of time the diary has engendered in readers. In this way, the novel produces a protracted desire for the return of a plot impossibly delayed, engendering not just tedium but a

tedious mode of reading—dilatory, inattentive, passive—while waiting for a time that may never arrive.

II. Reading Feeling

When *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* returns from this extended scene of reading, its overall effect on the time of the overarching narrative is treated less like a sustained digression and more like a momentary interruption. A tear marked by asterisks signals the abrupt end of the diary (pages torn away prior to the initial transaction between Helen and Gilbert) and the clunky resumption of Gilbert's narration: "Here it ended" (400). Brontë prolongs the experience of reading Helen's diary in order to extend our (and Gilbert's) exposure to its particular affective influence—a life virtually deprived of feeling for six long years. But Gilbert's ostentatious response indicates the possibility of a different emotional reaction to Helen's tedious narrative and a different way of reading it: "[t]he rest was torn away. How cruel – just when she was going to mention me!" (400). Not only does the excited immediacy of Gilbert's response readily contrast with the protracted experience of reading the diary, but the time of reading he reports clashes, too. After Helen hands her diary to Gilbert, he hurries home to read it:

Panting with eagerness, and struggling to suppress my hopes, I hurried home, and rushed upstairs to my room, – having first provided myself with a candle, though it was scarcely twilight yet, – then, shut and bolted the door, determined to tolerate no interruption, and sitting down before the table, opened out my prize and delivered myself up to its perusal – first, hastily turning over the leaves and snatching a sentence here and there, and then, setting myself steadily to read it through. (147)

The way in which Gilbert quickly settles into this scene of absorptive reading, "hastily turning over the leaves... and then, setting myself steadily to read it through," initially suggests his entry into the slower, "steady" pace of reading required by the diary. Yet Gilbert's reported consumption of the diary hundreds of pages later in the novel—reading it over the course of a

near-sleepless evening, rising again at dawn to “devou[r] the remainder of its contents”—is held in relief against the time it has taken for his secondary reader(s) to read it (402).

The affects associated with the quicker pace of the overarching marriage plot conflict with the sense of tedium produced by the length of Helen’s diary. To be sure, Gilbert acknowledges the possibility of distinct, individual readings prior to the diary’s introduction (“you could not, of course, peruse it with half the interest that I did”). But after its excerption, he re-prioritizes his scene of reading by asking his readers to imagine his feelings—“did you ever picture to yourself what my feelings would probably be during its perusal?” (147, 402)—and by fantasizing about what the change in emotions charted in the remainder of Helen’s narrative after the tear might look like:

At any rate, I would have given much to have seen it all – to have witnessed the gradual change, and watched the progress of her esteem and friendship for me, – and whatever warmer feeling she might have – to have seen how much of love there was in her regard, and how it had grown upon her in spite of her virtuous resolutions and strenuous exertions to – but no, I had no right to see it: all this was too sacred for any eyes but her own, and she had done well to keep it from me. (401)

Gilbert’s excited, accelerated reading is not the protracted, durational reading engendered by Helen’s (and Brontë’s) prose. Rather, the “gradual change” underwriting Helen’s entries and “strenuous exertions” of her emotional restraint are inverted here as the signs of Gilbert’s pleasurable reading and desire, feelings he now pictures surfacing from the submerged depths of Helen’s suppressed affective life. While “to have seen it all,” “to have witnessed the gradual change,” is *precisely* what the diary has otherwise yielded by way of its peculiar length, Gilbert’s feelings are the products of a different kind of reading process—hurried, impatient, closer to “perusal” than immersion—and a signal that what Helen has strived to prove by providing the diary has been lost on her immediate reader (401).

This return to the scene of reading in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*—a different reader’s scene of reading—yields an observation on the act of reading Helen’s diary and, in turn, Brontë’s novel: the reading it engenders by way of Helen’s diary is incompatible with the reading it reports. On the one hand, the affective continuity between Helen, tenant of Grass-dale Manor, and Helen, tenant of Wildfell Hall, is now made abundantly clear through the prolonged time of reading itself; on the other, Helen’s expansive text is compressed into and glossed by Gilbert’s momentous, singular reading, illustrating a profound disjunction between what the length of Helen’s narration affords in terms of durational feeling and the impulsive, reactionary emotions that Gilbert’s quick appraisal prioritizes. The experience of reading the diary produces a diminished state of receptivity in readers through which, as Christoff writes (in consideration of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*), “[w]e are not urged into the epiphany of realization but held at the level of language’s opacity,” settling into a slower timeline for receptivity and affective influence (146). However, the reported time of Gilbert’s reading illustrates that the temporality of novel reading (its felt duration) is not coextensive with the time of narrative (a causal sequence of events stretched out over so many pages). Helen’s temporal dilation and subsequent compression into the hardened, emotionally-inaccessible tenant whose diary we have open before us justifies her calculated reserve towards Gilbert; but the disproportionate length of her diary puts time between the harrowing conditions of Helen’s remote past and Gilbert’s immediate present—or between the extended lived time represented in the diary and the abbreviated reading of the diary in the novel—as well as the distinct structures of feeling produced by both readings.

Gilbert’s perusal underscores the problem of dissimulation presented in Helen’s diary and in Brontë’s novel: there are no sure signs at the diegetic level that the act of reading has produced a particular feeling in readers or, alarmingly, necessitates a specific form of affective response.

As Helen herself has illustrated in her diary, reading largely serves as a means to conceal rather than convey feeling—it functions as a guard against direct emotional confrontation, to the effect of making one’s “real” feelings illegible. But reading and feeling are further dissociated from one another in the narrative to the extent that they often appear in direct opposition to one another, conflicting rather than coextensive processes. Feelings, as Gilbert’s narrative has demonstrated, have a tendency to run long when given time and space to do so, impeding readers from reaching the end of the narrative. Two chapters prior, Gilbert comments on his suppression of the feelings that his letters to Halford have otherwise poorly hid: “[t]o tell you all the questionings and conjectures – the fears, and hopes, and wild emotions that jostled and chased each other through my mind as I descended the hill,” he reports to Halford, “would almost fill a volume in itself” (123). By signaling the possibility for anyone’s feelings (real or apparent) to “fill a volume in itself”—and subsequently proving the point with Helen’s diary—Brontë demonstrates the dangerous possibility for affect to overtake and overwrite narrative, in turn disrupting the timely arrival of narrative events and the steady process of reading. In the novel’s most notorious example of affect offsetting plot, soon after another failed attempt to win Helen’s hand, when Gilbert mistakes Lawrence, Helen’s brother, for a romantic rival, he strikes him off his horse and nearly kills him; “impelled by some fiend at my elbow,” Gilbert recounts the release of his unfounded animosity towards Lawrence and in turn shows little remorse for the “feeling of savage satisfaction” brought by the appearance of blood on Lawrence’s skull as he slips to the wet earth (134). In this way, feeling, which Brontë has otherwise aligned in the diary with tedium, is here realigned in the frame narrative with Gilbert’s dangerous lack of emotional restraint and his impulsive, reactionary, and above all *violent* response to reading. Gilbert’s reactions do not bode well for the affective influence of Helen’s diary: if Gilbert consistently

fails to read sensation after reading Helen's diary, perhaps reading itself provides no guarantee for the "timely hermeneutic intervention" it is meant to afford (Carnell 10).¹¹¹

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall figures reading as an affectively fraught operation—a process that fails to coordinate with the timely production and arrival of feeling in plot and that produces a number of unintended emotional responses, as seen in Gilbert's misreading and subsequent misfeeling(s). The diachronic nature of reading and feeling as processes resists reduction to discrete, interpretable acts in narrative. But further, reading and feeling in *Tenant* obfuscate the very distinction between activity and passivity. In fact, the distinction between *reading* and *not-reading* is routinely dissimulated in the diary in the interest of appearing in an ambiguous emotional condition or a state of *processing*, forestalling an immediate affective response as well as delaying the timely resolution of the plot.

Understood as a process, reading displaces more direct emotional responses in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. More often than not, as Arthur's companions overstay their welcome, Helen's attempts to busy herself with a book prove inopportune. Helen finds that reading signals an occasion for its interruption, even as she attempts to carve out a separate space for her leisurely activities by, fittingly, ensconcing herself in the library, her "secure retreat at all hours of the day" (359). Yet as Helen attempts to occupy her time with reading, she finds that reading affords the expression of different forms of feeling otherwise unavailable to her. In the following scene, reading figures as a means for Helen to guard onlookers from ascertaining her emotional reaction to Annabella as well as for Helen to directly communicate her frustration:

¹¹¹ As critics have pointed out, Gilbert's lack of command throughout the novel portends that he, like Arthur, will eventually prove his intemperance. In addition to Carnell, see Claybaugh in *The Novel of Purpose*: Gilbert "is not simply flawed but flawed in precisely the same ways as Helen's first husband" and demonstrates that "the novel is structured by the interchangeability of men—and the repetitions of their promises" (106).

I, less to divert my mind than to deprecate conversation, had provided myself with a book.... Perhaps [Annabella] thought I had a headache and could not bear to talk – at any rate, she saw that her loquacious vivacity annoyed me, as I could tell by the malicious pertinacity with which she persisted. But I checked it, effectually, by putting into her hand the book I had been trying to read, on the flyleaf of which I had hastily scribbled, –

‘I am too well acquainted with your character and conduct to feel any real friendship for you, and, as I am without your talent for dissimulation, I cannot assume the appearance of it. I must, therefore, beg that hereafter, all familiar intercourse may cease between us; and if I still continue to treat you with civility, as if you were a woman worthy of consideration and respect, understand that it is out of regard for your cousin Milicent’s feeling, not for yours.’

Upon perusing this, she turned scarlet and bit her lip. Covertly tearing away the leaf, she crumpled it up and put it in the fire, and then employed herself in turning over the pages of the book and, really or apparently, perusing its contents. (319-320)

Helen’s book performs two crucial functions in this scene. First, she successfully uses it to screen herself from the other guests. In this way, the book partially mitigates Annabella’s “loquacious vivacity” and attempts to mask the animosity Helen not so secretly harbors against her unwelcomed guest. But second, Helen’s book functions as a conduit for feelings that cannot be spoken out loud: Helen communicates her feelings to Annabella by “putting into her hand the book I had been trying to read.” As Leah Price remarks, this dual use of the book “as a prop for privacy or prompt for interiority” effectively enables Helen to deploy the “dissimulation” the book serves to “check” through its physical exchange—no one else in the crowded room can tell what has transpired between Helen and Annabella, as both appear, “really and apparently,” to be reading, while its exchange conveys and confirms the very feelings it originally served to screen (47). However, in the hostile feelings the book appears not only to facilitate but also *augment*, the medium turns into an uncertain conduit, a refractive rather than simply mimetic or obstructive object.

Annabella’s reaction to Helen’s flyleaf note further illustrates how these levels of reading are complicated in scenes wherein the appearance of reading is treated as proof of particular

emotions—or, considering the original scene of Gilbert’s reading, the work of novel reading as itself a hermeneutic operation, exposing a secret and submerged affective life. Annabella’s use of the book fails to mask her feelings, as Helen observes her poor attempt to hide behind the very same novel actually exacerbates her frustration. However, as Helen watches Annabella “pressing her finger against her teeth,” Helen begins to betray her placidity: “I watched her a few moments with a feeling of malevolent gratification; then, moving towards the door, I calmly asked if she had anything more to say” (320). By the end of the scene, the distinction between “really or apparently” reading, the pretense of (or absorption in) the act itself, collapses into the use of a book as a screen for real (or merely apparent) emotional preoccupation.

This non-distinction reflects on earlier, less momentous scenes of reading in Helen’s diary. In the first few years of domestic life, reading for pleasure is simply impossible to sustain. Whenever Helen picks up a book, Arthur becomes implacable: “when he sees me occupied with a book, he won’t let me rest till I close it” (221). These occupied periods of time not only hazard interruption, but prompt concerns for the feelings that reading both displays and hides:

I returned to my reading; and he endeavoured to occupy himself in the same manner; but, in a little while, after several portentous yawns, he pronounced *his* book to be “cursed trash,” and threw it on to the table. Then followed eight or ten minutes of silence, during the greater part of which, I believe, he was staring at me. At last his patience was tired out.

‘What *is* that book, Helen?’ he exclaimed.

I told him.

‘Is it interesting?’

‘Yes, very.’

‘Humph!’

I went on reading – or pretending to read, at least – I cannot say there was much communication between my eyes and my brain; for, while the former ran over the pages, the latter was earnestly wondering when Arthur would speak next, and what he would say, and what I should answer. (225)

This scene underscores the fascination in Brontë’s novel with another person’s reading, but it also reveals the absolute lack of any discernible difference in the novel between real feeling and

the appearance of feeling.¹¹² It does not matter whether or not Helen or Arthur are “really reading” for the purposes of their mutual speculation, nor does it matter what they are “really feeling.” Rather, reading puts off answering the questions that are raised once patience is truly “tired out” and feeling has no recourse to its legible expression and release as an emotional reaction. How can one tell whether someone else is “really” feeling or just “apparently” feeling? and if feeling is possible to fake, how does one verify what someone else has felt while they read? Indeed, Arthur’s accusation that Helen is only “apparently reading”—implied by his question “Is it interesting?”—was issued by Helen to Arthur on the previous page: “The paper, he set before him, and pretended to be deeply absorbed in its contents during the remainder of breakfast, and a considerable time after” (224). Reading may stave off an emotional confrontation or, by delaying the inevitable, exacerbate it; at the same time, reading underscores the difficulty with which durational feelings are made communicable by way of conversation or in print.

This uncertainty spills out beyond the confines of Helen’s diary into Gilbert’s narrative, as when his earlier attempt to gift Helen a new copy of Walter Scott’s epic poem *Marmion*, a present he intends as an “experiment” to test their affective bond, spectacularly fails.¹¹³ The book prompts a confused reaction from Helen:

A momentary flush suffused her face – perhaps a blush of sympathetic shame for such an awkward style of presentation: she gravely examined the volume on both sides; then

¹¹² Price treats this scene in Brontë’s novel as an example of how distracted reading and impassioned reading become seemingly fungible, interchangeable tropes for female readers in mid-Victorian fiction, pointing not only to the “willingness to be distracted” in Victorian culture, but to the vexing relation between the representation of reading and the interiority reading supposedly affirms (55-6). See also Dorrit Cohn.

¹¹³ See Winifred Gérin’s note on the seemingly anachronistic inclusion of Scott’s *Marmion*, which also appears in *Jane Eyre*: “very small editions [of *Marmion*] were available in the eighteen-thirties and – forties (too late for the stated time of action in *The Tenant*), but Anne may not have had any specific edition in mind” (500).

silently turned over the leaves, knitting her brows the while in serious cogitation; then closed the book, and, turning from it to me, quietly asked the price of it. – I felt the hot blood rush to my face. (94)

While Gilbert does not know quite yet that Helen's blush is not one of "sympathetic shame" (or for the purposes of his correspondence with Halford, pretends he does not know), its illegibility as something other than affection or aversion, well before he has read her expansive diary, makes it difficult for him to read her response. Helen's "momentary flush" is also quickly supplanted by the appearance of (or perhaps pretense to) reading, as "she gravely examined the volume... then silently turned over the leaves, knitting her brows the while in serious cogitation," attempting to read the book as if it held an answer appropriate for the situation (or *vice versa*). Gilbert takes any small affective signal from Helen as a telling sign of hidden feelings to be unearthed—"a look of repellent scorn," "a pitying smile," "a kind of serious, almost sorrowful displeasure" only formed when she is pressed, doggedly, into uncomfortable conversation (48, 58, 92). At the diegetic level, then, the act of reading in Gilbert's narrative is also aligned with the abstraction of emotional response, further obscuring the legibility of feeling by placing it behind the covers of a book. Helen's rejection of the gift initiates a sequence of disingenuous affective exchanges centered on the passing of a book from one reader to the next, a sequence culminating in the manuscript we have before us, premised on an assurance of something more than passing familiarity but what Gilbert instead refers to, in his first letter to Halford, as "a return of confidence" (33).

While I see Helen's obduracy in and beyond the diary as both product and sign of the agency she has formed during her affective depletion, it is also a stance that wards off the reductive, synchronic outcome of reading as an act rather than a process. As Catherine Gallagher observes, this tendency to synchronic interpretation demonstrates "our need to make the

narrative object as short as possible,” a method that both elides the diachronic structure of the novel as a narrative form and abstracts narrative as an object capable of arrest and analysis (Gallagher 230). In other words, the sheer length of Helen’s diary is an affordance for readers to feel that reading is a process, one that engenders durational affects at odds with their representation in narrative as emotions or, as the novel makes clear, discrete objects of interpretation and exchange. Beyond serving as mere proof of “the steady fact of abjection, diurnally endured and inscribed,” then, Helen’s diary also establishes novel reading as a site for negotiating feeling over time, resisting its codification in a synchronic “moment” of pure insight and instead requiring that feeling be understood as a process that exceeds the confines of narrative (Stewart 120).

