

Readerly Identification in the Realist Novel from Austen to Hardy

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INTRODUCTION: IDENTIFICATION, SPECIFICALLY

How do novels work? And what work do they do? More specifically, to the extent that novels engage in the work of ethico-political critique, how do they do it? This study on readerly identification in the realist novel begins from these questions, as well as from a commitment to the specificity of the novel as a form. That is, when novelists engage in the work of theory, they do so differently than theorists working in other forms. Thus, to grasp both the full extent of existing novelistic critique and the critical potential of the form *as a form*, we must first attend to the ways in which novels work *as novels*. In advancing this position, I build on Anna Kornbluh's polemic in "We Have Never Been Critical: Toward the Novel as Critique." Yet, I also seek to distinguish my vision of what engaging with novels as critique looks like from the argument she articulates. Strikingly, in making her case, Kornbluh sidelines the affective dimension of novels. In addressing Rita Felski's postcritical stance, which asks for a turn toward "inquiries into 'attachments,'" Kornbluh suggests "that Felski has the wrong answer (affect) to the right question: how can literary critics and humanists generally be more affirmative?" ("We" 398). In setting out her own answer to this question (through treating novels as critique by way of formalist analysis), Kornbluh specifies that "there are heartier things to be affirmed about literature than the affects it arouses in individuals" ("We" 398). Yet, I do not think we should be so quick to turn away from affective connection.¹ I posit that the ways in which novels ask us to affectively connect, or to refrain from such connection, are central to the ways in which novels do critique.² These invitations to enter into or to refrain from

¹ It may be objected that Kornbluh does not explicitly propose a complete turn away from affective connection. However, it is notable that after this early moment in the essay, affect drops out of the essay as a critical term. Indeed, considerations of affect and affective connection are strikingly absent from her closing reading of Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad*, through which she exemplifies her proposed method of reading (406-407).

² Kornbluh invites us to see the ways in which "the novel's conceptuality is neither linear nor logical but contrastive and accretive; when novels think they do not iterate evaluative judgments (child labor is bad, patriarchy sucks) but mobilize ideas in sensuous, plastic synthesis (the problem of child labor is inseparable from first-person narration and bildungsroman plotting)" ("We" 401). What I would add is that, when novels think, the problem of child labor

identificatory relation do not exist outside the novel's form but instead are articulated through it. Thus, we must ask not merely how novels ask readers to identify (Felski's animating question),³ but also to what ends and at what cost.

Readerly Identification

In its insistence on specificity, this project starts from a foundational insight: identifying as a reader with a fictional figure within the space of a novel is fundamentally distinct from identifying as a person with another person in the non-fictional world. This project further insists upon the differences between readerly identifications and the identifications made by viewers of visual media. Indeed, I suggest that the critical tendency to lump together, on the one hand, aesthetic identification and non-aesthetic identification and, on the other, identifications across aesthetic forms, has led to a lack of precision. This imprecision hinders us from comprehending the extent to which novelistic projects are bodied forth through affective connection and the costs of failing to attend to those connections (including those of the critic) in literary criticism. In this section, I will set out my key term, readerly identification. In so doing, I will distinguish it from psychoanalytical accounts of identification, as well as from accounts that set out aesthetic identification primarily as matter of will and/or as an embattled reading practice in need of critical defense.

I define readerly identification as a relation between reader and fictional figure — narrator and/or character — in which the boundary between them becomes blurred in a way that is sustained over time

becomes “inseparable” not only “from first-person narration and bildungsroman plotting” but also from the ways in which those forms invite us to feel about or with the child or children in question.

³ “But how, exactly, are we drawn in?” is the primary question for Felski in her work on identification, which she characterizes as a “defense” (79). Though she acknowledges that “aesthetic attachments *can* spill out into the political sphere,” she explicitly sets out her approach as a corrective against “overpoliticizing and overpsychologizing” (119, Felski's emphasis; 81). In so doing, she stops short of analyzing what, to me, is most interesting about identificatory relation, which is neither the fact of its existence nor its contingency, though it is not possible, of course, to determine the response of any given reader to a text in advance. Rather, I am interested in identification's facility for bodying forth the ethical and political projects of the novels. That is, I focus on identification not primarily as a readerly experience but instead as an authorial strategy.

through a fantasy of sameness. Readerly identification, as opposed to its psychoanalytic counterparts, is characterized not by ambivalence but instead by unqualified intimacy. Further, though readerly identification is at odds with some forms of sympathy — for instance, pity — it represents the intensification of others — for example, fellow feeling. It also poses a threat to projects that seek to extend sympathy across a wide range of characters. This threat arises from the intensity of identificatory relation, which insists on exclusivity, especially where the identificatory figure is in conflict with others within the fictional world. Further, although I separate out readerly identification from psychoanalytic accounts of identification, I argue that the identifications of a reader are not entirely products of will or readerly practice. Identifications, that is, do not take place exclusively within the reader's conscious activity, though readers can certainly reject or seek to distance themselves from identifications that jar with their commitments after their occurrence.⁴ In this way, my account of identification differs from those accounts that treat identification as a practice wholly under the reader's control, including those who find such a practice to be inherently liberatory or specifically feminist in and of itself.

In theorizing readerly identification, I start from psychoanalytic accounts, not so as to map psychoanalytic identification onto the experiences of readers but instead to distinguish readerly identification from such accounts. Given this aim, this discussion of psychoanalysis does not address in detail to the differences between various psychoanalytic accounts, though significant differences abound.⁵ Instead of attending to these differences, I want to focus on what is shared: beginning with Freud,

⁴ We might see such an example in Michelle Cliff's novel *No Telephone to Heaven*, in which the Jamaican heroine, Clare, forms and then rejects an identification with Jane Eyre:

The fiction had tricked her. Drawn her in so that she became Jane. Yes. The parallels were there. Was she not heroic Jane? Betrayed. Left to wander. Solitary. Motherless. Yes, and with no relations to speak of except an uncle across the water. She occupied her mind. Comforted for a time, she came to. Then, with a sharpness, reprimanded herself. No, she told herself. No, she could not be Jane. Small and pale. English. No, she paused. No, my girl, try Bertha. Wild-maned Bertha. (116)

Felski identifies this moment as an identificatory failure, one that shows “the ties between Brontë's protagonist and female readers have considerable durability and strength; but there is nothing inevitable about them” (109). But what Cliff describes is not Clare's failure to identify but her disidentification, that is, “an identification that one fears to make only because one has already made it” (Butler, *Bodies* 112).

⁵ For a brief account of some of these differences between psychoanalytical thinkers, see Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 205-207.

psychoanalytic accounts emphasize the fundamental role of ambivalence in identificatory relation. Strikingly, Freud's theorizing of identification begins, as Diana Fuss notes, with the rejection of the terms we might identify as those central to the nineteenth-century realist novel: "Freud presents his theory of psychical identification as a corrective to the figurative excesses of nineteenth-century psychology. Identification replaces 'sympathy,' 'imagination,' and 'suggestion' to describe, in more 'scientific' fashion, the phenomenon of how subjects act upon one another" (4-5). Notably, Freud does not theorize identification once but over and over again, often in ways that conflict with his previous accounts. Freud's theorization of identification, is, per Fuss, both "one of most important contributions to twentieth-century thought" and "also one of the most imperfectly understood — not least of all by Freud himself" (21). Yet though Freud's accounts of identification vary throughout his writings as to, for instance, whether identification is a symptom of hysteria or a normal part of subject development, they are consistent in their emphasis of the fundamental role of ambivalence in identificatory relation. "Identification, in fact," Freud tells us in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, "is ambivalent from the very first" (47). We might trace this ambivalence, as Fuss does, through Freud's analysis of the totem myth in *Totem and Taboo*. The brothers feel affection and admiration toward the father, but they also feel aggression towards him because they want to take his place. The brothers kill the father and eat him, transforming him into a part of them. Freudian identification, as Diane Davis notes, is a "*devouring* affection" (n. 1 at 124, Davis's emphasis). The totem meal they hold to memorialize the act is both a mourning of the loss of their father and a celebration of their victory over him, a manifestation of this continued ambivalence, even beyond death. Or, we might look to the identification at issue in the Oedipus complex, in which the "little boy will exhibit a special interest in his father; he would like to grow like him and be like him, and take his place everywhere" (*Group* 47). This idealization of the father, Freud tells us, always-already has a "hostile colouring," as the son's desire to "take his place" necessarily encompasses the desire for the father's removal (*Group* 47). The inherent ambivalence of identification continues to be emphasized in later accounts of identification. We might consider, for instance, Jacques Lacan's "Mirror Stage," in which the child's identification with the

mirror-image is from the first characterized by both a sense of fascination and a sense of alienation. Indeed, in their entry on identification, Jacques Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis characterize it as “probable” that “an ambivalence . . . with respect to the object is a precondition of the institution of any identification” (207).

Recent literary critical work on identification attempts to map psychoanalytic accounts onto the identifications of readers with literary characters. For instance, Laura Green theorizes “literary identifications” in “novels of female formation” as, in essence, the “secondary” and “partial” identifications theorized by Freud (2, 9). That is, these identifications are not the “early, unconscious, and preverbal relation” that one has, for example, to one’s parents, but are instead commensurate with those identifications that occur later on, with less central figures: a coach, a teacher — figures, in other words, with whom identificatory relation is still shot-through with ambivalence (9). Against such accounts, I propose that readerly identification differs from psychoanalytic identification in kind. Specifically, readerly identification offers the reader an identification free from this structuring ambivalence. In so proposing, I take up Catherine Gallagher’s insight in *Nobody’s Story*: that it is easier to identify with “nobody” — that is, a character or narrator — than with somebody — that is, a person who exists in the world. Building on Gallagher’s account, I wish to suggest that it is not just the identificatory object that changes in moving from real life into fiction — from somebody into nobody — but also the identifying subject. In other words, to be a novel reader is to enter into a different mode than that of a person in the world. This readerly mode enables a freer, less fraught relation between self and other, as the self is less on the defensive: one can, after all, always close the book. This unambivalent identification is thus associated with pleasure on the part of the reader, who experiences “intimacy” without the same threat to the self or sense of rivalry. I do not need to kill off Jane Eyre to take her place with Mr. Rochester, no more than I need envy Elizabeth Bennet the position of mistress of Pemberley. In identifying with these heroines, I experience their triumphs (“Reader, I married him”) as coextensive with my own.

I contend that ambivalence is not merely absent from readerly identification but also antithetical to it. That is, a reader's feeling of ambivalence toward a fictional figure stands in the way of identificatory relation. Like irony, in other words, ambivalence is inherently distancing, at odds with the closeness that characterizes readerly identification. This dynamic, which has been obscured by the critical insistence on treating readerly identification as a form of psychoanalytic identification, was, in fact, well understood by nineteenth-century novelists. As will be discussed in the chapters that follow, both Thomas Hardy and Jane Austen strategically courted readerly ambivalence in order to prevent (Hardy) or qualify (Austen) identificatory relation. Through this courting of ambivalence, these novelists invite readers to maintain a critical distance from the protagonist. Further, in pointing out this lack of ambivalence on the part of the identificatory reader, I do not mean to suggest that readerly identification is less ethically or politically fraught than psychoanalytic identification, nor that one has nothing to do with the other. Rather, I merely wish to suggest that the structure of readerly identification is different and thus calls for a different kind of attendance. Indeed, the similarities between these forms of identification are drawn on by the novelists on whom I focus, and my own account at times takes up insights from theorists working within the psychoanalytic traditions, including the conceptualization of disidentificatory relation in the work of both Judith Butler and Jose Muñoz.

While, on the one hand, I seek to differentiate my account from those studies that map psychoanalytic accounts onto readerly experiences, on the other, I want to preserve a role for the unconscious in identification, as well as a sense of identification's intensity for and claims on the reading subject. That is, I suggest recent accounts, including Rita Felski's *Hooked* and Maria Palacios Knox's *Wayward Reading*, that give short-shrift to psychoanalysis, also seem to miss out on some of its insights. Knox, writing against the portrayal of Victorian women as passive victims of fiction, insists on literary identification as a "selective exercise of imaginative autonomy," dismissing any role for the unconscious (6). Meanwhile, Felski positions herself as a defender of identification against those critics (primarily in film studies) who, in "mixing up potent cocktails of Freud, Marx, and Mulvey," have "excoriated any form

of identification as a trap” (81). Her too-broad definition of identification as “an affinity that is based on some sense of similarity” fails to capture the intensity and claim to exclusivity that readerly identification involves. Put differently, one may feel “an affinity based on some sense of similarity” with any number of characters in a work, even where they are in direct conflict with one another. This relation, I argue, is not identification but merely affinity. Strikingly, though Felski roots her definition in “everyday speech,” the way we tend to talk about aesthetic identifications in fact reflects this intensity and exclusivity (81). That is, current “everyday speech” about identification, at least in its most paradigmatic form — “I’m a Carrie”⁶— itself denotes that aesthetic identifications are not, and cannot be, as Felski suggests, “ambivalent, qualified, partial, or ironic” (119).

Readerly Identification seeks to guard against not only the collapse of aesthetic identification into psychoanalytic identification, but also other forms of collapse. *Readerly Identification* construes its scope of relations narrowly: it treats the identificatory relation between readers and fictional figures. It does not take up other forms of relation (fandom, identificatory relation between reader and author, identificatory relation between author and character, identification of readers as belonging to certain groups), nor does it take up the relation of viewers to other forms of art. In its insistence on a specific relation within the novel, this study is at odds with a trend toward capaciousness in theorizing identification. For instance, in *Hooked*, Rita Felski treats multiple forms of relation under the rubric of identification, including the relation between viewer and movie star and that between the critic and author, and also considers multiple forms of aesthetic objects, including novels, films, comics, and television shows, alongside one another. This

⁶ In the 2012 pilot episode of *Girls*, the naïve Shoshanna (Zosia Mamet) is humorously characterized through the very absurdity of her *Sex and the City* identifications. Specifically, she claims that she knows herself to be “definitely a Carrie at heart, but sometimes [. . .] sometimes Samantha kind of comes out. And then, when I’m at school, I definitely try to put on my Miranda hat” (Dunham 8:27-8:37; ellipses in original). Here, the success of the joke depends on the viewer’s recognition that identification does not work in the affinity-based, pluralistic way Shoshanna describes. In other words, the show expects us to recognize that to be “a Carrie” categorically disqualifies one from being “a Miranda,” if only at school. Identificatory attachment cannot be put on or taken off like a “hat” but is rather a more intense, more absorptive, more exclusive proposition.

trend toward capaciousness does a disservice to the specific formal features of the novel and to the specific relation between the reader and the fictional figure.

To return to Gallagher, one reason it is easier to identify with a nobody than a somebody is that the nobody's difference from us is less apparent on a moment-by-moment basis. This quality is not shared across aesthetic forms. I might know, for instance, that Elizabeth Bennet has dark eyes and that my own eyes are light, but knowing this fact is different than visually confronting these eyes unlike my own over and over again. Indeed, this distinction might account for the widespread expression of dissatisfaction that results whenever an actor is cast as a beloved literary character, regardless of how closely the actor matches the description provided in the text itself.⁷ That is, any fully-fleshed out visual representation will embody an otherness that interferes with the maintenance of identification's constitutive fantasy of sameness. Thus, in my account, nobodiness encompasses not merely the fictional versus the non-fictional but the literary versus the visual. To further illustrate this difference, we might recall Bertolt Brecht's famous solution to subverting identificatory relation between the viewer and character on stage: inviting "an alienation effect" through the actor's performance, in which the actor "expresses his awareness of being watched" (Brecht 93). Through this emphasis on the difference between actor and character, Brecht seeks to reinforce the difference between spectator and character: "The performer's self-observation, an artful and artistic act of self-alienation, stopped the spectator from losing himself in the character" (93). Such a means of subverting identification, strikingly, has no clear counterpart in the novel, where there is not this intermediary actor between the reading/viewing subject and the character. Thus, the ways in which novels create distance between reader and character are necessarily different from those employed by Brecht, which capitalize on the visual reminder of difference already at issue in a stage production.

⁷ I would separate out the expressions of dissatisfaction over the casting of literary adaptations, which are rooted in the reader's lack of a clear mental image of the identificatory figure, from the racist expressions of dissatisfaction that arise when an actor of color is cast as a character who is described as or assumed (at least by some readers) to be white.

Attempts to classify other types of relations under the same rubric as the relation between reader and fictional figure have had a similarly distorting effect. These attempts obscure the specific experience offered by readerly identification by lumping it in with forms of identification that are fundamentally characterized by ambivalence. For instance, Laura Green focuses on novels but defines “literary identification” to include not only readers’ relations to narrators and characters, but also authors’ relation to their character and narrators, and readers’ relations to authors. Yet, while it is true that identifications with fictional figures may bleed into these other relations, theorizing them under the same term blurs key distinctions. That is, while readerly identification occurs within the less ambivalent space of fiction, readers’ relation to authors are marked by the same ambivalence centered in psychoanalytic accounts of identification. To take one example, Green quotes Simone de Beauvoir’s description of her identification with George Eliot after reading *The Mill on the Floss* as a young person: “Through her heroine, I identified myself with the author: one day other adolescents would bathe with their tears a novel in which I would tell my own sad story” (Green 61, quoting Beauvoir at 140). In Beauvoir’s words, we might read the foundational ambivalence at the heart of identification outside of fiction: Beauvoir, we might say, admires Eliot but also desires to “take her place”; her affection is a “*devouring*” one (Davis n.1, at 124, Davis’s emphasis). The identificatory relation of author to character (which I suggest is more appropriately termed authorial self-representation), I argue is also characterized by ambivalence, as I discuss in detail in the third chapter.

My project also differs from recent accounts of identification, including those of Felski, Green, and Knox, which seek to defend identification as a specifically feminist (or proto-feminist) practice of reading. These account position themselves against the stigmatization of identification as an embarrassingly feminine readerly tendency.⁸ In reclaiming identification, these critics celebrate

⁸ For an account of the nineteenth-century conception of women readers as particularly susceptible to identificatory reading practices, see Kate Flint 31-41. While Green focuses on literary fiction, both Knox and Felski position themselves as, in part, rehabilitating popular forms that they believe have been unfairly denigrated by critics. While Felski discusses identification in popular films, television shows, and comics, Knox centers a portion of her study on the nineteenth-century sensation novel. With this focus on reclaiming not merely identificatory reading practices

identification as the privileged site (and practice) of feminist pleasure (Felski), of feminist politics (Knox), and female subject formation (Green). In my account, identification is in itself neither liberatory, nor a cause for celebration. I take identification to be one set of strategies among many through which a novelist may advance their political, aesthetic, and ethical projects. These projects may take up or advance feminist or proto-feminist aims. Indeed, with respect to the authors of this study, such is often the case. Yet, to say that identification has been useful for the advancement of certain feminist projects is distinct from a claim that identification as either a reading practice or an authorial strategy is feminist in itself. Indeed, as we will see, strategies of identification also often effect othering and serve to suppress difference. A recognition of a text's invitation to identify with a character is not the end of the inquiry but merely raises new questions, including: Through what means is the author inviting this relation? And to what ends is this identificatory relation being marshalled?

Identification and Sympathy

What is the relation of sympathy to identification? Two recent studies of sympathy in the Victorian novel — Audrey Jaffe's *Scenes of Sympathy* and Rae Greiner's *Sympathetic Realism* — come to opposite conclusions, even though both critics root their understanding of sympathy in the same passage from Adam Smith. In Jaffe's more psychoanalytically-informed account, sympathy is co-extensive with identification: "a plea for sympathy is itself a claim for identification" (12). In Greiner's account, which seeks to distinguish sympathy, a cognitive practice, from emotion, sympathy and identification are at odds: "sympathy resists identification . . . the identity of emotions is presented as a threat to, not an achievement of, sympathetic connection" (4). Sympathy itself is a broad term, particularly in nineteenth-century Britain, where it was used to refer to a range of phenomena from pity to what we would now call empathy, a term that, as Greiner reminds us, only makes its way into English (from the German *Einfühlung*) in 1909 (158).

but the genres that facilitate them, we can perhaps draw a parallel between Knox and Felski's recent efforts and the earlier reclamations of the romance genre by critics like Janice Radway.

What I want to suggest is that identification is an intensification of the strongest form of sympathy. It encompasses the *feeling with* of empathy but sustains it over time. It is at odds with weaker forms of sympathy, like pity, which I suggest has an inherently distancing effect, and with diffuse fellow feeling, in which a reader is invited to feel for multiple characters, even where the desires and interests of those characters conflict. Strikingly, several influential studies of sympathy in the literature of nineteenth-century Britain and America draw our attention to the representational unit of the scene — we might return to Jaffe’s *Scenes of Sympathy* or look to Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection*, both of which focus on scenes of suffering in particular, though in different contexts. My contention is that identification cannot be described in terms of individual scenes in isolation, though certain scenes of suffering — for instance, the Red Room scene in *Jane Eyre* — are highly effective in laying the ground for identificatory relation. What separates identification from lesser forms of sympathy is, in other words, not merely intensity (and its related claim to exclusivity) but also duration.

Readerly Identification and Realism

In *Hooked*, Felski complains about the concentration of focus on reader relations to characters in realism to the exclusion of other genres:

Audiences can identify with figures from fairy tales, comic strips, melodramas, parables, and superhero movies, not to mention *Star Trek*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, or *Blood and Guts in High School* . . . Identification proves to be as relevant to *Malone Dies* as to *Middlemarch*, to *Tom and Jerry* as to *Doctor Zhivago* — though the mechanisms of identification will certainly vary. (80)

For Felski, who seeks to examine how works of art “hook” us, that readers or (more prominently in her study) viewers identify with something or someone in a work makes “identification” as “relevant” to an understanding of that work as any other work with an identificatory “hook.” The only difference is the “mechanisms” through which this identification is figured. Strikingly, though Felski claims that “Identification *proves* to be as relevant to *Malone Dies* as to *Middlemarch*, to *Tom and Jerry* as to *Doctor Zhivago*,” she does not go on to “prove” it (80, my emphasis). These are in fact the only mentions of *Malone Dies* and *Tom and Jerry* in the book. Of course, Felski is correct that readers identify across all sorts of genres and

that identification is invited by works that feature characters not depicted in the “realistic” mode associated with authors on whom I focus in this study. Indeed, I agree with Felski that it seems, on the whole, easier for authors and creators to invite identification with a sketch than a fully-formed character, with a cipher “like James Bond” (“a man without qualities”) than with a complexly-rendered figure like Thomas Hardy’s Grace Melbury (Felski 80, quoting Amis, *James Bond* 43).⁹

I argue that what makes readerly identification a “relevant” subject for realism, and for the nineteenth-century British realist novel specifically, is not that it is the only genre that asks readers to identify but instead that identification is a particularly significant and marked site of aesthetic, ethical, and political potential and risk given the specific characteristics of the genre and the aims of its practitioners. Identification is a key source of pleasure for the realist novel, which, with its “attempts to come to grips with the fact that we live in a historical world,” has more limited access to some of the pleasures on offer in, for instance, a *James Bond* film or a *Tom and Jerry* cartoon (Shaw 6).¹⁰ Yet, identification also sits in tension with realism’s “positive, determinate relationship to historicism,” given its tendency to encourage readers to engage in a fantasy of sameness, in which the similarities between themselves and the fictional figures are emphasized over the differences, including differences in conditions rooted in historical specificity (6).¹¹ Identification is also a particularly fraught proposition for realist authors of nineteenth-century Britain in particular given their strong interest in advancing political and ethical projects through fiction. On the one hand, identification offers a particularly potent form of affective connection that enables authors to emphasize the humanity of people who may differ from their readership in fundamental ways, including gender and class, and the ways in which the lives of those people are unjustly constrained by

⁹ Though, as I will argue, realist authors are also aware of this distinction. For instance, I will argue Hardy similarly figures Jude Fawley as “man without qualities” in order to bolster his identificatory appeal. See Chapter 4 at 214.

¹⁰ For a fuller explication of this characterization of realism, see Harry Shaw 90-125.

¹¹ This lack of distance from which to historicize, from which to see the other as other, is Bertolt Brecht’s particular objection to identification. See also Elin Diamond at 87.

social and political systems that could be organized differently. In other words, identification facilitates the affective investment of readers in the lives of those they might otherwise never encounter: to inhabit the righteous anger (“Unjust!—unjust!”) of Charlotte Brontë’s marginalized governess in *Jane Eyre*, or to see themselves in the working-class boy dreaming of the university in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (19). On the other hand, the inviting of identificatory relation often coincides with a suppression of representations of nuance, complexity, and irreducible difference on the part of authors, as well as with the readerly papering over material differences between the characters and themselves. In this study, I argue that the realist novelists of nineteenth-century Britain are particularly engaged with navigating this dissonance, in teasing out for themselves the specific capacities and limitations of identificatory relations and in determining the most effective, least compromising ways of figuring it.

Readerly Identification and the Victorian Novel

Strikingly, Felski characterizes discussions of characterological identification as clustering not merely around realism in general but around Victorian realism in particular: “How many theses about character — whether positive or critical— have been built on a handful of novels by Dickens, Eliot, or James!” (119). I want to suggest that this clustering on which Felski is picking up does not arise from an abundance of studies on characterological identification within Victorian literary studies itself, but instead of an association of the Victorian novel with the solicitation of uncritical identification. This association has its origins not in Victorian studies but in modernist criticism like L.C. Knights’s *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?* (See Moi 31-48). As Toril Moi describes, “As a highbrow modernist, Knights heaps scorn on the popular and the middlebrow, blaming the rot of character criticism on the ‘growth of the popular novel, from Sir Walter Scott and Charlotte Brontë to our own Best Sellers, [which] encouraged an emotional identification of the reader with hero or heroine’” (42, Moi’s brackets, quoting Knights at 25). Knights thus characterizes these novels’ encouragement of “emotional identification of the reader with hero or heroine” as not only embarrassing, but also harmful. This association of the Victorian novel with

identification, I suggest, has been further bolstered by the tendency of educators to choose the most identificatory of Victorian novels to teach to students, particularly in courses that survey multiple fields. The appeal identificatory novels have for readers is rooted in their ability to cut across historical difference and to make affective experiences of the protagonists come alive even for students with little grounding in the period. This affective accessibility accounts for the greater frequency in which *Jane Eyre* appears on syllabi relative to *Shirley*, for the tendency to assign *Jude the Obscure* over *The Woodlanders*, and for the pedagogical preference for *Middlemarch* over *Romola*. In this study, I find this association of the Victorian novel with the invitation of uncritical identificatory relation looms much larger in our imagination than in reality. Indeed, I demonstrate that nineteenth-century British novelists had a more complex and even ambivalent relationship to identification than is commonly suggested, particularly when we attend to the entirety of their novelistic careers rather than merely the novels that are most popular with modern readers. In so demonstrating, I suggest that the questions I pose about readerly identification's suitability for advancing various ethico-political projects¹² were also open questions for the novelists on whom I focus — Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy — questions with which they attempted to grapple as they experimented with different forms and projects throughout their careers.