However, Helen’s diary also provokes concerns for whether or not the barriers to reading these durational forms of feeling also encourage passivity—the possibility of reading less attentively, less diligently, or, apparently, not reading at all. The harried, careless kind of reading Gilbert conducts over a sleepless night suggests that “really reading” and “apparently reading” are indistinguishable operations when it comes to the progression of plot; in turn, this form of reading enables Gilbert to ignore the affective state Helen reports in the diary and, as a result, respond in his, rather than her, best interest. Gilbert’s scene of reading projects a fantasy of close reading performed with minimal time and minimal effort, a protocol that takes perusal as both its method and its critical ethos. In failing to account for Helen’s lived time as well as that of his readers, Gilbert disrupts our sense of the real time and real energy novel reading really takes.

III. Untimely Feelings

After his all too brief scene of reading, Gilbert can barely find time to pause and reflect on his interpretation of the text. “Immediately... I hurried over to Wildfell Hall,” Gilbert writes; “I cast

the manuscript on the table, and looked in her face” (403). This scene of direct, virtually unimpeded confrontation demonstrates Gilbert’s desire to maintain control over the affects of Helen’s text in the final stretch of his own, to once more distemper Helen and reveal her inner feelings “in spite of her virtuous resolutions and strenuous exertions” to deny them (401). In doing so, Gilbert asserts that the direct link between reading and feeling that has become undone in Helen’s diary still—indeed, *must*—hold together for the timely resolution of his plot. Gilbert’s insistence on maintaining the causal relationship between feeling and reading can be seen as he searches for signs of Helen’s emotional restraint: “[i]t was not in anger, I was well assured, but only to conceal or control her emotion” he speculates, as Helen remains reticent to reciprocate and instead shows “resolute firmness,” continuing “[but] the downcast eyes and burning blush too plainly showed that *she*, at least, had felt it” (404, 406). Yet Gilbert’s pressing feelings yield here to another scene of failed reading:

I raise her hand to my lips, and fervently kissed it again and again; for tears prevented any other reply. She suffered these wild caresses without resistance or resentment; then, suddenly turning from me, she paced twice or thrice through the room. I knew by the contraction of her brow, the tight compression of her lips, and wringing of her hands, that meantime a violent conflict between reason and passion was silently passing within.
(404)

This scene mirrors an earlier scene of reading, when Gilbert takes Helen’s rejection of *Marmion* as a sign of her restraint rather than reticence: “the contraction of her brow, the tight compression of her lips,” is no assurance of reciprocated feeling. Helen’s signs of cogitation could signal any, all, or none of the feelings associated with (or projected by) Gilbert’s narration. Gilbert’s assumption that reading indicates proof of deeper feeling and his repeated failure to read Helen even when prompted with an open book, together create a recursive loop in which reading repeatedly stalls rather than advances the narration.

Although the diachronic form of the diary is collapsed into Gilbert's myopic interpretation, rendering his reading of Helen synchronic and instrumental to the marriage plot, the novel fails to draw to a timely close. Indeed, while readers may expect that this moment of direct confrontation between Gilbert and Helen will miraculously conclude the plot suspended for so many pages, the narrative appears incapable of ending. Instead, readers encounter a weariness within Gilbert's narration that, similar to Roland Barthes's association of the figure of weariness with "the endless process of ending," impedes resolution by repeatedly and falsely signaling the end of the narrative (Barthes 16).¹¹⁴ Weariness manifests here in a series of starts and stops: anticipated scenes of resolution, missed cues, deferrals and delays, and similar misapprehensions of closure. The focalization of Helen's clock in this scene, "the hair chain to which was appended her small gold watch – the only thing of value she had permitted herself to keep," suggests her ongoing impact on the temporal conditions of narrative resolution, even as Gilbert continues to act "from the impulse of the moment" (405, 407). Beyond Helen's insistence that Gilbert remain mindful of her marital state and consider the time he would have to wait until Arthur dies, she also insists on a further delay: a six-month waiting period, "to give your present ardour time to cool," and to see if Gilbert "can maintain a correspondence all thought, all spirit – such as disembodied souls or unimpassioned friends, at least, might hold" (409). The implication of "disembodied," "unimpassioned" correspondence, entertained by Helen either despite or because of her "real" feelings, undermines the harried work Gilbert has undergone to verify her feelings and in turn, to prove his to Halford by way of composing his narrative.

¹¹⁴ Barthes further describes weariness's relationship to time as follows: "one could say that weariness does not constitute an empirical time, a crisis, an organic event, a muscular episode—but a quasi-metaphysical dimension, a sort of bodily (and not conceptual) idea, a mental kinesthesia" (20). See Barthes, *The Neutral* (2005).

Further still, a separate sequence of events upsets the already-delayed resolution of Gilbert's story—interestingly, events unconnected to Gilbert's affective response to the diary and wholly contingent on the actions of absent parties. First, news of Arthur's sudden and rapid decline pulls Helen away from her reconciliation with Gilbert and back to her husband's bedside. Gilbert receives the news of Helen's departure indirectly through local gossip and then (indirectly still) through a letter from Helen sent to her brother Lawrence. Here Helen's letters narrate a drunkard's decline, providing a conclusion more proper to temperance fiction as Arthur's health quickly slips away: finding the "wretched invalid" possessed by a state of "half-delirium" after injuries from a hunting accident (they "would, as the doctor says, have been but trifling to a man of temperate habits; but with *him* it is very different"), Helen moralizes his suffering and sets it in a causal narrative of deterioration and death (428). Each letter reports a minor change, an improvement in his constitution ("decidedly better") or further signs of deterioration, clearly linked to Arthur's return to the bottle ("Alarming symptoms were the immediate result of [his] 'impudence'... [and] former feature[s] of his malady had returned with augmented virulence") (437, 445). This steady decline is exacerbated by slow and sporadic reportage: Lawrence agrees to provide Gilbert with updates, but only one letter at a time. Gilbert's timekeeping is impacted as he reports on the lengths to which he must go to extract "further intelligence" from Lawrence: "I never sought his company but with the hope of hearing something about her, and he never sought mine at all, because he saw me often enough without" (437, 443). Helen's correspondence with Lawrence restages the exchange of letters framing the inner narrative, displacing his "old-world story" with another digressive, protracted narrative and once more stalling Gilbert's active pursuit of the ending.

Second, and more significantly for the marriage plot, Helen determines the subsequent conditions under which she would consider Gilbert's hand—time-oriented conditions that are meant to ensure the duration and longevity of Gilbert's affections and guard against his rapid acquisition of her newly-acquired financial assets. Once Arthur has passed and Helen has received control of his estate, Gilbert weighs the affective and temporal obstacles against the seemingly more substantial financial ones: "there was a wide distinction between the rank and circumstances of Mrs Huntingdon, the lady of Grass-dale manor, and those of Mrs Graham the artist, the tenant of Wildfell Hall," Gilbert realizes, a concern that troubles him just as much as (if not more than) Helen's insistence that they spend six months apart (454, 456). Despite the difference in status, Gilbert proves incorrigible and persistent, even after acknowledging the most sizable gap—the gulf between Helen's "afflictive, overwhelming toil" to help her dying husband and Gilbert's "insupportably morose and misanthropical" inclinations toward others (453, 416). While experiencing "profound sympathy for her own afflictions," Gilbert's thoughts routinely return to an anxiety for bridging the gulf between yeomanry and landed gentry rather than between their affective positions, as he plainly states "Mrs Huntingdon and me would be what the world calls a *mésalliance*" (453).

Waiting through Lawrence's convalescence, waiting for Helen's letters posted from her bedside habitation with her dying husband, and then waiting through the six months set to ensure the tempering or cooling of Gilbert's emotions: all conspire together to set Gilbert off from his desired resolution. This final stretch of narrative, in which plot is subject to repeated and unwanted suspensions, reproduces the conditions of Helen's protraction in miniature, the boredom and impatience felt when time is out of one's control. "February... was approaching; December was past, January, at length, was almost over – a few more weeks, and then, certain

despair or renewal of hope would put an end to this long agony of suspense,” Gilbert writes (457). “Real time” only emerges, then, in these final chapters of the novel. “I would wait,” Gilbert repeatedly attests, despite the “doubts and disappointments” (another chapter, another obstacle to narration) set in his path: “my future proceedings should be regulated by her reply” (456). Gilbert’s narrative reproduces the time of its more central narrative and the experience of protraction as well, to the point that Gilbert must frequently realign his narration to bring it back into the affective conditions of linear, progressive time: “instead of boring you with my chagrin, my expectations and disappointments, my fluctuations of dull despondency and flickering hope, my varying resolutions, now to drop it, and now to persevere—now to make a bold push, and now to let things pass and patiently abide my time, – I will employ myself in settling the business of one or two of the characters, introduced in the course of this narrative, whom I may not have occasion to mention again” (459). (Not surprisingly, “settling the business of one or two... characters” concerns resolving stray, largely unsuccessful marriage plots within the diegetic frame: for example, Annabella is reported to have “eloped with another gallant to the continent, where, having lived awhile in reckless gaiety and dissipation, they quarrelled and parted” [461]). Despite the fact that Gilbert’s narration takes place long after the events of the story have settled—in preparing his story for Halford, he can certainly amend these uneventful sections in the interest of time—the way he lingers and dwells in this lassitude suggests a belated discovery long after his original reading. *Re-reading* Helen’s diary, then, impacts the scene of narration long after Gilbert has the means to correct his actions.

This brief period of unharried narrative, when something like pause and contemplation enter Gilbert’s narration, is disrupted by the return of the moment as temporal figure in Chapter 51, “An Unexpected Occurrence.” Marriage reasserts itself in the plot by unexpected and

momentous means, imparting urgency and accelerating the time of narration. Upon hearing a rumor that Helen is to marry within the day, Gilbert immediately sets off in reckless haste to make it to Grass-dale by carriage and, when heavy snow prevents transportation, by foot. Unlike the slow pace of reportage in the preceding chapters made to match the original feelings of uneasy anticipation, these final pages present not only the movement and activity otherwise lacking in both narratives, but a drastic alteration in narrative time as well, an unthinking eventfulness pressing Gilbert's retrospection into the present tense: "I *must* be there before the marriage. And why? Because a thought struck me, that *perhaps* I might prevent it – that if I did not, she and I might both lament it to the latest moment of our lives" (465). The momentousness of this sequence—*as if* it were happening in the present, *as if* Gilbert may or may not intercede in time to correct Helen's "mistake"—is further emphasized by an acknowledgement of what is left out of narration: "This was no time or place for explanation or discourse," he writes, "though, of course, all this passed in a much shorter time than I have taken to relate or even than you will take to read it" (469). The fact of this "shorter time," shorter than its narration or its reading, represents an inversion of the relationship between reading and time represented in Gilbert's perusal of Helen's diary: because the events of the narrative take more time to report and read than they do in the lived moment, they are impossible to accurately convey without distorting them. Whereas the lengthy account of Helen's years of suffering could be read in mere moments, the fleeting minutes that comprise Gilbert's rush to interrupt the wedding cannot be translated into an accurate account of their lived time in print.

Yet even after Gilbert crashes the ceremony and finds it to be the wrong moment—not Helen's but Lawrence's wedding—the hurry and haste remain, a momentum propelling Gilbert to Helen's new estate in Staningley. Gilbert's "hot haste" yields a drawn-out scene of confession

and reflection. Helen, perennially untouched by time, appears now truly untimely in light of the events she has endured: “her beautiful black hair unstinted still and unconcealed,” Gilbert comments, “she looked so like herself that I knew not how to bear it” (480). The stillness of this scene belies a frenetic energy threatening to outpace or overrun plot as Gilbert finds “her fingers, as she played with her watch-chain, were agitated with that restless, trembling motion which betokens high excitement” (480). But this affective moment is offset by another kind of energy as Helen, “pulling a book to her by the cover, began to turn over the leaves in an energetic kind of abstraction” (481). Gilbert confronts Helen with the expectation that her feelings have not only remained constant—set not so much in stillness as in perpetual motion, “restless, trembling”—but have intensified. Yet even in emotional confrontation, reading must be present, mediating the moment of revelation to the degree that feeling unmediated by a book, momentous and responsive feeling, proves unthinkable or, in the case of Brontë’s novel, unrepresentable: “without raising her eyes from the book, but reddening as she spoke and hastily turning over a dozen leaves at once,” Helen’s emotional response is obscured by her engagement in the act of reading (481-82). In a reversal of the conditions for the original gift, Gilbert proves that his skills as a reader of feeling remain unaltered:

She laid the rose across my palm, but I scarcely closed my fingers upon it, so deeply was I absorbed in thinking what might be the meaning of her words, and what I ought to do or say upon the occasion; whether to give way to my feelings or restrain them still. Misconstruing this hesitation into indifference – or reluctance even – to accept her gift, Helen suddenly snatched it from my hand.... (484)

“Absorbed in thinking,” Gilbert’s failure to read feeling reads as a failure to feel—to understand the tenor of the affective moment. Yet Helen must make the transaction literal, the non-book legible as an object freighted with affective weight, as she plainly states “[t]he rose I gave you was an emblem of my heart” (485).

While Gilbert's final scene of failed reading ultimately emphasizes Helen's agency (it is Helen who proposes, not Gilbert), it also reminds readers that the sense of enervation engendered by the diary cannot perfectly align with the progressive, linear time of reading a bound novel from cover to cover (or, as illustrated above, before and after its formative tear). The protracted time of the diary and the lack of feeling it engenders together supplant the linear, plot-oriented feelings in the novel—not only by repeatedly upsetting the anticipated resolution of the “central” marriage plot but also by explicitly contrasting the temperate reserve Helen records in great length in her diary with the intemperate actions of Arthur and Gilbert. As Gilbert is the first character encountered in the novel, many readers suppose that his feelings are, as far as the marriage plot is concerned, the most important for narrative resolution—not only for the sake of the frame, stalling the familiar affective payoff his courtship narrative will presumably yield, but because Brontë encourages “a link between the narrator's feelings and those of his presumptive audience,” readers who, like Gilbert, are invested in discovering the outcome of the secret Helen will disclose (Stewart 110). What Gilbert has not predicted is that, in providing Helen's narrative as a substantial part of his own, he complicates the temporal chain linking his feelings to those of his reader(s). While Gilbert's correspondence with Halford was originally meant to remedy the latter's impoverished disposition, his “semi-melancholy” state, the tone of the novel's last letter is overtaken by a desire to return to a quicker pace and more immediate, directly affected mode of reading. Gilbert's closing reminder of Halford's upcoming visit gestures to an uncomfortable space between the feelings he narrates and his “real” feelings: “[w]e are just now looking forward to the advent of you and Rose, for the time of your annual visit draws nigh, when you must leave your dusty, smoky, noisy, toiling, striving city for a season of invigorating relaxation and social retirement with us” (490). The inversion marked here is twofold: not only are

“invigorating relaxation and social retirement” oxymoronic, but the contrast between the energy and excitement of the city, “toiling” and “striving,” and the “invigorating” life of the rural estate, assumes a nostalgia for a time when feeling was more active, less routine, and less predictable, a time without the familiarity of an “annual visit” or, indeed, the sheer length of time to transcribe an unprompted account of “the most important event of my life” (34). The empty language of time as mere measure has overtaken the time of feeling—“[w]e are *just now looking forward*,” Gilbert states, anticipating not just more, but more of the same.

IV. The Untimeliness of Reading

I have argued that the enervation of feeling while reading represented (and to a certain extent *felt*) in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is itself untimely for a novel of the 1840s. Indeed, the low-intensity feelings tracked in Helen’s diary appear quite different from the accelerated sensations represented in other mid-Victorian novels linked to issues of social reform, to the extent that Brontë appears implicitly to advocate for passive endurance rather than radical transformation. As her novel demonstrates, Helen is unable to stop the destructiveness of time’s progression day after uneventful day and can only mitigate it, producing delays, disruptions, and recursive digressions to stagger its forward movement.

Yet the alliance of enervation with novel reading in *Tenant* signals an obstacle that impassivity poses to narrative and, by extension, time-discipline. As Helen’s diary shows, impassivity is primarily a strategy of concealment, one through which her feelings are restrained rather than eliminated; to that end, she dwells in the narration of her affects to prevent the subsequent deformation of her text by readers through abridgement or summation; even with Gilbert’s purported edits, a sense of her lived duration exceeds what is represented in print. In this way, Brontë introduces a structure of feeling at odds with the ends of plot: the untimeliness

of the diary offsets the timely conventions of courtship and marriage, to the extent that the novel's overarching narrative must take additional time to arrive at a resolution inevitable but now impossibly delayed.

Both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* feature protagonists who employ conscious strategies of dissimulation for the purposes of emotional concealment and preservation. However, these strategies can only be sustained at the level of textual production: the feelings that Agnes and Helen struggle to conceal from other parties in their narratives are unable permanently to challenge their relative social positions. While momentary acts of dissimulation (a white lie, restraint shown during an uncomfortable dinner party) are sustainable because of their brevity and relative inconsequence, Helen's narrative shows that concealing feeling over a prolonged stretch of time—for example, day after day during six long years of marriage—is particularly difficult. In this way, concealment is always a temporary strategy and not a permanent solution to the systemic social problems of marriage in the period, problems that, as Brontë's novel reveals, involve the denial of women's legal rights to property, their constant subjection to abuse within the home, and the subordination of their authority as writers to that of male authors and male readers.¹¹⁵ These issues extend beyond Anne Brontë's novels into larger concerns for gender and agency in the works of the period, particularly those of Charlotte and Emily Brontë. In Nancy Armstrong's reading, the Brontës's heroines supersede their delimited positions by way of their textual production. As Armstrong writes, the self-reflexivity of the Brontës's fiction "always identifies the female as the one with the power to determine the meaning of words and things, a power capable in certain instances of changing the

¹¹⁵ See Brontë's preface to the second edition of the novel: "All novels are, or should be, written for both men and women to read, and I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man" (29).

nature of the words and things themselves” (212). On the other hand, Amanda Anderson has shown how this account of textual agency makes “feminine agency ... continuous with [the] unreflective forms of power” and in turn “help[s] to reinforce the oddly nonreflective agency ... [of] the Victorian middle-class ideal” (36-7). Granting forms of agency to characters for whom, as “constrained subjects,” agency is otherwise unavailable, ultimately reproduces the logic of power these accounts strive to complicate and unwork.

While neither Armstrong nor Anderson touch on Anne Brontë’s novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* serves as a necessary correlate to the time-bound, socially constrained female subjects of the Brontës. To be sure, Brontë’s avocation of impassivity and withdrawal from social life may appear to square easily with the ideal domestic relationships on which her novels close: in *Agnes Grey*, Agnes inevitably marries the soft-spoken Mr. Weston, settling into a life of “sufficiency”; in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Helen marries not once but twice, a repetition that Claybaugh demonstrates diminishes the novel’s critique of marriage as both social institution and narrative form. Yet while the formal innovations within *Tenant* come at the expense of its timely intervention on its male reader and narrator, the unanticipated length of the diary and the tedium it engenders in readers achieve a belated effect on the instrumentality of time-discipline in narrative. By stalling the affective payoff of the marriage plot, Helen’s diary undermines the function of the momentous, synchronic feelings typically privileged in the mid-Victorian novel.

What Brontë seeks to understand in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, then, is how other forms of feeling—durational, diachronic, enduring—resist their categorization as affects of “everyday life,” a categorization that renders them inaccessible beyond their historical ken. While often read as such, states of boredom, lassitude, and tedium are not inaccessible to readers as historical referents; nor, as Gilbert’s excited response to Helen’s diary indicates, are they universal

byproducts of novel reading. Instead, Brontë's work in *Tenant* is to make these states feel strangely familiar, *as if* they were true for any and every reader, much like the implied personage of Brontë's original title for *Agnes Grey*, *Passages in the Life of an Individual*. If Helen appears "too abstractly individuated, too internally unpressured by the strains and frictions of [her] social world," as Eagleton attests, it is because the lived experience represented in the novel's expansive, experimental middle section seeks to be both a particular form of everyday life as well as an abstract, generalized, and *generalizable* one (136-7). In this way, Brontë suggests that domestic reading, typically cast as an "unpictured site" and "general condition" of reading the Victorian novel, is an already belated, anachronistic form by the midcentury, a retroactive approximation of forms of feeling that may or may not have been actively felt.

In this way, Brontë produces an *untimely* rather than *ahistorical* account of everyday life in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. While Brontë's heroines may be out of sync with their present moment, they are not wholly disconnected from social life and history. This can be seen in the novel's occupation of a middle position between historical regression and reform: the novel expresses nostalgia for an earlier era of the novel and a different, more strenuous means of affective influence while, at the same time, anticipating changes to the novel and its corresponding social institutions on the near horizon (Stewart 99).¹¹⁶ Although this account requires that the novel cast aside the logic of lived time that defines its generic identity in the 1840s as a work of temperance fiction, it suggests instead that feeling out of sync with the hurry and haste of industrialization can afford structures of lived time that are more amenable and more hospitable to lived experience: less conditioned by forces of discipline and routine, and less

¹¹⁶ Whereas Carnell argues that the novel projects "a nostalgic vision of domestic harmony within the Enlightenment public sphere" (23), Ian Ward situates the novel on the cusp of marriage law reform and as a precipitous force for the 1857 Divorce Act.

reactive as well. Understood in this way, lived time can be subject to redirection, renegotiation, and rehabilitation. This softer, dilatory structure allows for a reworking of the constrained relationship traditionally sustained in mid-century novels between feeling and time: rather than seeing time as determining and inescapable, enforcing a strict routine that permits no recourse, Brontë makes time less monumental and less momentous—and, against the feelings depicted in other more exciting, more sensational novels of the era, ultimately less interesting.

Anne Brontë's novels also demonstrate that novel reading is itself untimely, subject to indefinite protraction, redirection, and reinterpretation. This sense of untimeliness establishes distance from questions concerning otherwise historically contingent reading practices and affective responses—how the Victorians might have read, and the actual tedium Brontë's readers of the time may or may not have felt. Yet it also affords us greater license to reflect on how we historicize our contemporary interpretative strategies for novel reading and, evidenced in no small part by the recurring announcement of “new” reading practices, to consider their application apart from their institutional duration.¹¹⁷ Reading, as Rachel Ablow remarks, is “one of the most intriguing and mysterious of practices not just because of its apparent privacy or individuality, but also because of the significance of its consequences, and because those consequences—affective, cognitive, social, and political—can never be fully determined in advance” (10). An untimely reading practice, Brontë shows, is one that redefines and reworks an otherwise constrained relationship between affective response and historicity to allow for new temporalities of reading and modes of feeling to emerge. Out of sync with the ongoing present or the seeming stasis of the past, these modes of feeling—durational, diachronic, enduring—are no

¹¹⁷ A partial list would include Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's “surface reading,” Franco Moretti's “distant reading,” and Elaine Freedgood and Cannon Schmitt's “nonfigurative reading.”

longer bound to available, historically contingent methods of interpretation, but require time to process and take shape.

But in the broader context of my dissertation, I want to suggest that Brontë's untimely fictions pose an intractable problem for novel reading as an affective process. Indeed, Brontë's fictions not only show how mid-Victorian novels become aware of their length—a peculiarity that reveals itself in Agnes's concern for the reception of her digressive story as well as in Gilbert's attempts to renegotiate the affective influence of Helen's unwieldy narrative—but begin to form more expansive structures for representing the kinds of nebulous, non-agential feelings engendered by novel reading, much like in the case of both Dickens and Trollope.¹¹⁸ Although the linearity of narrative ensnared novel reading within a continuous logic of production and persistence in Trollope, Brontë's work suggests a greater capacity for delay, alteration, and even belatedness within the process of reading. In the next chapter, I consider how Eliot looks to abridge novel form in order to constrain and redirect the feeling of reading.

¹¹⁸ Elisha Cohn remarks on the outcome of treating novel reading “as a negation of activity,” in particular a means for “the release of... vigilance and coherence of the self”: while a useful association for the novel as site of aesthetic value, as Cohn maintains, “the irreducibility of affective response has no necessary relationship with social transformation” (853-54, 857).

CHAPTER FOUR

George Eliot's Brevity: Narrative Length and Empathy in *Silas Marner*

We learn *words* by rote, but not their meaning; *that* must be paid for with our life-blood, and printed in the subtle fibres of our nerves. But I will hasten to finish my story. Brevity is justified at once to those who readily understand, and to those who will never understand.

—George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil*

There are words which, owing to their extreme precision—a precision demanding time for thorough realization, or to their excessive philosophical generality, forcing the mind to lose time in long divagations—there are words which make the Reader think and feel, in a way make him *live*, slowly....

—Vernon Lee, *The Handling of Words*

Introduction: On Narrative Length and Sympathy

In the final chapter of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), a catastrophic flood sweeps away Maggie and Tom Tulliver, eradicating Dorlcote Mill and upending much of the narrative world carefully established over the preceding volumes. Critics are largely in agreement that it is a particularly unfitting end to the novel, aesthetically disproportionate with respect to the long, complex narrative that came before it—too sudden, far too short—as well as dissonant with the work's expansive affective aims.¹¹⁹ Yet to describe the form of the ending to *The Mill on the Floss* is to also describe the specific affective impact it has on readers: the surprising termination of two lives carefully traced over the course of three volumes, now pressed to a sharpened point in the last line of Eliot's stunted conclusion, “[i]n their death they were not divided,” abruptly severs our sympathetic connection with the Tullivers (*Mill* 544). If Eliot's success as a novelist lies in immersing readers in a world assembled over so many pages in order to bring us into

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who remarks that the “tragedy” presented in the conclusion to *The Mill on the Floss* “was not adequately prepared” (qtd. in A.S. Byatt's introduction to the Penguin edition). For an overview of critical responses to the flood, see Adela Pinch.

greater sympathy with a novel's inhabitants, her endings often remind readers of the differences between our lives and the lives we encounter in novels. While our lives may run parallel to the time of reading, they are not, thankfully, coextensive or coterminous with the length of a novel.

Eliot not only wrote very long novels, but she also wrote them with their length in mind. As Nicholas Dames, Amy M. King, and David Kurnick have argued, the respective lengths of Eliot's last two novels, *Middlemarch* (1871-2) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), appear coextensive with what they aim to represent: the gradual development of sympathy in characters like Dorothea and Gwendolen through the enlargement and enrichment of their affective faculties, which can only develop in narratives of sufficient length, narratives in which characters have room to grow and their capacity to feel space to take shape.¹²⁰ Yet Eliot understands the formal expansiveness of her late fiction to facilitate the affective growth of her readers as well as her characters. Consider her remark in personal correspondence with Charles Bray that "[i]f art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally," as well as her oft-quoted observation from "The Natural History of German Life" that our encounters with art provide "mode[s] of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot" (*Letters* 9:220; "Natural History" 271). Reading long novels, Eliot claims, makes readers capable of greater sympathy by gradually bringing us to identify with characters over (narrative) time and in doing so, "extending our contact" with others.¹²¹ More than a theme or

¹²⁰ Dames links Eliot's use of narrative length to the complexity of Wagner's long-form compositions. See too King, who understands the nineteenth-century novel's tendency to "long descriptive excursus" as a holdover from the practice of quotidian observation in natural history texts and as an extension of their "religiously sanctioned ethics," as well as Kurnick, who reads Eliot's *Romola* as a novel in which "the figurative conditions of Eliot's character ontology become the subject of diegetic elaboration" (King 461, 465; Kurnick 491). Dames, King and Kurnick all follow Catherine Gallagher in attempting to develop a "concept of [narrative] length" related to, but distinct from, "temporal analysis" (Gallagher 229).

¹²¹ On sympathy as a complex psychological process of identification rather than unmediated emotional receptivity, see Rae Greiner, who draws from the Smithian tradition. Eliot, Greiner writes, "was deeply

moral aspiration for her readership, although it is often both, length is the central aesthetic principle of Eliot's late fiction, an aesthetic directed to the "extension" and "enlargement" of our capacity to think of and feel for others, and formalized via the expansiveness of narrative itself.¹²²

If Eliot associates narrative length with the development of sympathy—in Alicia Christoff's words, if she treats the novel as a "medium of feeling" and appears to take that phrase in its literal sense—the brevity of her 1861 novel *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* appears to affirm the other side of this principle (142). Measured against lengthy novels like *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, *Silas Marner* seems a formal aberration. Indeed, critics claim that the brief, disjointed work, replete with odd elisions and gaps in the narrative, underdeveloped characters, and a thematic alignment with allegory rather than social realism presents a failed relationship between aesthetic form and affective development. Of the novel's critics, Anna Neill most explicitly claims brevity as the aesthetic and affective failing of *Silas Marner*, and in doing so, she confirms what Dames, King, and Kurnick have argued about the direct relationship between narrative length and the development of sympathy in Eliot's work. Whereas in Eliot's late novels, "narrative form aims to represent as well as to activate the

aware of sympathy's limitations when the ideal of intersubjective communication turns into brainless, effortless reproduction at best and, at worst, fatal absorption"; instead, she argues, Eliot's sympathy is based on a form of "difficult thinking" that insists on recognizing yet maintaining the gap between ourselves and others (139, 140). See too Jaffe and Reilly on Eliot and sympathy.

¹²² Critics consistently figure sympathy as the aim of Eliot's aesthetics. Daniel Cottom explicitly links sympathy to expansion and growth in Eliot's aesthetics, observing that "[a]mong the adjectives most frequently associated with 'sympathy' in Eliot's writing are 'growing' and 'enlarged'" (183). Yet according to Cottom, Eliot's identification of sympathy with art "provides[s] for the class of her readership dramatic images of the ideals already enshrined in their social theories and practices" (184, 190). See too Carroll Viera, who sees in Eliot's works a gradual transition from Romantic notions of organic growth to the development of a comprehensive ethical system, and Debra Gettelman, who finds that Eliot aims to promote a form of moral imagination that is ostensibly a continuation or extension of the formal parameters of sympathy represented in her narratives.

sympathetic fibers of a vast social organism,” Eliot’s shortest novel does not allow “the expansive, imaginative, and spiritual vision that emerges in the dilatory, multi-layered narratives of the longer novels” (“Sympathy” 21-2). In particular, Neill argues, *Silas Marner* fails to expose readers to the entire duration of Silas’s descent into emotional despondency over his fifteen years of social stigmatization and isolation, and as a result, readers are unable to experience a similarly continuous affective transformation over the time of reading. The absence of this affective process in the narrative has led other critics to regard the character who facilitates Silas’s transformation from hardened miser into sensitive parent as a mere contrivance of plot: Godfrey’s abandoned child Eppie, whose unlikely appearance on Silas’s hearth clumsily unites the lives of the two characters, yielding Silas’s recuperation and Godfrey’s castigation.¹²³ In sum, *Silas Marner*’s formal features—namely, discontinuity and concision—are typically taken to be in conflict with the expansive, holistic affective values of connection that emerge in the novel after Silas adopts Eppie. Whereas this generous act enables Silas’s gradual return to social life, the same affective values fail to find coextensive representation in the form of the novel.

While critics often focus on how *Silas Marner* fails to make feeling and form coextensive, what they have not considered is *why* Eliot might intend a different relationship between feeling and form in this work. In this chapter, I argue that the aesthetic and affective failings associated with *Silas Marner*’s abbreviated length reflect the narrower aesthetic and affective aims of Eliot’s novel—aims that, while they initially appear at odds with the unity and complexity of her later novels, actually underscore a closer and more pervasive link between

¹²³ See Susan Stewart and Susan R. Cohen. See too Srdjan Smajic, who sees no real conflict in social realism’s inclusion of seemingly supernatural events. Eppie’s appearance on Silas’s hearth has also served as a focal point for critiques of the novel’s embrace of familial ideology. Jeff Nunokawa demonstrates how the “conspicuous doctrine” of familial propriety throughout Eliot’s fiction ultimately becomes perverted in *Silas Marner* through the novel’s money plot, and Lee Edelman treats Eppie as a figure of “reproductive futurism,” a constellation of compulsory systems that link heterosexuality to social redemption and historical progress (Nunokawa 101; Edelman 66).

feeling and form throughout Eliot's fiction that has been underexplored in favor of the tie between sympathy and narrative length. This common conflation of narrative length and sympathy occurs in part because sympathy, like the three-volume novel itself, is formally diffuse and affectively expansive. Sympathy, which aims for maximum distribution amongst many subjects, shares in the sprawling formal nature of Eliot's long narratives, which take on an ever-expanding web of characters whose feelings, thoughts, and interrelated lives occupy narrative attention.¹²⁴ In this way, *Silas Marner*'s abbreviated form confirms what critics claim about the relationship between sympathy and narrative length, and not just in Eliot's fiction: the novel *is* too short to properly represent profound, necessarily slow affective growth over time or to achieve the sense of aesthetic coherence that critics typically associate with the facilitation of sympathy.¹²⁵

Yet as I will show, the brevity of *Silas Marner* questions the centrality of narrative length as the primary aesthetic aim of Eliot's fiction and, more broadly, it challenges sympathy as a pervasive affective aim of the nineteenth-century novel. *Silas Marner* shows how aesthetic features commonly associated with narrative length like continuity, expansiveness, and complexity have been over-valued at the expense of less legible, but no less pervasive and

¹²⁴ See Alan Palmer, who distinguishes between representations of "intermental" and "intramental" thinking in *Middlemarch*. Palmer argues that critical emphasis on the latter, which concerns individual thought, is often at the expense of the former, which refers to "joint, group, shared, or collective" thought, and despite Eliot's investment in both (427).