In the chapters that follow, I explore the identificatory engagements of British nineteenth-century novelists by means of four exemplary instances. Each chapter traces the trajectory of a single author across their career, attending to the way they experiment with form in order to access the potential and avoid the limitations of identificatory relation. This methodology is selective, not exhaustive. I aim not to produce a linear historical narrative but rather to consider four innovative and dynamic responses to the question of

¹² In this project, I often refer to these authorial projects as ethico-political to reflect the co-existence of ethical and political aims, as well as the great overlap between these categories themselves. However, in specific places, I do explore tension between specific projects that I see as primarily oriented toward the ethical and the others that I identify as primarily political. In drawing such distinctions between politics and ethics, I do not mean to suggest that any clear-cut distinction can be made. The ethical, of course, always has political implications. However, I do seek to mark a difference between projects that centers around the stance one should take toward others, and those that call for more impersonal, systemic changes or that articulate a vision of how society should be organized or might be organized better.

readerly connection. Attending to these four career trajectories, I suggest, gives us an appreciation for the wide range of stances nineteenth-century novelists take up toward identification. So attending offers us insights into the extent to which identification can effectively advance ethico-political projects through the novel, as well as the limitations associated with identification's constitutive emphasis of similarity over difference. In particular, the careers of these authors speak both to a self-reflexivity with respect to identification and a willingness to engage in formal innovation in order to find new and better ways of inviting and resisting specific readerly relations to fictional figures.

Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of the distortions that occur when critics fail to properly account for identification in their readings. While these critical distortions, which include identificatory evasion, identificatory backlash, and identificatory overwriting,¹³ are discussed and theorized across all four chapters of this project, they are particularly prevalent within Austen criticism, leading to misunderstandings of her novelistic project that have persisted over time. In attending to these critical distortions, we can see the ways in which analyzing Austen's solicitation of and resistance to identification is critical to understanding her proto-feminist, materialist project, as well as the innovativeness of her experiments with novelistic form. Specifically, while Austen invites identification with her early heroines by first demonstrating their superior merit and then by situating us within their novel-endorsed perspective, she breaks from this structure in *Mansfield Park* by decoupling heroic merit from narrative attention. This break in structure has led to confusion rooted in the failure of critics to attend to Austen's identificatory structure. As a result, *Mansfield Park* has been misread as an especially conservative outlier in Austen's

¹³ In instances of what I call identificatory evasion, the critic ignores or gives short-shrift to the identificatory pull through which the novelist is, at least in part, articulating their project. See e.g., the discussion of Marilyn Butler in Chapter 1 at 20-21. The second critical distortion is what I call identificatory overwriting, in which the critic replaces the concerns of the novel with the concerns of their own due to his highly-identificatory relation with the hero. See e.g., the discussion of Raymond Williams in Chapter 4 at 207-209. This distortion can also manifest in the form of an extreme defensiveness toward criticism of the identificatory object. See e.g., the discussion of Talia Schaffer in Chapter 3 at 100. The third critical distortion discussed is identificatory backlash, which results when a previously held identification is violently disavowed. This distortion manifests in an aggressiveness toward the former identificatory figure. See e.g., the discussion of D.A. Miller in Chapter 1 at 21-22 and the discussion of Rosemary Clark-Beattie in Chapter 2 at 100-101.

oeuvre by critics who have assumed that Austen intends for us to respond to Fanny Price in the same identificatory manner that we respond to Elinor Dashwood and Elizabeth Bennet. Attending to the specifics of Austen's figuration of identification in these early novels lights up Austen's experimental subversion of her previous identificatory structure in *Mansfield Park*. That is, in *Mansfield Park*, Austen represents the deservedness of the witty and ethically sophisticated Mary Crawford yet awards the heroine's centrality to the less compelling Fanny Price. Indeed, Fanny's refusals both to take material concerns seriously and to engage in critical reading practices are put under pressure not only by Mary, with her more effective action-oriented approach to ethics and sensitivity to gender-based precarity, but also by the novel itself, which highlights Fanny's failures and deflates the happiness of her ending. This break in *Mansfield Park*, I suggest, not only allows us to (re)read Mary's ending as a happy one but also lights up the originality of Austen's late career experiments with identification, including the figuration of a latent identification in *Emma* and of a carefully-figured, unqualified identification in *Persuasion*, both of which support her promotion of a more materialist critical analysis.

The second chapter explores the identificatory engagements of Charlotte Brontë, which, I argue, are marked by anxiety and over-correction. After the repeated rejection of *The Professor* by publishers, Brontë sets out to write a novel that explicitly foregrounds identificatory pleasure. In writing *Jane Eyre*, Brontë is remarkably clear-eyed both about the difficulty of pulling off such a feat and the compromises required to do so. I argue that Brontë's uneasiness about the limitations of universal identificatory writing — writing designed to solicit identification from any reader at all — is apparent not only from the different representational choices she makes in *Shirley* and *Villette* but also from the text of *Jane Eyre* itself. That is, even as Brontë succeeds in figuring an incredibly powerful and pleasurable identification in *Jane Eyre*, the novel bears the traces of her anxiety over its limitations — most notably, its uncritical celebration of individual agency, its suppression of specificity, and its vulnerability to appropriation. In *Shirley*, Brontë not only turns away from identification but further uses the heroine's inability to overcome her circumstances to mark the limits of the individualist politics of *Jane Eyre*. In *Villette*, Brontë returns to the risks and

pleasures of identifications but strikes a different balance between them in ways that more precisely reflect her ethical and political commitments. That is, Brontë engages in a riskier strategy of figuring intense and abstracted moments of identification that serve to portray the depth of her heroine's suffering without the creation of a spectacle that figures the reader as a spectator rather than an identificatory participant. The intensity of these abstracted yet highly identificatory moments, in which Lucy Snowe's pain becomes our own, underwrites the specificity and complexity of the novelistic world she inhabits. Further, while *Jane Eyre* repeatedly courts identification through the representation of Jane standing up for herself against those who wrong her, *Villette* refuses to limit the causes of Lucy's suffering to the actions of individuals. Through this refusal, the novel bodies a more systemic critique of gender-based harm, including a more sustained critique of the lack of employment opportunities available for women, as well as of unequal pay for equal work and of failures to pay working women a living wage.

The third chapter attends to the accidents and effacements that characterize George Eliot's engagements with identification. I begin by arguing that Eliot's invitation for readers to identify with Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* is issued by mistake. More specifically, Eliot miscalculates in failing to recognize the extent to which Maggie's subjection to the gendering by her family and friends will read as victimization, an insight into the fundamental violence at the heart of such 'girling.' Eliot's sensitivity to Maggie's pain is in tension with her novelistic project of promoting and extending readerly sympathy for a wide range of fictional figures. That is, readers do not sympathize with the other characters in the way Eliot intends because they are so intensely focused on Maggie. Strikingly, in the case of Tom Tulliver and the Dodsons, readers turn against them for the pain they have caused Maggie. Recognizing this distorting effect of identification on her ethical project, Eliot avoids inviting identification and the centering of attractive, desiring girls like Maggie throughout her middle novels. However, in *Middlemarch*, she returns to identification, this time on purpose. Eliot invites readers to identify with the desiring, unfairly constrained Dorothea Brooke in order to articulate her proto-feminist political critique. In so doing, she offsets the distorting effects of the identificatory logic through which Dorothea's narrative operates by combining her

plot with that of the *Middlemarchers*. The *Middlemarcher* plot works to advance not Eliot's political critique, but instead her ethical project of extending readerly fellow feeling across a large swath of people of different experiences. The genius of the novel, I suggest, is not (merely) that it promotes both of Eliot's conflicting projects simultaneously, but that it does so in ways that mask the different logics of the two plotlines. That is, Eliot disguises the extent to which Dorothea's narrative relies on identificatory logic, even as she capitalizes off of this identification's affective potency, as well as the pleasure it offers to readers. In these discussions of *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*, I take up critical accounts that assign an authorial identification with the heroine to Eliot herself. In so doing, I theorize authorial self-representation as a separate, more ambivalent relation than readerly identification.

In the final chapter, I consider Thomas Hardy's late-career turn toward identification. While Hardy begins his novelistic career with an ethical insistence on emphasizing the differences between the lives and concerns of the working-class rural communities he represents and those of his predominantly middle-class readership, he ends it by inviting readers to identify with the tragic working-class protagonist of his final novel. In Hardy's earlier "return of the native" novels, like *The Woodlanders* and *The Return of the Native*, Hardy explores the tensions and pressures at work when an educated, upwardly mobile young person returns to their rural community. Yet, he does not allow the emotional experience of that young person — who could have easily been presented as a figure of identification for his educated readership — to overshadow the experiences of the family and friends to whom they have returned. Indeed, the experiences of both the returner and the returned to are rendered with great complexity and treated with ambivalence in ways that encourage the reader to consider these complicated individuals and the multifaceted communities to which they belong from a distance. In his final novel, Hardy changes tactics, abandoning this commitment. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy invites readers to affectively connect with a protagonist who is relentlessly victimized by both the working-class community to which he belongs and the upper-class world he aspires to join. In so doing, Hardy encourages the kind of crude overwriting of the protagonist's life with the reader's own by under-determining his protagonist. Jude's flatness makes the kind of nuance

we see at work in *The Woodlanders* impossible. *Jude the Obscure* has long been celebrated for the compelling case it makes for reforms in educational access. However, the way in which this novel advances its project — that is, through an insistence on intimacy with the reader — necessarily entangles the desirability of reform with the deservedness and relatability of the character. Jude Fawley deserves better, in other words, because we can see ourselves in him. In this final chapter, I explore the limitations and legacies of Hardy's late work, where represented deservedness is figured as a prerequisite to political action and at the expense of Hardy's earlier commitment to representing diversity and complexity in rural working communities.

In a Coda, I consider the impact of Hardy's capitulation to unqualified identification and how the novel's reception as a modernist work might bear on our understanding of narratives that seek to limit identification to the Victorian period. In so doing, I ask: Are we as critical about identification's constitutive fantasy of sameness as they were? And what would it mean to bring the self-reflexivity and insight of these nineteenth-century novelists into our present moment?

CHAPTER 1: JANE AUSTEN'S IDENTIFICATORY EXPERIMENTS

Austen criticism has an identification problem. Or, perhaps, more precisely, I should say certain influential Austen critics have a problem with readerly identification. In *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, Marilyn Butler remarkably declares that “Jane Austen is not interested in impressions conveyed by subjective identification with a heroine” (228). Indeed, she further suggests that, to the extent modern readers form these subjective attachments, we are reading Jane Austen anachronistically: “The great nineteenth-century novelists changed the reader’s relationship to the consciousness of the central character, so that we are trained to involve ourselves more sympathetically than critically in the inward experience a novel has to offer” (166-67).¹⁴ In order to avoid misreading Austen’s novels, we “have to be cajoled” (presumably by Butler herself) to read beyond our affective responses “as a conscious exercise in historicism” (167). Yet, Butler cannot get rid of her own identificatory commitments so easily: they haunt her account of Austen’s novels as naturalized conservative propaganda. For instance, she claims that *Sense and Sensibility* fails to successfully impart its conduct book-like lesson against sensibility because “we tend to approach Marianne subjectively” (196). Interestingly, while Butler’s earlier statement implies that the responsibility not to approach characters subjectively resides with the reader, here Butler instead assigns the error to Austen, who lacks “control” over Marianne and “our responses to her” (196). Since Marianne’s identificatory pull is “in flat opposition to the author’s obvious intention,” Jane Austen’s “moral case remains unmade” (196). Elizabeth Bennet also troubles *Pride and Prejudice*’s conservatism because “the

¹⁴ Butler does not allow for the possibility that Austen is making an artistic intervention by strategically figuring and then deploying these affective relationships between reader and character. For Butler, Austen is a static data point that marks the before of “the great nineteenth-century novelists” but I read her instead as inaugurating the tradition — though I am less confident than Butler that other eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novelists were not also interested in inviting readers to approach their characters subjectively. See, for instance, Catherine Gallagher’s *Nobody’s Story*, which examines the ways in which Maria Edgeworth and Frances Burney sought “to encourage new forms of identification” through their fiction. (xviii; 203-327).

reader cannot help admiring Elizabeth's wit and sharing her lively and satirical vision" despite her "morally . . . defective outlook" (216-17). Here, too identificatory reading is taken for granted — "But, granted that the reader cannot identify himself either with Darcy or Jane, where is his alternative?" — and the error is again ascribed to Austen for leaving an "inadvertent impression" that undermines her project (217). While Marianne and Elizabeth compromise the moral cases of *Sense and Sensibility* and of *Pride and Prejudice* respectively by being too subjectively appealing, Fanny Price endangers the moral project of *Mansfield Park* through her "failure" to be "likeable," undermining the reader's "instinct to identify" with her (248). In Butler's counterintuitive account, then, Austen is uninterested in readerly identification, but her project is greatly compromised due to her own repeated failures to effectively court or resist it,¹⁵ even as her contemporary readers knew (and her modern readers should know) to ignore their own subjective responses in determining the meaning of the novels.

Butler is not the only Austen critic for whom readerly identification poses a problem. In D.A. Miller's *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style*, Miller's over-identificatory relationship with Austen, who he troublingly conflates with her narrator (particularly in *Emma*), causes him to lose the emotional distance necessary for critical analysis as he moves to *Persuasion* — a novel in which Austen's narrator no longer exerts the same identificatory pull.¹⁶ In response to losing this prized identificatory relationship, Miller

¹⁵ The sheer number of errors Butler ascribes to Austen suggests, at least to me, that Austen is not attempting to execute the conservative project Butler sets out for her. This possibility seems particularly strong in light of what D.A. Miller calls "the meager archivia" available regarding Austen's life (*Jane* n. 39, at 106). Butler, for instance, puts great emphasis on two prayers composed by Austen (which she dubiously combines) in arguing that Austen, "as a Christian, deplored" that "doctrine of complacency and self-sufficiency" for which Marianne "has stood" throughout "the first half of the novel" (189, citing Austen, *Minor* 453-54, 456). Such a heavy reliance on these prayers, where archival material is both so meager and so compromised (due to Austen's sister's destruction of much of her correspondence), seems misplaced and, moreover, distorts Butler's critical insights. In other words, having determined Austen's negative attitude toward Marianne from her prayers, Butler can only read the readers' positive response to Marianne as the result of an authorial mistake.

¹⁶ I would suggest more broadly that D.A. Miller's (over)identification with Austen leads him to over-write his concerns with the burden of personhood over Austen's own concerns, which I read as differing from one novel to the next. In so over-writing, Miller fails to properly attend to the specificity of Austen's novels. For instance, Miller writes that "what being a character in Austen means" is "to be slapped silly by a narration whose constant battering, however satisfying — or terrifying — to the reader, its recipient is kept from even noticing" (*Jane* 71). While this is perhaps an accurate description what it means to be Emma Woodhouse or even Catherine Morland, it seems a poor

lashes out, seeking to destroy any sense of lingering closeness to Austen through takedowns of her final completed novel and incomplete manuscript. These accounts of the novel read as both strangely bitter and disconcertedly misogynist. *Persuasion*'s narrator is, per Miller, not merely more like a person than their¹⁷ predecessors but specifically more like "an old maid" who "bristles with contempt" and "irritability" (69). The novel itself is described, not as a different kind of Austen novel but, disparagingly, as a "diary written in the third person" (73). *Persuasion* not only fails to contribute to Austen's project of "extraterritoriality," but also, quite remarkably, serves as "a retraction of her great world-historical achievement" (75). When Miller turns to Austen's manuscript of *Sanditon*, left uncompleted upon her death, he revels in "its bad writing" in a way that feels unserious in its nitpickery (81). For instance, Miller complains that the "Hilliers are said to reside . . . at the *bottom* of Sanditon Hill" and that "the two whites" of one particular sentence (the first pertaining to curtains, the second to dresses) "clash in a way that seems more negligent than deliberate" (89, Miller's emphasis). By the time Miller accuses Austen of having a "veritable fetish" for "the letter H," his reader might consider the possibility that the critic, assiduously tabulating H's, might be gratifying a fetish of his own (90). Indeed, we might accuse Miller, in the same terms he uses to accuse the letter H, of "failing to do [his] work by *overdoing* it" (91, Miller's emphasis).

Butler and Miller, however, are far from the only critics who struggle with Austen's engagements with readerly identification.¹⁸ And, perhaps, we need not be so hard upon them, considering that Austen's

fit for the experiences of Elizabeth Bennet or Elinor Dashwood, who are occasionally battered by the novelistic action but not by the narration itself.

¹⁷ I refer to Austen's narrator by the singular *they* pronoun to reflect the relative freedom of this impersonal figure from being gendered. I similarly use the singular *they* pronoun to refer to the narrator of Eliot's late work in Chapter 3.

¹⁸ For instance, Wayne Booth, too attached to critical distance to fall into identificatory relation even where explicitly invited to do so, misses out on the pleasures of *Persuasion*, which he declares (incorrectly, or at least overbroadly) to be a novel of "tedium" for readers (251). Harry Shaw, likewise, misreads the pivotal letter scene of *Persuasion* due to his failure to attend to the novel's identificatory pleasures. Shaw reads the letter as primarily providing readers with "a fantasy of achieving perfectly adequate articulation and communication," a fantasy, that is, which centers around the experience of Wentworth (127). Yet, the novel encourages us to imagine ourselves not in Wentworth's position, writing the perfect letter, but in Anne's position, receiving it. The fantasy offered by the letter is not of "perfectly adequate articulation" but of being desired by the person you most desire, a fantasy that is figured through our identification with Anne (127). Shaw's misreading here is all the more striking because he begins by recounting Adela

approach toward courting and resisting identification is remarkably complex and varies from novel to novel. Indeed, Austen's experimental stance toward identification makes it particularly difficult for critics who share the tendency, as Mary Favret puts it, "to homogenize her fiction (so that any one work stands in for all)" ("Raymond" 4).¹⁹ I argue that attending to readerly identification in Austen is critical not just because failing to do so can have a distorting effect on our critical work but also because Austen's novels advance and articulate their critiques through the courting or resisting of readers' affective responses, including readerly identification. In this chapter, I attend to the ways in which identification is figured and marshalled in Austen's final five completed novels, with a particular focus on *Mansfield Park*, which I argue breaks from identificatory structure of the earlier two novels and sets Austen down a path of bolder experimentation in *Emma* and *Persuasion*. Centering identificatory dynamics in our readings lights up Austen's political and ethical commitments and the ways in which they are bodied forth through a closely-calibrated oscillation of identificatory closeness and critical distance. Specifically, Austen figures and deploys our affective attachments to her characters in ways that serve to promote her commitments to materialist analysis — by which I mean analysis sensitive to dynamics of power and the pressure exerted by material circumstances — and critical reading.²⁰

Identificatory Alignment in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*

Pinch's account of her repeated re-readings of the letter scene (and the parts of the novel that precede it) during her adolescence. In Pinch's account, which focuses on the novel's attendance to sensory experience and absorption, these adolescent re-readings read as intimately connected to the romantic and erotic pleasures offered by the novel in general and by this scene in particular — pleasures on which Shaw's account strikingly misses out due to his failure to attend to identification in his analysis (Pinch 114).

¹⁹ Favret launches this particular criticism at Raymond Williams, who she argues uses Austen as "a touchstone" in a way that "leaves the novels untouched" ("Raymond" 4). Susan Fraiman makes a similar complaint about Edward Said's reading of *Mansfield Park*, which she argues "sacrificed" the novel's "particular complexity" in order to "offer Austen as exhibit A in the case for culture's endorsement of empire" (808).

²⁰ In excluding *Northanger Abbey* from this study, I do not mean to contribute to the critical tradition that characterizes this novel as less sophisticated or interesting than Austen's other novels. Rather, I exclude it only because readerly identification is both less of a driving force in the novel and is figured quite differently within it, due to what Susan Lanser calls the novel's more "overt authoriality" (63).

In *The One vs. the Many*, Alex Woloch describes the characterological dilemma of the novelist: “all characters are potentially overdelimited within the fictional world — and might disrupt the narrative if we pay them the attention they deserve” (13). In writing *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen sees this potential for disruption as a problem to solve. Specifically, she neutralizes this threat by aligning the narrative attention a character receives with their represented deservedness. This alignment of merit and attention leaves us focused on only those characters who are most interesting, most sensible, and most humorous. And indeed, rather than expecting readers to take this alignment for granted, Austen’s second and third novels take pains to show their work. In the first volume of each novel, the characters openly “jostle” for narrative space, as the narrator moves freely among characters, providing snippets into their interiority as their pleasure (Woloch 177). Only after the battle for attention is won by the most deserving character (our heroine) does the novel begin to situate us within the heroine’s perspective. This alignment of merit with narrative attention enables Austen to court readerly identification with her heroines with ease: the reader feels comfortable settling into a character who has so explicitly received the novel’s endorsement. By calibrating this move into the heroine’s consciousness precisely to the reader’s desire to be with her, Austen does not so much encourage the reader to enter into an identificatory relationship with the heroine as insist upon it, even as she also employs counter-identificatory strategies that encourage readers to maintain a slight critical distance within that relationship. Notably, these distancing strategies rely on our affective commitments to the non-heroine characters, which are marshalled in ways that make us desire space from the heroine. This slight distance, more effectively figured in *Pride and Prejudice* than in *Sense and Sensibility*, enables us to grasp the ways in which the politics of the novels differ slightly from those of their heroines: that is, the novels are more committed to (and better at performing) materialist analysis than the heroines themselves.

In the characterological jostle that begins *Sense and Sensibility*, some characters, like Poor Margaret, lose out early: “Margaret, the other sister, . . . had already imbibed a good deal of Marianne’s romance, without having much of her sense, she did not, at thirteen, bid fair to equal her sisters at a more advanced

period of life” (9). With this single sentence, the narrator has effectively dismissed Margaret from our notice; not sensible enough to tempt *us*, she is relegated to helping along her sisters’ courtship plots. In reading *Sense and Sensibility*, we quickly come to realize that nearly everyone in the small cast of characters — excepting Mrs. Dashwood, her daughters, and her daughters’ respective love interests — is ridiculous (Mrs. Jennings, Sir John Middleton, Nancy Steele, Charlotte Palmer), selfish (Mr. John Dashwood, Lady Middleton, Lucy Steele, Mrs. Ferrars), or a combination of the two (Fanny Dashwood, Robert Ferrars). These minor characters are so unworthy of our attention that we, like Marianne and Elinor, feel that we see too much of them. Austen quickly identifies Elinor and Marianne as the characters who most deserve our attention, and the narrator goes on to provide significant insight into each sister throughout the first volume. The second volume, however, places us firmly in Elinor’s perspective, where we remain until the narrator takes back the reins at the novel’s conclusion. At the moment of its occurrence, this move into Elinor’s mind feels so right to us that it may not even register as a change. While we feel for Marianne after Willoughby’s departure in chapter fifteen, by the time the transition takes place seven chapters later, we have eyes only for Elinor, who has just been informed by Lucy Steele of her engagement to Edward Ferrars. That the novel is giving us exactly what we want (more Elinor) when we want it (at her moment of crisis) eases this transition from split into unified focalization. Indeed, this transition into Elinor’s consciousness is so seamless, some critics understandably characterize the novel as entirely focalized through Elinor.²¹

Though the transition itself works well, the focalization begins to chafe as the narrative proceeds. We start the volume more interested in Elinor, but Marianne’s heartbreak soon takes precedence. Like Elinor, we are worried about Marianne after Willoughby’s betrayal, yet, accustomed to the more direct access to Marianne’s thoughts, we wish for more than Elinor’s worried thoughts can give to us. We may even begin to feel that, like Colonel Brandon, we have come to the novel “to look at Marianne and talk to

²¹ See e.g., Butler: “the entire action [of *Sense and Sensibility*] is refracted through Elinor’s consciousness” (190); Favret: “[Elinor’s] point of view controls the story” (*Romantic* 145).

Elinor” (160). As Marilyn Butler notes, it is difficult for us “to accept the way consciousness is presented in the novel” (196). Yet, though Butler properly diagnoses the novel’s problem, she misidentifies its effect, which, as noted above, she believes to be an undermining of the novel’s conservative politics, due to our subjective attachment to Marianne. That is, in Butler’s account the novel dramatizes a battle between Elinor’s sense and Marianne’s sensibility in the manner of a naturalized conduct book (though one might presume in that case that Austen or her publisher would have thought to title the book Butler describes as *Sense or Sensibility*). In my reading, however, the novel’s political commitments are bodied forth through our subjective attachment to both sisters, which draws our attention to their social precarity rather than the individualized choices. Indeed, the novel de-emphasizes of the sisters’ agency through its doubled plot structure, which enables us to see how little either Marianne or Elinor can protect themselves by “good” behavior.²² Elinor may quibble with Marianne’s decision to correspond with Willoughby without a positive engagement but declining to correspond with Edward Ferrars does nothing to protect Elinor from her own heartbreak. The novel encourages readers to come to this insight, to which neither Elinor nor Marianne comes within the space of the novel, specifically by encouraging the reader to pull back from Elinor’s understanding of events in its final pages. The ending, in which the narrator consciously uncouples from Elinor’s perspective, invites us to take distance from Elinor’s judgment both through a structural shift back to narrative summary and by having Elinor’s desire for Marianne to marry Colonel Brandon far exceed our own (and, troublingly, that of Marianne). Despite the narrator’s assurance of the second couple’s eventual happiness, our sense of Marianne as being pushed by her family into this marriage prematurely (“what could she do?”) lingers, especially considering her husband only receives the love of her “whole heart” at some point after their wedding (352). By my account, then, our unmet desire to be with Marianne prior to the conclusion of the novel does not compromise the novel’s political vision, which depends on our attachment to both sisters and our investment in what happens to them, but its aesthetic

²² See Johnson: “What is at stake [in the novel] is not propriety but survival” (50).

success: the novel has taken something desirable (Marianne's perspective) away from us without justification. This failure to justify our focus on Elinor's consciousness relative to that of her sister, I would contend, is what Austen seeks to remedy in *Pride and Prejudice*.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen reworks what Woloch calls her "character-system" only slightly. Most importantly for our purposes, she recalibrates the battle for our narrative attention²³ and develops new strategies for inviting both identification and critical distance. Specifically, in the initial "jostle" for narrative attention, Elizabeth Bennet dominates over everyone else in the novel, including her most sensible sister, correcting the primary error of *Sense and Sensibility*. Indeed, Elizabeth overshadows Jane from their first represented conversation, in which the two sisters discuss their impressions of Mr. Bingley:

"[Mr. Bingley] is just what a young man ought to be," said [Jane], "sensible, good-humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manners! — so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!"

"He is also handsome," replied Elizabeth, "which a young man ought likewise to be, if he possibly can. His character is thereby complete."

"I was very much flattered by his asking me to dance a second time. I did not expect such a compliment."

"Did not you? *I* did for you. But that is one great difference between us. Compliments always take *you* by surprise, and *me* never. What could be more natural than his asking you again? He could not help seeing that you were about five times as pretty as every other woman in the room. No thanks to his gallantry for that. Well, he certainly is very agreeable, and I give you leave to like him. You have liked many a stupider person."