¹²⁵ Two proponents of this view are Martha Nussbaum and Dorothy J. Hale, who both argue that literary works model ethical behavior by way of their particular aesthetic features. Both treat sympathy as the normative aim of novel aesthetics; Hale, for instance, focuses on the ways in which free indirect discourse provides direct access to perspectives beyond our own, while Nussbaum argues that literature employs perception and particularity to facilitate ethical understanding. Literary theorists working at the intersections of cognitive studies and developmental theory have made similar claims to literature's emotionally enriching affects. For an overview of these positions, see Suzanne Keen, who is skeptical about literature's ethical commitments. See too Anna Lindhé. For a discussion of affect and aesthetic complexity, see the conclusion to this chapter.

significant aesthetic features like discontinuity, concision, and simplicity. By embracing brevity through several formal “failings”—the narrator’s reluctance to elaborate and recourse to aphorism and summary, the collapse of durational experiences into short chapters and, often, mere sentences, as well as curious temporal gaps in the narrative—Eliot underscores how these minor features, present but typically overlooked in novels when our focus is on narrative length, do not serve the usual end of aesthetic apprehension through formal unity, increasingly taken up by the novel as the century progressed. Rather, *Silas Marner*’s deviations from the conventional three-volume form demonstrate how shorter novels can represent and facilitate affective responses other than sympathy: constrained, suddenly arrested or curtailed, inconsistent, or simply brief, these responses are admittedly narrower, less idealized, and much more difficult to ascertain in the course of reading. Yet they are significant precisely because they conflict with the conception of the novel as a holistic affective work and prevent the reader’s realization of a discrete, singular affective state by the end of a novel. The novel’s abbreviated length can thus be read as a refusal to treat sympathy as the *normative* aim of aesthetic experience, which is a product of the critical assumption that the aesthetics of literary form should always yield an increase in the range of our affective interests and create deeper reserves in our capacity to feel for others.

To address the constrained aesthetic and affective parameters of *Silas Marner*, I will turn to Vernon Lee who, in her 1923 collection *The Handling of Words and Other Studies in Literary Psychology*, employs the term *empathy* to describe our more minor affective responses to literary form. For Lee, reading as an embodied process falls somewhere between our psychological and physiological registers, requiring our active contemplation of literature as an aesthetic object as well as encouraging the affective reactions produced in the course of reading. Empathy casts this

alternation between aesthetic contemplation and non-aesthetic response not only as a facet of literary form but also as its particular virtue: its proximity to lived experience. “[L]iterature is vaguer, more superficial, less massively efficient than the other arts, and infinitely less aesthetic,” Lee writes, “[b]ut for that very reason, it is more closely connected with life” (*Handling* 68, 79). For Lee, works of literature—and novels in particular—become “more closely connected with life” when they collapse the distinction between aesthetic perception and affective response via lapses in contemplation, moments that cause the aesthetic and the affective to become categorically indistinguishable. More than simply affecting readers, novels produce a kind of joint or tandem activity *with* readers through the very process of reading, resulting in “the *merging* of the activities of the subject in the object” (*The Beautiful* 58). Novel reading is an empathetic rather than sympathetic process for Lee because it encourages moments of “merging” in which the distinction between subject and object, reader and text, is productively unworked.

This chapter demonstrates how treating novel reading as an empathetic process helps us understand the narrower aesthetic and affective aims of *Silas Marner* and, more broadly, the impact of abbreviated or constrained narrative length on the expansive aesthetic-affective aims otherwise associated with novel form in the nineteenth century. Whereas sympathy facilitates the wide-ranging affective connections and increased understanding typically realized at the end of a lengthy novel, empathy helps us attend to the minor affective responses felt in the course of reading—the obstacles to realizing feeling, the frustrations and false starts that fail to accrete and amount to an increase in feeling for others, and the slow time that novel reading, in its tendency towards detour and digression, can take. In doing so, empathy enables us to see how these minor responses reflect the more delimited aesthetic-affective parameters of literary form that emerged after the experiments in length treated in my previous chapters.

In the following section, I explore how we can treat novel reading as an empathetic process, one in which the borders between aesthetic experience and affective response become blurred. I will draw on Lee's writings on empathy and novel reading to show how the unique formal features of novels help us collapse the distinction between disinterested contemplation and "interested" affective response, one often upheld in the aesthetic tradition, and enable us to focus on the minor forms and feelings encountered in the course of reading. After demonstrating how Lee's theory of empathy enables us to treat literature as a uniquely aesthetic-affective medium, in the second section, I focus on how Eliot experiments with the aesthetic-affective aims of novelistic form in *Silas Marner*. Whereas sympathy is typically how we talk about form in Eliot—and in large part, how we talk about the bridge her novels seek to build between reader and text—the formal features associated with brevity in this novel limit these large-scale aesthetic and affective aims by creating a disjunction between narrative time and narrative length. By focusing on "empathetic moments," passages in the narrative and in the experience of reading it that draw attention to this disparity between the aesthetic and affective, I show how *Silas Marner* ultimately embraces a more constrained field of action and narrower view of history. The concluding section argues that Eliot's efforts to make these minor forms of feeling palpable amount to a less deterministic understanding of the relationship between novel form and everyday life—and, in turn, everyday life and historical progress.

I. On Empathy and Literary Form: Vernon Lee

Of George Eliot's early twentieth-century critics, Vernon Lee is perhaps the most exacting in her critique of the form of the author's late fiction.¹²⁶ In *The Handling of Words*, Lee criticizes Eliot

¹²⁶ Whereas Eliot's reception was largely positive in the late-nineteenth century, it was quite mixed in the first half of the twentieth, a shift that corresponded with changes in novel length. See, for example, F.R. Leavis's critique of *Daniel Deronda*, which he refers to as a "massive," "voluminous mixed work" and

for popularizing what became “more or less the typical form of the former English three-volume novel,” which she names “*the novel built up in scenes*” (14, emphasis original). Lee identifies this form with “analytic” narrative techniques like omniscient narration, “passive description,” protracted exposition, and retrospection, which are employed at the expense of affecting, “synthetic” techniques, such as first person narration and situated, introspective accounts of feeling (16-17). For Lee, these analytic techniques negatively impact Eliot’s affective aims: “real action stops” in Eliot’s novels, Lee writes, when her narrators serve to provide “connecting links” between events, describing what should be represented by characters through their own words and actions (14). The resulting novel is an “excessively unlikelife” work, one that reads as if it were simply a “system of scenes” capable of indefinite extension—in Lee’s example, a novel that reads like a play, with a built environment lacking in “emotional atmosphere” that ultimately fails to integrate its characters into its setting or, for that matter, draw in its audience (14, 16, 22).

Lee suggests that the opening chapter of *Middlemarch* best illustrates this disjunction between aesthetic features and affective aims in Eliot’s work. The chapter focuses on a scene between Dorothea and Celia who, while trying on jewelry inherited from their late mother, gradually enter into a conversation that anticipates the arrival of Sir James Chettam and the Reverend Edward Casaubon in the following chapter. Prior to the dialogue between the sisters, readers are informed that Dorothea, “enamoured of intensity and greatness,” “felt some veneration expectation” for Casaubon’s upcoming visit (*MM* 6, 7). Although Dorothea has not yet met Casaubon, the narrator is explicit about their compatibility: Casaubon, who is “engaged on a great work concerning religious history,” is a clear match for Dorothea, “who had strange whims of fasting like a Papist, and of sitting up at night to read old theological books” (*MM* 7,

for which he proposed excising and reworking Gwendolen’s narrative as a separate, slimmer novel, titled *Gwendolen Harleth*. See too James Eli Adams and J. Russell Perkin.

6). Details provided in the subsequent conversation between the sisters—Dorothea’s “Puritanic” insistence on not wearing jewelry, and Celia’s interest in whether or not Dorothea will allow an exception for their visitors—only confirm Casaubon as an ideal suitor (*MM* 6). This scene, Lee writes,

merely gives you a feeling of too many things happening in one day, and of Mr. Casaubon appearing, not simply as a mere new visitor, but as the destined husband of Dorothea. For, remember that the Reader tends to attribute to the personages of a book whatever feelings you set up in him, so that, if you make the Reader feel that Casaubon is going to be the bridegroom, you also, in a degree, make Dorothea feel that she is to be the bride. And that, even for Dorothea, is rather precipitate. (Lee 18)

Lee claims that Eliot’s narrator provides information readers “either need not have at all, or ought to get in some more direct way”—preferably, by way of character rather than narrator. Put differently, the opening scene of *Middlemarch* tells readers what to feel regarding Dorothea and Casaubon rather than showing them the gradual development of Dorothea’s feelings over the course of the narrative. This opening scene thus demonstrates how the novel’s primary aesthetic features are incongruous with Eliot’s larger affective aims: by operating at a remove from her characters, Eliot treats them as “illustrations of theories of life in general” rather than “living and suffering and changing creatures,” evidenced in part by the novel’s subtitle, *A Study of Provincial Life* (29).

Lee’s reading of *Middlemarch* is counterintuitive, if not contradictory: why criticize Eliot’s adherence to a literary form dictated in large part by conventions of the period?¹²⁷ Would

¹²⁷ It is important to note the common substitution of “three-volume format” for any lengthy work of prose fiction, which often confuses publication method for formal features. See Richard Menke on this distinction and on the collapse of the three-volume format. As discussed in previous chapters, novelists like Dickens and Trollope wrote in installments to meet the demands of a literary market organized around serial production; in this sense, the episode, often contained to a chapter, was useful as a discrete temporal unit for narrative, but it was also a formal constraint dictated by means of publication. Jerome Beaty demonstrates how *Middlemarch* required a new serialization format to allow Eliot more space for each installment and to match her rate of production. The novel was serialized in eight lengthier installments from 1871 to 1872.

not any opening scene of a novel seem “precipitate” by sheer virtue of establishing context, serving (as most if not all opening scenes do) to introduce readers to an unfamiliar setting and its characters? And, more importantly, why single out the first chapter of a particularly lengthy novel—no less a scene seemingly picked at random—when its aesthetic merits and affective impact are best understood when considered from the perspective of the novel as a whole? Indeed, Eliot is clear about the importance of formal integrity and wholeness to the aesthetics of literary form. In her 1868 essay “Notes on Form in Art,” she puts forward an organic conception of form as a set of interrelated parts that follow a kind of evolutionary process of development and growth, striving for increased variety and ever-greater complexity. For Eliot, our psychological faculties follow this model, too, as we seek to better apprehend the complexity of relations in the world through active mental synthesis of our perceptions: “knowledge continues to grow by its alternating processes of distinction and combination, seeing smaller and smaller unlikenesses... group[ed]... under a common likeness,” she writes (“Notes” 356). Literature is thus the highest form of art for Eliot because, by virtue of its formal complexity, it is “in the most complex relation with what it expresses” (358). A novel like *Middlemarch*, then, could be seen as an attempt to represent (and reproduce) a complexity found in life itself—as Eliot often imagines it, as an immense web striving to encompass more and more entities, building towards greater unity through expansion and interconnection.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Many critics have commented on Eliot’s metaphors of organic unity and relationality. See, for example, Fredric Jameson, who claims that Eliot’s use of the web metaphor “emphasizes relationality over substance”: “one is a part of the web whether included or excluded... even when it affirms its individuality against an oppressive whole” (121).

Unlike Eliot, Lee does not value complexity and wholeness in art, nor does she treat either as essential to the aesthetics of literary form.¹²⁹ Instead, Lee claims, our assessment of these aesthetic features must always account for literature's "non-aesthetic attractions," the affective responses produced during the embodied process of reading a literary work (*Handling* 68). I will clarify what Lee means by "non-aesthetic attractions" below, but I want to first stress the significance Lee places on moving our attention away from complexity and wholeness as literature's primary aesthetic features. Literature "is not produced by the *whole of anything*," Lee claims, as the "whole import" of a given literary work "is not needed, or at all events is not felt to be operative" in the production of the work nor, more importantly, in its consumption by readers (36, emphasis original). This lack of wholeness derives from the fact that the formal properties of a work of literature—say, a three-volume novel—are impossible for a reader to take in and comprehend all at once. By virtue of the sequential configuration of words on the page and the linearity of reading as an embodied process, formal units like chapters, paragraphs, even complete sentences are impossible to see in their simultaneity as parts of a larger whole. Rather, the most important features of a literary work can only be comprehended from moment to moment in the process of reading it: as Lee observes, literature makes use of "the mere written or

¹²⁹ Lee wrote extensively on aesthetics. Many of her texts are collected, reprinted, or revised in *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (1883), *Juvenilia: Being a Second Series of Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (1887), *Beauty & Ugliness: And Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (1912, with C. Anstruther-Thomson), and *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (1913). In *The Beautiful*, Lee provides a definition of aesthetic experience that sees the alternation between contemplation and distraction as formative to beauty and aesthetic preference: "art is conditioned by the desire for beauty while pursuing entirely different aims, and executing any one of a variety of wholly independent non-aesthetic tasks" (*The Beautiful* 110). Lee is somewhat inconsistent in distinguishing between what she refers to alternatively as "writing," "literature," and "the novel," in part because her focus on writing as an affective process is independent of specific forms of or mediums for the written word—or, as she comments, "we have it equally in reading the newspaper, histories, and memoirs" (68). This lack of specificity makes terminological consistency difficult. Throughout this chapter and unless otherwise indicated, I will consistently use "literature" and "literary form" to discuss novel form, given that the majority of Lee's examples of literary form are, in fact, novels.

spoken word” to reach its audience, and with no depth or breadth beyond mere marks on the page, literary form is dependent on its smallest units to be perceived—slowly, steadily, piece by piece—and assembled retroactively in the reader’s mind (74). (In this sense, literature has much more in common, aesthetically speaking, with music than with the visual arts, its distinct formal features encountered only momentarily during the process of experiencing the work.)

By placing emphasis on reading as an embodied, temporal process, Lee demonstrates how literary form challenges our capacity to distinguish between psychological contemplation and affective response as separate registers of experience, aesthetic and non-aesthetic, respectively. For Lee, it makes little sense to prioritize a reader’s psychological contemplation of a novel as a discrete aesthetic object (itself a consecutive series of scenes conveyed by narration, available to a reader’s scrutiny and assessment only via retrospection and in consideration of a novel as a whole) over a reader’s physiological or affective reactions produced in the process of reading it (the feelings that, Lee claims, *should* curiously mingle with the feelings of characters, and that should not appear too early in the course of events). The two registers, psychological and physiological, are engaged and ultimately entwined in the process of reading, and as a result, our immediate perceptions become difficult to distinguish from the thoughts, feelings, and memories drawn out by the text. Whereas “all art deals with habits of perception and association, which are but the tracks of the endlessly repeated deeds of our life,” literature depends much less on our faculties of perception, which we actively employ when encountering a painting, sculpture, or other visual, three-dimensional work, and depends much more on our recollected experiences, the “endlessly repeated deeds” that structure our “habits of perception and association”:

[H]ow far more exclusively does the phantom-reality called literature exist only in the realm of our recollections! It is not composed of objective, separately perceptible lines,

masses, colours, note-sequences and note-consonances; it has no existence, no real equivalent, outside the mind; and the spoken sound, the written characters, have no power unless translated into images and feelings which are already within us. (73-74)

As the passage above demonstrates, literary form draws on “images and feelings which are already within us,” assembled from memories, mere impressions, and related sensations that are largely preexisting, decidedly past tense, and both physiological and psychological in basis (76).¹³⁰ Literature is thus a “phantom-reality” precisely because it is suspended between the psychological and the physiological, our thoughts and our feelings, depending less on the coordination of the two registers than on their conflation and confusion. Without reference to “separately perceptible lines, masses, colours” and related “objective” features, we are unable to determine or assess the particular aesthetic features of a given literary work unless we also attend to the affective responses produced while reading it.

Lee’s term for explaining how the aesthetic and “non-aesthetic attractions” of literary form come to impact readers—the peculiar aesthetic-affective process of reading—is *empathy*. In our encounters with any form of art, empathy designates a felicitous perceptual failing: as Lee writes in *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (1913), it reflects “the tendency to merge the *activities* of the perceiving subject with the qualities of the perceived object,” a “feeling into” (derived from the German, *Einfühlung*) that, not to be confused with the simple projection of the activities of the subject into the perceived object, designates the

¹³⁰ In the course of her career, Lee shifts from a primarily physiological account of affective response, very much drawn from Victorian theorists like Alexander Bain and G.H. Lewes, to a psychological account, informed in large part by contemporaneous debates in aesthetics and psychology. For an overview of this shift in Lee’s writings, see Carolyn Burdett, “Vernon Lee’s Psychological Aesthetics.” It is important to note that while Lee treats affective response as a psychological phenomenon in her later work, she holds to a distinction throughout between “perceptions,” which are active, and “sensations,” which are passive, although she ultimately finds that aesthetic contemplation succeeds in integrating both: “aesthetic contemplation can be and normally is, an intermittent function alternating with practical doing and thinking” (*The Beautiful* 108). I explain this alternation in greater detail below.

animation of subject and object alike, an interdependent or joint movement (*The Beautiful* 63).¹³¹ Lee's oft-cited example is our perception of a "rising mountain": although "we know perfectly well that the figure we have chosen expresses the exact reverse of the objective truth"—the mountain is inanimate and immobile—we associate "*the action of rising*" with the object rather than with our perception of it (62, emphasis original).¹³² This verbal error indicates our absorption in the perception of an object, when we are "engrossed by something outside ourselves," but it also marks a slippage between subject and object, the moment when "we cease thinking about ourselves, and cease thinking about ourselves exactly in proportion as we are thinking of the mountain's shape" (62-63). Empathy thus explains aesthetic preference for Lee, why we find some forms more interesting or absorbing than others (and to what degree); it also justifies the value of aesthetic experiences as extensions of affective processes latent in daily life, "the perpetual flux of action and thought" encountered in our everyday experiences (110).