"Dear Lizzy!" (16)

In this passage, Jane's earnestness is endearing, but it is Elizabeth's wit, with its unexpected turns ("No thanks to his gallantry for that . . . You have liked many a stupider person") that catches and holds our attention. Here, we find not only a clear winner of the battle over narrative attention — what we were missing in *Sense and Sensibility* — but also a change in the way humor is marshalled in the narrative. While the Dashwood women operate like a comedy troupe — competitively building off one another's jokes

²³ The comparative mechanism on which Austen's characterization rests (which Alex Woloch discusses in greater detail than I will go into here) has become more ruthless in *Pride and Prejudice*, even as it now allows for finer gradations. For instance, while in *Sense and Sensibility*, the machinery of the novel separates the two equally sensible and funny heroines from their one lesser sister, here the novel works to separate one funny and sensible heroine from her four sisters, whose subordinate claims on our attention themselves vary in degree from Jane (sensible though not funny) and Lydia (funny though not sensible) to Mary (funny but not on purpose) and Kitty (none). Woloch persuasively argues that Kitty represents the problem of surplus itself (119).

about Colonel Brandon's flannel waistcoat — Elizabeth is satisfied with a straight man (Jane, with her lightly scandalized, "Dear Lizzy!") (16). From this early exchange, we already understand Elizabeth's pull on our attention, unlike Elinor's, will not be jeopardized by her favorite sister. Indeed, while our desire to be with Elinor was contingent upon our interest in her courtship plot relative to that of her sister at any given moment, our desire to be with Elizabeth is not plot-dependent. Even when Jane is jilted, we would still rather be with Elizabeth as she thinks of Jane than with Jane herself. Because we consistently desire more of and from Elizabeth, the novel's singular and ever-deepening commitment to her consciousness never rankles in the same way as *Sense and Sensibility*'s commitment to Elinor's perspective.

Just as Austen more effectively figures the heroine's identificatory pull in *Pride and Prejudice* by more fully justifying the heroine's centrality, she also improves the way in which she encourages the reader to maintain critical distance by introducing a misalignment between our desires and those of Elizabeth in the first volume. In *Sense and Sensibility*, we are only encouraged to step back from Elinor in the conclusion; for many readers, this affordance of critical distance may be too little, too late. Specifically, in order to realize the import of the double plot structure, we must reconsider the events of the novel from our new position outside of Elinor, a step that surely not every reader can be trusted to undertake. In *Pride and Prejudice*, however, we are encouraged to maintain a slight critical distance from Elizabeth Bennet throughout the second and third volume, enabling us to see the ways in which the novel's positions differ from those of Elizabeth as the narrative unfolds.

Austen creates this strategic misalignment in our desires and those of Elizabeth through the character of Charlotte Lucas. In Woloch's account, Charlotte Lucas is "the most interesting" minor character in the novel because she problematizes our understanding of characters who "bear only a functional relationship to the protagonist" by both exemplifying a "helper" character in volume one and exceeding it through her decision to marry Mr. Collins (89). Woloch focuses on Charlotte's humanness and, in particular, on how her enduring emotional hold on Elizabeth prevents Elizabeth from fully cutting her off. In so focusing, Woloch applies much needed pressure on readings that reduce Charlotte to an

embodiment of the realist viewpoint she espouses — a viewpoint that the novel excises or contains through Charlotte's own marginalization (90). I find Woloch's insistence that we see Charlotte as more than a structure either for an opposing but incorrect viewpoint (in what he calls the "traditional reading") or for a veiled critique (in the "deconstructive reading") to be critical (90). What I would add to his analysis is a greater attendance to *how* Charlotte becomes marginalized in the novel. Like Jane, Charlotte must lose to Elizabeth in the battle for our attention, yet she notably puts up a much better fight. Charlotte's liveliness pushes Elizabeth's own to new heights. For instance, at the Lucas party, Elizabeth remarks to her friend that Mr. Darcy has been, rather unaccountably, listening in on her conversations with others. Charlotte responds not by offering a sympathetic ear, as we might expect of Jane, but rather by "provoking" her friend to ask Mr. Darcy about it upon his approach, even though he seemed to have "no intention of speaking" to them (25). Charlotte brings Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth together in lively conversation, which she then further enlivens by teasing Elizabeth into an "easy and unaffected" musical performance (25). Though Elizabeth's wit ultimately triumphs over that of Charlotte ("You are a very strange creature by way of a friend!"), we cannot leave such a skillful display by Charlotte without a desire to see more of her (25). As "a sensible, intelligent young woman of twenty-seven," who shares our preference for Elizabeth, Charlotte seems to make a more suitable companion for Elizabeth (and for us) than the earnest Jane (19). Indeed, our early preference for Charlotte over Jane foreshadows our preference for Darcy over Wickham: we prefer Elizabeth to be with a partner who spars over one who merely agrees. Yet, after her acceptance of Mr. Collins's proposal, Charlotte — who had previously been a key interlocuter for Elizabeth — falls out of favor. Notably, this marginalization is spearheaded, not by the narrator, but by Elizabeth herself, who "felt persuaded that no real confidence could ever subsist between them again" and whose "disappointment in Charlotte made her turn with fonder regard to her sister" (125). Interestingly, while Elizabeth's actions are generally either supported by the novel or addressed as mistakes within its pages, her (mis)treatment of Charlotte received neither novelistic endorsement nor correction. In cutting off Charlotte, Elizabeth compromises her own identificatory pull by denying us the time with Charlotte against

our wishes and by exemplifying the risks of over-identification, making her into a sort of cautionary tale for the reader.

Strikingly, in misjudging Charlotte's actions in accepting Mr. Collins, Elizabeth falls into a classic pitfall of identificatory relation: she overwrites Charlotte's circumstances and preferences with her own.²⁴ In accepting Mr. Collins, Charlotte disrupts the narrative that Elizabeth has constructed about their similarity: "The possibility of Mr. Collins's fancying himself in love with her friend had once occurred to Elizabeth within the last day or two; but that Charlotte could encourage him seemed almost as far from possibility as she could encourage him herself" (122). After the initial shock, Elizabeth acknowledges that "Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own" (123). And yet, Elizabeth cannot forgive her. Indeed, the shock of this disruption in her narrative closes Elizabeth off to Jane's arguments on Charlotte's behalf:

"My dear Lizzy, do not give way to such feelings as these . . . You do not make allowance enough for difference of situation and temper. Consider Mr. Collins's respectability, and Charlotte's steady, prudent character. Remember that she is one of a large family; that as to fortune, it is a most eligible match; and be ready to believe, for everybody's sake, that she may feel something like regard and esteem for our cousin."

"To oblige you, I would try to believe almost anything, but no one else could be benefited by such a belief as this; for were I persuaded that Charlotte had any regard for him, I should only think worse of her understanding than I now do of her heart . . . You shall not defend her, though it is Charlotte Lucas. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger security for happiness." (133)

Here, Jane is, to quote Butler, "surely too kind" in imagining Charlotte might feel anything "like regard and esteem" for Mr. Collins (211). Yet, Jane calls Elizabeth's (and our) attention not only to differences in "temper" but also to differences in "situation." Specifically, Charlotte, to take up the stark terms of her 2005 film adaptation counterpart, is "twenty-seven-years old," has "no money and no prospects," is

²⁴ In making this connection, I do not mean to imply that identificatory relationships between two people, or between two characters, work in the same manner as those between a reader and a character. I do wish to suggest that all identificatory relationships carry the risks of over-identification and, in particular, the risk of over-writing the other's concerns and circumstances with one's own.

“already a burden to her parents,” and is “frightened” (Wright 55:31-41).²⁵ In the novel, both Jane and the narrator take Charlotte’s “large family” and lack of “fortune” seriously. Indeed, the narrator dutifully reports that the Lucas siblings believe their prospects to be materially improved by Charlotte’s impending marriage: her brothers “were relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte’s dying an old maid,” and her younger sisters “formed hopes of *coming out* earlier a year or two sooner than they might otherwise have done” (120). While Elizabeth understandably dismisses Jane’s belief in Charlotte’s regard for Mr. Collins, she ignores Jane’s more compelling argument about the evils of Charlotte’s situation by issuing a blanket prohibition: “You shall not defend her, though it is Charlotte Lucas.” Importantly, Elizabeth’s denial of our desire for more of Charlotte happens within the first volume, where Elizabeth’s perspective, though favored, does not yet dominate. This moment of discord, I suggest, invites us to take just a slight distance from our heroine, space to consider the possibility of a gap between Elizabeth’s politics, which view Charlotte’s marriage as unprincipled and mercenary, and those of the novel which, as in *Sense and Sensibility*, take seriously the pressure exerted by material circumstances. This invitation for critical distance extends through the novel, even as the action is filtered through Elizabeth, for her offense continues: True to her word, Elizabeth does not let Charlotte back into her confidence during her time at Rosings and, even more

²⁵ We might see evidence of Charlotte Lucas’s enduring appeal in her film character’s second life on social media. As of the time of writing, eighteen years after the release of Wright’s 2005 adaptation, posting a still or clip of the moment in which Charlotte expresses her concerns is a popular way to announce a twenty-seventh birthday, to lament a move into the house of one’s parents, or to express anxiety over the state of one’s personal life or career relative to those of one’s peers. The escalating precarity of the current moment has perhaps increased Charlotte’s readerly appeal. In a recent essay, “Love Under these Conditions,” Erin A. Spampinato suggests that her experiences seeking employment within the “broken” academic job market have turned her from an Elizabeth Bennet into a Charlotte Lucas.



(Wright, 55:41)

remarkably, does not extend her an invitation to Pemberley after her marriage.²⁶ While Woloch draws our attention to the subjective hold Charlotte has over Elizabeth, I want to focus attention on the subjective hold Charlotte has on the reader. Indeed through her readerly appeal, Charlotte, though always exceeding the critique she embodies, does body forth critique on multiple fronts. Specifically, that we want more *for* Charlotte than what she receives, or could reasonably hope to receive by refusing Mr. Collins, is a critique of the society that fails to accommodate her;²⁷ that we want more *of* Charlotte than we receive is a critique of Elizabeth, whose failure to attend to the differences between her own situation and that of Charlotte leads to Charlotte's unjust marginalization. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen thus addresses the flaws of *Sense and Sensibility* by more precisely aligning narrative dessert and attention through a more rigorous separation between the sisters at the outset and by inviting readerly distance in a more sustained, evenly distributed way through her treatment of Charlotte Lucas, whose mistreatment by Elizabeth itself thematizes the perils of a lack of critical distance. Having effectively eliminated the threat of characterological disruption through the perfection of her character-system, I suggest, Austen, in turning to her next project, begins to experiment with strategically permitting this disruptive potential to seep back into the novel.

A Conscious Uncoupling in *Mansfield Park*

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen playfully offers us an unexpected protagonist: “No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine” (5). Catherine is the daughter of parents neither “neglected, or poor,” with a mother who failed to do Catherine the courtesy of dying during the course of her birth, “as any body might expect” (5). Austen's satirical beginning

²⁶ While Wickham is banned from Pemberley, Charlotte, who eagerly extended an invitation to Elizabeth upon her own marriage, is merely forgotten. This is a remarkable omission given that the Darcys' guests include, amongst others, Miss Bingley, Lady Catherine, and Lydia.

²⁷ Like Woloch, I do not read Charlotte as embodying, as Mary Poovey suggests, a critique of the novel's value system (Woloch 96; Poovey 229). Rather, I maintain that the novel's value system already takes into account of our attachment to Charlotte, and the pressure her effacement in the novel places on our understanding of her society and on our relationship to Elizabeth.

distinguishes her realist heroine from her sentimental and Gothic counterparts, but it also suggests the possibility of a mismatch between our attention, which is focused exclusively on Catherine from the start, and her right to it, which has yet to be determined. This threatened mismatch of attention and dessert never really comes to fruition — like Henry Tilney, we find we cannot resist Catherine’s charm once we take the time to notice it. Yet, the mismatch seems to have retained appeal for Austen, who, I argue, returns to it in designing her character-system for *Mansfield Park*. Critics generally agree that *Mansfield Park* represents a break from *Pride and Prejudice*, though their accounts of the break itself vary. Butler suggests the break is topical in nature, spurred on by Austen’s alleged immersion in evangelicalism (242); Johnson suggests the break is primarily tonal, as “Austen did not want to write another ‘rather too light, and bright, and sparkling’ novel” (94, quoting Letter to Cassandra Austen, 4 Feb. 1813). Lionel Trilling suggests the break is characterological: Austen breaks from *Pride and Prejudice* by separating moral merit and narrative interest, which had been united in Elizabeth Bennet, into the characters of Fanny Price (moral merit) and Mary Crawford (narrative interest) (304). I agree with Trilling that the break centers around a change in Austen’s figuration of her character-system, though I do not think this change works in quite the way he describes. In Trilling’s account, Austen is advancing an argument that style like that of Mary Crawford, though compelling, is not ethically important and thus must be subordinated in the character-system to real merit like that of Fanny Price. Contra Trilling, I argue that Mary Crawford wins the first volume battle for narrative attention *both* by being a most attractive character and by espousing a more nuanced and appropriate approach to ethics than Fanny Price. Specifically, I suggest Mary Crawford repeatedly performs the type of careful materialist analysis that Elizabeth Bennet neglects in her treatment of Charlotte Lucas and that Austen invites the reader to perform for herself in *Sense and Sensibility*. The break from *Pride and Prejudice* is not the decoupling of interest and merit but rather the decoupling of heroic form (which Fanny receives) and heroic dessert (which belongs to Mary). In this way, I read Austen’s self-proclaimed turn toward “ordination” not as a content instruction to take Edmund’s profession plotline seriously (Trilling’s argument) but instead as a commentary on the structure of the novel itself (298, quoting

Letter to Cassandra Austen, 29 Jan. 1813). In other words, the question “what if narrative attention and heroic merit were divorced?” might instead be phrased “what if heroic centrality were ordained rather than earned?” Through this bold decoupling of merit from attention, Austen destabilizes the way meaning is communicated in her novels. No longer can the reader rely on a minimally-critical affective identification with the heroine to grasp the novel; rather, the reader must now engage in the kind of critical reading modeled by Elizabeth Bennet in her treatment of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham in order to meaningfully grasp the novel’s critique.

Mansfield Park nominally has the same formal structure as *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*: a first volume, in which the narrator offers a kaleidoscopic account of the novelistic action and moves easily between the perspectives of various characters; a second and a third volume where the reader is situated primarily within the perspective of the heroine; and a conclusion, in which the narrator takes us out of the heroine’s perspective in order to tie up loose ends. What is different about *Mansfield Park* is that the character who wins the represented competition for our attention — Mary Crawford — is not awarded the formal trappings of a heroine, which are instead afforded to the unlikeable Fanny Price.²⁸ Our transition into Fanny’s consciousness rankles. As Butler notes, “after the brilliant first volume . . . the second and third volume arouse our resistance” (245). Butler, committed to her predetermined understanding of *Mansfield Park* as a naturalized fable of Christian endurance bodied forth by Fanny, locates this resistance in mistakes made by Austen: first, Austen’s chosen structure fails because Fanny, as a Christian exemplar, cannot show the kind of individuality or susceptibility to temptation to hold our

²⁸ While Trilling and Butler both suggest that dislike of Fanny is a particularly modern phenomenon, even Austen’s early readers found Fanny difficult to love, as evidenced by the reviews of friends and family Austen collected in “Opinions in *Mansfield Park*” (Trilling 296; Butler 248). Readers and critics alike have long been taken with the boldness of Austen’s own mother in declaring her daughter’s heroine “insipid” (and with the apparent thickness of Austen’s skin in recording this response for posterity). Yet, I want to suggest this “opinion” is not quite the insult to Austen’s craft it might appear to be, in light of Austen’s identificatory experimentation in *Mansfield Park*. As Katie Gemmill notes Austen tends to juxtapose her family and friends’ opposing views of her characters (1119). Gemmill suggests Austen does this in order to gesture at “their arbitrariness and perhaps even their insignificance” (1119). Yet, in Austen’s careful collection of her readers’ conflicting emotional responses to her characters, I see the desire not to master her critics, but to determine the results of her experiment.

attention (346); second, Austen tries to make Fanny particularly “more appealing” by making her feeble²⁹ and immature but the attempt fails because people do not, in fact, tend to like these qualities (248). My argument, which does not read *Mansfield Park* as a conservative novel but instead as one committed to an ethics rooted in materialist analysis, locates our resistance in Fanny’s own lack of merit, both in terms of holding our interest and in terms of being a good reader — a prerequisite for being an ethical person for Austen. Thus, Fanny’s lack of appeal is not a miscalculation but a strategic move on Austen’s part to invite the reader to make use of the very critical reading skills Fanny lacks.

That Austen intends for us to be, to quote her nephew George Knight, “interested in nobody but Mary Crawford” is made apparent early on in the novel (“Opinions”). Specifically, *Mansfield Park* begins with a series of false starts. The novel first seems to mirror the opening of *Sense and Sensibility*, throwing us into a tangle of relations only to extricate us for the inciting incident of the novel: the forced removal of the heroine from her home. Indeed, the narrator does provide us with several scenes of little Fanny Price’s arrival to Mansfield Park, which work to marshal our sympathy on her behalf. Yet, after less than a single chapter focused on Fanny Price’s childhood trials, we unexpectedly skip ahead five years to the death of Mr. Norris and to the threat of a second forced removal for Fanny, this time to Mrs. Norris’s home. At first, this second chapter seems to be the true start of the novel: the heroine is now of marriable age, and something unexpected has occurred to disrupt the status of the narrative. Yet, again, the novel fails to begin in earnest. The threatened removal is avoided and, after the Grants take over the Parsonage, what D.A. Miller calls “the narratable” is again paused as “everything at Mansfield went on for some time as usual”

²⁹ In a recent article, Ula Klein argues that Fanny Price should be read as “a disabled heroine.” I agree with Klein that Fanny’s “physical weakness” does not serve to make her less likeable but rather lights up the abuse she suffers at the hands of the Bertrams, including Edmund (582). However, I would like to push back on the way in which Klein reads Fanny’s morality and interiority through Fanny’s “frailty” (590). In Klein’s account, attending to Fanny’s “embodied disability” allows us to see that “the generalized notion of Fanny as a woman of limited imagination and possibilities is radically incorrect” (592). Yet, I would argue that Fanny is a heroine with both a (sensitively-portrayed) disability and, unrelatedly, a “limited imagination”; that the novel represents Fanny in ways that at once “probe the logics of ableism” at work in *Mansfield Park* and lay bare the inadequacies of Fanny’s morally-simplistic viewpoint (581).

(*Narrative* ix, *MP* 30). Indeed, the notable events of the three years that follow — Sir Thomas’s departure, Edmund’s acquisition of a mare for Fanny, and Maria’s engagement to Mr. Rushworth — are summarized in a matter of paragraphs, as if the narrator’s (and our) interest in them cannot be properly sustained over time. The novelistic action begins only after the arrival of the Crawfords mid-way through the fourth chapter. Strikingly, upon Mary and Henry’s arrival, the narrator quickly ties up their summary (“Such was the state of affairs . . .”) in order to enter into a more scenic mode of narration — one attentive to the unfolding of events in narratable space and time (38). The inciting event of the novel is thus not Fanny Price’s forced removal to Mansfield Park but Mary Crawford’s forced removal to its parsonage.

Through this series of false starts, Austen both delays the characterological competition for attention and limits its possible winners. Prior to the arrival of the Crawfords, the narrator implies through their representational choice that no one is worthy of their, or our, attention, even little Fanny Price who insists on “shrinking from [our] notice” (13). And, after their entrance, the Crawfords easily retain their predetermined hold on the narrative, amusing us with their lively conversations and introducing new and exciting dynamics into the previously static world of the novel. Which Bertram sister will Henry prefer? Which Bertram brother should Mary marry? How will the previously-allied Bertram sisters manage competing against one another for Henry’s attention? What will happen with Maria Bertram’s engagement to Mr. Rushworth? Mary’s wit in particular dazzles. Like Elizabeth Bennet, who amuses her friends with a lively retelling of Darcy’s insult, Mary has a talent for converting embarrassing incidents — like the farmers’ refusal to help her to move her harp — into *material*. Mary’s creativity seems to exceed even that of her heroic predecessors, as she adds to Elinor’s responsive quickness and Elizabeth’s humorous anecdotes the ability to invent scenes out of whole cloth, as she deftly demonstrates in her sketch of the “Mrs. Eleanors” and “Mrs. Bridgets” of Sotherton chapel (82). Moreover, D.A. Miller astutely notes, Mary’s humor (unlike that of Elizabeth or Elinor) seems to reach beyond the characterological field to infiltrate the discourse of the narrator (*Narrative* 28). For instance, in describing Mary’s impressions of the Bertram brothers, the narrator notes, “She had felt an early presentiment that she *should* like the eldest best. She knew it was her

way” (Austen 45, Austen’s emphasis). As Miller recounts, the narrator’s “she knew” leaves the striking impression that Mary is somehow gamely in on the joke, even though it is at her expense (*Narrative* 28).³⁰

In the excitement of the new arrivals, Fanny Price gets lost in the shuffle, falling out of the narrator’s (and the reader’s) view. It is true that Austen strategically limits our exposure to the heroine in the early chapters of both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Never before, however, has a heroine disappeared from both the action of the narrative and from the thoughts of the other characters to such an extent as in *Mansfield Park*. Strikingly, the usually reticent narrator is forced to undertake uncharacteristically direct action in order to remind us of Fanny’s continued existence: “And Fanny, what was *she* doing and thinking all this while? and what was *her* opinion of the newcomers?” (46). The narrator’s interjection here, essentially “But what about Fanny?,” resembles George Eliot’s more famous narratorial intrusion, “But why always Dorothea?” in *Middlemarch*. And, indeed, both Austen’s and Eliot’s narratorial intrusions work similarly, not merely in marshalling our attention in the way desired by the narrator, but also in making us chafe against this direction. Just as Eliot’s readers balk at the proposition of turning away from the Dorothea’s “blooming” and “young skin” to focus on Casaubon’s “blinking eyes and white moles,” we resist leaving the charismatic Mary to attend to the fretful Fanny (and are relieved to find this mandated turn short-lived) (Eliot, *Middlemarch* 278). This unusual narrative intrusion also lights up the distinction between Fanny, on the one hand, and Elinor Dashwood and Elizabeth Bennet, on the other. At the start of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, we are left in a state of wanting more of our heroine. The narrator need not prompt us to ask, “And Elizabeth/Elinor, what was *she* doing and thinking

³⁰ Miller argues that those heroines who engage in “undisciplined novelism” (Emma, Elizabeth, Mary) are punished for it by the “stylothete” narrator (a privileged stand-in for Austen herself), because the narrator is a figure who “would tolerate no rivals” (*Narrative* 13, *Jane* 42). I want to suggest a different dynamic is at work. Miller’s schema depends on Austen creating some bad/reformed heroines, who engage novelism and some always-already good heroines (Elinor Dashwood, Anne Elliot), who lack novelistic ambition. However, I see not a separation of good heroines from bad heroines but rather novelistic creep, in which each successive heroine takes on more and more skills of the novelist. While Elinor is a skilled conversationalist, Elizabeth repackages experiences into anecdotes; Mary invents scenes; Emma plots; and Anne wields narrational insight. Miller suggests that Austen seeks self-representation only through her narrator, but it seems plausible to me that her heroines also represent aspects of her interiority through the (not consistently effaced) novelism of her heroines.

all this while?,” as the question inheres in the logic of the novel. It need not be pressed on us from the outside.

Fanny’s solicited impressions of the newcomers are unremarkable — she finds Mary pretty and Henry plain — and her “doing” and “thinking” during this time period remain (despite the promise implied by the narrator’s question) otherwise unrepresented. Notably, the narrator quickly transitions from Fanny’s impressions of Mary to Mary’s impression of Fanny:

The notice, which she excited herself, was to this effect. “I begin now to understand you all, except Miss Price,” said Miss Crawford, as she was walking with the Mr. Bertrams. “Pray, is she out, or is she not? I am puzzled. She dined at the Parsonage, with the rest of you, which seemed like being out; and yet she says so little, that I can hardly suppose she *is*.” (46)

The swiftness of this transition leaves the reader with the odd impression that Mary’s interest in Fanny is what reminds the narrator of their duty to attend to Fanny in the first place: that Mary, and Mary alone, is thinking of Fanny unprompted. Edmund answers Mary’s question with a strange declaration of ignorance: “I believe I know what you mean, but I will not undertake to answer the question. My cousin is grown up. She has the age and sense of a woman, but the outs and not outs are beyond me” (46). Tom then seizes an opportunity offered by Mary’s reply to swiftly move the topic of conversation away from his cousin. He guides the group in a lighthearted examination of the “dreadful scrape” in which he found himself because of his confusion over the status of a young woman in London (48). Edmund eagerly takes up the new topic by dutifully assigning moral error to such young women for “acting on motives of vanity” and to their respective mothers who had “given them wrong notions from the beginning” (48). Ultimately, it is Mary who must redirect the conversation back to Fanny and who, ultimately, declares herself “satisfied” that Fanny is “not out” because she has never attended a ball (49).

In Butler’s reading of this scene, Mary Crawford “brings up the question of whether Fanny is ‘out’ or ‘not out,’ so that Jane Austen can contrast two widely divergent ideals of young womanhood.” Specifically, “Edmund considers whether, out or not out, young women act with any real modesty; Mary, whether they act in accordance with convention” (223). Butler thus reads the scene as creating a binary between the disfavored social standards of Mary and the favored moral ones of Edmund, a formulation

that conveniently leaves out the conversation's most loquacious participant (Tom). I agree with Butler that this conversation calls attention to "the moral landscape of the various characters," yet I read these "moral landscapes" quite differently than she does (223). In her reading, Butler takes Edmund at his word that "the outs and the not-outs are beyond [him]," but we have reason not to take his equivocation at face value. That Edmund — the son of a baronet who has attended Eton and Oxford, is an active participant in the social scene of his own neighborhood, and has spent time in London — is apparently baffled by the social mores of the class to which he comfortably belongs should strike us as suspicious, especially in light of Austen's own assumption of readerly familiarity with "the outs and not outs" in *Pride and Prejudice*.³¹ Once we realize Edmund is playing up his own ignorance, we can also see the subsequent turn in conversation away from Fanny, which both brothers take up with great energy, for what it is: an avoidance tactic. That each brother takes up the subject on which he is most accustomed to pontificating — for Tom, the idle eldest brother, the social scene in London; for Edmund, the aspiring clergyman, the morals of wayward women — should perhaps not surprise us. What is a more natural response to discomfort than a return to one's comfort zone? Yet, this recognition leaves us with the question: why are Edmund and Tom so uncomfortable with Mary's question? Edmund and Tom cannot give Mary a direct answer, I suggest, because to do so would mean both facing and articulating their family's mistreatment of Fanny, which neither man is prepared to do on such short notice. In the isolated "family circle" of Mansfield Park, the Bertrams can act with impunity: they need satisfy only themselves that the actions they have undertaken to "make [Fanny] remember that she is not a *Miss Bertram*" are justified (146, 12). Mary Crawford's presence in that circle exerts a new (and uncomfortable) pressure on the family members to explain what is both socially and morally inexplicable. Specifically, Fanny does not fit into either the category of "out" or "not (yet) out" because the Bertrams have no plans for Fanny to ever be treated as a person entitled to a "share

³¹ In addition to the representation of Charlotte's sisters' hopes of coming out earlier in light of the engagement, *Pride and Prejudice* also includes a scene in which Lady Catherine and Elizabeth discuss "the outs and not outs" of the Bennet girls at length (120, 162).

in the festivities of the season” (34).³² Fanny is “grown up” but disallowed a social life (not to mention a romantic life) by the Bertrams, who treat her like a mix between an unpaid attendant and a disconcertingly young “old maid.” In asking this question, Mary, who has had her own experience with familial mistreatment, is not merely seeking an explanation for an oddity, but also consciously prodding these men to reconsider their role in something that seems wrong to her. In this conversation, the battle is not between Mary, with her adherence to social standards, and Edmund, with his adherence to ethical ones. Rather, the discussion stages a conflict between Mary, with her attentiveness to abuse, and the Bertrams, with their unwillingness to face their own complicity. Indeed, I argue that the latent effect of this very conversation is a material improvement in Fanny’s life. Strikingly, following this conversation, Edmund, after an initial misstep in which he commandeers Fanny’s horse for Mary’s use, begins to advocate for Fanny’s “share” in the family’s amusement, including by offering Fanny his own spot for the Sotherton excursion. This unprecedented action on Fanny’s behalf (which, unlike his previous acts of kindness, forces him to offer to give up something he desires) is rooted in his guilt over the mare but also in his new recognition that Fanny has been repeatedly denied the “gratification” of the kind of “pleasure” to which she should be entitled as a young woman (74). The inclusion of Fanny in the Sotherton scheme leads to her integration into the young people’s schemes, including a ball and, to Fanny’s great anxiety, the preparations of the play. Mary’s question thus is what ultimately enables Fanny to properly join the novelistic action.

Critics tend to treat “the Crawfords” as a unit, who readers either “fall for” (Graham 867) or learn to reject, as “citified stock figures” (Johnson 96) or, more dramatically “as Satan in the Garden of Eden”

³² Notably, this entitlement is not (or not precisely) class-based. Had she remained in Portsmouth, Fanny would perhaps not be entitled to participate in social outings like a tour of Sotherton or the specific balls and dinners attended by her cousins. Yet, she would still be permitted to join in on a version of these kinds of amusements within her own social world. This reality is highlighted by William’s inquiry to Sir Thomas about Fanny’s dancing (to which Sir Thomas cannot speak due to his niece’s social marginalization, which has taken place at his explicit request). Like Mary’s questioning of Tom and Edmund about Fanny’s “outness,” this uncomfortable question leads to a partial recognition of Fanny’s mistreatment and a subsequent effort to improve Fanny’s social life through her “coming out” ball.

(Butler 229). Peter Graham claims the Crawfords have a “rare emotional closeness” that is “unique,” even among Austen’s many close sibling pairings, due to their similar personalities (872). This Crawford conflation obscures important ethical differences between the two stylish siblings. While Mary spends her first days at Mansfield taking notice of Fanny and carefully calling attention to her mistreatment, Henry spends his beginning a particularly careless flirtation with both Miss Bertrams: “He did not want them to die of love; but with sense and temper which ought to have made him judge and feel better, he allowed himself great latitude on such points” (43). The novel paints a much less rosy picture of Mary’s life and of the relationship between the siblings than Graham and other suggests. That is, through its representation of Mary’s interest in the material circumstances of Fanny’s life, the novel invites the reader consider Mary’s own situation in a more rigorous manner. The novel’s treatment of Mary, in which the quite difficult material circumstances of her life are laid bare but not emphasized, prefigures the way Austen will handle Emma Woodhouse in ways that should inform our reading of both novels. Mary, we learn from her introduction, is a young person of fortune (twenty-thousand pounds) who has a difficult family life. Orphaned as a child, she was raised by a kind aunt and a “vicious” uncle, who after her aunt’s death “chose, instead of retaining his niece, to bring his mistress under his own roof” (39). Mary, forced from her home, asks her brother, “who had a good estate in Norfolk,” to take her in, only to find her request rejected (39). Instead, Henry, who does not want to be tied-down, forces his sister to “hazard herself among her other relations,” specifically, a half-sister she barely knows and a brother-in-law who is a stranger (39). Indeed, from her selfish brother, Mary is able only to secure for herself what she will later secure for Fanny Price: the promise he will convey her elsewhere should things get to be too bad. Even the light-hearted conversations between the three siblings over marriage hints at a darker dimension to Mary and Henry’s relationship. In hearing of Mrs. Grant’s plans to marry off Henry, Mary responds: “If you can persuade Henry to marry, you must have the address of a Frenchwoman . . . I have three very particular friends who have been all dying for him in their turn; and the pains which they, their mothers (very clever women), as well as my dear aunt and myself, have taken to reason, coax, or trick him into marrying, is inconceivable”

(41). This reply, with its humorous commentary on Mrs. Grant's "French" arts of persuasion and Mary's friends' "very clever" mothers, is light in tone, yet if Marianne Dashwood and Jane Bennet have taught us anything, it is not to take precisely the pain of this kind of abandonment lightly, even if these women did not come as close to literally "dying for" Henry as Marianne does for Willoughby. This pain caused by Henry seems to be particularly acute for Mary, who, faced with the limits of her own family circle, is shown to take her friendships particularly seriously. Mary experiences heartbreak upon hearing of her friend's unhappy marriages and feels for Mrs. Grant in her marriage to her "indolent, selfish *bon vivant*" of a brother-in-law, whose temper mars both her sister's enjoyment and her own (104). Mary's wit may make her troubles harder to detect, but, as the narrator reminds us, just because Mary treats something "as a joke" does not mean she fails "to think of it seriously" (40). Our attention is drawn to Mary not only by her style, which her careless brother shares, but by her substance, by her sense of justice and the way she feels for others.

Taking Mary's own experience with precarity seriously allows us to better understand her ethical commitments and the ways in which they differ from, and are superior to, those held by Fanny Price. Fanny is often considered to be as Austen's most moral heroine for her unwillingness to abandon her deeply-held principles by, for instance, taking a role in *Lovers Vow* or entering into a loveless marriage (Butler 222). Fanny's sense of morality is, in the words that Marilyn Butler uses to (incorrectly) characterize Austen's own morality, "preconceived and inflexible" (198). Specifically, Fanny has internalized certain standards of morality and propriety (which are troublingly conflated in her mind), primarily through the instruction she receives from Edmund. She uses these standards to direct her thoughts and actions. Her morality prioritizes deference to authority in almost all spheres, and she views an emphasis on material concerns like money as a sign of moral failure. Notably, Fanny views the policing not only of one's speech and actions but also of one's private feelings to be of utmost moral importance. Mary, in contrast, understands the necessity for considering material concerns and abusive power dynamics in her ethical considerations, which must be made on a case-by-case basis. To say that Mary takes each case on an

individualized basis is not to imply a relativism in her ethics but only to emphasize the kind of rigorous analysis and attention to detail that Fanny forgoes by mechanically applying “a rule” (404). In one telling instance, Mary, who does not feel she owes these careless men her silence, publicly jokes about both her uncle’s “vicious conduct” and her brother’s neglect, offending both Edmund and Fanny (39). While Edmund objects to Mary’s speech about her uncle as “indecorous,” that is, *wrong because made public*, Fanny characterizes it as “ungrateful,” that is, *wrong because felt* — wrong, in other words, even if it had remained unspoken (60). Indeed, Fanny’s belief in the moral importance of private feelings recurs throughout the novel: upon Sir Thomas’s departure, Fanny, like her cousins, feels immense relief, “but a more tender nature suggested that her feelings were ungrateful, and she really grieved because she could not grieve” (31); during the play rehearsals, Fanny enters into an unreciprocated identificatory relationship with the heartbroken Julia: “Fanny saw and pitied much of this in Julia . . . They were two solitary sufferers, or connected only by Fanny’s consciousness” (150); and, upon learning she is to be brought to Mansfield in the wake of Henry and Maria’s scandal, Fanny frets over “being exquisitely happy, while so many were miserable . . . she dreaded lest she should learn to be insensible of it” (411). Austen, I want to suggest, applies considerable pressures to Fanny’s belief in the moral import of her private feelings, as Fanny’s “moral actions” have no impact on the people around her. Sir Thomas is hurt neither by Fanny’s relief nor by her happiness, and Julia does not benefit from Fanny’s sympathy, as it takes on “no outward” expression (150). The futility of Fanny’s moral fretting can be compared directly to Mary’s ethical interventions, which focus upon instances where she might have a real impact: she prods the Bertram men about Fanny’s mistreatment; she consoles Fanny when she is ridiculed by Tom and Mrs. Norris; and, faced with her brother’s flirtations with the engaged Maria Bertram, she takes her concern not to Henry, over whom she has little influence, but to Mrs. Grant, who has the power to “send him off” before he causes real trouble (150). We might even read in Mary’s response to Mrs. Grant’s scandalized “Think of Mr. Rushworth!” as an articulation of her own moral philosophy: “You had better tell Miss Bertram to think of Mr. Rushworth. It may do *her* some good” (149). Mary has often been characterized as “amoral” or as a young woman

who, unlike Fanny, fails “to consider what the issues are in the first place,” but if we attend to Mary’s interventions and her history as presented in the first volume, we come to understand the contours of her action-oriented power-sensitive ethical program, which unlike Fanny’s fretting, has a material impact on those around her (Butler 104, Johnson 113). Indeed, between her stylish wit and careful ethical reasoning, Mary wins the battle for narrative attention staged over the course of the first volume; she is who many of us would choose to follow if given the power to choose, which Austen, of course, retains for herself.³³

The second volume, in which we move reluctantly into Fanny’s perspective, puts further pressure on Fanny’s heroic merit. From the start, the move into Fanny’s mind rankles, as our desires, which are explicitly put into words by the other characters, are rejected by Fanny out of hand. Like Edmund, we miss the “lively” evenings with the Crawfords and, like Henry, we long for the “bustle” of the play and wish Sir Thomas had not arrived quite so soon (183, 208). The validity of these complaints is summarily rejected by Fanny, who does not find the evenings with Sir Thomas “long” and feels that, in light of her uncle’s disapproval, the play “had gone quite far enough” (183, 209). This misalignment of desires creates the resistance to which Butler so astutely calls to our attention. Through we are *with* Fanny like we are *with* Elizabeth Bennet and Elinor Dashwood in terms of the narrative structure, the increased insight into the workings of Fanny’s mind does little to improve our impression of her. While Trilling locates the source of our dislike of Fanny in her unwavering virtue, I would place it instead in her lack of sense, which I believe to be critically underrated (296).³⁴ The second volume obliterates any sense we might have had of

³³ Many critics seem eager to disclaim their initial attraction to Mary Crawford. For instance, Trilling declares that “Mary Crawford is conceived — is calculated — to win the charmed admiration of any reader” but that Mary’s speeches “diminish in charm upon second reading,” revealing themselves (and Mary herself) to be marked by “insincerity” (297, 302). Trilling thus remarkably disclaims the ways in which he personally feels pulled to Mary both by disintegrating himself into the category of “any reader” and by tainting Austen with the charge of calculation, a word that itself reeks of “insincerity,” as if Mary has learned her tricks from her author. His claim about this latent charm-diminishing effect is similarly odd in its vagueness: “We begin to hear something disagreeable in [the speeches] intonation,” he tells us (302). How does Austen create this effect? Trilling uncharacteristically declines to provide an example of this “something disagreeable,” leaving the reader with the impression that it might be no more than an opportunistic revision designed to fit Mary into his reading of the novel based primarily on its ending.

³⁴ Notably, critics seem to take it for granted that because she is an Austen heroine, Fanny is sensible and intelligent. Even Claudia Johnson’s account, which is itself quite critical of Fanny, takes Fanny to be “perceptive” (113). But unlike in *Sense and Sensibility*, where Elinor’s and Marianne’s sense is declared as literary fact by the narrator, and *Pride*

Fanny as an astute observer or principled analyst of human behavior. Indeed, in an extraordinary moment, we break from Fanny's consciousness in order for Austen's narrator to excuse (and, in doing so, emphasize) Fanny's silliness in cherishing Edmund's perfunctory letter as "as a treasure beyond all her hopes" — a scene which prefigures Harriet Smith's presentation of her box of "*Most precious treasures*" (containing, among other things, a piece of "court-plaister" discarded by her beloved) to Emma Woodhouse both in its language and in the scorn it incites in the reader (*MP* 244, *E* 274). The other narrated incidents do little to unsettle our negative impression or excite our interest. Butler argues that the second volume drags because "the business of Crawford's necklace versus Edmund's chain as the right partner for William's cross is not only crude in its symbolism: it has little more than symbolism to recommend it" (246). But what Butler misses in her analysis is that both the "crudeness" of the symbolism and belaboring of the "business" originate with Fanny. For all of the critical hand-wringing over what Butler terms "Mary's deceitful effort to involve her with Henry by giving her the necklace," we are more likely to agree with Mary's amused "My dear child . . . what are you afraid of?" than with Fanny's agony over her choice (239). Fanny's fixation on these kinds of immaterial dilemmas betrays her lack of a proper sense of proportion.³⁵ And, strikingly, the scenes that most powerfully draw on our sympathy for Fanny — Fanny watches Edmund admire Mary riding Fanny's mare, Fanny is left alone at Sotherton while Edmund goes off with Mary, Fanny is abused by Tom Bertram and Mrs. Norris — are located in the first volume. Butler complains that Fanny's consciousness fails as "the medium through which the reader

and *Prejudice*, where Elizabeth's and Jane's sense is obvious to everyone who encounters them, Fanny Price's sense is vouched for only by Edmund, who "knew her to be clever" (22). Whether Edmund himself has a strong claim to sense is, at the very least, open for debate.

³⁵ We might read even Fanny's infamous reference to asking her uncle "about the slave-trade last night" (in a scene we do not see) as a joke at her expense: What question would a girl who spends an entire evening obsessing over necklace chains ask a plantation owner about the slave-trade? What does Edmund imagine she might ask in the follow-ups he encourages her to pursue? And what on earth does she mean when she says she feels "pleasure in his information" (184)? Despite the critical accounts of Fanny as a sensible girl, it is difficult for me to imagine Fanny, who earlier "grieved because she could not grieve," analyzing the major moral issue of her time with any success, especially as she gives up the attempt immediately for fear of showing up her cousins (31). For a reading of the novel's relation to abolition, see Patricia Matthew.

receives the novels” because, as an exemplar of evangelical Christianity, her “experience on a subjective level cannot be the matter at issue” (246, 247). I want to suggest instead that Austen sets up Fanny’s interior life to fail instead because Fanny’s concerns are simply too limited and her moral program too simplistic to hold our attention. This readerly resistance to Fanny that Austen courts in the second volume encourages us to take distance from Fanny in the third when we are offered an opportunity to do so.

Our view of Mary too suffers from being filtered through Fanny’s perspective. Mary’s attentiveness to materialist concerns takes on a less flattering valence when applied to her relationship with Edmund and her encouragement of Henry’s courtship of Fanny. Limited to what Fanny knows, we are left in the dark about Mary’s real intentions, of which the jealous Fanny tends to assume the worst. Though a motivated reader may find space to make a case for Mary in the second volume — that she is being practical in taking account what her everyday life would look like as Edmund’s wife, that she believes Henry marrying Fanny is the best outcome for both of them, that Edmund could end her waiting game at any point by proposing — it is a difficult case to make in light of Fanny’s observational advantage. Fanny can see the “expression in Miss Crawford’s eyes” that leads her to believe that Mary loaned her the necklace in bad faith, but we cannot see it for ourselves and thus cannot advance an alternate reading of Mary’s act (240). The structure of the third volume disrupts this dynamic between the reader and Fanny. At Portsmouth, Fanny, like us, must experience these other characters through their letters, which we can read for ourselves.

From the beginning of her time at Portsmouth, we are reminded that Fanny is not the most skilled analyst, even before she faces the challenge of interpreting a letter. Faced with a crass father, a neglectful mother, a cramped living space, and the “incessant noise” caused by her many siblings, Fanny responds by romanticizing her time at Mansfield, which she remembers (inaccurately) as a home where “every body had their due importance” and where “every body’s feelings were consulted” (363). Though we are perhaps relieved that Portsmouth does not drive Fanny into a loveless marriage, in accordance with Sir Thomas’s hopes, Fanny’s takeaway from her time away is nonetheless disappointing. Specifically, Fanny’s time at

Portsmouth offers her an opportunity to recognize the importance of material circumstances: rather than romanticizing Mansfield, Fanny might instead recognize that it is better to be neglected in the estate of a baronet than in a crowded house in Portsmouth. Indeed, the similarities in personality and disposition between Fanny's mother and Lady Bertram call out for a materialist analysis, which Fanny nonetheless leaves to the narrator to perform (362). That Fanny is presented with this opportunity to recognize the importance of material concerns and fails to take it, I suggest, primes the reader to diverge from her perspective. And Fanny's resistance to taking material concerns seriously encourages us to see Mary's hesitation in a new light. Though she is sometimes labeled a snob in the vein of an Emma Woodhouse or a Mary Musgrove, Mary Crawford is not concerned about losing precedence or "being first," concerns, in other words, that draw Austen's scorn. Rather, Mary is concerned with what her life would be like as Edmund's wife. Could she be happy in a country parsonage? Would she resent being separated from her friends, from London society, from the kind of life to which she is accustomed? Would she find the expectations that come with being the wife of a clergyman stifling? Mary Crawford's standard of living is not that of a Fanny Price or of a Jane Austen, but this discrepancy does not render Mary's questions frivolous nor her concerns mercenary. In light of Mary's worry that she will find herself wanting, like the first Mrs. Weston, at once to be the wife of Mr. Edmund Bertram and Miss Crawford of London, her waiting game looks like a practical strategy for securing herself the time she needs to think through a major life decision.

As Mary Favret notes, the letters Fanny receives "overwhelm" her, as they are "overloaded" with meaning (*Romantic* 137). Favret argues these letters register Austen's "suspicions" of the letter as a medium (*Romantic* 137). Yet, I maintain that Austen includes these letters in the third volume not to "overwhelm" the reader with interpretative possibilities, but rather to invite the reader to join in the game of interpretation. We have been reliant on Fanny's impressions and interpretations for hundreds of pages, but now we are offered limited instances in which Fanny's information matches ours exactly. We might come to our own mind about the letters, particularly those authored by Mary Crawford. Mary's first few

letters to Fanny at Portsmouth offer lighthearted insights into Mary's life in London: her continuing fascination with Edmund, her pleasures in the parties of London and the society of her friends, her discussions with her brother about Fanny, and her continued acquaintance with the Rushworths. In these letters, Mary curates anecdotes about their mutual acquaintance that she (mistakenly) believes will amuse Fanny in her isolation. Mary, who knows neither about Fanny's feelings for Edmund nor of Fanny's disapproval of her, does not succeed in pleasing Fanny, but her letters are nonetheless generous towards the young woman she hopes will be her sister-in-law.³⁶ Fanny's reception of them is considerably less so. While reading a letter in which Mary cheerfully recounts her friends' opinions of Edmund's good looks, Fanny becomes incensed, "The woman who could speak of him, and speak only of his appearance! What an unworthy attachment! To be deriving support from the commendations of Mrs. Fraser! She who had known him intimately half a year! Fanny was ashamed of her" (387).

We need not endorse Fanny's (over)reaction to Mary's letter, however. Indeed, we can already see the ways in which Fanny, eaten up with jealousy, is not a reliable reader of Mary's intentions. Fanny, however, takes no steps to repair her own reading process. Though she revisits her letters repeatedly while stuck at Portsmouth, she does not return to them with the eye of a critic. In this carelessness, Fanny differs from her heroic predecessor Elizabeth Bennet, who models good critical reading practices in *Pride and Prejudice*. Notably, upon first receiving the letter from Mr. Darcy, in which he details his involvement in the separation of Bingley and Jane and his dealings with Wickham, Elizabeth, like Fanny, reads "with a strong prejudice against everything he might say," yet, unlike Fanny, she does not stop there (198). Though after her first read, Elizabeth wishes "to discredit it entirely" and puts "it hastily away, protesting . . . that

³⁶ D.A. Miller argues that "Mary's letters come to be much less equivocal and (like those of Lady Susan) more positively wicked than her speeches and reported thoughts have ever been" (*Narrative* 83). Yet, with the possible exception of her letter inquiring about Tom's health, which is addressed later in this section, I see no evidence of wickedness. Mary's letters do not suit Fanny's priggish ideas of proper correspondence, but they strike me as an (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to make Fanny feel included, as if she is just another one of Mary's friends with whom she might joke and share superficial gossip. I read Mary as attempting to undo some of the damage of the Bertrams' abuse by writing to Fanny as if she were "a *Miss Bertram*" (11).

she would never look in it again,” she returns to the letter only “half a minute later” in order to embark on a “mortifying perusal” (199). To effect this “mortifying perusal,” she “commanded herself so far as to examine the meaning of every sentence” (199). She “read and re-read” until she could regard the circumstances described in the letter “with what she meant to be impartiality” (199). Afterwards, she places what she has read in the letter next to her own experience of the parties involved in order to determine the plausibility of the course of events the letter describes. In doing so, she reckons with the uncomfortable truths that support Darcy’s case: that Wickham’s stated intentions did not match his behavior; that Charlotte warned her Jane’s shyness might read as indifference. This reckoning is painful, but Elizabeth nonetheless goes through with it in order to discern the truth. Elizabeth, in short, shows us what it means to be an ethical reader: one who reads critically, even when doing so leads to knowledge that one would have preferred to avoid. Fanny Price puts herself through no such trouble.

Indeed, I argue that Fanny’s unwillingness or inability to read critically sets in motion the conclusion of the novel, just as much as Maria and Henry’s elopement. Specifically, I wish to turn to Fanny’s ungenerous and uncritical reading of Mary’s penultimate letter, which focuses on the state of Tom Bertram’s failing health (“The Tom Letter”). Notably, in the weeks prior to receiving this letter, Fanny has received both the aforementioned letter from Mary, in which Mary conveys Mrs. Fraser’s opinion of Edmund’s appearance, and a letter from Edmund himself, in which he agonizes over how to propose to Mary. Both of these letters, written in the time before Tom’s illness, convince Fanny that Mary and Edmund’s engagement is both inevitable and imminent. Of Mary, she thinks, “She would hesitate . . . but she would finally accept,” and of Edmund, “He will marry her, and be poor and miserable” (387, 393). Wholly convinced their engagement is impending, Fanny begins to read Mary’s letter, excerpted here:

I want to know the state of things at Mansfield Park, and you, no doubt, are perfectly able to give it. One should be a brute not to feel for the distress they are in; and from what I hear, poor Mr. Bertram has a bad chance of ultimate recovery. I thought little of his illness at first . . . but now it is confidently asserted that he is really in a decline, that the symptoms are most alarming, and that part of the family, at least, are aware of it. If it be so, I am sure you must be included in that part, that discerning part, and therefore entreat you to let me know how far I have been rightly informed. I need not say how rejoiced I shall be to hear there has been any mistake, but the report is so prevalent that I confess I cannot help trembling. To have such a fine young man cut off in

the flower of his days is most melancholy. Poor Sir Thomas will feel it dreadfully. I really am quite agitated on the subject. Fanny, Fanny, I see you smile and look cunning, but, upon my honour, I never bribed a physician in my life. Poor young man! If he is to die, there will be *two* poor young men less in the world; and with a fearless face and bold voice would I say to any one, that wealth and consequence could fall into no hands more deserving of them. It was a foolish precipitation last Christmas, but the evil of a few days may be blotted out in part. Varnish and gilding hide many stains. It will be but the loss of the Esquire after his name. With real affection, Fanny, like mine, more might be overlooked. Write to me by return of post, judge of my anxiety, and do not trifle with it. Tell me the real truth, as you have it from the fountainhead. And now, do not trouble yourself to be ashamed of either my feelings or your own. Believe me, they are not only natural, they are philanthropic and virtuous. I put it to your conscience, whether 'Sir Edmund' would not do more good with all the Bertram property than any other possible 'Sir.' . . . Do not you think Edmund would have been in town again long ago, but for this illness? — Yours ever, Mary. (402)

In this letter, Mary seeks information from Fanny about the “state” of Tom Bertram’s “decline.” Though she spends much of the letter expressing her concern for Tom (“Poor young man!”) and “trembling” for the Bertram family, the letter undergoes a jarring shift in tone as Mary transitions from her “agitated” state to her anticipation of Fanny’s “smile.” Her joke about the bribing of the physician perhaps crosses the line into inappropriateness, even for a more generous and less prudish reader than Fanny, given the seriousness of the circumstances. Yet, our objection to Mary’s tone is not a reason to avoid reading her words carefully or to assume the worst of her intentions. Indeed, the second half of the paragraph, with its veiled allusions to the past — “a foolish precipitation last Christmas” (Edmund’s ordination) — and tonal complexities — “Poor young man! If he is to die, there will be *two* poor young men less” — call out for close reading. Fanny, true to form, however, neglects to perform it. Rather, she jumps to conclusions, for which she cites no textual support, as if the meaning of the letter were perfectly clear. Fanny writes a response: “Her representation of her cousin’s state at this time was . . . such as she supposed would convey to the sanguine mind of her correspondent the hope of everything she was wishing for” (404). Fanny thus assigns a “hope” for Tom’s death to Mary, but Mary, though she acknowledges her interest in Tom’s prospects “with a fearless face and a bold voice,” does not go as far as Fanny suggests. From the narrator’s description of her response, we suspect Fanny is not merely reading Mary’s words but reading into them, an impulse she does not check by undergoing a “mortifying perusal” in order to determine “the meaning of every sentence” with “impartiality.” Notably, Mary’s letter, which owns that a marriage to a future Sir Edmund

would be more advantageous than one to a Mr. Edmund Bertram, is silent on what Mary will do if Tom recovers (other than to celebrate the good news). Thus, one might assume that Fanny's understanding as to the likelihood of the marriage should Edmund remain a second son would remain unchanged, if not strengthened by Mary's parting question about Edmund whereabouts.