Yet as suggested above, empathy is typically treated as a failing: unable to detach ourselves from our emotions and view a work of art with disinterested contemplation, we experience empathy when we fall short of our aesthetic aims. Beyond the aesthetic tradition, empathy has been viewed as an affective shortcoming, too, commonly regarded in moral philosophy as a diminutive form of sympathy. Although both processes engender moral emotions, the latter is a complex and potentially far-reaching process, enabling one to feel with and potentially inhabit the perspective of another, while the former is simpler and limited in

¹³¹ Some suggest that Lee's understanding of empathy derives from psychologist Edward Titchener, who translated *Einfühlung* as "empathy" around 1909. As Benjamin Morgan shows, the term was in use prior to the twentieth century, deployed by Robert Vischer to describe optical perceptions and developed by Theodor Lipps to explain psychological phenomena in philosophy and psychology, respectively. For an overview of Lee's aesthetic influences, see Laurel Brake, Carolyn Burdett, and Sarah Townley; on Lee's involvement in the debate over psychological aesthetics in the early twentieth century, see Morgan.

¹³² See Morgan, who discusses this example in greater depth.

scope, tending to encourage self-absorption rather than increased social reciprocity.¹³³ But if we treat literature as an aesthetic *and* affective medium, we can see that empathy has a much more central and fundamental role than sympathy in the process of reading. Given the constant interplay of thought and feeling in the course of reading, empathy constitutes the very ground of our capacity to attribute our thoughts and feelings to the words we read, and, beyond what we read, to what we think and feel: “[e]mpathy can be traced in all modes of speech and thought,” Lee writes, “particularly in the universal attribution of *doing* and *having* and *tending* where all we can really assert is successive and varied *being*” (*The Beautiful* 68). Empathy reveals a pervasive verbal reality in and beyond literature, a reality in which our capacity to attribute action and agency to others as well as to ourselves depends on the confusion of, rather than distinction between, subject and object. To again consider the example of the rising mountain, Lee suggests that the use of the infinitive, “to rise,” finds us perpetually alternating between dynamic and stative tenses to describe the actions of subject and object alike, an alternation that naturally occurs in the course of reading word after word, sentence after sentence, as we adjust and process information as it is received. Whereas sympathy is as an aesthetic-affective *ideal* of reading—that literature might enable us to recognize the feelings of others and, in turn, lead us to moral action—empathy describes the aesthetic-affective *experience* of reading: the confusion of one’s feelings encouraged by a particular arrangement of words, sentences, and paragraphs, the blurred boundaries between subject and object, self and text, and the unique temporalities facilitated by our affective responses to reading prose.

Empathy thus requires a different approach to assessing literature’s aims and effects as an aesthetic-affective medium. Unlike representational forms of art like painting or sculpture, which

¹³³ On empathy as a precursor to sympathy, see Keen, who covers the Humean and Smithian traditions. On the distinction between sympathy as cognitive and empathy as emotional, see Greiner, who holds fast to the separation of the aesthetic and the affective in her treatment of Smith’s impartial spectator.

“posses[s] the direct suggestiveness of represented scenes and objects,” Lee writes, “the written word must always... fight its way against the thoughts and feelings already occupying our consciousness” (*Handling* 101). Lee describes the struggle particular to literature as follows:

[A] word taken separately, for instance any noun, awakens, an image in the mind which is apt to be complex and vague, susceptible to self-contradiction, or at least to alternatives, because every time that the word has been used it has been used in slightly varying circumstances, a deposit of each of which has been left, more, or, ... less faintly, in the mind. (47-48)

To avoid the sheer multiplicity of possible affective responses to a literary work, then, writers must employ words with specificity and care in order to delimit and direct the feelings and thoughts of potential readers. Thus for Lee, the process of reading—and to an equal extent, the process of writing—is a selective and subtractive one, more properly understood by way of a term Lee affiliates with empathy, *canalization*. Proper nouns, adjectives, and adverbs direct and delimit the potential meanings that inhere in language, and in more than a strictly grammatical sense. For example, nouns, because they stand for “representative[s] of reiterated experiences of a similar kind,” “the impressions which, on successive occasions, have become stored up as part and parcel of it,” when they are modified, they *gain* specificity rather than lose it (49). Each possible “awaken[ing]” that a word can prompt is thus forestalled by selection, allowing a writer “to shut the doors to impressions [they] do not want and to canalize, in a particular direction, those which [they] do want” (48). A writer’s manipulation of these discrete units affords productive limitations to the associative nature of reading and permits what Lee describes as a kind of “movement,” the “*pace and weight, impact and rhythm*” of our responses to prose as we read it (132, emphasis original).¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Lee’s theory of empathy is specific to the formal and affective parameters of long-form prose, although she claims early in *Handling* “that all Writing, in the highest artistic sense, tends to the condition of the Lyric” (37). On lyric pauses in the Victorian novel, see Elisha Cohn, who demonstrates how

Lee insists that literature's unique status as an "emotional art" comes from its capacity to limit or curtail our affective responses to what we read. However, delimitation goes against our commonsense notions that literature is rich in meaning, that grammatical units like adjectives "*add something* to nouns" rather than "cut off something," or that literature's aesthetic value draws from what it adds to life, not from what it, seemingly, takes away (49, emphasis original). For example, when Lee clarifies that "when we speak of the stormy sea, or the blue sea, we are not *adding* to the impressions conveyed by the word *sea*, but, on the contrary, diminishing them," one can't help but feel like Lee's example fails to account for how some readers may respond differently, recalling other "stormy" or "blue" seas and subsequently feeling much more (or much less) than intended (49). How, precisely, do qualifiers like "stormy" and "blue" *constrain* our affective responses rather than augment them or invoke a potentially endless series of associations? Yet as Lee finds, even our tendency to get mired in the multiplicity of our affective responses to words is put to particular use in reading: detours in feeling are not distractions, and our natural lapses in attention and tendency to wander beyond the words on the page provide reprieve and relief from the constant demands of perception and attention in everyday life. Indeed, empathy is best facilitated in moments when we begin to confuse the aesthetic features of a literary work with our affective responses to it, and when we feel the need to reassert our own affective boundaries—or, as Lee puts it, when we find "[i]t is our own life... which must for ever check, deflect and alter whatever of the life of others attempts to mingle with it" (86-7).

To achieve its joint aesthetic and affective aims, literature establishes a unique aesthetic-affective relationship not only between readers and words, but also between readers and writers,

moments of "non-reflection, inaction, and absorption" can "suspend the arduous framework of self-culture" and disrupt, if only momentarily, the teleology of the conventional *Bildungsroman* (2-3).

what Lee refers to as a “co-operation of the Reader with the Writer” (94). The writer, for whom the “very act of feeling is selective,” must thus select her words and compose her sentences in ways that constrain and “rearrange” a reader’s “units of consciousness,” the “chaos of living, moving things” accrued through the course of our lives and specific to each reader (52, 53-4). The writer must keep her readers “perpetually forestalled, perpetually kept in the right path, perpetually kept awake,” and the reader “must bring all his experience to the business, all his imagination and sympathy; he must enter deep into the Writer’s work, help to make it live, and thus receive a strengthened and purified life in exchange” (42, 94). As an aesthetic-affective medium, then, literature places writers and readers in closer congress with one another—indeed, it makes them dependent on one another for the livelihood of a particularly lengthy literary work like a novel. (It shouldn’t be surprising to discover, then, that Lee simply prefers shorter novels, as evidenced by her curious ranking of Stevenson over Eliot throughout *Handling*, or that she sees all prose aspiring to the form of the lyric, to its concision, compactness, and immediacy [*Handling* 37].)

Lee’s understanding of empathy and the unique aesthetic-affective relationship facilitated by novel reading was not readily embraced by literary critics in the early twentieth century: empathy is in direct conflict with the tenets of New Criticism, which sought to distance aesthetic assessments from affective responses in literary analysis rather than collapse or reduce the gap between them.¹³⁵ In the coda following this chapter, I’ll demonstrate how Lee’s method enables us to rethink recent trends in affect theory that seek to further this distance between the aesthetic and the affective. But here, there are two immediate implications for how I will read *Silas*

¹³⁵ For representative examples, see I.A. Richards’s *Practical Criticism* (1929), in which Lee receives cursory treatment, and Wimsatt and Beardsley’s 1949 essay “The Affective Fallacy.” As Morgan rightly argues, Lee complicates the received tradition of a clean break “between Victorian moral-aesthetic evaluative criticism,” which valued authorial intention and affective response, “and modern, analytical, descriptive criticism” by dwelling between these affective and aesthetic regimes (49).

Marner in the following section. First, given how literary form facilitates the interplay of active and passive states, it is aesthetically *and* affectively significant when and how a novel amends or truncates the reading process: when, for example, a lull is introduced in the course of events, when a narrator expects less vigilance from readers and encourages “the general slackening of attention,” the “inactivity and confusion of thought,” or when particular temporal processes are abridged in or omitted from a narrative (234). “[P]assing from present to future, from more remote to less remote past, from the historic past to subjunctives and gerunds,” Lee writes, readers are “forced at once to realize very definitely the exact import of each grammatical form and to connect them swiftly with one another, thus establishing a kind of *intellectual space* in which the logical concatenation is held, and a series of *planes of action*, more central (*i.e.* present) or more back (*i.e.* past), or more forward (*i.e.* future), and in various positions of mutual dependence, along which the Reader’s attention shifts the nouns and adjectives obedient to the Writer’s behest and thus grasps the exact meaning” (235). As the passage suggests, each aesthetic decision entails an affective decision, too, but what’s more, the various movements produced in the reader as he or she shifts from one temporality to another in the process of reading are not detrimental but formative to literary experience. We can thus see that moments in which affective responses are “canalized” in particular ways do not reflect aesthetic failings, per say, nor do they necessarily jeopardize the integrity of the work as a whole. Rather, these moments when we find our attention idling, our thoughts and feelings lingering on a word or a phrase, underscore a less binding, less deterministic relationship between part and whole facilitated by the form of the literary work. These moments thus reveal how the joint aesthetic-affective aims of a literary work can be best apprehended by treating reading as a process, “reading” as the gerund of “read,” and not as a singular or static product, “a reading.”

Second, brevity is ultimately more important than bulk for the critical analysis of literature. Literature's capacity to produce and maintain "a state of intensified and co-ordinated feeling" requires that we shift our attention from larger formal features (passages, paragraphs, chapters, novels) to smaller ones (individual words, or an alteration in tense from one sentence to another) to best measure the minor ways in which reading impacts us—or, to put it another way, how affect operates within language (127). Although we need not carry this method as far as Lee, who herself attempts a kind of "statistical experiment" at the end of *Handling* (in which she counts the nouns, verbs, and adjectives employed by various authors in select passages from their exemplary works, in what Benjamin Morgan identifies as a kind of proto-Moretian "distant reading"), we might envision this alteration in attention as an *even closer* form of close reading, or *empathetic reading*.¹³⁶ Lee demonstrates that by immersing ourselves in reading as a process, we can find closeness with the impressions, thoughts, and feelings the writer has selected and organized into so many individual units—words and sentences, passages and paragraphs—for readers to comprehend and potentially feel in turn.¹³⁷ But not only do we come into a kind of confused contact with others: by submitting ourselves to the vicissitudes of words on a page, the peculiar tempo maintained from line to line in an extended work of prose, we come into a kind of "verbal concordance" with the aesthetic object, too, entering a period of time in which, sense confused, we lose the borders that separate us from our objects, even if only for a moment (235).

Although Eliot and Lee disagree on the central aesthetic features of literary form—Eliot values complexity, whereas Lee values concision—they ultimately agree on literature's affective aims. Lee and Eliot share the understanding that literature encourages "the realizing of other

¹³⁶ See Lee's introduction to the case studies of Meredith, Kipling, Stevenson, Hardy, James, and Maurice Hewlett at the end of *Handling*, pgs. 187-192. See too Morgan.

¹³⁷ See Frances Ferguson, "Now It's Personal: D.A. Miller and Too Close Reading."

people's feelings," the improved contact and congress with others that leads to an awareness of and respect for lives outside of our own (*Handling* 116). Yet what Lee finds is that there is no form of aesthetic contemplation free from affective influence; at the same time, our tendencies to become absorbed in our sensations and thoughts require that we carefully and judiciously establish the parameters of our aesthetic practices, defining and delineating what, precisely, they seek to achieve.¹³⁸ If what literature ultimately affords is "an intensification, but also a prolongation, of real life," rather than simply cordoning off or "enclos[ing] us completely in a world of its own," we need be attentive to the specific ways in which literature enters into and extends our lives—or, for that matter, the ways in which a particular work fails to do so—and what these lessons of narrative length might hold for the various forms our own affective experiences take (114).

II. In the Moment: Brevity and Narrative Time in *Silas Marner*

Eliot's 1861 novel *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* is a decidedly brief work. Coming in at twenty-one chapters and fitting within a single volume, it is much shorter than the expansive three-volume novels that precede and follow it, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Romola* (1863). Yet the novel's brevity not only derives from its relatively short length, but from other formal features as well: the laconic, often aphoristic remarks of Eliot's narrator, episodic chapters, an almost paratactic logic of causality in the novel's two intersecting plots, and, as critics are wont to note, curious temporal gaps in the narrative. While *Silas Marner* encompasses familiar themes and tensions explored in Eliot's lengthier works—the need for community, crises of faith, and

¹³⁸ Although Lee finds that the disinterested contemplation she associates with aesthetic apprehension is difficult to facilitate in novel reading, she does not find it impossible. Rather, she understands it as one of literature's aims as an aesthetic-affective medium, amongst many. On disinterestedness as an aesthetic pursuit in the nineteenth century, see Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, who account for the proliferation of different objectivist practices (and their subjectivist tendencies) that emerged alongside the novel. See too Anderson.

conflicts between individual desires and social demands—the novel explores these themes and tensions in an abbreviated form: it does not present the steady accumulation of details, the unhurried development of characters over time, or the peripatetic psychological digressions that, taken together, would have conferred greater length to the narrative and enabled the work to both represent and facilitate the development of sympathy. Rather, the novel compresses all of its history into a few key moments, summarizing wide expanses of emotional and social transformation—what would typically take many pages for Eliot—with concise retrospectives and telegraphic asides.

Of the novel's formal features, its temporal gaps pose the most trouble to Eliot's usual aesthetic and affective aims. Consider the first gap in the narrative between the second chapter, which details Silas's arrival in the town of Raveloe after his excommunication from Lantern Yard, and the third, which resumes the narrative approximately fifteen years later and introduces a new set of characters, Dunstan and Godfrey Cass, sons of the wealthy Squire Cass, and Nancy Lammeter, Godfrey's romantic interest. The end of the second chapter seeks to explain Silas's affective transformation after his peers falsely accuse him of stealing money from the church deacon. After quickly recounting how Silas left Lantern Yard and resettled in Raveloe, Eliot's narrator briefly describes what readers are told is a protracted period of incessant labor and profound emotional impoverishment:

This is the history of Silas Marner, until the fifteenth year after he came to Raveloe. The livelong day he sat in his loom, his ear filled with its monotony, his eyes bent close down on the slow growth of sameness in the brownish web, his muscles moving with such even repetition that their pause seemed almost as much a constraint as the holding of his breath. (26)

"This is the history of Silas Marner," the narrator states, no less summarizing the events of the preceding chapter than denoting the function of the subsequent sentence: to condense fifteen

long years into a description of repetition, one caught in “the slow growth of sameness in the brownish web” that gradually grew to encompass labor and life alike for Silas as he became accustomed to near-complete solitude. Although readers are told that over the course of these fifteen years, Silas’s life had “narrow[ed] and harden[ed] itself more and more into a mere pulsation of desire and satisfaction that had no relation to any other being,” his gradual deformation is not represented as an extended temporal process in the course of narrative events, nor as an extended formal process in the narrative (25). Instead, Eliot’s narrator suggests that the fifteen-year gap between chapters two and three is purely a means of abbreviating this process in order to introduce the “second great change [that] came over Marner’s life,” an event many years later when Silas’s “history became blent in a singular manner with the life of his neighbours,” while nevertheless attempting to convey its entire affective import (27). In this sense, the first temporal gap in *Silas Marner* serves to summarize a potentially uninteresting (or perhaps unnarratable) portion of Silas’s existence, a prolonged period of utter sameness.