Shortly after this letter is presented but under-analyzed by Fanny (if not by us), it takes a back seat to the news of the scandalous conduct of Henry Crawford and Maria Rushworth. Fanny is swiftly transported back to Mansfield, where she learns "all the particulars which had yet transpired," including an account, from Edmund himself, of Edmund and Mary's post-scandal interview (417). In Edmund's account of this meeting, Mary tried to discuss "the folly" of Maria and Henry, much to his horror: "To hear the woman whom — no harsher name than folly given! . . . No reluctance, no horror, no feminine, shall I say, no modest loathings? . . . Spoilt, spoilt!" (422). Mary then expressed anger toward everyone involved in the scandal and, ultimately, attempted to solicit the assistance of Edmund in her plan to pressure Henry into marrying Maria. The worldliness and practicality of this request from a frustrated sister accustomed to cleaning up her brother's messes further offended Edmund, which he let Mary know in no uncertain terms. After hearing his reprimand, Edmund recalls:

"She was astonished, exceedingly astonished — more than astonished. I saw her change countenance. She turned extremely red. I imagined I saw a mixture of many feelings: a great, though short struggle; half a wish of yielding to truths, half a sense of shame, but habit, habit carried it. She would have laughed if she could. It was a sort of laugh, as she answered, 'A pretty good lecture, upon my word. Was it part of your last sermon? At this rate you will soon reform everybody at Mansfield and Thornton Lacey; and when I hear of you next, it may be as a celebrated preacher in some great society of Methodists, or as a missionary into foreign parts.' She tried to speak carelessly, but she was not so careless as she wanted to appear. I only said in reply, that from my heart I wished her well, and earnestly hoped that she might soon learn to think more justly, and not owe the most valuable knowledge we could any of us acquire, the knowledge of ourselves and of our duty, to the lessons of affliction, and immediately left the room. I had gone a few steps, Fanny, when I heard the door open behind me. 'Mr. Bertram,' said she. I looked back. 'Mr. Bertram,' said she, with a smile; but it was a smile ill-suited to the conversation that had passed, a saucy playful smile, seeming to invite in order to subdue me; at least it appeared so to me. I resisted; it was the impulse of the moment to resist, and still walked on. I have since, sometimes, for a moment, regretted that I did not go back, but I know I was right, and such has been the end of our acquaintance. And what an acquaintance has it been! How have I been deceived! Equally in brother and sister deceived! I thank you for your patience, Fanny. This has been the greatest relief, and now we will have done." (426)

In *Narrative and its Discontents*, D.A. Miller declares this scene “the last climax” of the novel (86). According to Miller, Mary Crawford is given “the typical structural position of the heroine, without the typical heroine’s good luck” (86). In *Narrative*, he reads Mary as a rival with staying power: a Lucy Steele on steroids.³⁷ Mary’s appeal is so great that Austen is forced to dismiss her from the novel “behind her back,” by offering this secondhand account from a “point of view she has never fully embraced” (86). I want to suggest, respectfully, that Miller has missed the climax of the novel by a single paragraph. The passage above, in fact, does not set in motion the closure in which Miller is so interested. Rather, it rehearses the narratable waffling we have seen from Edmund ever since Mary Crawford’s arrival. Edmund once again begins to defend Mary by quibbling with Fanny’s critique of her conduct (“Cruelty, do you call it? We differ there. No, hers is not a cruel nature”) (42). His report of their interview, full of anger and dotted with exclamation points (“Spoilt!”), is not the account of a man who has come to a settled opinion but that of a man who is working his way, gradually, into a reconsideration of his own position. His disgust at Mary’s emasculating smile, the smile that seems “to invite in order to subdue,” will soon fade, is fading

³⁷ In *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style*, Miller promotes Mary to “one of Austen’s typical heroines” without explanation (42). This quiet promotion leaves unaddressed how his later view of Mary as the heroine of the novel fits in with or diverges from his reading of the novel’s politics in *Narrative and its Discontents*. In *Narrative*, Miller is committed to an account of Austen as a “conservative” novelist and thus takes for granted that Austen is “of course . . . in deep sympathy with what Edmund and Fanny do” (88). In his account, Austen recognizes that Fanny and Edmund’s “reduction of Mary’s complexity” is “unfair” but endorses it anyway as “the necessary price of settlement” (89). Forced to squeeze Austen’s novel into a pre-determined political category, he reduces Mary to an interesting wrinkle in the novel, one that ultimately leaves its conservative agenda intact. Once closure has been secured, “the novelist can put back some of what had to be taken away,” in particular: “the richness of Mary Crawford” (88, 89). In making this move, Miller seeks to contain Mary, but his own writing betrays him. Strikingly, in a chapter covering the entirety of Austen’s novelistic career, Miller seemingly cannot stop writing about Mary Crawford, the non-protagonist of a single novel. He returns to her again and again; his own language discloses his anxiety about her centrality. “I have somewhat overstated the case for Mary’s ironical threat; but this seems inevitable if one is to state it at all,” he writes after six pages of detailed Mary-centric analysis, an admission that allows him to then continue in order to explain what is inevitable about this overstating (32, see 27–33). Later in the chapter, he admits that the analysis of the five preceding pages, again focused on Mary, is “probably dotting to many i’s” (82). Yet, it too is necessary because “the point . . . is an important one.” This second confession/justification works in the same way as the first, and the analysis of Mary continues for five more pages in order to advance “the point” (82, see 77–87). As Miller’s later book does not focus on the specific political orientation of Austen’s novels, he elides the ways in which his promotion of Mary to heroine clashes with his previous understanding of the novel’s politics.

even in the retelling. Indeed, Edmund, despite his declaration (“now we will have done”) is nowhere near done:

And such was Fanny’s dependence on his words, that for five minutes she thought they had done. Then, however, it all came on again, or something very like it, and nothing less than Lady Bertram’s rousing thoroughly up could really close such a conversation. Till that happened, they continued to talk of Miss Crawford alone, and how she had attached him, and how delightful nature had made her, and how excellent she would have been, had she fallen into good hands earlier.³⁸ (426)

Closure, Fanny is dismayed to learn, is not yet on the table. Edmund is still under the spell of Mary Crawford, is still open to being talked into a different decision, even if he has to do the talking himself. Thus, the account of the interview cannot be the novel’s climax, as it merely continues the narratable hesitation that precedes it. The climactic event of the novel is not, as Miller would have it, “Mary Crawford miscalculates,” but “Fanny Price gets her hands dirty.” Faced with Edmund’s wavering, Fanny goes in for the kill:

Fanny, now at liberty to speak openly, felt more than justified in adding to his knowledge of her real character, by some hint of what share his brother’s state of health might be supposed to have in her wish for a complete reconciliation. This was not an agreeable intimation. Nature resisted it for a while. It would have been a vast deal pleasanter to have had her more disinterested in her attachment; but his vanity was not of a strength to fight long against reason. He submitted to believe that Tom’s illness had influenced her, only reserving for himself this consoling thought, that considering the many counteractions of opposing habits, she had certainly been more attached to him than could have been expected, and for his sake been more near doing right . . . Fanny’s friendship was all that he had to cling to. (426)

Faced with the possibility of Edmund returning to Mary, Fanny convinces Edmund that Mary wanted to reconcile *because* she believed he would be the Bertram heir. Fanny feels herself to be “more than justified” in making this revelation. But *should* she? To answer this question, we must return (as Fanny will not) to the Tom letter and to Fanny’s impressions of the state of Edmund and Mary’s relationship prior to its receipt. As noted above, Fanny believes, upon receipt of the letter in question, that Edmund and Mary’s engagement is only a matter of time, that Mary will “accept” Edmund, even as a clergyman non-heir.

³⁸ D.A. Miller argues that the situation of this scene in Edward’s recollection invites the reader “to imagine a different version of the scene, more ambiguous and less obvious than Edmund’s” (*Narrative* 86). I would suggest that the rewritability of this scene exists not just for the reader but for Edmund himself, who seems keen to embark on a rewrite of his own when Fanny interrupts his process with her revelation.

Further, in the letter itself, Mary speaks only to what would happen should Tom die (that she and Edmund would enter into a mutually advantageous marriage); Mary is silent as to what she plans to do should Tom recover, which, in theory, should leave Fanny's previous understanding of the certainty of the marriage intact. Here, however, Fanny suggests Mary's "attachment" to Edmund is dependent on her "interest" in *Mansfield Park*, which far exceeds Mary's disclosure. Fanny, however, does not perform such an analysis within the space of the narrative, nor does she explain how she has come to her conclusions. Fanny has allowed her disgust with Mary's letter to not only permeate her reading of what is in Mary's letter but also to add in what is absent.³⁹ The narration of Fanny's disclosure seems to gloss over considerations important to our analysis of its ethical import: What does Fanny say in this "hint"? How exactly does she describe the "share" that Tom's health "might be supposed to have in her wish for complete reconciliation"? Does she believe what she is saying is true or does she know, on some level, that she is embellishing? Is she aware of the ways in which taking this "liberty" serves her own self-interest? If so, does this knowledge give her any pause? This narrational withholding could be read as a sort of shield the narrator provides to Fanny to protect her misconduct from our prying eyes, but I want to suggest this instance of narratorial reticence works differently. In deemphasizing Fanny's mindset at the moment she decides to take this "liberty," the narrator implies Fanny's ethical mistake occurs not in the moment of her disclosure but earlier: specifically, when she misreads Mary's letter. For Austen, being a good reader is a prerequisite to being an ethical person.

By vanquishing her rival, Fanny secures her "happy" ending, which the narrator provides in a noticeably deflated fashion. Rather than a romantic conversation leading to an engagement, followed by a loving discussion reliving the trials of the courtship, we get only a few narrated sentences, which deny us

³⁹ We might question even Fanny's initial disgust. Mary's joking tone and honest assessment of her interests may clash with the seriousness of Tom's illness, but her letter accords with the action-oriented ethics that she set out in the first volume. That is, Mary does not hesitate to acknowledge her interests in Tom's death because she knows that speaking of them will do nothing to affect the trajectory of his illness. It is not, to take her own example, as if she has "bribed a physician" to kill him off (402). As noted above, in acknowledging her interests, she never expresses a wish for Tom to die.

even a timeframe for the events described (“I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion . . .”) (436). In other words, once Fanny effectively excludes Mary Crawford from the novelistic action, the narrator seems to lose interest in narrating it, returning to the summary mode that characterized the novel prior to the Crawfords’ arrival.⁴⁰ As I noted above, Miller argues Mary is afforded “the structural position” of the heroine, while Fanny is given its content. In this section, I have argued for an inversion of his terms: in my reading of the novel, Fanny receives the heroic form, and Mary receives the heroic content. And indeed, at the close of the novel, Fanny is afforded the form of the heroine’s happy ending (a marriage) while Mary gets its content (the happiness). Notably, the narrator awkwardly hedges in describing Fanny and Edmund’s happiness, relying on the modal verb “must” to such an extent that the reader begins to feel that the narrator perhaps could not be bothered to actually check in on the characters.⁴¹ We learn that Fanny “*must* have been happy” that Edmund has given up on Mary; that Edmund’s “happiness” upon learning of Fanny’s love for him “*must* have been great enough to warrant any strength of language . . . it *must* have been a delightful happiness” (428, 437, my emphases). Notably, the narrator’s hedging only escalates as they turn toward Fanny and Edmund’s married life: “the happiness of the married cousins *must appear* as secure as earthly happiness can be” (439, my emphasis).⁴² In its modality, Fanny and Edmund’s ending resembles those of many of their fellow characters. Henry’s vexation over his conduct, for instance, “*must* rise sometimes to self-reproach, and the unhappiness of Maria and Mrs. Norris must be “reasonably

⁴⁰ The narrator transitions from the aftermath of Fanny’s revelation to the closing summary by making a rather strange declaration: “Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore everybody, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest” (428). This transition serves to temper the ending: while Emma Woodhouse and George Knightley are promised “perfect happiness,” Fanny and Edmund can boast only “tolerable comfort” (*Emma* 392). Yet it also puts pressure on the passage we just read. That is, if the misery belongs to Edmund, to whom does the guilt belong? To Mary Crawford? To Fanny Price?

⁴¹ Like Kingsley Amis, Austen’s narrator seems hesitant to spend an evening with Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Bertram (Amis, “What” 439).

⁴² If Mary finds it difficult to “satisfy” her newly-acquired taste for men like Edmund in London, one wonders how Edmund satisfies his own newly-acquired taste for “lively” evenings at the Parsonage (143).

supposed’ by the readers in light of our knowledge of their “tempers” (432, my emphases). Notably, the narrator switches out of the modal in describing Mary’s ending:

Mrs. Grant, with a temper to love and be loved, must have gone with some regret from the scenes and people she had been used to [upon her husband’s succession to a stall in Westminster]; but the same happiness of disposition must in any place, and any society, secure her a great deal to enjoy, and she had again a home to offer Mary; and Mary had had enough of her own friends, enough of vanity, ambition, love, and disappointment in the course of the last half-year, to be in need of the true kindness of her sister’s heart, and the rational tranquillity of her ways. They lived together; and when Dr. Grant had brought on apoplexy and death, by three great institutionary dinners in one week, they still lived together; for Mary, though perfectly resolved against ever attaching herself to a younger brother again, was long in finding among the dashing representatives, or idle heir-apparents, who were at the command of her beauty, and her £20,000, any one who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield, whose character and manners could authorise a hope of the domestic happiness she had there learned to estimate, or put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head. (436)

Mrs. Grant’s ending, like that of her brother, is narrated through modal musts. With Mary, however, the narrator seems to have remained on more intimate terms, as the narrator provides direct insight into her circumstances and into “her head.” Unlike the main couple, Mary’s narrative interest is not worn out by the close of the novel. Indeed, as Miller notes, in this passage, Mary “recovers her capacity to unsettle the judgement made on her” by once again infiltrating the narrative discourse with her own self-ironizing linguistic style” (*Narrative* 87). Critics, including Miller, have nonetheless tended to read Mary’s ending as an unhappy one. Miller reads Mary’s ending as a guaranteed old maidenhood (for Mary, “the marrying season is approaching its end, and all the good men seem to have been caught”), which he seems to conflate, disconcertingly, with a death sentence, as Mary becomes the “martyr” for Style (*Jane* 55, 54). Johnson reads Mary’s ending as a justified dismissal from (an admittedly compromised) Mansfield Park; Butler as an expelling of evil. Against these critics, I read Mary’s exclusion from Mansfield as an escape. Mary loses her first love, but as a “remarkably pretty” young person of fortune, there is little justification for reading her wonderfully open-ended ending as an unhappy one, not least because Edmund has done so little to endear himself to the reader. Strikingly, in this ending, Austen affords Mary Crawford exactly what we (or at least I) have wished for so many of her other characters: what Emma Woodhouse calls, “time to look about her” (51). This time is what I wanted for Marianne Dashwood, for Louisa Musgrove,

and even for Emma herself: time for few more seasons in London, time to be selective, time to heal before entering into a new relationship in order to avoid the pitfall of over-correction. Mary, who is in her early twenties,⁴³ has ample time to be fastidious in, to adopt Miller's crude terminology, catching a man before the marrying season is over. Further, were Mary to remain single, her singlehood would not render her ending an unhappy one (much less a death sentence). Indeed, one could imagine much worse for a lively, creative woman than a comfortable life in London with an affectionate sister — a sister whose irritable husband has been conveniently removed from the equation. Miller insists that Mary's "lively mind" will never find creative expression as "the closest she ever comes to writing is correspondence" ("Austen's Attitude" 3). Yet, after spending a majority of the novel stuck inside the head of Fanny Price, we actually have very little idea how Mary, a woman with no home or needy relations to manage,⁴⁴ spends her private time, nor do we know what creative activities she will take up in the future. To read Mary's prospects as unhappy ones is a failure of critical imagination, one rooted in an unwillingness to undertake the materialist analysis Mary herself champions and models in *Mansfield Park*.

Mansfield Park thus breaks with the identificatory structure of Austen's earlier novels. While Austen encourages the reader to enter into a strong (though not unqualified) identificatory relationship with Elizabeth Bennet and Elinor Dashwood through the alignment of merit and narrative attention, here, she encourages identification with Fanny through its structure and identification with Mary through its content. This split lessens the identificatory pull of both characters: we do not have enough access to Mary to really fall into her character the way we do with Elinor and Elizabeth, yet we do not wish to take this plunge

⁴³ The respective ages of Mary and Henry are not specified. However, Mrs. Grant is thirty at the start of the novel (fifteen years younger than her forty-five-year-old husband) (24), and Mary and Henry are described as children at the time of her marriage, which occurred far enough in the past to make both Mary and Mrs. Grant anxious about the prospect of living together again (39). Edmund, a man of only twenty-four, also remarks on Mary's great discernment in spite of her youth.

⁴⁴ One of the more unsettling aspects of the ending of *Mansfield Park* is Susan Price's fixed presence at the estate, attending to her aunt's "hourly comfort" with no mention of any provision for her education or of any plans for her coming-out ball (438).

with Fanny, who struggles to hold our attention and whose morality is too simplistic to be taken seriously.⁴⁵ In *Mansfield Park*, Austen, for the first time, writes a character who models the novel's ethical and political commitments to materialist analysis. Yet, without our full identificatory commitment, Mary Crawford is left vulnerable to bad reading by Fanny Price and by readers of the novel.⁴⁶

Late Experimentation in *Emma* and *Persuasion*

Though I do not have the space here to treat both of Austen's final novels fully, I want to briefly highlight the ways in which attending to Austen's experimentation in *Mansfield Park* enables us to appreciate the boldness and success of her identificatory experiments in both *Emma* and *Persuasion*. These novels are not, as D.A. Miller would have it, the peak and valley of a single aesthetic project, but rather two separate iterations of the affective experimentation Austen begins in *Mansfield Park*. Thus, each novel operates on its own identificatory logic and must be considered on its own terms, rather than in the terms formulated for the other. In *Emma*, Austen experiments with giving us a heroine whose centrality is not won or lost but assumed and whose treatment by the narrator invites the reader to feel superior to Emma, even as her identificatory pull sneaks up on us through our parallel experience of her many vexations. In *Persuasion*, however, Austen experiments with the potential of unqualified characterological identification, which she

⁴⁵ In spite of the impressive ambition of Austen's experiment, the novel's identificatory flatness, and the resulting lack of sexual tension, are aesthetic problems, especially in the second volume. Austen removes these novelistic pleasures without compensation, creating the resistance Butler highlights in her account. This resistance, I have argued, encourages us to abandon Fanny's limiting perspective, but in and of itself, it is still a flaw of the novel.

⁴⁶ Austen may have, in fact, been counting on at least some of these bad readers to pick up the book. Lanser suggests that, in writing *Mansfield Park*, Austen may have been attempting to capitalize on the public's taste for books like Hannah More's *Coelebs*, which Austen herself appears not to have admired (Lanser 71; see Johnson 3). Yet, Austen may also have been somewhat troubled by the readership's unwillingness to grasp the subtlety of the novel's politics. We might read Austen as clarifying the politics of *Mansfield Park* through her writing in *Emma*. Specifically, we might read both the experience of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax as adopted children/wards as commentary on the strangeness of the Bertrams' treatment of Fanny. Frank, who is taken in by his (snobby) grandparents, is fully treated as their son. Jane, likewise, is treated as a daughter in everything (affection, education, opportunities to socialize) but inheritance by her family friends, and, unlike Fanny, is encouraged to maintain an active relationship with her less prestigious family members. Further, we might also see *Emma* as clarifying *Mansfield Park*'s position on the slave-trade by replacing its "dead silence" with a clear condemnation (MP 184; Ferguson 132, 135).

figures not through a collapse of character and narrator but with an innovative repositioning of their respective functions. Through the creation of a safe space (Anne) for the reader to let go of critique, Austen experiments with the potential of identificatory closeness, including the figuring of readerly pleasures more attuned to physical sensation.

Emma breaks with the structure of the earlier three novels by beginning with a heroine already in place: “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” (3). The earlier novels began with a kaleidoscopic overview of the novelistic world before transitioning us into the perspective of the heroine. Here, however, the novel does not involve a transition into Emma’s consciousness at the end of the first volume. Just as we remain at Highbury throughout all three volumes, our access to Emma’s thoughts, which are consistently qualified and ironized by the narration, remains at the same level as we proceed through the novel. Though D.A. Miller claims the narrator’s ironizing treatment of Emma “necessarily severs identification with character,” I want to suggest that identification is not absent from *Emma* but is instead both figured and marshalled in new ways (*Jane* 60). While Austen figures the reader’s identification with Elinor and Elizabeth by aligning narrative access and heroic merit, here, our access to Emma’s interiority makes the reader feel superior to her, particularly at the start of the novel. We know, as she should, that Mr. Elton is not in love with Harriet and that an affair between Jane Fairfax and Mr. Dixon is unlikely. Yet, this superiority is undercut by an undercurrent of identificatory pull, courted by our own experience of Emma’s vexations, which, like those of Mary Crawford, are treated lightly by the narrator and by the character herself.⁴⁷

The “real evils of Emma’s situation” come to light as we experience Emma’s days alongside her. Specifically, Emma is trapped in Highbury by the never-ending task of soothing her beloved father’s anxieties. Without the partnership of Mrs. Weston, Emma finds herself newly alone in managing this care

⁴⁷ In one of most apt jokes in *Clueless*, Cher responds to Josh’s psychoanalytic reading of her interest in helping Tai with “Freshman Psych rears its ugly head” (Heckerling 28:28-28:29).

work, from which she receives only temporary relief from Mrs. Weston and Mr. Knightley during social visits.⁴⁸ Emma's circumscription subjects her (and, importantly, us) to the endless drivel of Miss Bates, to the carelessness of a brother-in-law who further agitates her father, the uselessness of a sister who offers no help, and the hopelessness that things will ever change (as well as the repressed guilt over wishing they would). Indeed, it is difficult to see Emma's practiced declaration that marriage is unnecessary for *her*, which Claudia Johnson takes at face value, as anything but a deflection from the reality that marriage does not seem to be a possibility for her under the current circumstances. (69, Johnson 124)⁴⁹ After spending ten chapters with Emma, who on earth would want to take her place as mistress of Hartfield? Both Emma and Mrs. Weston acknowledge "the difficulty of disposing of Mr. Woodhouse" in their plans for Emma's romantic future (379), and our insight into Emma's thoughts reveals that, despite her insistence to Harriet that falling in love would change her analysis, Emma believes she would refuse any suitor's proposal regardless of her feelings for him. What would change "were [Emma] to fall in love" is not the content of her answer (still no) but the words she would use to describe her refusal: to say no to a man she finds "necessary to her happiness" (as Frank Churchill is not) would indeed be a "sacrifice" (211).

Emma, forced to be careful at home, is repeatedly careless in the social world: gratifying her snobbery and starting rumors without support. Emma's narrator invites us to be judgmental of Emma, as Mr. Knightley is, about this tendency to "misapply her sense" (51). Yet, the toll of Emma's vexations eventually come for the reader, who has, of course, been dealing with them for less time than Emma

⁴⁸ In saying this, I do not mean to exclude the work of the servants who attend to the Woodhouses at Hartfield and lighten Emma's load considerably. However, Emma's work is largely non-delegable, given the specificities of her father's condition. Mr. Woodhouse's nervousness and his distrust of new people and situations keeps Emma tied to this position in a way that might not otherwise make narrative sense in light of her resources.

⁴⁹ In particular, the absurdity of Emma's inclusion of "carpet-work" on her list of possible employments here should put pressure on our understanding of Emma's speech to Harriet as a genuine articulation of feminist principles (69; but see Johnson 124). Booth also notes "carpet-work" as an oddity in Emma's declaration but he suggests it speaks to Emma's lack of self-knowledge (261). In doing so, he reads the speech as an act of self-deception, in which Emma "boasts" of her independence, both financial and emotional (260). I read it instead as an act of deception directed at others in order to convince them that Emma does not want that which she knows she cannot have.

herself. Importantly, Austen creates this effect, in part, by bringing back a representational technique she had abandoned after *Sense and Sensibility*: the representation of annoying characters in all their annoyingness.⁵⁰ By the time Emma snaps at Miss Bates at Box Hill, we may be so aligned with Emma in her annoyance that we, like Emma, fail to immediately notice the import of what she has done. As Susan Wolfson notes, “the cumulative rhetoric of Austen’s fiction (if you will) is to jab at us with a dilemma at Box Hill: Would you have said such a thing? Thought it? Smirked?” (5). Like Emma, we feel “less happy than . . . expected” about the Box Hill trip, this long awaited, long-desired trip out of Highbury, and, in our “disappointment,” find ourselves less in control of our own tendency toward aggressiveness (298). Emma’s emotional response to Knightley’s correction may seem out of proportion to the offense; after all, Emma addresses the fallout from her insult quickly and without fanfare by visiting Miss Bates. Emma’s “extraordinary” tears are not for Miss Bates but for herself. They serve as a release of her repressed stress about taking care of her father without Mrs. Weston’s assistance — from which Emma has been assiduously distracting herself through her schemes for Harriet and unsupported theories about Jane (305).

Our identification with Emma through our readerly experience of her vexations⁵¹ does not, I want to suggest, draw our attention to our own moral failings. It is not that Austen has tricked us into being complicit with Emma so that we consider how we might avoid making similar mistakes in our own lives. Rather, Emma’s inability to “resist” at Box Hill (and our identification with it) highlights not her moral failings or our own, but the immensity of the stress she is under due the circumstances of her everyday

⁵⁰ While Mrs. Jennings and Sir John Middleton oppress us to nearly the same extent that they oppress Marianne and Elinor, in *Pride and Prejudice*, characters like Sir William Lucas and Mr. Collins are represented directly only to the extent they amuse us. Elizabeth is bothered, for instance, by Sir William’s constant chatter on their carriage ride to London, but we are not subjected to it (163).

⁵¹ As Wolfson importantly notes, Emma’s circumstances are considerably worse than the reader’s experience of them, as we, unbound by “the constraints of courtesy and social surveillance,” can indulge in “our own escapes and exits” by, for instance, skipping over or skimming through Miss Bates’s speeches or Mr. Woodhouse’s anxious interjections (6).

life.⁵² If Emma's moral development feels, as Stephanie Hershinow's notes, "minimal," it is perhaps because we reasonably doubt Emma's (and our own) ability to "resist" in the future if the pressure exerted by her circumstances remains unchanged (301). Emma's frustration over the untenability of her situation seems bound to again find expression, if not in spreading rumors about affairs or insults to Miss Bates, then in other forms which may be no less problematic. Emma's reform at the end of the novel comes not from a moral examination spurred on by Knightley but from the lessening of her troubles through her marriage. Emma's realization of her feelings for Knightley is, of course, spurred on by the threat of his marriage to someone else: first, Jane Fairfax and then Harriet Smith. This threat feels so severe to Emma because it represents not only the loss of a potential romantic partner but also a blow to the already-compromised social support system that makes her life feel (barely) sustainable. What makes Mr. Knightley an appealing partner for Emma is not that he can save her from her problems, but that he can share them, which he first proves to us through his masterful easing of the tension between his brother and Mr. Woodhouse early in the novel — his best scene by far — and then by his willingness to move into Hartfield with Emma after their marriage. Hershinow identifies this arrangement as Emma's greatest achievement: "She effectively suspends her possible worlds, managing at once to be the wife of Mr. Knightley, and Miss Woodhouse of Hartfield" (132). Yet, though Emma remarkably secures herself an ending beyond her hopes — as Mrs. Weston notes, "who but Mr. Knightley could know and bear with Mr. Woodhouse" — this achievement is also the source of the "melancholy" on which D.A. Miller picks up in the novel (*Jane* 56). Emma gets more than she expects, but it is still less than we might wish for her. We hope her "perfect

⁵² Though Wayne Booth recognizes the importance of the "sustained inside view" of Emma in cultivating our attachment to her, he misses this particular insight by jumping the identificatory ship. Rejecting Emma's identificatory pull, he aligns himself (and declares Austen too aligned) with Knightley, who he sees as the straightforward conveyer of "Jane Austen's judgment on Emma" (251, 253). But Booth's account ignores that Knightley himself lacks the emotional distance necessary to render properly proportioned judgments. Specifically, Knightley condemns Emma's actions at Box Hill in such strong terms not because he believes her offense to be so great, but because he too is looking for an outlet to express his frustration and disappointment. His aggressiveness toward Emma in this moment is rooted not in his fellow-feeling with Miss Bates but in his jealousy of Frank Churchill, who has spent the day flirting with Emma and encouraging her bad behavior.

happiness” lasts beyond Mr. Woodhouse’s death, that she does not come to regret choosing a long-term solution (marriage to Mr. Knightley) to a short-term problem (her loneliness and lack of support while caring for her father).⁵³ Thus, in *Emma*, Austen brilliantly courts a latent readerly identification with Emma, not by aligning attention with merit, but by aligning Emma’s “lived” experience with our readerly one. Through this latent identification, which sneaks up on those of us who felt confident in our sense of superiority, Austen draws attention to the difficult material circumstances of Emma’s life, encouraging us to attend to the relentlessness of serving as a primary caretaker for a family member. Indeed, through reliance on new identificatory strategies, Austen attends to the melancholia of the “real evils of Emma’s situation” while also allowing space for the reader to first indulge in the fun and energy of Emma’s troublemaking.