But it is nevertheless difficult to understand the significance of this upcoming “great change” without having a substantial account of Silas’s gradual deterioration, the reduction of his life to “the unquestioning activity of a spinning insect”—or, for that matter, to acquire a real sense of Silas’s character, his actions, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings, when he remains strangely absent from the chapters immediately following the gap (21). This lack of diegetic elaboration is particularly curious, and not only in consideration of how much thematic and textual importance Eliot places on it in her other works. *Silas Marner* also appears to place importance on the slow yet steady process of transformation over time, even if the duration of Silas’s own gradual affective transformation is absent from the narrative. Despite the fact that the events in the novel cover roughly thirty years, a span of time that sees the bones of Dunstan

dredged from the Stone-Pits, covers the maturation and marriage of Silas's adopted daughter, Eppie, and finds Lantern Yard radically transformed into a manufacturing town in the novel's penultimate chapter, little in the narrative serves to represent these extended temporal processes as textual processes, too. Privileging ellipsis and efficiency over process and complexity, Eliot's narrator does not formalize narrative time as narrative length in this novel. As a result, she does not present affective transformation in the protraction of literary form, the extension of a novel to accommodate the progression of a life over time—and not just for Silas, but for Godfrey, Nancy, and Eppie, too, their development as characters similarly elided later in the work by a second, sixteen-year gap separating the first and second parts of the novel.

Although most critics claim that *Silas Marner* fails to represent affective growth as itself a temporal, diegetic process, some argue that this failure is due to Eliot's chosen subject. By focusing on a village “never reached by the vibrations of the coach-horn, or of public opinion,” and placing few geographical markers to signify its precise location in history, Eliot's narrator operates at a willful distance from the characters and curious customs she describes, narrating the lives of those from an unspecified past (10).¹³⁹ This distance is made clear during the narrator's frequent narrative asides throughout the novel, explanatory comments in which she pauses to describe unfamiliar domestic duties performed by “primitive housekeepers” or traditions she assumes are at a remove from the lives and values of her readership (45). As suggested by the recurrence of the term “primitive,” this distance also manifests as an epistemological or psychological divide between Eliot's narrator and her subjects, marked from the start of the novel when the narrator sets the events in a “far-off time” rooted in “superstition”: “To the

¹³⁹ Part of this distance derives from the novel's basis in allegory, which appears in tension with the germs of historical progress that frame the novel in its conclusion as well as its opening. See Ilana M. Blumberg, who reads the novel as an “allegory of value” set in the Restriction Period (1797 to 1821) and a work that effectively marks a “transition from objects of value to signs of value” (492-93). See too Stewart and Knoepfelmacher on the function of allegory and folklore in the novel.

peasants of old times,” she observes in the opening chapter, “the world outside their own direct experience was a region of vagueness and mystery,” continuing to note that for those “pressed close by primitive wants,” “[a]ll cleverness... was in itself suspicious” (8-9). Most of the narrator’s remarks that serve to establish this distance in the opening chapters of the novel take the form of declarative statements: “it is difficult to enter into that simple, untaught state of mind in which the form and the feeling have never been severed by an act of reflection,” the narrator states, both criticizing these “untaught” characters for their seemingly thoughtless adherence to “religious feeling” as well as lamenting the tragedy of their lot (17). Unable to “sever” form from feeling through “an act of reflection,” these characters are cast as historically remote as well as psychologically and emotionally underdeveloped: “simple” and “untaught,” they “kno[w] nothing of abstractions[,] as the little child knows nothing of parental love, but only knows one face and one lap towards which it stretches its arms for refuge and nurture” (20). Eliot’s narrator thus presents an explanation for the lack of diegetic elaboration in the narrative: by focusing on characters who do not have the capacity to issue into complex psychological processes, and presenting her narrator with no real means of separating “form” from “feeling” for the inhabitants of Raveloe, either, there will be simply less to narrate with respect to their inner lives, and less with which readers can sympathize.

In the opening chapter of *Silas Marner*, Eliot’s narrator clarifies the peculiar formal constraints that will hold for the rest of the narrative: barred from accessing the minds of characters, she cannot issue into an extended treatment of their psychological processes; with distance from the events, there is less to describe and, simply, less to narrate. Yet most critics also center these formal and thematic issues in a specific aspect of Silas’s experience: his cataleptic spells, moments of physical and psychological arrest that no less deny the narrator’s

omniscience than serve as convenient explanations for improbable occurrences in the plot. For Anna Neill, Silas's spells unsettle "the integrity of realist narrative itself" by preventing sympathetic communion between Silas and his immediate community as well as between *Silas* and its readers ("Primitive" 948-49). "Unable to penetrate Silas's consciousness," Neill observes, "the narrator cannot bring subjective and social realities into sympathetic dialogue and her characters are correspondingly incapable of the kind of emotional growth achieved by a Dorothea or a Gwendolyn" (949).¹⁴⁰ Other critics follow Neill in associating Silas's spells with the novel's affective shortcomings, its failure to facilitate "sympathetic dialogue" between characters and readers, which they in turn associate with a corresponding lack of formal complexity. Ilana M. Blumberg, for example, treats Silas's catalepsy as a product of a changing socio-historical landscape at the turn of the nineteenth century, the novel ultimately mourning "those who struggle to navigate a complex reality without the capacity for abstraction"; similarly, Kate E. Brown understands Silas's catalepsy "as an experience of the insufficiency of form to feeling," a claim that simultaneously points to psychology's thematization in the novel as a site of loss and trauma as well as to its relative lack of representation in the narrative itself (510; 238). Unmet by available forms of explanation in his social world—medical, spiritual, or psychological—critics claim that Silas's catalepsy marks his isolation as one of the "remnants of a disinherited race," an "alien-looking" individual whose social illegibility and "insect-like existence" prevent any possibility of true social integration in or affective communion beyond the book (*SM* 7, 22). In sum, Silas's catalepsy appears a convenient synecdoche for *all* of the novel's aesthetic shortcomings as well as its affective ones: his spells come to signify any alteration in the linear extension of narrative, representing any moment when narrative form is

¹⁴⁰ See John H. Mazaheri's response to Neill, in which he raises concerns for what he reads as Neill's association of religious belief with primitivism.

suddenly abridged, when the narrator is unable to access a character's interior state, or when (narrative) time is abruptly arrested or surprisingly absented, all of which prevent readers from witnessing and experiencing the emotional development of characters over the course of the novel.

Although I agree with these critics that catalepsy alters the affective experience of reading *Silas Marner*—and I clarify my agreement below—I question the emphasis they place on the novel's failure to facilitate sympathy. The unfolding of a formal principle that would typically serve to represent the development and enrichment of a character's affective faculties in a longer work by Eliot is denied by Silas's catalepsy, but with purpose: to convey the frustration of feeling and thought alike, rather than represent their fostering and steady growth; to reflect what such inexplicable absences in one's lived experiences change about the shape and trajectory of one's personal narrative; and, most importantly, to draw readers into similar affective conditions—not feeling, not thinking, the absence of life in the interval of catalepsy. In short, catalepsy *does* signify a particular affective shortcoming in *Silas Marner*, but an intended one. Blocking access to his interior state, Eliot's narrator refuses unable to provide a situated, affecting account of Silas's experience of isolation in the novel's "present," the unnumbered days filled with incessant activity yet strangely devoid of thinking and feeling. As a result, Eliot's narrator must find other formal means to engender the loss of experience and gap in time otherwise impossible to represent by conventional narrative means. Readers are obstructed by a similar "suspension of consciousness" in the course of novel reading by these other formal "failures," encountering obstacles that approximate the very pause conveyed by—but never directly encountered in—Silas's catalepsy.

Thus, these spells can be read for how they encourage readers to consider a different aesthetic-affective relationship with the experience of reading the novel, anticipating and obviating its elisions and breaks, finding no recourse in conventional narrative techniques like omniscience, and relying instead on the very aesthetic-affective confusion engendered in its place. We can observe how catalepsy engenders this experience at the beginning of the novel when the narrator attempts to explain Silas's odd status in Raveloe. First, when Jem first encounters Silas with his eyes "set like a dead man's," upright but unresponsive, the apparent suspension of thought and feeling spurs local inquiry into Silas, outsourcing the kind of work typically associated with retrospective narration to the novel's minor characters. "[T]here might be such a thing as a man's soul being loose from his body," Mr. Macey initially speculates, attributing Silas's catalepsy not to "a 'fit,' a word which seemed to explain things otherwise incredible," but to the possibility of practicing occult rituals, here concluding "that was how folks got over-wise, for they went to school in this shell-less state to those who could teach them more than their neighbours could learn with their five senses and the parson" (11). The suspicion engendered by the lack of immediate explanation matters as much for the other characters in the narrative as it does for the narrator, prompting questions for the form of the novel as well as the affective experience it will (and will not) engender in readers: if the narrator is unable to access Silas's mind, will readers be unable to witness his emotional development? What will *Silas Marner* center on if not the sympathetic growth of its eponymous character? Reaching back before Raveloe to Lantern Yard, the narrator attempts to establish how Silas's spells marked a break from "the movement, the mental activity, and the close fellowship" he had once experienced in his previous life (12). While the narrator expressly wishes to convey the extent of Silas's impoverishment via this second, earlier scene—which finds Silas inadvertently ostracized

by his partner Sarah, betrayed by his former friend, William Dane, and subsequently subjected to the vicissitudes of community-sanctioned justice through the drawing of lots—the narrator once more declines to directly represent the experience itself in the narrative by means other than its absence.

To restate, sympathy does accord with narrative length in Eliot's other novels. Yet *Silas Marner* is atypical in that sympathy is not the affective aim of the novel, nor length the particular aesthetic principle centered in it.¹⁴¹ Recognizing this, we can see that *Silas Marner* instead presents abridgement and concision as its aesthetic-affective values: the narrator defies divulgation by presenting a character inassimilable into conventional narrative logics of expansion and elaboration conveyed via psychological access and affective growth and, in turn, abridges the form of the novel to account for a kind of experience difficult to capture by narrative means, an experience of confusion, *too undefined, too indeterminate*, to truly grasp as "experience." Like Silas, readers are provided with no means of contemplating the aesthetic or affective qualities of these moments of sudden arrest: they have no measurable (i.e. formal) experiential properties and present little if anything for the narrator to describe. These properties

¹⁴¹ Other critics have questioned the centrality of sympathy to Eliot's aesthetic and affective aims. See, for example Christopher Lane, who demonstrates how Eliot's conception of social life ultimately depends on the "enmity" and "rancor" that sympathy fails to override or expunge. Taking *Silas Marner* as an example, Lane asserts that Eliot "presents aspects of social conflict as insoluble and participation in communities as sometimes irreparably damaging to individuals" (116). Whereas Lane suggestively concludes that sympathy in Eliot is itself suspect, Jacob Jewusiak argues that Eliot shows how sympathy only works on a smaller scale, away from generalizations like "society." Jewusiak persuasively claims that this limit to large-scale sympathy occurs on a formal level, too, as a novel like *Middlemarch* presents "multiple, simultaneous narratives that also deserve [the reader's] attention" (857). As an alternative to sympathy, Alicia Christoff argues for centering weariness in Eliot's project as "a fact of realism's narrative form," what emerges at the limits of sympathy (142). See too Daniel Wright, who identifies Eliot's "ethos of vagueness" as "a lived commitment or aspiration to the kind of epistemic disorientation" and treats as a fact rather than an aspiration in Eliot's literature (641). "Vagueness" for Wright seems to privilege diegesis, the dilation of narrative, a narrator's wandering attention and the wavering commitments of characters.

are not simply unavailable to the narrator: they are nonexistent. *Silas Marner* thus engenders the very gaps in feeling and thinking Silas himself “experiences” on the level of novel form.

In lieu of extended sequences of psychological rumination, the chapters and volumes that would expose readers to Silas’s affective life over the course of a lengthy narrative, the novel instead presents a series of *empathetic moments*, brief passages that force readers to rethink the aesthetic properties of the novel and, as a result, reshape our affective responses to it. A “moment” is purposefully undefined: as an interval of time, the moment refers to an event of short yet unspecified duration; as a matter of narrative length, “moment” might substitute for a term like “episode,” “scene,” or “period,” terms denoting smaller narrative units equally hazy in their formal parameters.¹⁴² But what I refer to as “empathetic” in these moments in *Silas Marner* signals the peculiar impact that these undefined segments of narrative have on the process of reading: the collapse and confusion of aesthetic form and affective response that occurs between individual words, or in the transition from one sentence to the next, in which a shift in or elision of narrative time produces a disjunction in the temporality of reading. Typically corresponding with unexpected, transformative events in the narrative, these moments recreate for readers the experiences of characters who, encountering similarly unanticipated events, subsequently struggle to lend shape to their own narratives, wavering between an account of the past and a vision of the future. By following the contours of these indeterminate stretches of time and occupying a space where linear narrative temporality breaks down, readers fall into a similar state of aesthetic-affective confusion—experiential, to be certain, but no less disorienting.

Focusing on these empathetic moments in *Silas Marner* enables two related claims about the aesthetic-affective experience of reading the novel. First, each empathetic moment interrupts

¹⁴² See Zemka on the moment in Victorian culture.

the process of reading and, in turn, disrupts the sense of continuity typically associated with novel form, a continuity that lends aesthetic and affective coherence to the novel as a defined, stable aesthetic object, both a narrative with clear formal parameters as well as a book delimited by physical properties. If reading an entire novel and reaching its end presents readers with the promise of formal mastery or knowledge of the novel as a whole, this mastery depends largely on our uninterrupted immersion in the process of reading and ability to synthesize the work as a discrete object of analysis. “The triumph of the omniscient narrator is worked in pulling the reader out of sympathy with any particular time system other than his or her own” Susan Stewart writes, an effect achieved largely by breaking from the sense of time engendered in reading the novel and returning readers to their own temporality at the very end of a narrative (10). While novel reading depends on the absorption of the reader in another time system, breaks in the continuity of a narrative cause readers to fall out of time with the novel, in turn preventing the holistic, rounded sense of the novel and its aesthetic-affective properties typically achieved at the end of reading it. Second, and as a result of the first claim, the emphasis placed on these empathetic moments in *Silas Marner* requires that we rethink our units of literary analysis, and indeed, rethink the novel as itself a coherent formal unit. Catherine Gallagher identifies a strong emphasis in literary analysis on the reduction of the formal properties of a literary work in its analysis, “our need to make the narrative object as short as possible”: “Formalist analyses seem bent on showing that, although a novel represents temporal sequence by means of temporal sequence, it nevertheless has, or should have, a *form* that can be made apprehensible all at once” (229). If what Gallagher is describing largely pertains to the reduction of lengthier novels to discrete, summary claims, the other side of what she criticizes is also true: the desire to explain shorter literary forms by way of an extended analysis suited to a longer, larger form can

ultimately enlarge and distort their aims, in turn missing the ways in which their abbreviated form actually resists extrapolation and expansion.¹⁴³

I will read a key empathetic moment in the novel below, but it is important to first clarify how *Silas Marner* initially casts the relationship between its aesthetic and affective aims. For most of the narrative, *Silas Marner* treats its aesthetic aims as separate from, if not antithetical to, its affective ends, a separation maintained by both form and content. Indeed, as Neill et al. suggest above, to represent Silas's impoverishment over so many years by lengthening the narrative would ultimately conflict with sympathy as an affective value, exposing readers to affective diminution, not expansion. But this divide between the aesthetic and the affective also plays out on a thematic level: the narrator reports that Silas's sole pursuit up for years has been the steady accumulation of gold, a project that becomes not only a substitution for sympathy and fellowship, but an aesthetic perversion of these necessary affective bonds. Silas's hoarding is described as an "absorbing passion," one that takes the form of a repeated aesthetic encounter when, each night, he ritualistically uncovers the leather bags containing his fortune and handles his coins, receiving "their form and colour... like the satisfaction of a thirst" (24, 26). The guineas are meant to formalize the time of Silas's emotional hardening, the gold having "come to mark off his weaving into periods" and providing a kind of formal principle for his ongoing affective destitution: "Marner wanted the heaps of ten to grow into a square, and then into a larger square," following the expanding pattern like someone "shut up in solitary imprisonment, ... marking the moments by straight strokes of a certain length on the wall, until the growth of the sum of straight strokes, arranged, in triangles, has become a mastering purpose" (24). This

¹⁴³ See too Patrick Fessenbecker, who identifies in the "folk-psychological" assertions throughout *Middlemarch* a kind of "paraphrasable content" often elided in critical methodologies of reading: "by making intuitions central to their structure, narratives offer philosophical positions, in a way a literary critic can draw out—usually, by redescribing or paraphrasing the narrative's movements as a kind of theoretical reflection" (134, 125).

satisfaction in aesthetic experience, born as it is from a gradual, accretive process of “narrowing and hardening” otherwise absent from the narrative, stands in for what Silas would otherwise receive over time through affection (25). “[E]very added guinea, while it was itself a satisfaction, bred a new desire,” the narrator comments (24). Yet the lack of real, reciprocal affection has also led to Silas’s deformation from a subject into an object, as his “face and figure shrank and bent themselves into a constant mechanical relation to the objects of his life, so that he produced the same sort of impression as a handle or a crooked tube,” and his faculties of perception similarly impaired, his eyes “now looked as if they had been made to see only one kind of thing that was very small, like tiny grain, for which they hunted everywhere” (25). After his guineas are stolen, Silas is deprived of the aesthetic experience the coins provided night after night as well as denied the curious affective relationship he had formed with them, their disappearance marking both the loss of any “phantasm of delight” and of his “unborn children” (90).

Throughout the first half of the novel, *Silas Marner* appears to follow a bad formalism, the compression of its eponymous subject into an object virtually bereft of life and with “no meaning standing apart,” a transformation indicative of a competition in the novel between aesthetic form and affective value (25). Readers are restrained to the same degree as Silas, pressed to follow a peculiar aesthetic principle at the expense of the emotional development typically pursued elsewhere in Eliot’s work as chapters alternate between Silas’s stillness and Godfrey’s machinations. This relationship between the aesthetic and the affective changes, however, in chapter twelve, which centers on a temporally brief but diegetically-protracted moment that confuses the distinction between the two registers, pulling together the novel’s separate plots, Silas’s and Godfrey’s, and uniting them in the introduction of a new character. For the first few pages, the narrator follows Eppie’s entrance into the warm hovel and withholds

the felicitous circumstances behind her easy reception before then issuing into an explanation. I quote at length below, as the passage centering on Silas's spell is one of the few extended, uninterrupted sequences in the novel:

But where was Silas Marner while this strange visitor had come to his hearth? ... Since the on-coming of twilight he had opened his door again and again, though only to shut it immediately at seeing all distance veiled by the falling snow. But the last time he opened it the snow had ceased, and the clouds were parting here and there. He stood and listened, and gazed for a long while—there was really something on the road coming towards him then, but he caught no sign of it.... He went in again, and put his right hand on the latch of the door to close it—but he did not close it: he was arrested, as he had been already since his loss, by the invisible wand of catalepsy, and stood like a graven image, with wide but sightless eyes, holding open his door, powerless to resist either the good or evil that might enter there.

When Marner's sensibility returned, he continued the action which had been arrested, and closed his door, unaware of the chasm in his consciousness, unaware of any intermediate change, except that the light had grown dim, and that he was chilled and faint. He thought he had been too long standing at the door and looking out. Turning towards the hearth, where the two logs had fallen apart, and sent forth only a red uncertain glimmer, he seated himself on his fireside chair, and was stooping to push his logs together, when, to his blurred vision, it seemed as if there were gold on the floor in front of the hearth. Gold!—his own gold—brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away! ... The heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger beneath his agitated gaze. He leaned forward at least, and stretched forth his hand; but instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls. (126-127)

As the only cataleptic episode represented at the diegetic level of the novel—indeed, one of the only extended narrative events in the entire work—this moment at first seems to represent a decisive break from the novel's aesthetic interests. Critics typically read this passage as the scene in which *Silas Marner* confirms its firm footing in folklore, presenting a moment of metamorphosis in which Eppie is transformed into Silas's gold and Silas's gold is transformed into Eppie.¹⁴⁴ Yet this transformation is never completely effected or stabilized in the narrative:

Eppie continues to alternate throughout the remainder of the novel between a figurative and a

¹⁴⁴ See Nunokawa, who refers to this scene as a "fairy-tale telling of the labor theory of value" (119). Stewart associates this scene with the miraculous transmutations common to folklore. Blumberg posits that the narrator is much better about maintaining the separation and difference between Eppie and Silas's gold at this moment; nevertheless, in her reading, Eppie figures as a new kind of value that emerges midway through the novel.

literal replacement for the gold in which Silas has invested all of his person, all of his affective energies. Even when Eppie is finally revealed before Silas's "blurred vision" to be more than money in the scene above, Silas rests in the confusion of gold for girl and girl for gold, repeatedly stating "[t]he money's gone I don't know where, and this is come from I don't know where" (139). "Thought and feeling were so confused within him," the narrator adds, "that if he had tried to give them utterance, he could only have said that the child was come instead of the gold—that the gold had turned into the child" (141).

For Eliot, this indeterminacy, the incessant passage between aesthetic and affective registers, is precisely the point: Eppie confuses Silas's aesthetic experience and his affective needs because she ultimately collapses the capacity to distinguish between the two in the novel—and not just for Silas, but for readers, too. Eppie brings Silas into "more active sympathy," making him "a person whose satisfactions and difficulties could be understood," albeit by a limited number of persons. But she also represents a new kind of aesthetic value for the novel, the introduction of a formal principle unlike the empty, linear sequence of weaving or, as we will see with *Godfrey* below, the repetition and redundancy modeled in the novel when psychological rumination is encouraged and represented by the narrator (138, 149). Indeed, Silas's life—and Eliot's novel—follows a different aesthetic path after Eppie's arrival: "The gold had kept his thoughts in an ever-repeated circle, leading to nothing beyond itself; but Eppie was an object compacted of changes and hopes that forced his thoughts onward, and carried them far away from the old eager pacing towards the same blank limit" (144). This "compactness" is even suggested by Eppie's full name, "Hephzibah," for which "Eppie" is itself offered as an abbreviation, one that, as Silas's neighbor Dolly Winthrop comments, is "a deal handier" (143).

The experience of reading *Silas Marner* is meant to feel like inhabiting the constricted space of its narrative world, the process of reading coming to mirror the myopic vision of the weaver. Yet the novel also emphasizes and reinforces this process by briefly drawing into relief the relationship between psychological depth and narrative length explored elsewhere in Eliot's work. The importance that *Silas* thus places on diminutive forms of experience can be better understood, then, when read against the novel's avatars for depth and length: Dunstan and Godfrey. Consider first what precedes Eppie's arrival in the narrative, the theft of Silas's gold guineas by Dunstan, an episode that curiously mirrors the theft for which the lonesome weaver was framed in Lantern Yard fifteen years earlier. The theft occurs in chapter four when Dunstan (often abbreviated as "Dunsey" by Godfrey and the narrator alike), having accidentally killed Godfrey's horse and bearing little conception of the "remote consequences" of this action, finds himself wandering by the Stone-pits and Silas's cottage, the rumor of Silas's fortune "growing in vividness" as he makes his way through the gathering mist (42-43). While the chapter anticipates the cause that will enable Dunstan to enter Silas's home undetected and carry off his heavy bags of gold—Silas will likely be struck by the "invisible wand of catalepsy," and will be unable to sense the thief's presence, as in the case of the Lantern Yard robbery—it is soon revealed that Silas is altogether absent from the scene. Dunstan briefly speculates on potential causes for Silas's absence, which quickly escalate in implausibility: "If the weaver was dead, who had a right to his money? Who would know where his money was hidden? *Who would know that anybody had come to take it away?*" (46, emphasis original).

Dunstan is not a particularly complex character. His self-serving logic is specious, and Eliot's narrator appears, at first, to condemn it: "[a] dull mind, once arriving at an inference that flatters a desire, is rarely able to retain the impression that the notion from which the inference

started was purely problematic,” she states (46). However, Dunstan’s specious logic is the very logic of the plot that appears, at least up until the moment of Eppie’s arrival, to operate unchecked in the narrative, a series of inferences drawn from a problematic notion. Despite what Eliot’s narrator says concerning Dunstan’s “dull mind,” his reasoning underscores the absence of a consistent logic of plot, one discernible to readers. Instead, plot is presented at diegetic and extradiegetic levels as simply a serendipitous sequence of unforeseen events that are particularly difficult to explain after the fact via available discourses—spiritual, supernatural, or, as the narrator repeatedly reminds, psychological. Eliot’s narrator alternates between claiming that no character in the narrative possesses a mind capable of understanding the obvious causality at work in the novel, incapable in turn of discerning its patterns, while emphasizing (and in doing so, rewarding) this lack of understanding, which is exploited by Dunstan and, later, Godfrey. This alternation between a confirmation of narrative causality and the sporadic operation of contingency not only shows that no insight will come to or from the novel’s characters into how or why events unfold as they do; it also makes readers question *which* logic of plot, causal or coincidental, is at work in the novel at any given time.¹⁴⁵ Virtually every character in *Silas Marner* appears incapable of either following narrative events or intentionally inciting them, possessing psychologies bereft of the kind of plotting that characters like Dunstan and Godfrey accidentally exploit. Yet in turn, readers experience a similar inability to make sense of the logic of plot unfolding from chapter to chapter, placed in a similar position of impoverished reasoning when events do not occur as anticipated. If narrative events can follow a causal logic—Silas’s incessant weaving yields more and more guineas—*as well as* occur seemingly at random and without a clear sense of a connection between an action (stealing gold) and a consequence

¹⁴⁵ Critics have observed a structuring tension in *Silas Marner* between causality and chance, which are alternately scrutinized and embraced by the narrator at different points in the narrative. See Cohen for an extended account. See too Smajic.

(imprisonment, or any consequence at all—Dunstan vanishes), it is relatively useless to predict what will happen or, for that matter, how.

Readers can see how the aesthetic decision to withhold the logic of plot relates to a larger disregard for psychological depth in the novel by looking to the chapter immediately following Dunstan's theft. Oblivious to Dunstan's arrival and departure, Silas returns to his cottage "free from the presentiment of change":

What thief would find his way to the Stone-pits on such a night as this? and why should he come on this particular night, when he had never come through all the fifteen years before? These questions were not distinctly present in Silas's mind; they merely serve to represent the vaguely-felt foundation of his freedom from anxiety. (48-9)

In the passage above, Eliot's narrator demonstrates that the chain of reasoning typically exhibited in realist narratives is unthinkable to Silas and the other villagers of Raveloe. The narrator is even unable to attribute the questions above to Silas; instead, her questions "merely serve to represent the vaguely-felt foundation of his freedom from anxiety," questions pointing to an impression held by Silas, one seemingly non-representational—or at the very least, unformed and only "vaguely felt." The widespread search that follows from Silas's panicked enlistment of villagers in the Rainbow Inn after he realizes the theft only further demonstrates the poverty of available forms of reasoning, as well-intentioned citizens spin wholly fictitious (but no less improbable) narratives of possible responsible parties and detour efforts to reach the real culprit. "To connect the fact of Dunsey's disappearance with that of the robbery occurring on the same day, lay quite away from the track of every one's thought," she remarks, a connection that should otherwise be immediate to readers who, in most other works by Eliot, would occupy a perspective independent of and unavailable to the novel's characters, one much like the position occupied by the third-person narrator (89).

The lack of psychological depth in *Silas Marner* that other critics attribute to its subject can thus be read as a concern for how psychological processes, if given space, might come to protract narrative form, distorting and distending the constrained experience of reading and the aesthetic-affective impact of the moment. The efforts of the citizens of Raveloe to find the individual responsible for the theft transform subsequent chapters into ungrounded speculation, spurious given the full knowledge possessed by the narrator and partial knowledge grasped by readers. While Dunstan underscores the elision of psychological depth in *Silas Marner*—no character can or should be able to predict how plot will operate—Godfrey serves as the primary focal point for the novel’s rejection of psychology’s formalization via narrative length. Unlike Dunstan’s serendipitous discovery (and, as only revealed in the second part of the novel, his equally unfortunate demise), Godfrey’s states of rumination are often represented as a form of *successful* narrative plotting, as when he considers the possible consequences of his past and present actions, weighing “the effect of each alternative on his future lot” and anticipating alternative, increasingly complex, conclusions, “dreaming of a possible benefactor, a possible simpleton who may be cajoled into using his interest, a possible state of mind in some possible person not yet forthcoming” (86, 134). Chapters eight and nine demonstrate the potential expansiveness of Godfrey’s speculations, which, when they prove to be *actually* pinned to “some possible person not yet forthcoming” in the narrative, begin to seem like they might have an actual relation to and impact on the plot and, as a result, the form of the novel. Indeed, such confirmation seems to occur when Godfrey witnesses Silas carrying his daughter into the Red House on New Year’s Eve in chapter 13:

[W]hen Godfrey was lifting his eyes from one of those long glances, they encountered an object as startling to him at that moment as if it had been an apparition from the dead. It *was* an apparition from that hidden life which lies, like a dark by-street, behind the

goodly ornamented façade that meets the sunlight and the gaze of respectable admirers. It was his own child carried in Silas Marner's arms. (131)

Godfrey's surprise at the sudden appearance of his child does not represent a moment of psychological insight rewarded—indeed, this moment simply reveals that he is “a man whose happiness hangs on duplicity,” one who is ultimately incapable of anticipating what plot points will emerge, let alone how or when; and the more readers are exposed to Godfrey's thoughts, the less we are capable of sympathizing with him, encountering only these counterfactuals (132). But the scene above does suggest that extended representation of a character's mind will yield an impact on the form of the narrative itself. This impression that Godfrey's speculations could extend the narrative is anticipated early in the novel by his wish for a “longer... interval” between his present moment of undiscovered moral turpitude—his marriage to the poor barmaid Molly—and the inevitable uncovering of his secret life: “The longer the interval, the more chance there was of deliverance from some, at least, of the hateful consequences to which he had sold himself; the more opportunities remained for him to snatch the strange gratification of seeing Nancy, and gathering some faint indications of her lingering regard” (38). As if articulating the very formal principle on which Eliot's other novels operate, Eliot's narrator remarks on the possibility that, if Godfrey were given more (narrative) time, his character would reap the benefits by virtue of time's extension: “more chance... of deliverance,” and “more opportunities” to realize his vision of marrying Nancy.

While Godfrey's wish appears to be fulfilled in chapter twelve—Molly, unknown to anyone in Raveloe, dies on her way to confront his family, and with Eppie safe in the hands of Silas, “the path now lay straight forward to the accomplishment of his best, longest-cherished wishes”—the form of the novel does not yield the desired interval (152). Instead, as if to speed up the “orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its kind,” the novel abridges

Godfrey's "path," jumping ahead after a break between parts one and two to the moment, sixteen years later, when his subterfuge is finally exposed after years of peaceful partnership, and Silas's gold is found in the depths of the Stone-pit intermingled with Dunstan's bones (87). The aftermath of Godfrey's confession to Nancy reveals that distance has not granted the "longer interval" and "chance... of deliverance" that originally seemed promised to him. Rather, a proximity to the past events is reaffirmed, as if by virtue of the fact that the events transpired just a few pages prior. Indeed, the textual closeness of the past represented in the consolidation of sixteen years into a break between parts of the novel suggests that the lack of (narrative) distance from the events in question have made for this lack of affective transformation. Godfrey's desire for more time is thus found to have "defeated its own end," for while he *is* granted this time at the level of *fabula*, he is not granted the same gradual change and development over the space of the narrative: he "had not measured this wife with whom he had lived so long," a remark that reflects both his lack of affective growth over the time of their marriage *and* on the absence of a corresponding period of change represented in the novel (184).

The concluding chapters of *Silas Marner* once more draw attention to brevity and its aesthetic-affective values. The final chapters before Eliot's concise conclusion—Chapters 19, 20, and 21—are exceedingly short, even in consideration of the work as a whole, and focus on the actions Godfrey takes to correct for his past mistakes by way of offering a new (narrative) future for Eppie. Coming to see Silas and Eppie right at the moment when the two are discussing the serendipitous return of Silas's gold as well as the frightening prospect of losing each other once again, Godfrey and Nancy suddenly appear at Silas's door with exactly that possibility. Godfrey casts his admission of Eppie's parentage as both a counterfactual narrative, one that, if followed at an earlier time in her life, would have afforded different opportunities for her affective

development, and as a corrective future, one that, with Godfrey's wealth, will enable Eppie to develop much more quickly, comfortably, and fully. Yet "surprised at the difficulty he found in approaching a proposition which had seemed so easy to him in the distance," Godfrey finds that "he was not prepared to enter with lively appreciation into other people's feelings counteracting his virtuous resolves" (188, 190). The chapter soon becomes a conflict between the aesthetic-affective values embraced by Silas and Eppie—proximity, closeness, and empathy—and those all but recently rejected by Godfrey—distance, prolonged rumination, and sympathy. Pressed together in Silas's cottage, Godfrey's proposal that Eppie come and live with them at the Red House is beyond the ken of Silas's vision, the myopia induced by the "close work" of weaving, as well as the values of proximity and closeness affirmed throughout the entire course of the narrative in the collapse of its aesthetic and affective aims (187). Although Eppie begins to envision what this change might look like—"Her imagination had darted backward in conjectures, and forward in previsions, of what this revealed fatherhood implied"—Silas's steadfastness occludes any further attention to a different (narrative) future (192). "[R]epentance doesn't alter what's been going on for sixteen year," Silas states, continuing "[y]our coming now and saying 'I'm her father' doesn't alter the feelings inside us." (190-191). It is "the pregnancy of Marner's simple words," their poignant directness, that helps to delimit the possibility of issuing into a different, extended mode of feeling—or, to think of it in terms of narrative length, into a longer novel, one in which Godfrey's expansive vision of a future life with Eppie might actually come to fruition (191). In this way, Godfrey's invocation of a future for Eppie beyond the empathetic "mingled feelings" Silas and Eppie present appears impossible to imagine quite simply because, given the preceding narrative, it is impossible to feel. "I can't leave my father, nor own anybody nearer than him" Eppie states, while Silas casts it as a much more violent

formal operation: “‘You’d cut us i’ two’” (188, 189, 191). Even if given more (narrative) time, *Silas Marner* suggests, Godfrey would not be able to correct for the choices once made in the moment, or to pull apart two subjects who have now grown together.