In *Persuasion*, Austen offers us not the melancholy of intractable problems but instead the pleasure of letting go. D.A. Miller would have us believe that *Persuasion*’s narrator betrays their old maidenhood as if by accident, as if Austen can only hide for so long before the truth of her identity outs itself in her language. However, our attendance to Austen’s formal experimentations with identification enables us to see her narration in *Persuasion* not as a bad copy of the earlier narration that betrays who Austen *really is* but rather a strategic formal choice made by an artist interested in doing things differently. Specifically, in *Persuasion*, Austen gives us a heroine with whom she invites us to fully identify, without maintaining the critical distance she courts in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. This invitation is figured both on the level of form (Anne quickly wins out in the represented “jostle” for our attention) and content, as Anne embodies fully the political and ethical commitments of Austen: she is a good reader who prizes being useful and takes pleasure in her own “elegant and cultivated mind” (39). In creating a heroine who

⁵³ The brilliance of Amy Heckerling’s choice to set *Clueless* in a high school resides in the way this setting appropriately circumscribes Cher’s world — like Emma in Highbury, Cher is stuck seeing even those who annoy her day-in and day-out. It also, however, also saves Cher from Emma’s melancholy ending. High school will be over soon, and Cher will have the opportunity to determine whether Josh is still the right partner for her once her world opens up. As Hershinow notes, unlike Emma, Cher retains “the latent potential for her adolescence” (131).

is “almost too good,” Austen provides us (and herself) with the safe space from which to fully explore the potential of identificatory relation (Letter to Fanny Knight 350).

We are encouraged to fall into Anne not only by her merits but by the distinction drawn between her and the narration, where we have been known to hide out when possible. While Emma Woodhouse does much of Austen’s dirty work for her — declaring Miss Bates “an eternal talker,” judging Harriet for her silliness, being snobby about Mrs. Elton — here, Anne’s hands must be kept relatively clean (*E* 133). Thus, the tasks of this articulating the novel’s sharpness — of noticing Mrs. Musgrove’s unseemly grief and girth, of informing us about Dick Musgrove’s uselessness, of emphasizing the snobbishness of Anne’s relations — falls largely to the narrator, while the task of adding humor to this sharpness, by noticing, for instance, the subtle ways in which Wentworth’s reaction to being asked about Dick Musgrove betrays his own negative opinion of the boy, is left to Anne. Anne also takes over the job of making judgments or jokes at her own expense, as when, after advising Captain Beckwith on “patience and resignation” she worries “that, like many other great moralists and preachers, she had been eloquent on a point in which her own conduct would ill bear examination” (94). This division of labor troubles Miller, who has read Austen as using the narration for self-representation, but this division between narrative discourse and the other discourses of the novel seems arbitrary to me; Austen may seek self-representation (if that is really something that interests her) in more flexible ways than Miller would have us believe. Austen’s adoption of this more prickly narrator brilliantly opens up the possibilities of stronger identificatory relationships with narrated characters.

Our absorption into Anne works not only because Wentworth is the character who needs to learn to develop a more nuanced lens through which to view the world, but also because the novel employs it to open up new kinds of readerly pleasures. While we are used to spending large swaths of the novel inside the mind of the heroine, we are with Anne both in mind and, newly, in body. The novel is a masterclass in the figuring of tension and of sensory experience. As Maria Edgeworth astutely notes, we feel not that we can see Captain Wentworth take the child off Anne’s back but instead that we “feel him” do it as if “in

her place” (Letter to Mrs. Ruxton, quoted in Pinch at 107). Austen figures these embodied experiences through the narration, which, now focuses less on providing an experience of the character’s “inner life as she never could,” (Anne’s self-knowledge seems to render this function almost wholly redundant) than on providing an account of her physical sensations “as she never could” (D.A. Miller, *Jane* 60). While the other novels called on us to notice, for instance, Darcy’s “admiration of the brilliancy which exercise” had given to Elizabeth’s complexion or Edmund’s pleasure in “directing [Mary Crawford’s] management of the bridle” (*PP* 34, *MP* 52), now we are not looking at men looking at the heroine but rather are in the place of the heroine as she registers the looks. While *Mansfield Park* attends to Fanny’s longing, her desires are both childlike in quality and, as Johnson notes, troublingly incestuous in character (116). Here, Anne’s desires are both adult and, as Pinch describes, heightened by the fact that they are not new but “renewed” (114). Our identificatory immersion in Anne enables Austen to give Anne a satisfying ending that nonetheless leaves her heroine radically less settled than her predecessors (no landed estate, no parsonage). This is an ending that we, accustomed to Pemberley, may not have accepted so readily had our identification with Anne been less strongly figured.

I have argued here that attendance to Austen’s identificatory experiments is necessary to an undistorted understanding of both her aesthetic ambitions and her ethico-political project. While Austen has often been read as a conservative novelist given her subject-matter (see e.g., Butler) and/or her endings (see e.g., Booth), I have argued that Austen’s politics reveal themselves not through the events of the plot in and of themselves, but in how the novel asks us to feel about them. Specifically, our finely-calibrated identification with Austen’s heroines, figured in increasingly innovative ways, directs us not only to attend to the precarity of her heroines (often the emphasis of more progressive accounts of Austen, see e.g., Johnson) but also to adopt and apply a power-sensitive, flexible, materialist lens to the novelistic world and to our own circumstances and moment. Indeed, the portability of Austen’s ethical program enables the reader to properly analyze where Austen’s heroines fall short — Elinor’s self-righteous propriety, Elizabeth’s mistreatment of Charlotte, Mary’s eagerness to marry the heir to a fortune rooted in

enslavement — as well as where Austen herself fails to take her own materialist analysis far enough — for instance, in her own seemingly uncritical support for the Royal Navy. That is, what Austen’s novels offer to us, in increasingly formally-sophisticated ways, is not knowledge of a particular community in a particular time but rather what Anna Kornbluh calls a mobile, plastic “mode of knowing” bodied forth through identificatory experimentation (“We” 399). As we turn to Charlotte Brontë, we find again a willingness to innovate. However, while Austen’s later experimentation arises out of the sense that she had perfected, in *Pride and Prejudice*, the identificatory structure best suited to the project, Brontë’s innovations are rooted in anxiety over the ethical-compromises of the near-universal identification she figured in her runaway hit, *Jane Eyre*.

CHAPTER 2: CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S IDENTIFICATORY ANXIETY

In 1846, Charlotte Brontë began contacting publishers on behalf of herself and her sisters, Emily and Anne. The three sisters, writing under the pseudonyms of Currer (Charlotte), Ellis (Emily), and Acton (Anne) Bell, were seeking a publisher for “three distinct and unconnected tales” that Charlotte Brontë, in her cover letter, indicated might “be published either together as a work of 3 vols. of the ordinary novel-size, or separately as single vols” (Letter to Aylott and Jones). Publisher Thomas Cautley Newby, however, had his own idea about how the work might be divided into three volumes: two volumes for Ellis Bell’s *Wuthering Heights* and the third for Acton Bell’s *Agnes Grey* (Smith n. 1, 72). Charlotte Brontë thus found herself summarily cut out of her own publication scheme. Undeterred, she continued to send out her tale, titled *The Professor*, to publishers as a standalone work. Her efforts were met with rejection: publishers praised the writing but complained of “a want of varied interest in the tale” (Letter to Smith, Elder, & Co., 7 Aug. 1847, 85). Brontë discovered, much to her dismay, that “publishers in general . . . liked something more imaginative and poetical — something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy, with a taste for pathos, with sentiments more tender, elevated, other-worldly” (Preface 3).

With this discovery in mind, Brontë began work on a new novel — a tale “of a more exciting and striking character” designed to fit into the three-volume format preferred by publishers. In writing *Jane Eyre*, Brontë “endeavoured to impart more vivid interest than belongs to *The Professor*” (Letter to Smith, Elder & Co., 7 Aug. 1847, 86). In this endeavor, she was wildly successful — *Jane Eyre*, published in October 1847, caused a sensation. As Elizabeth Gaskell recounts, “the whole reading-world of England was in a ferment to discover the unknown author” (347). Within three months of its publication, the novel had been adapted for the stage, and, within the year, even New Englanders were declared to be suffering from “the distressing mental epidemic passing under the name of ‘*Jane Eyre* fever’” (Whipple 97).

Readers were struck by the absorptive and identificatory nature of the first-person work. Even professional critics confessed to rapturous non-stop reading experiences, in which they “forgot both

commendations and criticisms, identified . . . with Jane in all her troubles, and finally married Mr. Rochester about four in the morning” (Unsigned Review: *Shirley*, *Fraser's* 152). Both G. H. Lewes and William Makepeace Thackeray reported weeping.⁵⁴ “For everyone,” Miriam Allott explains, “*Jane Eyre* was ‘new’” (*Charlotte* 20). But what was so new about *Jane Eyre*? Certainly not the madwoman in the attic plotline, which Thackeray critiqued as “familiar” and Lewes as contributing to the “melodrama and improbability” that “smack of the circulating library” (Thackeray, Letter to W.S. Williams 70; Lewes, Unsigned Review: *Jane Eyre* 85). Rather, I suggest that this sense of novelty comes from the near-universal success of the novel’s identificatory pull — the way in which the text, to return to Lewes, “fastens itself upon your attention, and will not leave you” (84). Even Elizabeth Rigby, whose famously negative review characterized *Jane Eyre* as “a pre-eminently anti-Christian composition,” conceded that it was “impossible not to be spellbound” (110).

In this chapter, I track Charlotte Brontë’s shifting relationship to readerly identification in her published work. In the first section, I argue that, following the repeated rejection of *The Professor*, Brontë set forth to write a novel that foregrounds identificatory pleasures. Throughout the novel, Brontë is remarkably clear-eyed both about the difficulty of pulling off such a feat and the compromises required to do so. Indeed, I argue that Brontë’s uneasiness about the limitations of unqualified identificatory writing — writing designed to solicit identification from any reader at all — is apparent not only from the different representational choices she makes in *Shirley* and *Villette* but also within the text of *Jane Eyre* itself. That is, even as Brontë succeeds in her figuration of an incredibly powerful and pleasurable identification in *Jane Eyre*, the novel bears the traces of her anxiety over its limitations — most notably, its uncritical celebration of individual agency, its reliance on the coherence of the subject at the expense of a more nuanced view of mental life, and its vulnerability to appropriation. In the section that follows, I turn to *Shirley*, in which

⁵⁴ Lewes: “After laughing over the *Bachelor of Albany*, we wept over *Jane Eyre*. This, indeed, is a book after our own heart”; Thackeray: “I wish you had not sent me *Jane Eyre*. I have lost (or won if you like) a whole day in reading it at the busiest period . . . Some of the love passages made me cry — to the astonishment of John who came in with the coals.” Thackeray, Letter to W.S. Williams 70; Lewes, Unsigned Review: *Jane Eyre* 83.

Brontë attempts both to avoid the pitfalls of identification and to walk back *Jane Eyre*'s celebration of individual agency. Indeed, we might read *Shirley* as marking the limits of the political vision advanced by *Jane Eyre*. Finally, I attend to *Villette*, Brontë's final published novel, in which she returns to the risks and pleasures of identifications but attempts to strike the balance between them anew, in ways that more precisely reflect her ethical and political commitments. In *Villette*, in other words, Brontë returns to her identificatory project but does so in a way that creates space for the specificity and complexity of her characters and for the possibility of a more systemic social critique.

Identificatory Success: *Jane Eyre*

Identificatory Promise and Difficulty at Gateshead

Charlotte Brontë begins *The Professor* as an epistolary novel but abandons the epistolary form after a single letter. Her hero's desired correspondent is unreachable, as he had "accepted a Government appointment in one of the colonies" (13). Finding his friend unavailable, William Crimsworth decides to dedicate his "leisure time" to writing for "the public at large" (13). His narrative, he regrets to inform us, "is not exciting and, above all, not marvellous"; however, "it may interest some individuals, who, having toiled in the same vocation as myself, will find in my experience frequent reflections of their own" (13). The pleasures offered by the novel, in other words, are those of identification — the reader is promised "frequent reflections" of their own experience. Yet, this identificatory pleasure is offered to a quite narrow group — "some" other educators. In making the extratextual case for publication of *The Professor*, Brontë frames the value of its contribution in terms of the novelty of its subject matter: the novel "gives, I think, a new view of a grade, an occupation and a class of characters" (Preface 3). Brontë thus argues that the novel offers both identificatory pleasure to an in-group and "a new view" of that group to a general readership. These dual offerings were apparently not enough to persuade publishers; *The Professor* was published only in the wake of her untimely death.

In writing *Jane Eyre*, Brontë not only adds aspects of the “exciting” and “marvellous” through the more action-packed plot but also expands the promise of identificatory pleasure beyond a specific group. Eager for publication, Brontë makes identificatory pleasure available to a general reader, independent of their identity or experiences. Yet, she also recognizes the challenges of ensuring an identificatory response from any and all readers. Indeed, in the early chapters of the novel, she not only begins to masterfully figure her heroine’s identificatory pull but also represents both the potential power of identification and the difficulties inherent to its successful figuration.

In the initial chapters of *Jane Eyre*, we find ourselves immersed both in Jane’s perspective (“There was no possibility of taking a walk that day”) and in a novelistic world populated by books. Jane Eyre, already long suffering at age ten, seeks temporary relief from her hardships through Bewick’s *History of British Birds*, Goldsmith’s *History of Rome*, and Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. She also encounters unauthorized versions of Richardson’s *Pamela* and Brook’s *Henry, Earl of Moreland* through the stories of her nurse Bessie, who appropriates novelistic plots to amuse her charges. Young Jane is both a rapacious reader and an identificatory one. In Jane’s famous first act of rebellion, she directs a litany of “suitably literary” insults toward her bullying cousin (Hennelly 696):

“Wicked and cruel boy!” I spoke. “You are like a murderer — you are like a slave-driver — you are like the Roman emperors!”
I had read Goldsmith’s *History of Rome*, and had formed my opinion of Nero, Caligula, &c. Also I had drawn parallels in silence, which I never thought thus to have declared aloud. (13)

In this moment, young Jane demonstrates the power of readerly identification. Through her identificatory reading of *History of Rome*, in which she aligns her cousin with Nero and herself with his victims, Jane is better able to recognize and articulate the circumstances under which she is living and what she finds objectionable about them. The “parallels” Jane draws are certainly imprecise — identification is necessarily identification across difference — yet the narrator does not reprimand her for her creative license. On the contrary, narrating Jane tacitly sanctions her younger self’s alignment of John Reed with a “slave-driver” by describing her younger self as “like any other rebel slave” in her resistance (15). Jane’s identifications with the enslaved person and the mistreated Roman subject, the novel suggests, are fictions but useful,

nonetheless. The erasure of meaningful difference between an unhappy fourteen-year-old bully and Nero, not to mention that between his bourgeois ten-year-old victim and an enslaved person, is positioned as an acceptable price to pay (if it can be considered a price at all) for young Jane's coming to consciousness as a victim of injustice.

In addition to representing the potential of reading for identification, these early chapters also dramatize the novelist's difficulty in securing an identificatory response from a general readership. Jane's early experiences of reading are marked not only by identification but also by rebellion. She picks up Bewick's *Birds* but ignores "the letter-press" in favor of the pictures, which she supplements with her own imaginings (10). In Gayatri Spivak's reading of this scene, Brontë courts readerly identification with Jane through an alignment of our activities — like Jane, we are reading — but she allows Jane to retain an "odd privilege" over us, as she "continues never quite doing the proper thing in its proper place" (246). Spivak thus assumes that while Jane is waywardly skimming *Birds*, we are faithfully attending to *Jane Eyre*. Yet, I am not so sure that this assumption is justified. Just as Bewick is not around to scold Jane for skipping over the portions of the text that fail to interest her, Brontë also lacks control over our reading practice — we too might ignore whole sections of text, or, like Bessie in her bedtime stories, we might appropriate and modify the text to suit our own purposes.⁵⁵ Brontë, like Bewick, wields only the power to write pages that we cannot "pass quite as blank" and to connect those pages "with the succeeding vignettes" in ways that convey "significance" (11). Notably, while young Jane's unruly reading would seem to pose a threat to the work of her narrating counterpart by demonstrating the practice that could overturn the narrator's identificatory project, the narrator does not scold her for engaging in it. She further does not relegate these

⁵⁵ In addition to the many novels inspired by or written in response to *Jane Eyre* — including, most famously, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) — there are also accounts of both contemporary and modern readers self-editing the novel. For instance, in the 1860s, suffragette Elizabeth Malleon read her children *Jane Eyre* "from beginning to end entirely omitting Rochester's mad wife, and so skilfully that [they] noticed nothing amiss with the plot" (Malone 187). Roughly one hundred years later, the evangelical mother of novelist Jeanette Winterson altered the novel's conclusion, so that Jeannette grew up believing that Jane ends the novel engaged in missionary work in India alongside her husband, St John Rivers (Green 187).

rebellious reading practices to Jane's childhood, as she will do with Jane's angry outbursts. The failure is not assigned to young Jane for reading incorrectly but to the text that fails to enchant her. The struggle is thus not, as Carla Kaplan argues,⁵⁶ for narrating Jane to find her "ideal" reader but rather for narrating Jane to write pages so difficult to ignore that they transform any reader into the ideal reader (6).

Yet, Brontë knows that readers are a fickle lot, no matter how compelling the story. In the aftermath of the Red Room incident — in which young Jane is punished with confinement in a possibly haunted room and suffers a nervous fit as a result — Jane successfully convinces Bessie to fetch her favorite book, *Gulliver's Travels*, which she "had again and again perused with delight" (25). Yet "this cherished volume" now leaves Jane cold: "when I turned over its leaves, and sought in its marvellous pictures the charm I had, till now, never failed to find — all was eerie and dreary; the giants were gaunt goblins, the pigmies malevolent and fearful imps, Gulliver a most desolate wanderer in most dread and dangerous regions. I closed the book, which I dared no longer peruse" (26). Strikingly, the narration does not provide any insight into what has gone wrong. Why does Jane no longer identify with Gulliver? Has Jane's traumatic experience changed her relationship to adventure? Will the book and its hero ever recover their magic for Jane? Leaving us to wonder, the narrator simply moves on. Jane has changed, and the charm of the novel is gone; the threat of disenchantment looms all the larger for being unspecified. How can an author ensure success in her identificatory project, given the contingency associated with readers, who always bring their (constantly changing) personal experiences to the novel?⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Kaplan argues that Jane Rochester, dissatisfied with her husband, writes *Jane Eyre* in order to find her "ideal listener/lover": the female reader of her autobiography (6). I would suggest instead that we are not Jane's ideal dialogic community but rather the means through which Jane, as the author of the work (conspicuously not a private diary nor a letter but "a novel" addressed to a public "Reader"), hopes to arrive at the more intellectually lively, urbane life she fantasizes about while working at Thornfield. In other words, we might read Jane writing this novel as an attempt to advertise for a new life once again. That a still-young woman — whose children are approaching school-age and whose disabled husband has recently become more independent — might be in search of a more creative and urbane life than the strictly domestic one she has been living need not suggest an inherent lack in her partnership. It might instead gesture toward the impossibility of any partnership or any domestic life fully satisfying the desires of an artistic, ambitious person over the course of a life.

⁵⁷ Rachel Ablow recounts a similarly sudden disenchantment with *Jane Eyre* after encountering Nancy Armstrong's work: "*Desire and Domestic Fiction* took *Jane Eyre* away from me. That was disappointing" ("Taking" 7). That the novel is ruined for Ablow by Armstrong's account of Jane's complicity in England's imperial project is itself symptomatic

Identificatory Appeal

The identificatory strength of *Jane Eyre's* opening chapters has long been acknowledged. "Most readers," Mark Hennelly claims, "experience flashes of childhood memories as they picture the lonely, bullied little girl of these early chapters" (695). Even the critical Elizabeth Rigby acknowledges that Brontë "at once takes possession of the reader's intensest interest by the masterly picture of a strange and oppressed child she raises up in a few strokes before him" (106). Yet, why should this barely-fleshed-out "oppressed child" elicit such strong reactions? I suggest that the effect comes from Brontë's canny choice and scaling of subject matter, her emphasis on Jane's endurance over her rebellion, and her careful framing of her conduct by her grown-up narrator.

The novel begins by throwing us directly into a day of young Jane's life, in which "there was no possibility of taking a walk" (9). Ten-year-old Jane is "glad" to miss out on the chilly outdoor occupation but is a bit disconcerted to find herself "dispensed from joining" her cousins and aunt by the fireside of the drawing room. Jane's exclusion, spearheaded by her aunt, is due to her failure to "endeavour in good earnest to a more sociable and child-like disposition, a more attractive and spritely manner — something lighter franker, more natural as it were" (9). Jane, perhaps puzzled by the instruction to "endeavour" to be "more natural," requests a bill of particulars: "What does Bessie [the alleged informant] say I have done?" (9). No specifics are provided; Jane is merely dismissed. Though Jane takes her unjust exclusion in stride — she picks out a book and ensconces herself in the "double retirement" of the curtained window seat of the breakfast room — the reader, less accustomed to these kinds of indignities, may find herself thrown out of joint (11). That the complaints against Jane lack specific content reeks of unfairness, inviting our indignation on her behalf, even as Jane herself barely registers the offense.

of the novel's foregrounding of identificatory pleasure, as readers often enjoy novels that advance political projects they abhor. It is telling then that Ablow's enjoyment of *Jane Eyre* is so bound up in her identification with Jane that a disruption to that relation destroys her enjoyment of the novel as a whole, notwithstanding its other pleasures (beautiful writing, suspenseful plotting, etc.).

Jane's reading, which fits her aunt's criteria in being both "silent" and "seated," comes to a premature end (10). Her fourteen-year-old cousin, who torments Jane "not two or three times a week, nor once or twice in a day, but continually," demands her attention (12). Again, Jane seems largely unmoved by John Reed's taunts and blows. However, when John assaults Jane with her own beloved book, leading her to fall down and suffer a head wound, Jane's anger finally rises to match that of the reader. Feeling blood "trickle down [her] neck," Jane both insults John and flies at him in a "fury" (14). Notably, even though the first chapter culminates in this "picture of passion," its language stresses not Jane's break but the pressure that comes before it and, more specifically, Jane's previous, rather remarkable, endurance of this pressure. Jane, we are told, is "habitually obedient" to both her bully cousin and cruel aunt (12); that "accustomed to John's abuse," she "never had an idea of replying to it" (13); and that she had "never thought" she would actually say the insults she had formulated "aloud" (13). Even after her outburst, both the narrator and Bessie take pains to remind us that resistance is "a new thing for [Jane]" (15, 16). By foregrounding Jane's endurance in light of increasingly distressing conduct, Brontë ensures that by the time Jane settles upon the mantra of "Unjust! — unjust!" while locked alone in the Red Room, we have been thoroughly primed to join her in the chant (19).

In addition to inviting us to anticipate Jane's rebellion, Brontë also carefully calibrates the intensity and quality of childhood victimization to ensure Jane's relatability for a general readership. Here, Jane faces startling but not life-threatening physical abuse at the hands of a fellow child, with the implicit sanction of the supervisory adult. The situation Jane faces is extremely painful yet also intimately familiar. Who among us manages to escape childhood without finding ourselves unjustly injured by another child or unfairly punished by an adult? Jane's childhood pain is not othering or unimaginable but recognizable in ways that encourage us to reflect on our own. That this scaling of injury is deliberate comes into clearer focus when we compare it to the depiction of childhood abuse in *Shirley*, a novel in which Brontë is uninterested in figuring this kind of universal identificatory appeal. In *Shirley*, the heroine, Caroline Helstone, recalls "some weeks that she had spent" with her alcoholic father as a child. During their time together, her father

neglected to provide her with basic care, including regular access to heat and food. When she fell ill as a result of this neglect, her father shockingly threatened to “kill her, for she was a burden to him” until “her screams had brought aid” (99–100). This childhood memory, with its more serious and shocking account of abuse, both invites pity for the heroine and provides psychological grounding for some of her behaviors and attitudes. Yet in its extremity, this scene fails to elicit identification with Caroline in the same universal manner as Jane’s experience with the Reed family.

Critical accounts tend to read the carefully-scaled opening incident of *Jane Eyre* — the intense anger, the snap — in the context of the novel’s status as, in Spivak’s words, “the cult text of feminism” (244). That is, the snap is, to borrow Sara Ahmed’s term, an explicitly feminist one. As Ellen Moers writes, “before she gives Jane Eyre a name, or a class, or an age, Brontë makes her speaker both a person and a female in the quickest shorthand available to women writers: she has her say no” (24).⁵⁸ Yet, to read this scene as a quintessential experience of girlhood, while not necessarily incorrect, limits its identificatory reach in a way that shortchanges the breadth of Brontë’s achievement. Indeed, though Jane is described as a girl in the book, nothing in this formative experience of childhood cruelty and rebellion is specifically gendered. The same might be said of Jane’s early experience of humiliation at the direction of Mr. Brocklehurst at Lowood, another highly-identificatory scene of childhood victimization and anger. Indeed, what Brontë calls up in these early scenes is the near-universal experience of feeling powerless and victimized as a child, both by other children and by adults, as well as the pleasure of (or at least the pleasure

⁵⁸ This characterization is notably not precisely accurate. Jane is given both a name (p. 10) and an age (p. 12) before she engages in any act of resistance (p. 13). Perhaps because of its identificatory hold on critics — the novel feels so intimately a part of you that you do not feel like you need to return to the text — there seem to be a number of misrememberings of the specifics in critical accounts. For instance, Susan Lanser conducts a reading of Jane’s act of throwing the book at “Master Reed” (“the master reader”), yet in the novel it is Jane, not John Reed, who is on the receiving end of the book assault (184). Similarly, Talia Schaffer argues that Brontë celebrates voluntary caregiving over its paid counterpart through the novel’s ending, in which “Jane chooses to become Rochester’s nurse and Adèle’s teacher, rendering her emotional labor authentic, loving, and delightful” (87). Yet, Jane declines to take charge of Adèle education after she removes her from the unsuitable school to which Rochester has sent her, muddling Schaffer’s clear delineation of paid and unpaid care work: “I took [Adèle] home with me. I meant to become her governess once more, but I soon found this impracticable; my time and cares were now required by another — my husband needed them all. So I sought out a school conducted on a more indulgent system, and near enough to permit of my visiting her often and bringing her home sometimes” (518).

of the fantasy of) fighting back. Indeed, we can see the legacy of the early chapters of *Jane Eyre* in the opening *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1997), in which J.K. Rowling invites universal identification with her protagonist, another child of ten,⁵⁹ through a compelling representation of his own (magical) snap in the wake of his own experience of continual abuse at the hands of a larger, bullying cousin.

Notwithstanding its carefully-curated relatability, Brontë knows that Jane's rage may be alienating to some readers — who bring to the narrative not only their varied and ever-changing personal experiences but also their pre-existing ideas about what constitutes appropriate behavior for girls — and strategically marshals her narrator accordingly. In particular, Narrator Jane enables our identification with her younger self by purporting to place in context some of the behaviors of Jane's tormenters. While ten-year-old Jane cannot figure out why the Reeds treat her in this unjust way, our narrator claims to “see it clearly”:

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them. They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathise with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities, a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment. I know that had I been a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, romping child — though equally dependent and friendless — Mrs. Reed would have endured my presence more complacently. (19)

In this passage, narrating Jane sets herself out as a neutral party. From “the distance of — [she] will not say how many years,” she claims to have achieved a perspective that permits her to provide insight from a place of critical detachment. The neutral, almost clinical tone (“chosen vassalage”) of this passage suggests its author has, in fact, overcome any lingering sense of resentment or anger on behalf of her younger self: she is in control of her emotions. She has since learned not to relish “the germs of indignation” and “contempt of their judgment.” This careful display of adult control, I want to suggest, does not work to undercut our identification with child Jane but instead counterintuitively licenses it. Identifying with Jane

⁵⁹ In terms of the universality of these early identificatory scenes, it is key that both of these child-protagonists are ten years old — old enough that their feelings and thinking register as both legible and significant to an adult reader but not so old as to have experienced the intensely gendered/gendering experience of puberty.

in her anger is made acceptable by the relegation of her ungovernability, her lack of control over her emotions to her childhood. Yet, if the tone of the passage is meant to bolster narrating Jane's authority, its content is designed to solicit our strong dissent.⁶⁰ The narrator cleverly sets up an equivalence between the positions of Mrs. Reed and those of Jane that cannot withstand even the slightest level of readerly scrutiny. Why should Mrs. Reed care for Jane when Jane doesn't care for her? Why should Mrs. Reed regard Jane with affection when Jane fails to sympathize with her? Why shouldn't Mrs. Reed resent Jane when Jane resents her? The answer is obvious: Mrs. Reed is bound to care for, sympathize with, and not resent Jane because Mrs. Reed is an adult who has been entrusted with Jane's care. It is not Jane's duty as a child to "serve the interests" or to "add to the pleasures" of her adult caretakers, nor is she obligated to be "sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, romping" for their benefit. The purported equivalence of the behavior of the adult and that of the child serves only to highlight the differences in their relative positions and duties. Lest we miss the point, the narrator reiterates the inappropriateness of Mrs. Reed's conduct through the narration of her subsequent confrontation with Jane, in which Mrs. Reed responds to Jane "rather in a tone in which a person might address an opponent of adult age than such as is ordinarily used to a child" (44). The narrator's intervention thus works to at once license identification with her younger self, even in her extreme anger, while increasing our sense of the unjustness of her treatment.

With her careful rendering of the opening chapters, Brontë solicits readerly identification with her heroine that is unmoored from the specificities of her readers' identities and experiences. In so inviting, she effectively stacks the deck for her identificatory project — though, as Judith Butler reminds us, and as

⁶⁰ Strikingly, narrating Jane, who within the fictional conceit has already lived through the events of the novel, knows her analysis to be false. When Jane visits Mrs. Reed on her deathbed, Mrs. Reed confesses that her antipathy toward Jane is not rooted in Jane's heterogeneity but in Mrs. Reed's jealousy of Jane's mother, who was "a great favourite with" her husband (267). She resents the interest her late husband took in Jane when she was an orphaned infant, who he "used to nurse and notice as if it had been his own: more, indeed, than he ever noticed his own" (267). That Mrs. Reed's mistreatment of Jane has its roots in jealousy and anxiety over the amount of "notice" she attracts relative to that attracted by her own "darlings" suggests that Jane would not have been better off as a "brilliant" and "romping" child who might have diverted even more attention away from her cousins (267).

Brontë is well-aware, identifications, including readerly ones, “are never simply or definitively made or achieved; they are insistently constituted, contested, and negotiated” (*Bodies* 76).

Identificatory Limits

Brontë’s representation of these early scenes of childhood victimization and rebellion open up the possibility of a more universally available identificatory relation with Jane. Yet, Brontë faces a significant challenge in transitioning from Jane’s particularly accessible childhood to her early adulthood, which is more defined by the specifics of her gender and class. As Susan Lanser notes, *Jane Eyre* breaks from the governess novels that precede it, including Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey*, by basing the narrator’s authority not “on temporal and spiritual differences between narrator and protagonist” but “on their identity” (182). Seeking readerly identification with both child Jane and her adult counterpart, the novel emphasizes not how much Jane has changed — though, of course, she must learn to control her anger in order to continue as an attractive figure for identification into her adulthood — but how much she has remained the same. The novel achieves this effect in part by skipping over the years in which Jane learns this control as a student at Lowood; to the extent Jane does change, these changes occur off-page.⁶¹ The narrator justifies this time jump by advancing the somewhat incredible claim that these eight “silent” years will fail to possess any “degree of interest” for the reader (99).⁶² The gap between Jane at age ten and Jane at age eighteen is bridged by the somewhat clumsily-managed appearance of Jane’s former nurse, Bessie, who has apparently

⁶¹ See also Lanser at 182: “Although the young Jane does learn from her mistakes, the narrator never seriously criticizes her, and the narrator’s values are more-or-less continuous with those of the younger character.”

⁶² The narrator further roots her representational choice in the fact that she is not writing “a regular autobiography” that attends to each time period equally (99). The narrator claims that “to the first ten years of my life I have given almost as many chapters” but notes that this chapter per year allocation will not dictate the narrative structure going forward. Yet, this claim is itself wildly misleading. We have spent nine chapters not on the first ten years of Jane’s life but rather on eight-months of her tenth year. We then proceed to spend the next twenty-four chapters on the roughly twenty-one-month period from eighteen-year-old Jane’s arrival at Thornfield until her successful wedding. The novel is, in fact, split between Jane’s childhood fight against victimization at Gateshead and Lowood — which, as I have argued, functions essentially as an identificatory lure — and the events of her late teenage years, which capitalize on the identificatory relation already in place and then extend it through specific representational strategies to enlist the reader in Jane’s quest for fulfilment.

traveled the fifty-mile distance to Lowood at her own expense merely to “get a look at” Jane before she departs for Thornfield (108). This visit, though not fully integrated in the logic of the novelistic world, provides Jane with an opportunity to show off her new accomplishments — her drawing, her language skills, her restraint — and for Bessie to helpfully integrate “the lady” of Jane Eyre into what she “expected” from her spirited childhood (108). Bessie thus provides reassurance that Jane is not only coextensive with her younger self in a way that makes our earlier identification feel relevant but also has improved in developmentally appropriate ways that make continued identification sustainable. Indeed, though *Jane Eyre* is often described as a Bildungsroman, it is difficult to pinpoint the ways in which Jane herself is shown to develop, as any differences between Jane as a child, as a young adult, and as a married narrator are de-emphasized within the novel itself.

As the story progresses, Brontë reinforces Jane’s identificatory pull in a number of ways. She courts intimacy with the reader through frequent first-person address (“Reader”) and, once again, aligns our activities with those of Jane: both reader and protagonist are working to solve the mystery at Thornfield.⁶³ Brontë also calls attention to the narrative status as fiction at key moments of transition, emphasizing Jane’s own fictionality or “nobodiness” as a character. This emphasis on the fictionality of the heroine, which we might assume would take us out of the story, in fact promotes identification; as Catherine Gallagher notes, “it is easier to identify with [a fictional] nobody’s story and share nobody’s sentiments than to identify with anybody else’s story and share anybody else’s sentiments” (172).⁶⁴ More troublingly,

⁶³ For the identificatory and suspenseful pleasures of this alignment of Jane’s truth-seeking efforts and those of the reader, see Caroline Levine 65–83.

⁶⁴ We can see Brontë cannily taking advantage of this counterintuitive relation shortly after the somewhat abrupt transition from Jane’s childhood to her adulthood:

A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must fancy you see a room in the George Inn at Millcote, with such large figured papering on the walls as inn rooms have; such a carpet, such furniture, such ornaments on the mantelpiece, such prints, including a portrait of George the Third, and another of the Prince of Wales, and a representation of the death of Wolfe. All this is visible to you by the light of an oil lamp hanging from the ceiling, and by that of an excellent fire, near which I sit in my cloak and bonnet; my muff and umbrella lie on the table” (111).

In this moment, Brontë reminds us of the fictionality of the narrative both through explicit reference to its fictionality — notwithstanding the claim of novel’s subtitle, “An Autobiography” (added at the request of her publisher), this

Brontë maintains Jane's identificatory pull through rendering her thoroughly relatable, including by skipping over or suppressing what risks alienation of readers and by writing her as an impossibly coherent and agential subject.

This insistence on presenting Jane as a figure of relatability creates an interesting tension in the novel, as Brontë also wants to insist on Jane's creativity and her strangeness as the source of her superiority — particularly in comparison to Blanche Ingram, whose mind produces “no unforced natural fruit” (216). In other words, (specifically those of Nina Auerbach), Brontë must work out how “to universalize a heroine who [is], in essence, eccentric and estranged” (“Victorian Players” 189). Brontë negotiates this tension between Jane's creativity and relatability by dwelling on evidence from the past of Jane's unique imaginative capacity while suppressing any continuing role this capacity plays in the narrated portion of her life. Strikingly, Rochester identifies Jane as worthy of notice when he encounters the compelling strangeness of her artistic output. Rochester examines Jane's “water-colours” at such length that the narrator, breaking out of the temporal-conceit of the novel, engages in an act of extended ekphrastic description: “While he is so occupied, I will tell you, reader, what they are . . .” (147). Indeed, each of the three paintings is remarkably allotted its own full paragraph of description. The pictures themselves are as striking to Rochester as they are to the reader: haunting, dreamlike scenes that recall Jane's childhood fascination with the images in Bewick. In the first, a bird sits on the “half-submerged mast” of a sunken ship with a bracelet in its beak while “below the bird and mast, a drowned corpse glanced through the green water; a fair arm was the only limb clearly visible, whence the bracelet had been washed or torn” (147). In the second, the shape of a woman with “dark and wild” eyes who is “crowned with a star . . . rises into the sky”; in the third, “the pinnacle of an iceberg piercing a polar winter sky” in the distance, while “in the foreground, a head, — a colossal head, inclined towards the iceberg, and [rested] against it” (147). The explanation given for these images — that Jane, left alone at school without occupation or

author is writing a “novel” with “chapters”— and through the proliferation of realist details (the portraits, the wall paper, carpet), which, as Gallagher explains, “confirms rather than obfuscates” the work's status as fiction (173).

responsibility on her vacations, attempted to represent the images seen in “her spiritual eye” — cannot quite account for their unnerving strangeness (147). These artworks, in other words, speak to a complexity of the inner life of their creator that the novel seems otherwise unable to accommodate within its identificatory framework. Indeed, once the reader catches up with Jane as an adult (which is after the production of these pictures), she is never again shown to create work in this vein. Rather, her artistic production becomes unfailingly figural: she creates portraits praised as “correct” and “like” rather than as original and which are instrumentalized — to compensate for the absence of the loved one, to bring home a difficult reality — in ways difficult to imagine with respect to the three “water-colours” (428).

Jane’s relatability is further maintained by the narrative elision of those aspects of her life that are not accessible to a general readership. Every reader is perhaps all-too-familiar with feeling left out at a party or envious of a romantic rival — emotional experiences that, like Jane’s childhood rebellion, receive extensive representation. In contrast, Jane’s paid labor, with its challenges and tedium, is left nearly entirely to the reader’s imagination, even though Jane spends the majority of her days at both Thornfield and Moor House engaged in teaching. Indeed, Elizabeth Rigby’s assessment that she would never hire Jane Eyre as a governess for her own children is so laughable because of how little of Jane’s work is represented in the novel.⁶⁵ Notably, this elision does not seem rooted in Brontë own interests; she explores teaching in great detail in *The Professor* and returns to it again in *Villette*. Rather, this suppression instead seems motivated by her understanding, derived from the feedback she received on *The Professor*, of the limited identificatory appeal of such a topic.

Jane’s appeal as an identificatory subject is underwritten not only by her relatability but also by the novel’s figuration of her as what we might think of as the ideal liberal subject: an impossibly reasonable

⁶⁵ We might see a reflection of Rigby’s unwillingness to identify across class difference in the *Guardian* critic’s unwillingness to identify across gender, instead positioning himself in the role of prospective lover, as Rigby does prospective employer. Specifically, he writes that he would “respectfully decline . . . the honour of an intimate acquaintance” with either Jane Eyre or Lucy Snowe (Unsigned Review: *Villette*, *Guardian* 194).

possessor of a coherent interiority and the unquestioned driver of her own destiny.⁶⁶ This portrayal of Jane supports identification not because readers are in fact rational decision makers with control over both their emotions and their future but because we would like to imagine that we are.⁶⁷ In other words, by presenting Jane in ways that emphasize her legibility and agency, Brontë makes identifying with Jane feel not just pleasurable but empowering. First, Jane's legibility as a subject makes her available to us; we can more easily enter into her desires because they are rendered knowable to both Jane and the reader. This vision of mental life is considerably simplified, especially when considered in the context of Brontë's later work. While *Villette*'s Lucy Snowe describes herself as "perverse," her inner life not fully accessible to either the reader or herself, Jane is troubled by no such complexity (427). Indeed, Jane, once she leaves childhood behind, is never again shown to lose control of herself or of the narrative. Indeed, even when Jane declares herself to be "quite insane" following her failed wedding, her own behavior belies the accuracy of her diagnosis: Jane decides to leave Thornfield because "laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be" (365). If this is insanity, what, we might wonder, does sanity look like? In Jane, "reason sits firm and holds the reins and she will not let the feelings burst away and hurry her to wild chasms" (223). Even on the verge of dying of exposure, Jane presents a perfectly legible, even eloquent, case as to why the Rivers should take her in: "I will trust you. If I were a masterless and stray dog, I know that you would not turn me from your hearth to-night: as it is, I really have no fear . . . excuse me from much discourse — my breath is short — I feel a spasm when I speak" (388). The novel

⁶⁶ See Scribner at 319 (taking up Wendy Brown's argument that a "model of the liberal subject based on 'fixed boundaries, clearly identifiable interests and identities, and power conceived as generated and directed from within the entity itself' remains dominant until well into the twentieth century" in the context of the nineteenth-century British novel). However, as Scribner notes, not every account of liberalism, including in the novel, revolves around a specific understanding of the subject (319). In taking up this term, I mean not to flatten the understanding of liberalism but merely to adopt what seems to me a useful shorthand for the specific emphasis of agency and coherence at work in *Jane Eyre*'s conception of the subject.

⁶⁷ Scribner, following D.A. Miller, suggests that we have been conditioned to think of ourselves in this way by the novel itself: "The novel constructs a subject who is also the subject of a liberal politics" (319).

emphasizes not only Jane's extreme coherence as a subject and her legibility for the reader but also the way in which she is the driver of her own plot. Jane does not wait for life to happen to her but rather puts herself in the way of life, including by advertising for her governess position. Identifying with Jane feels so powerful because the novel encourages readers to think of ourselves as like Jane: in control of our choices and destiny.

While Jane's coherence and her power to create her own happiness underwrite her position as the subject of readerly identification, Bertha's extreme illegibility and lack of control over her circumstances troublingly works to render her as a non-subject, outside the sphere of identificatory or even sympathetic possibility.⁶⁸ Indeed, though Rochester acknowledges that his wife has "lucid intervals of days — sometimes weeks," she never appears in any coherent manner within the space of the narrative (289). Jane's subjectivity is defined in terms of her humanity, with its attendant freedom: "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you" (293). Bertha is denied status as a subject on the same metric: her freedom of movement has been curtailed by Rochester's violent imprisonment and her discursive status as a human being is denied through Jane's repeated and racialized associations of her with the animal: "What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal" (338). Indeed, Bertha's ultimate exercise of her own "independent will" — burning down Thornfield and leaping to her death from its roof — is represented in incredibly indirect fashion, narrated to Jane by a former Thornfield butler months after its occurrence. While it is Bertha's exercise of agency that, strictly speaking, creates the conditions for the novelistic resolution, Brontë elides Bertha's exercise of free will in favor of that of Jane. She emphasizes not Bertha's decision to burn down the house but Jane's decision to answer Rochester's supernatural call in its wake: "It was my time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play and in force" (483). This elision of Bertha's lucidity and agency,

⁶⁸ For an account of Bertha as Jane's double onto whom Brontë has displaced Jane's anger, desires, and ungovernability, see Gilbert and Gubar 336-445.

coupled with Brontë's troublingly racialized portrayal of her and of mental illness, works to other Bertha so completely that she exists in the novel only as an obstacle to Jane's happiness. The readerly pleasure in Jane's success ("Reader, I married him") is underwritten by Brontë's rendering Bertha's life, to use Judith Butler's term, "ungrievable" (*Precarious* 150). Despite trading on this scheme to ensure the affective success of her project, Brontë herself seems uncomfortable with the neatness of this coherence/incoherence scheme she has figured and the theory of the subject that underlies it, with its emphasis both on unqualified agency and unqualified mental health. Following *Jane Eyre's* publication, Brontë expressed regret over "making horror too prominent" in her depiction of Bertha Rochester, as "profound pity ought to be the only sentiment elicited" (Letter to W.S. Williams, 4 Jan. 1848, 96). And, indeed, we can find evidence of Brontë's discomfort with her depiction of mental illness not merely in her post-publication communications and later work but also within the novel itself, in her representations of Jane's lingering anxiety over madness and her husband's treatment of his first wife.⁶⁹

Identificatory Anxiety: Madness

While Brontë relies on the othering of Bertha to secure the identification of the reader with Jane through the lovers' happy ending, she also expresses discomfort with the view of mental life that underwrites it. We can read traces of Brontë's discomfort both in Jane's refusal to adopt her lover's simplified account of madness and in her anxious fixation on madness itself. When Rochester explains his treatment of his wife to Jane, he provides an understanding of madness that is useful to the identificatory project of the novel. In Rochester's fixed and racialized account of madness, the "germs of insanity" are passed from "infamous mother" (in the present case, "the Creole . . . both a madwoman and a drunkard") to "true daughter," (who "copied her parent in both points"). These germs, moreover, can be "prematurely

⁶⁹ Though Brontë expresses regret over her portrayal of Bertha's mental illness and revises this view of mental life in her later work, her later novels leave unrevised her uncritical views on colonialism. For instance, Lucy Snowe expresses no moral qualms about the nature of the work M. Paul performs to restore Madame Walravens's "large estate" in Guadeloupe to productivity (509).

developed” by the predisposed person’s “excesses” (337, 353). The mad person thus both is genetically marked out for madness and usefully may be blamed for their “unchaste behaviors” and their “great propensities” (353). This account of madness as a predetermined category into which only the unworthy will fall is convenient for Rochester, a person seeking to justify the unjustifiable, but also for the novel itself, which needs Rochester to remain a viable romantic prospect for Jane and the readers who identify with her. Yet, despite its usefulness for the novel, Jane never fully adopts this account as her own. Though she never advances an explicit critique of her husband’s fixed, biologically-determined account of madness, she continues to quietly hold a different set of assumptions about mental life. Indeed, it seems Brontë, who herself struggled with mental health and who would go on to provide a more nuanced account of mental life and health in *Villette*, could not quite allow Rochester’s account to stand unqualified.

In Jane’s competing account of madness, mental illness is not brought on by a person’s immoral “excesses,” for which they must be held accountable. Rather, Jane takes issue with Rochester’s display of “vindictive antipathy” toward his wife because Bertha “cannot help being mad” (347). Though Rochester tries to separate his hatred for his wife from her mental illness, Jane proves difficult to convince. When Rochester asks, “If you were mad, do you think I should hate you?,” Jane does not hesitate to reply, “I do indeed, sir.” (348). Rochester cuts short his rather chilling meditation on how differently he would treat Jane if she were mad instead of Bertha — “if you raved, my arms should confine you, and not a strait waistcoat . . . if you flew at me as wildly as that woman did this morning, I should receive you in an embrace, at least as fond as it would be restrictive” — on the grounds of relevance (348). “But why,” he asks himself, “do I follow that train of ideas?” (349). For Rochester, the hypothetical is irrelevant: Jane is sane and will remain so. But Rochester, who first encounters Jane in her adulthood, does not know her as we do: he has no access to the trauma of the Red Room; he does not know how close she came to losing control over her own narrative at Lowood, to being labeled as a “servant and agent” to the “Evil One” (78). For Jane, this hypothetical perhaps feels more pressing, though she notably fails to press him on it.

Though Jane lets Rochester's account of madness stand uncorrected, she continues to fixate on madness itself, long after this discussion at Thornfield and even after Bertha's death. When Jane learns from the former Thornfield butler that Rochester is now "stone-blind" due to the fire, she notes that she "had dreaded worse. I had dreaded he was mad" (505). The content of Jane's worry is striking — why would the most likely medical issue resulting from a fire be madness? Might Jane's continued preoccupation with madness speak to a lingering concern over Rochester's mistreatment of Bertha and the unsatisfactory account of madness that underwrites it? Indeed, Jane's expression of worry makes clear that she continues to see madness not as a predetermined category but rather as a state into which anyone, including Rochester or herself, might slip (or be pushed) under the right circumstances. Jane's insistence on the slipperiness of madness at this late point in the novel suggests that Rochester's explanation for his behavior cannot fully satisfy the sense of dissonance Jane earlier expresses over his hate toward and treatment of Bertha. Because we do not see Jane resolve this dissonance within the space of the narrative, the anxiety it produces casts a shadow of doubt over the proclaimed "perfect concord" of the couple (519).

Notably, Jane decides to return to Rochester not because she has worked through her concerns over his treatment of Bertha but because of a "supernatural" event: the call of Rochester's voice (483). By introducing this device, Brontë sidesteps the issue of how to resolve Jane's dissatisfaction with Rochester's explanation but creates a new problem for the novel: our always-sane Jane is now hearing voices. Strikingly, Jane refuses to share her experience of this "supernatural" call with Rochester upon their reunion, though she fills him in on everything else that has occurred since her departure from Thornfield. After hearing her tale, Rochester confides in Jane about his recent brush with the supernatural: prior to her arrival, he called out to her with "such frantic energy" that "if any listener had heard me, he would have thought me mad" and heard her voice in return, notwithstanding the distance between them (515). In response, Jane seeks confirmation from him about the timing of this event and the fact that he spoke aloud in calling to her. Yet she fails to explain to Rochester why these details matter; instead, she explains it to us:

Reader, it was on Monday night — near midnight — that I too had received the mysterious summons: those were the very words by which I replied to it. I listened to Mr. Rochester's

narrative, but made no disclosure in return. The coincidence struck me as too awful and inexplicable to be communicated or discussed. If I told anything, my tale would be such as must necessarily make a profound impression on the mind of my hearer: and that mind, yet from its sufferings too prone to gloom, needed not the deeper shade of the supernatural. I kept these things then, and pondered them in my heart. (515)

In the treatment of the call, Brontë splits the difference. Jane's experience of the supernatural is confirmed to the reader by Rochester, bolstering her authority and her grasp on reality. However, the novel slightly undermines its own claim of "perfect concord" between the lovers by having Jane refuse to disclose this moment of connection — which, if shared, would seem more like fate than "gloom" (519). Further, as Carla Kaplan notes, the novel gives no indication that Jane ever shares this information with Rochester, notwithstanding his recovery and the next ten years that they spend talking "all day long" (Kaplan 20; 519). Critical attention has focused on the fact of the non-disclosure rather than on its specific content. "Why," Kaplan asks, "doesn't Jane tell Rochester her story?" (16). Ivan Kreilkamp argues that, in this moment, Jane chooses writing over speech, a preference that Brontë will further explore through Lucy Snowe in *Villette*. Kaplan suggests that Jane withholds because Rochester is too different — by virtue of his gender — from Jane to serve as her ideal listener, a role that is instead filled instead by the reader. But these are answers to the wrong question. The question raised by this passage is not "Why doesn't Jane tell Rochester her story?" — she has, after all, already told him nearly all of it — but why doesn't she tell him about *this*? I propose that Jane does not tell Rochester about her participation in their "supernatural" conversation because she fears that doing so will place her sanity into question, notwithstanding Rochester's corresponding experience. Jane tells us what happens instead of her fiancé not because we are her ideal listener but because we do not share Rochester's history of locking up wives in the attics. Just before Jane's ultimate moment of triumph "Reader, I married him," Brontë allows for this small moment of doubt, both Jane's and her own, over Rochester's treatment of Bertha and the account of mental illness he uses to justify it.

Identificatory Anxiety: Rochester's Fiction of Special Pleading

Brontë's novel evinces anxiety not only over Rochester's problematic but useful account of madness but also over the ways in which that account is articulated: that is, through the same formal moves made by the novel itself. Raymond Williams argues Charlotte Brontë "stands very obviously at the head of a tradition" that he "coldly" calls "the fiction of special pleading" (*English* 74). Fiction of special pleading, he explains, is "fiction in which the only major emotion, and then the relation with the reader, is that exact stress, that first person stress: 'circumstanced like me'" (74). "The stress," Williams elaborates, "is this really: the world will judge me in certain ways if it sees what I do, but if I knew how it felt it would see me quite differently" (74).⁷⁰ Williams is "wary" of such fiction as it not only reduces all other characters besides "the special, the pleading, the recommending character" to "emotional landscape" but also that "extraordinary things have been done in its name: use of others, abuse of others" (74). Williams does not accuse Brontë of undertaking these "extraordinary things" herself (though other critics have not hesitated

⁷⁰ Williams begins his chapter on the Brontës with a promise to elucidate the differences between Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* in order to highlight "the originality of those twenty months in 1847 and 1848" in which both novels appeared (*English* 60). Yet, after explaining what the two novels share — "an emphasis on intense feeling, a commitment to what we must directly call passion, that it is itself very new to the English novel" — he switches *Jane Eyre* out for *Villette*, which notably did not appear within the twenty-month period that interests Williams (60). He strangely claims to make the switch on the basis of plot — *Jane Eyre* "is in every sense dramatic," which apparently relates it too closely to *Wuthering Heights* for us to understand the difference between the writing of the two sisters. Yet, Williams's definition of the "fiction of special pleading," in which the sharing of affective experience renders acceptable what would otherwise be judged to be unacceptable, seems a better fit for *Jane Eyre* than *Villette*. That is, in *Jane Eyre*, the protagonist undertakes any number of questionable actions — physically attacking her cousin, publicly advertising for a governess situation, falling in love with her much older employer, leaving his home with little of value, returning to him despite his deception, settling in a remote home as his wife and caretaker — that make perfect sense once we join the protagonist in experiencing the emotions — rage, boredom, desire, pride, longing — that motivate them (74). Yet, it is not an appropriate description of *Villette*, in which the protagonist's rather smaller list of actions — accepting work caring for an old woman, moving abroad to work as a teacher, accepting help from her lover to set up her own school — are more rooted in precarity and an assessment of the opportunities available to her than in her emotional life, which is not rendered fully legible to the reader or herself. See also Ablow, *Victorian* 83 (similarly noting that Williams's characterization is a better fit for *Jane Eyre*, as it fails to "capture the strangeness of *Villette*").

to do so);⁷¹ rather, he suggests that Brontë provides the tools that others may pick up to advance more nefarious projects.