Although Godfrey proves unable to correct for the sixteen years absented from the novel, as if by the power of suggestion, Silas pursues a similarly recuperative vision of (narrative) time in the final chapter of the novel. Here, *Silas Marner* dwells on the categories that have been sacrificed in the interest of brevity—namely, the representation of sweeping social and cultural transformations afforded by historical progress. I noted earlier that *Silas Marner*, while unlike Eliot’s other works in terms of its aesthetic and affective aims, nevertheless places importance on temporal processes and historical development. As if recognizing the elision of both, Chapter 21 places Silas on a trip to Lantern Yard to, as the weaver hopes, find himself exonerated for his past crimes. Yet what Silas discovers isn’t that time has led to affective changes to the values of the community or has revealed the truth of what happened to the parson. Instead, Lantern Yard has vanished, effaced by the progress of industrialization and its oppressive compression of so many lives into the space of the factory “from which men and women were streaming for their midday meal” in a torrent of progress (200). “‘Oh father, I’m like as if I was stifled,’ said Eppie. ‘I couldn’t ha’ thought as any folks lived i’ this way, so close together’” (200). If sympathy in Eliot’s other works presents itself as a capacity to inhabit the perspectives of others, *Silas Marner* here suggests that the march of history will prevent rather than facilitate the imaginative inhabiting of other lives. Empathy, then, offers itself as the reality of historical progress at the end of *Silas Marner*, a living “so close together” that might afford the intermingling of perceiver and perceived, the confusion of previously distinct or discrete registers, at the expense of the long perspective of history and the knowledge afforded by distance.

Eliot's conclusions tend to provide a summary statement on the aims of the work as a whole. In this respect, the conclusion to *Silas Marner* is no different, although it denies the perspective of historical distance typically afforded by her omniscient narrators and appears instead to encourage deliberate reorientation within the present. Although the shadow of a large-scale, widespread historical transformation is briefly glimpsed at the end of the narrative by way of industrialization—a transformation that will and, in the logic of Eliot's retrospective narration, already *has* come to eliminate weaving as a profession, has wiped any trace of Lantern Yard and, soon enough, will eradicate Raveloe, too—the moment is presented in the conclusion of the novel as a temporal and formal category that might resist these historical processes that threaten to absorb and elide minor forms of feeling and modes of life. “[T]hey could not only enjoy the slow advent of their pleasure,” the narrator remarks, commenting on the festivities surrounding Eppie's wedding, “they had also ample leisure to talk of Silas Marner's strange history, and arrive by due degrees at the conclusion that he had brought a blessing on himself by acting like a father to a lone motherless child” (205). *Silas Marner* might seem to be much like its subjects, the rural characters who appear recalcitrant to the growth and development associated with historical progress. But rather than categorically reject history as a process, the novel instead wants readers to inhabit a moment or pause within its incessant flow, and to see the forms of life that do not add up to its larger current, lives only briefly protected from time's inexorable march.

III. Conclusion: Slow Time

I have argued thus far that *Silas Marner* marks a moment in Eliot's work when her aesthetic and affective aims become aligned if not indistinguishable: seeking greater correspondence between aesthetic form and affective response, her works after *Silas Marner* treat narrative length and sympathy not just as organically developing processes that can only properly unfold over the

space of so many pages, but as relatively coextensive ones, too. Eliot memorably casts this aspiration for a closer correspondence between form and feeling in *Middlemarch* as a potential danger in itself: “If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence,” she remarks (124). “[P]erhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it,” and as Eliot’s late novels illustrate, perhaps narratives could hardly bear much of it, either, straining to accommodate an ever-expanding field of thoughts, feelings, and impressions, striving for a complexity that must yield more and more prose (124).

Yet for a brief moment in the second part of *Silas Marner*, Eliot’s narrator considers what this process formalized in and as narrative length might look like, and how it might affect readers. Set shortly after the second temporal gap in the narrative, the seventeenth chapter is occupied by a prolonged account of Nancy’s “Sunday thoughts” as she awaits Godfrey’s return:

Her mind not being courted by a great variety of subjects, she filled the vacant moments by living inwardly, again and again, through all her remembered experience, especially through the fifteen years of her married time, in which her life and its significance had been doubled. She recalled the small details, the words, tones, and looks, in the critical scenes which had opened a new epoch for her by giving her a deeper insight into the relations and trials of life, or which had called on her for some little effort of forbearance, or of painful adherence to an imagined or real duty—asking herself continually whether she had been in any respect blamable. This excessive rumination and self-questioning is perhaps a morbid habit inevitable to a mind of much moral sensibility when shut out from its due share of outward activity and of practical claims on its affections—inevitable to a noble-hearted, childless woman, when her lot is narrow. “I can do so little—have I done it all well?” is the perpetually recurring thought; and there are no voices calling her away from that soliloquy, no peremptory demands to divert energy from vain regret or superfluous scruple. (174)

Nancy’s interior process is expansive, especially in relation to what has come before in a novel virtually bereft of extended representations of psychological states. Rooted in the “wandering of her thought from the text,” what is described in this passage—and soon modeled in the chapter as a whole—is a form of narration uncharacteristic of Eliot’s narrator in *Silas Marner*, a

prolonged description of the vicissitudes of thought prompted by an open book (174). And while Eliot's narrator aligns this form of "excessive rumination and self-questioning" with "morbid habit," she also appears to recognize its potential to attend to "the small details, the words, tones, and looks, in the critical scenes" of Nancy's life, all freighted with the potential to issue into a "new epoch." Nancy's "Sunday thoughts" thus reflect on the process of reading *Silas Marner*: although they present a relationship between interiority and narrative form otherwise absent from the novel, wherein thought is given space to roam and the power to impact the form of narrative, her brief yet "excessive" consideration of the minor yet transformative moments in her life—following these thoughts to different ends and considering the possibility that things could have gone differently—enable us to see the possibility of change emerging from similar moments of pause.

Capable of synthesizing vast stretches of narrative, and of forgiving Godfrey after he confesses his entire past, Nancy gestures to the emergence of the capacious, synthetic kind of narrative psychology represented in Eliot's subsequent works, a psychology linked with the ethical and moral values advocated for in these works, too. But Nancy's short stay within her thoughts and feelings—Godfrey soon returns home, interrupting her thoughts and, accordingly, the chapter—also suggests a different relationship between (narrative) history and lived experience that can be facilitated by empathy when it is treated as a mode of reading. Whereas sympathy treats narrative as a finished product, a past only understood from the perspective of the whole, empathy treats narrative as an ongoing process, a past still active, still moving, one that leads to uncertain, unfinished futures. Empathy and sympathy thus reflect a tension within novel reading between two approaches to understanding (and formalizing) historical experience: on the one side, the tendency to want to arrest processes, examining them and turning them over

as if they were identical to the objects they are, pages bound between covers; and on the other, the desire to *inhabit* these processes, to “live slowly,” as Lee suggests, within the very act of reading, taking digressions and following paths beyond the ends of the narrative.

Eliot’s 1859 story “The Lifted Veil” dramatizes this very struggle in her fiction to find balance between empathy and sympathy as aesthetic-affective values by way of the curious relationship it establishes between narration and history.¹⁴⁶ The work is narrated by the young artist Latimer who, after sudden sickness and prolonged convalescence, develops a “superadded consciousness of the actual,” a kind of parallel psychological state that enables access to other minds as well as fleeting yet powerful premonitions of future events in his life (18). Latimer memorably describes it “like a ringing in the ears not to be rid of, though it allowed my own impulses and ideas to continue their uninterrupted course,” something “like a preternaturally heightened sense of hearing, making audible to one a roar of sound where others find perfect stillness” (18). While it affords virtually unimpeded access to the private thoughts of those around him, Latimer’s power does not lead to the development of sympathy. Indeed, it is less a power he can use at will than an unwanted and sometimes unmitigated stream of information, to which Latimer is repeatedly subjected—“the obtrusion on my mind of the mental process going forward in first one person, and then another, with whom I happened to be in contact,” he writes, noting how “this involuntary intrusion of other souls” presses upon him despite his efforts to hold it in abeyance (13, 18). Latimer’s “abnormal sensibility” gradually yields to an intense hatred for the “fatiguing obviousness of... other minds,” the thoughts and feelings that crowd and press into his mind when in proximity to others (13, 29). And, as revealed at the opening of the

¹⁴⁶ See Viera on the import of “The Lifted Veil”: “although most of the problems confronted in this story reappear in the novels, here is her aesthetic the central issue” (750).

narrative, it is also accompanied with the paralyzing knowledge of his death, the end of the narrative he has already lived and is now transcribing.

For many critics, “The Lifted Veil” represents the conflicted relationship between sympathy and realist narration.¹⁴⁷ As Rae Greiner argues, Latimer “literalizes a common feature of nineteenth-century realist fiction, omniscient narration’s ‘inside view,’ then subjects its celebrated liaison with sympathy to devastating critique,” demonstrating how greater access to other minds does not afford more sympathetic understanding, but can actually engender far less (126). Indeed, Latimer describes it in no uncertain terms as a troubling omniscience: it is constrained, “fitful,” and offers access to “the trivial experience of indifferent people,” leading to a distaste and ultimately distrust of others, an ethical souring by way of his “diseased participation in other people’s consciousness” (13-14, 17). Yet for Greiner, “The Lifted Veil” does not present a critique of sympathy as much as it demonstrates the limitations of omniscience in narrative. Latimer’s profound inability to identify with others is indicative of the need for greater critical distance in order to properly conduct sympathy—in short, for a narrative form more conducive to practicing sympathy and avoiding any intermingling between subjects and objects, narrators and characters, readers and texts.

It is to this end that sympathy is typically seen at both an affective and a historical remove from empathy, the former treated as the domain of nineteenth-century novels and the values promoted by (and engendered in) reading them, while the latter seen as the byproduct of modernist experimentation and evidence of the fragmentation of modern life. The former is more psychologically rigorous, a mode of “difficult thinking” that preserves distinctions, whereas the latter facilitates the collusion and confusion of identities, “requiring that others’ feelings and

¹⁴⁷ See Anderson as well as Thomas Albrecht.

minds be known or identically shared” (159). Clearly here, the distinction is also a matter of periodization. Indeed, Greiner attributes the turn in twentieth-century literary criticism away from sympathy, a predominantly affective and reflective process that keeps “separateness... at least partially intact,” to the distinctively modern (and Modernist) embrace of empathy, which promotes a “fusion of forms, art object and self” as an aesthetic agenda (135, 158). By returning instead to Victorian realism’s sympathetic aims—what Greiner casts as “impartiality,” “self-difference,” and “social relationality”—critics can prevent the collusion and confusion of identities otherwise promoted by empathy’s lingering aesthetic paradigm.

Yet when treated as a facet of lived experience and, as Lee and Eliot both demonstrate, the distinctive operation that takes place when reading literature, empathy is not as dangerous as Greiner makes it seem. Indeed, the distinction Greiner raises between sympathy and empathy seems to be between an aesthetic-ethical *ideal* for the form of novels, for which sympathy is (and, often, is only) a well-intentioned aim, and an aesthetic-affective *process* that occurs when reading novels. Processes are not entirely reducible to products, and we might see the danger not in what empathy collapses or confuses, but in what critics elide when treating empathy as an undeveloped or failed form of sympathy. In this respect, empathy occupies an uncertain position in relation to past and present critical paradigms for novel reading, especially those that seek to place literary value in either purely aesthetic or purely affective ends.¹⁴⁸ Whereas the call for a return to sympathy as a Victorian critical practice suggests the desire to maintain distance between our aesthetic and affective ideals, enshrining our objects of analysis and studying them with the arrest we assume historical distance affords, empathy suggests what might happen when

¹⁴⁸ As Lee maintains, empathy is not opposed to the “cultivated distance” required of sympathy, nor is sympathy bereft of aesthetic aims; rather, empathy is a process foundational to sympathy, providing “the essentials of aesthetic contemplation” and means of coming into greater contact with the lives of others (117).

we strive to reduce the distance between the past and the present, and the unlived potential we might find in the words that impact us still.

CODA

Affect in Brief

Dickens's amorphous affects, Trollope's protraction of narrative to accommodate everyday life, and Brontë's distension of the time of reading have all pointed to a tenuous relationship between form and feeling, an unstable reciprocity between alterations in the shape of feeling and shifts in novelistic form. I have argued throughout this study that novelistic form accommodates affect in non-specific ways. Its principle features are reshaped to represent minor feelings and attenuated affective states, but feelings, too, become formalized, the frustration, weakness, tedium, and confused produced in readers oddly redirected to and assimilated within the texts that have produced them. I maintain that these reading affects require readers to embrace different critical practices: for Dickens, they require readers to see literary character as itself a grammatical fiction, entified; for Trollope, they draw attention to a weak form of narrative energy only glimpsed from treating the author's literary career as a whole; for Brontë, they enable us to grasp tedium as an internal operation within novels as well as a mode of reading, in which scenes of reading are dilated or paused and interpretations are offset and delayed.

But in Eliot, we have encountered an impulse to constrain and limit these reading affects, to see the affective process of reading reworked to account for an abridged form. Indeed, the problems and critical practices in the first three chapters emerge from the need to consider the novel as a large, complicated, and unwieldy form, and the corresponding need to situate an understanding of its affective register(s) as contributing to a complex whole. In the previous chapter, I offered instead a mode of analysis emphasizing proximity and closeness, a mode that readers might simply take as close reading: the conviction that attention to the minor or small formal properties of a work will yield insight into its larger meaning or significance.

Yet what I want to suggest in my coda to this study is that an attention to brevity enables us to see something different about the form(s) of these reading affects, the temporalities they engender, and the repercussions they have for our understanding of the novel as typically large, complicated, and unwieldy. Lee's emphasis on the affective dimensions of words, how smaller formal units direct or "canalize" response and set readers in alternative temporalities, is not simply a means of analyzing shorter novels. It is a practice through which we can understand minor forms of reading in larger novels, too, of seeing constrained, limited, and unformed affects unfurling within the space of a lengthier work, one in which these smaller processes model multiple, indiscrete modes of reading that fail to amount to a unified, holistic approach.

In this way, I see Eliot and Lee challenging a critical tradition of novel reading that assumes linearity, that parses novels into beginnings, middles, and ends, and that looks to effect the cohesion of a novel as an aesthetic object. Lee's emphasis on the limits and constraints of the feelings elicited during novel reading—in particular, her insistence on the ways in which literature succeeds in directing or "canalizing" feeling in minor ways—provides a corrective to recent turns in affect theory that associate novel reading with the unmitigated capacitation of affective response. We have found that rather than simply serve as a conduit for feeling in general, or ethical feeling in particular, novels can model and account for a range of specific affective responses. This modeling does not encompass or account for all *possible* affective responses to reading—after all, "literature lacks the definiteness, the massive certainty of the other arts," and what some readers feel, others may not—but it does assume that some affective responses, by virtue of being provoked by specific arrangements of words, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters only exist in the process of reading (*Handling* 83). Our critical attention to these arrangements can help us understand affective responses that escape synthesis, or that

fail to accord with the larger affective-aesthetic values of a novel when taken as a whole. Indeed, the ways in which affective responses are under-signified draws our attention to forms of embodiment left out of historical accounts of feeling and emotion in Victorian studies—namely, forms of lived experience we might associate with affective diminuation, disability, old age, and illness.

When we take into account these reading affects, we can also allow for the dissonance and discord that naturally makes up a literary work, and to account for this dissonance without trying to assimilate it into a larger claim about the form, or, for that matter, overlook these features in the interest of making a more global claim about the mode of reading modeled in a text. Literature's lack of "definiteness" thus places greater weight on the vicissitudes of feeling traced in a work *as it is read*. This critical process better speaks to the diffuse nature of reading where attention can no longer be paid to an entire work at once. Instead, it directs us to the subtle movement conveyed from moment by moment, brief as each may be, in the feelings we encounter in novels that fail to measure against ours—and ours, theirs.

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