And indeed, in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë gives form to the anxiety she feels about the availability of the techniques that she uses so effectively to bolster Jane's identificatory appeal. In particular, mid-way through the novel, Rochester, fresh off his failed wedding to Jane, engages in a special-pleading of his own in order to convince Jane to become his mistress: "I am a fool!" cried Mr. Rochester suddenly. "I keep telling her I am not married, and do not explain to her why . . . Oh, I am certain Jane will agree with me in opinion, when she knows all that I know!" (351). Both character Jane and her narrating counterpart cede the floor, as Rochester undertakes a largely uninterrupted narrative that extends over the next twelve pages.⁷² His goal is that of every special pleading — "[you] will agree with me . . . when [you] know all that I know!" Like Jane's own narrative, Rochester's story is both intimately narrated, with frequent recourses to direct address ("Janet") and highly curated in ways designed to attract identification. Rochester's fiction, like Jane's own, begins with an emotional story of youthful victimization at the hands of his relatives: in particular, his "avaricious, grasping" father and brother, who "joined in the plot" to trick him into marrying Bertha and collecting her "thirty-thousand pounds" by concealing her family history of mental illness (352). Though he was an adult at the time of his marriage, Rochester — again recalling narrating Jane's performance in the early chapters — emphasizes his youth, his inexperience, and his lack of control: he was married "almost before [he] knew where [he] was" (352). Upon his marriage, Rochester describes himself as being further victimized by his "perverse and imbecile" wife and her "giant propensities" (353).

⁷¹ There is a rich critical tradition that persuasively critiques the racialized strategies through which Brontë others and eliminates Bertha to ensure Jane's place as, in the words of Spivak, "the feminist, individualist hero of British fiction" (251). See Spivak; Lanser; Armstrong, "One"; David, among others.

⁷² This opportunity to be heard is precisely the opportunity that Narrator Jane denies to St John Rivers, whose preaching leaves Jane's heart "thrilled" and mind "astonished" (405). The effects of St John's "power" on Jane are catalogued but the content of the preaching itself is unrepresented. Denied access to his words, we are not permitted to be moved by them. This elision effectively puts a thumb on the scale for Rochester, whose power we experience alongside Jane.

Like Jane, he emphasizes his own endurance: “even then, I restrained myself: I eschewed unbraiding, I curtailed remonstrance . . . I repressed the deep antipathy I felt.” Indeed, even when it became apparent that “only cruelty would check” her vices, he “would not use cruelty.” Finally, his wife, “the true daughter of an infamous mother,” was “discovered . . . to be mad” (353). While Rochester emphasizes his restraint and disclaims his agency through passive construction and an emphasis on his status of youthful victimhood — he emphasizes the agency of those who oppress him, including his wife, whom he holds responsible for developing madness prematurely through her “excesses” (353).

Trapped with a wife he cannot legally divorce, Rochester, desperate and flirting with suicidal ideation, receives a sign: “A wind fresh from Europe” blows in to bring him hope, and it is this “Hope” that instructs him to “take the maniac to England” and “leave her” with attendants at Thornfield so that he might seek happiness elsewhere (356). Rochester’s recounting of this sign from nature is disconcerting, to say the least, given its similarities to the novel’s representation of the “work of nature” — not a “miracle” but “her best” — on which Jane will base her decision to return to Rochester (483). Indeed, we might hear in the language of Rochester’s “regeneration” (“My heart . . . swelled to the tone, and filled with living blood — my being longed for renewal — my soul thirsted for a pure draught. I saw hope revive — and felt regeneration possible”) echoes of Jane’s own self-empowering declaration (“It was my time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play and in force”) (353, 483). When the miraculous call from nature appears for Jane, the novel encourages us to trust its implicit message: embrace your power, go to Rochester. Yet, Rochester also seems to sincerely believe the message he receives from nature, even as its result — his pursuit of mistresses across several European countries while his wife remains locked in the attic of Thornfield — is harder to square with the novel’s project than Jane’s fairy tale ending. Rochester’s appropriation of the very forms through which Jane’s “fiction of special pleading” is articulated thus puts pressure on the novel’s own methodology — what can be counted on if youthful victimization, first-person narration, direct address, self-empowerment, and signs from nature may be appropriated to any end? In other words, Rochester takes up the very formal techniques Brontë uses to make Jane compelling and uses

them to ends that she does not fully endorse, putting pressure on her own reliance on these strategies. Indeed, to return to Williams, Rochester clearly undertakes “extraordinary things,” including “use of others, abuse of others” in the name of his own narrative of self-empowerment and self-justification (74). That Rochester takes up these techniques, and not wholly without success — the account doesn’t achieve its immediate aim of convincing Jane to be his mistress but it does secure her forgiveness and the possibility of their romantic future — registers Brontë’s lingering uncertainty about the formal strategies that bolster Jane’s identificatory pull.

Brontë’s first published novel is thus both an incredible feat of identificatory writing and a site of anxiety over both the power of that writing and the representational compromises required to secure its effect. In her later work, she first steps away from the risks and pleasures of identification in *Shirley* only to return to them in *Villette* in an attempt to figure them differently.

Identificatory Avoidance: *Shirley*

Just before he proposes to Jane at Thornfield, Rochester implies that he plans to marry Blanche Ingram. Heartbroken, Jane insists she “must go” from Thornfield (292). “Roused to something like passion,” she embarks on one of the most famous speeches in all of Victorian literature:

“Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? . . . Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!— I have as much soul as you, — and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom . . . — it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal, — as we are!” (292)

It is easy to locate the enduring appeal of such a speech, with its claim to an equality independent of wealth, personal appearance, and gender. The speech is effective because it is beautifully rendered and passionately expressed. Yet, it is also effective because the novel has stacked the deck in its favor. Jane argues that her value is not rooted in her desirability, but she is, in fact, already desired by Rochester. It would indeed be at least “as hard” for Rochester to leave Jane as it was for Jane to leave him, which he makes clear in his

response: “‘As we are!’ repeated Mr. Rochester — ‘so,’ he added, enclosing me in his arms, gathering me to his breast, pressing his lips on my lips: ‘so, Jane!’” (292). The appeal of Jane’s declaration is reinforced by her success, but this reinforcement has consequences for the politics of the novel. It feels so good to agree with Jane, to cheer her on in her proto-feminist speeches, not just because she is right but also because everyone agrees with her that she is right. Her expression of that rightness secures her desires without cost, though, of course, not without risk.

As I have noted, identifying with Jane feels so pleasurable and empowering because she is the driver of her own plot. *Jane Eyre* is frequently characterized as a story of a woman “finding her voice” (see e.g., Peters). Yet, as a description of the novel as a whole, this is not quite accurate: Jane “finds her voice” at ten years old early on in the novel (“*Speak* I must”) and then consistently deploys it to great effect throughout her adulthood (43, Brontë’s emphasis). Indeed, Jane’s voice is so powerful within the world of the novel, that her thesis — “Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails” — does not strike us as particularly implausible when read in context (484). Yet, as a description of reality, this claim cannot withstand scrutiny. Sometimes no amount of “energy to command” is enough to secure “obedience” on the part of a third party — particularly when the command is filtered through the listener’s pre-existing biases toward, for instance, the speaker’s class status and gender identity. This moment of novelistic implausibility points to a limit on the politics of *Jane Eyre* as the story of a heroine with an “exceptional destiny.” As film director Céline Sciamma explains, in the context of realism, “the exceptional destiny is always politically problematic” (Batuman). The novel’s critiques — of the harshness of British charity schools, of gender inequality, of the lack of fulfilling career options for women — are watered down by its heroine’s ability to overcome these obstacles, or at least to make them no longer relevant to her happiness. Secure in our identification with Jane, we may leave the novel confident both in our right to express our justified anger and our belief that we will be rewarded for our acts of self-assertion with an “exceptional destiny” of our own. But what happens when we make a speech in defense of our right to an emotional life to an employer who is *not* secretly in love with us? What happens when we find ourselves in

a different kind of world, one that is hostile to our voice and where harm is not always perpetrated by individual people but by complex systems to which we have limited access? What if declaring our “independent will” does not guarantee that others will recognize our humanity or respect our right of movement? What if no amount of “energy to command” on our part secures us our rights or puts us in the way of happiness? What is the value, as Sciamma asks, in representing “people overcoming constraints, through some combination of ingenuity and intense desire, when most people had failed to overcome those constraints, regardless of how ingenious they had been or how intense their desire?” (Batuman).

In her next novel, *Shirley*, Brontë explores precisely these limits of her previous project. While *Shirley*, a historical novel narrated in third person, is often described as Brontë’s “most explicitly political novel” due to its treatment of both the economic effects of the Orders in Council⁷³ and the Luddite unrest of 1811 and 1812 in Yorkshire, I argue that *Shirley* does more to mark the limits of *Jane Eyre*’s political vision than to advance one of its own (Armstrong, *Desire* 221). Indeed, critical attempts to read the novel as containing a straightforward political agenda often distort the narrative beyond recognition, as, to quote Amanda Anderson, “the novel makes it very hard to identify clear values within the political register” because it “wreaks havoc with any one-to-one correspondence between social position and political ideology” (“Dickens” 350, 349).⁷⁴

⁷³ “The Orders in Council” refer to the government-ordered economic blockade on France, its Allies, and neutral countries during the Napoleonic War.

⁷⁴ For instance, in Terry Eagleton’s Marxist account of the novel, he argues “the main ideological thrust of *Shirley* is to re-create and celebrate that class-consolidation between squire and mill-owner, achieved as it was by the catalyst of working-class militancy” (46). Yet, it is difficult to understand the novel as a celebration of this unification of the ruling class since the militancy exceeds the “central dramatic event” at Moore’s Mill. After the ruling class comes together to put down the unrest (killing one worker and injuring six more), Robert Moore, a mill-owner and our hero, is shot by a working-class agitator and nearly dies himself. Indeed, no meaningful change occurs, nor seemingly could occur, to the relationship between the mill owners and the workers (or that between Robert and Caroline) until the restrictions imposed by the Orders in Council are removed.

In Nancy Armstrong’s account of the novel as a demonstration of women’s “hardly acknowledged” role in enacting historical transformation, she focuses on the morality lesson Caroline seeks to impart on Robert through their erotically-charged reading of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* (*Desire* 227). Interestingly, Caroline’s strategy is to educate (and Anglicize) her cousin through identificatory reading. She believes Robert will identify with Caius Marcus and thus learn from his mistake in treating his subjects poorly, a lesson he will (with her encouragement) apply to his own treatment of his workers. Yet, Robert’s identificatory investment goes awry. He “perfectly” sympathizes not with Caius Marcus’s change of heart but with the “revenge” plan that precedes it (89). When Caroline attempts to apply

The novel, which has been widely regarded as a disappointment by both contemporary and modern readers of *Jane Eyre*,⁷⁵ focuses on the courtship plots of two attractive young women, Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar. Like Jane, Caroline and Shirley are passionate, fiercely committed to gender equality, and misunderstood by their families. However, they are not written so as to attract readerly identification. Indeed, if Jane's identificatory hold on the reader is figured through a carefully-calibrated combination of sympathy and aspiration, in *Shirley*, Brontë avoids the ethically-fraught specter of identification by breaking up the formula: the tragic Caroline courts pity, while the magnetic, secretive Shirley solicits admiration. The capricious narrator seems quite set on maintaining an affective distance between the reader and characters even at great aesthetic cost, as if over-correcting for the ethical and political pitfalls of *Jane Eyre*. Strikingly, the narrator maintains this distance by routinely denying our access to the inner life of the more compelling Shirley and by treating the all-too-available interiority of naïve, romantic Caroline with no small degree of irony. The narrator further distances us from both heroines by skipping over the narration of events with great potential for affective investment and plot development, including Robert's rejected proposal to Shirley.⁷⁶

To kick off the novel, Brontë's narrator, in the vein of Crimsworth, promises us "something unromantic as Monday"; to bring it to a close, she teases us with the image of "the judicious reader putting

her reading of the play to his situation, Robert shrugs off her attempt to "tack [her moral] to the play" and abruptly changes the topic (90). Indeed, Robert continues in his current treatment of his workers until he is shot in the head (which convinces him that treating his workers more generously is desirable) and the Orders in Council are lifted (which allows him to do so). Armstrong, who emphasizes Caroline's "retiring, feminine, and thoroughly benevolent . . . power," fails to account for the fact that this "barely acknowledged" power is not successful in achieving its aim (*Desire* 227-28). Indeed, from Armstrong's reading of the scene, we would have no idea that Caroline is anything less than totally effective in her attempt to "catechize" Robert (228).

⁷⁵ As one reviewer explains, "In some respects [*Shirley*] is superior; but we do not like it half so well — or we should say, we do not succumb to it half so much . . . It would take a great many *Shirleys* to put *Jane Eyre* out of our heads" (Unsigned Review: *Shirley*, *Atlas* 120). Even reviewers who appreciated the novel were quite explicit about their preference for *Jane Eyre*: "Too bad it is a second novel; I prefer the first" (Forcade 144).

⁷⁶ In his review, Lewes takes great umbrage with both Brontë's decision to narrate Shirley's love story through Louis's notebook and the elision of Robert's proposal to Shirley: "Incident," he writes, "is not the forte of Currer Bell . . . in invention she is at yet only an artisan, not an artist" (Unsigned Review: *Shirley*, *Edinburgh Review* 169).

on his spectacles to look for the moral” in what has been narrated (*Shirley* 5, 608). And indeed, it is difficult to pinpoint an affirmative ethical or political project of the novel, though its heroines share with Jane Eyre a great concern over the lack of opportunities made available to women. Rather, the novel seems designed not just to avoid the ethical issues created by Brontë’s former reliance on identificatory strategies but also to walk back the celebration of self-assertion that made identification with Jane feel so compelling. Specifically, *Shirley* is a novel about “impotence” peopled by “characters defined by their very inability to initiate action” (Gilbert and Gubar 375). Though critics have at times blamed Caroline’s lack of Jane-like fire for the novel’s impassivity, Brontë presents us with no shortage of characters of “Yorkshire soul”: people, that is, who are willing to fight for what they think is right and who take pleasure in the fighting itself (8). Yet, these characters’ most pressing obstacle — that the restrictions imposed by the Orders in Council have destroyed the financial feasibility of the manufacturing business that dominates their local economy — is out of their reach. The Orders in Council are what stands in the way of mill-owners being profitable, of the workers receiving better wages, and of Caroline Helstone marrying the Robert Moore, a financially-strapped mill owner. Unable to do anything about the overarching obstacle to their livelihoods and happiness, these characters redirect their energy into the conflict between workers and mill owners over the adoption of new technology, with the workers breaking the mill owner’s new machinery⁷⁷ and the mill owners, fortified by the support of clergy, defending their property with violence.

The heroines similarly lack a productive outlet for their energy. Caroline and Shirley share Jane’s penchant for compelling speeches in defense of gender equality and of passion. Yet, they lack Jane’s luck in audience. The people to whom Shirley and Caroline direct these speeches are not interested in changing their positions, and, even if they were, they are not in the position to effect change on the issues under discussion. Even more troubling, they are not above responding in bad faith. For instance, when Shirley

⁷⁷ Eagleton is surely right that Brontë gives short shrift to the sophisticated motives of the workers, whose non-fictional counterparts used machine breaking as a strategic tactic to negotiate better wages and working conditions for themselves (49). Yet, this lack of curiosity and investment in the workers does not in itself turn the novel into the conservative celebration of the ruling class that Eagleton imagines it to be.

and Caroline debate Joe Scott, Robert's sexist foreman, on the proper scope of concern for women, they give a virtuoso performance, shooting down his every point with skill and humor. Joe, however, meets their rejoinders with "disdainful silence" and ad hominem attacks (310). All parties leave the conversation all the more convinced of the merits of their original position.

Several chapters later, Caroline finds herself in another argument with a similarly closed off opponent. Mrs. Yorke criticizes Caroline for being led by her emotions and for conducting herself in ways "better suited to a novel-heroine than to a woman who is to make her way in the real world by dint of common sense" (380). In reply, Caroline passionately defends the importance of emotion: "Of course I should often be influenced by my feelings. They were given me to that end. Whom my feelings teach me to love I *must* and *shall* love . . ." (380). As she speaks, she feels "pleasure in saying this with emphasis" and "pleasure in daring to say it in Mrs. Yorke's presence" (380). In the pleasure of success, Caroline feels invincible: "she did not care what unjust sarcasm might be hurled at her in reply" (380). Yet, Caroline soon learns that she has overestimated her own fortitude, for Mrs. Yorke responds by taking aim at her seemingly unrequited feelings for her cousin: "Don't waste your dramatic effects. That was well said — it was quite fine; but it is lost on two women. . . . There should have been a disengaged gentleman present. — Is Mr. Robert nowhere hid behind the curtains?" (380). This "cool" reply not only embarrasses Caroline in front of Robert's sister, Hortense, but also strikes her "in her very heart" (380).⁷⁸ While Jane is celebrated for making her desires known, Caroline learns that being known is also a liability. Mrs. Pryor is perhaps not too far off the mark in her critique: Caroline seems to think she is living out her life in *Jane Eyre* rather than in its critique.

⁷⁸ The novel itself seems undecided about the best way to handle a bad faith debater like Joe Scott or Mrs. Yorke, as evidenced by the subsequent debate over Caroline's performance held by the Jessy and Rose Yorke. Jessy, "whom the scene appeared greatly to edify," believes that Caroline has proved herself to be a match for her mother; Rose disagrees, preferring the approach taken by Shirley, who has perhaps learned from her run-in with Joe Scott: "No; Miss Helstone is not my mother's match, for she allows herself to be vexed . . . Shirley Keeldar manages better. — Mother, you have never hurt Miss Keeldar's feelings yet" (383).

Caroline struggles not only to make her voice heard but also to move forward her plot. Stifled by her domestic duties and finding her hopes of marrying Robert stymied by his dire financial situation, Caroline decides to seek employment. Like Jane, Caroline is frustrated by the lack of career options for women, and, like Jane, she decides to escape her current unhappiness by seeking “a new servitude” as a governess (*JE* 102). However, Caroline immediately faces pressures from her friends to give up her plan. While her uncle’s objections are based in status-anxiety — “I will not have it said that my niece is a governess” — the objections raised by Shirley and, especially, by Mrs. Pryor (who is both Shirley’s former governess and Caroline’s mother) are based in real concern for her health and happiness (184). Indeed, Mrs. Pryor’s firsthand knowledge of “the sedentary, solitary, constrained, joyless, toilsome” life of a governess makes her objections difficult to dismiss out of hand (355). In the face of such strong objections, Caroline decides to delay her plans.

While Caroline’s decision may seem reasonable to a reader unfamiliar with *Jane Eyre*, those “sufferers of *Jane Eyre* fever” have learned to expect more from their heroines in terms of self-assertion. Brontë anticipates the objections of her particularly fiery readership by placing these objections to Caroline’s passivity into the mouth of a character modeled not on Jane Eyre herself but on her most determined readers. On the night she faces down Mrs. Yorke, Caroline also converses with Rose Yorke, a quietly assertive girl of twelve, and her younger sister, the brilliantly humorous Jessy. While Jessy imagines herself as a wife and mother, Rose plans to reject the demands of domestic labor in favor of travel and adventure, regardless of the views of others: “I mean to make a way to do so if one is not made for me. I cannot always live in Briarfield” (377). Giving explicit form to the feminist, individualist stance of *Jane Eyre*, twelve-year-old Rose criticizes Caroline for living her life “like the toad’s, buried in marble” (377). It is better, Rose tells her, “to try all things and find all empty than to try nothing and leave your life a blank” (377). Indeed, failing to put oneself in the way of life is immoral: it is to “commit the sin of him who buried his talent in a napkin — despicable sluggard” (377). Rose’s position, like that of Jane, is compelling: full of the vigor of life and the confidence of youth. Yet, Caroline remains unconvinced; she argues that seeking

adventure is not good in itself but rather its value depends upon the result: “I fear a wanderer’s life, for me at least, would end like that tale you are reading [Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*] —in disappointment, vanity, and vexation of spirit” (377). While Rose’s position has greater readerly appeal, especially for those of us already frustrated by the state of Caroline’s arrested plot, the novel makes it impossible to endorse Rose’s position, even temporarily. Chapters earlier, the narrator uses her “magic mirror” to reveal to us the future of the Yorke girls, a future full of travel but also of “disappointment” (144). Strikingly, the narrator presents us with the image of Rose “alone in a foreign country” keeping watch over the grave of Jessy, whose premature death took place in her sister’s “guardian arms” (145). We are then invited to “behold Rose two years later” in a location that “is far from England”: “The little quiet Yorkshire girl is a lonely emigrant in some region of the southern hemisphere. Will she ever come back?” (145). This moving yet disconcerting peek into the future serves not to shame Rose for her ambitions and optimism but rather to (re)figure the choice to seek out adventure not as a moral imperative but as a matter of moral luck. Jane is right to leave school for Thornfield because she gets her happy ending but that result, *Shirley* suggests, is not guaranteed. Caroline, who lives in a different world than Jane, could have as easily ended up with an employer like Mrs. Pryor’s Mrs. Hardman as with Jane’s Mr. Rochester. Indeed, Caroline’s happy ending, which is secured not by any action of her part but by the end of the restrictions of the Orders in Council, feels like a matter of chance rather than fate. Even as Rose’s fate works to undo the uncritical endorsement of agency promoted by *Jane Eyre*, Caroline’s ending is not presented as an affirmative endorsement for staying put. The novel thus seeks not to take us somewhere new but to return us to where we were before we entered into our incredibly pleasurable identificatory relation with Jane. Before, that is, we sought “a new servitude,” spoke up for ourselves and our humanity, and declared in triumph, “Reader, I married him” (517). It is little wonder the readers found this novel, which undermines the uncritical pleasures offered by our empowering, individualist identification with Jane Eyre, to be a disappointment.

Identificatory Returns: *Villette*

“Every reader of *Jane Eyre*,” Harriet Martineau declares, “will be glad to see the autobiographical form returned to” in *Villette*. Yet, for Martineau, this greatly celebrated return to form fails to deliver on its promise; she confesses herself disappointed to find Lucy Snowe only “a feebler sister of Jane Eyre” and the world she inhabits “almost intolerably painful” (174, 172). In this review, over which Brontë effectively ended their friendship, Martineau describes the resistance the novel incites in the reader: “we are wont to say . . . the author had no right to make readers so miserable” (172). This readerly resistance is expressed in even stronger terms in Matthew Arnold’s famous characterization of *Villette* as “disagreeable” precisely “because the writer’s mind contains nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage” (201). Yet, like *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* has also held and continues to hold readers “spellbound” (Lewes, Unsigned Review: *Villette*, *Leader* 185). In 1853, George Eliot gushed that *Villette* is “a still more wonderful book than *Jane Eyre*,” as “there is something almost preternatural in its power” (Letter to Mrs. Bray 192). In 2015, Daniel Lavery likewise described feeling both “as if [he] had a fever” and “unjustifiably angry at the world, as if it had conspired to keep *Villette* from [him]” upon finishing the novel (xiii).⁷⁹ As with *Jane Eyre*, even its harshest critics could not resist what Christina Crosby calls “the irresistible interest of the novel”; “even those who hated the novel,” she notes, “responded strongly to it” (112). For instance, Thackeray, who expresses dislike of both the novel and its heroine, calls it “a plaguey book,” a novel from which one cannot escape, even when escape is desired (Letter to Mrs. Bryan Proctor 198). An early reviewer of the novel describes this same quality in more positive terms, “the oldest man, the sternest and most scientific, who is a genuine novel-reader, will find it hard to get out of Madame Beck’s school when he has once entered there with Lucy Snowe” (Unsigned Review: *Villette*, *The Athenaeum* 188).

This intense split characterizes readerly reactions not only to the novel but also to its heroine, Lucy Snowe. While *Jane Eyre* continues to, in the words of Nancy Armstrong, attract “relatively intense

⁷⁹ Lavery notes the novel’s “secret and forbidden” quality, as well as the way it seems to be “passed along through a silent chain of fiercely earnest women” (xiii). His remarks recall those of Raymond Williams on the incredible intimacy of the novel, “I’ve noticed again and again — you’ve probably all noticed too — how difficult it is reading *Villette* out, read it out in public. For that isn’t its world” (*English* 73).

identification . . . from literary critics — indeed, from readers of all kinds,” both the readerly and critical responses to Lucy Snowe have been decidedly mixed or, more precisely, divided (“One” 215). Strikingly, as Anne A. Cheng notes, “almost all readers of *Villette* respond to Lucy Snowe with either resentment or a disturbing insistence” (75). Through many critics argue that Lucy Snowe — “Victorian fiction’s most intransigent heroine” — blocks identificatory closeness,⁸⁰ I argue that Brontë returns in *Villette* not just to the fictionalized autobiography form but also to identificatory writing (Auerbach, “Victorian Players” 189). Indeed, both the “disturbing insistence” and the “resentment” Cheng so insightfully identifies are more indicative of identificatory relation than its absence. Resentment is, after all, not the response of a reader who has merely failed to identify — from whom we might expect ambivalence or even boredom — but that of a reader who has disidentified, where disidentification is the “identification that one fears to make only because one has already made it” (Butler, *Bodies* 112). Notably, neither “disturbing insistence” nor “resentment” lends itself to the kind of detachment required of the critic. And in fact, the distortions of such unaccounted for identificatory attachments proliferate in criticism on *Villette*.

Even a cursory review of the literary critical work on *Villette* bears out this symptomatic schism. For instance, in Talia Schaffer’s account of Lucy as the proto-typical “female migrant caregiver,” the reader’s relationship to Lucy is protected at all costs (84). Even Lucy’s prejudice against Catholics is excused as “a psychological mechanism to cope with migration” undertaken “out of defensive desperation when she finds herself targeted by someone else’s quasi-colonizing campaign” (92). Indeed, though Schaffer’s account astutely emphasizes the material conditions that inform Lucy’s “crisis about identity, vulnerability, and language,” her attempt to position Lucy as beyond reproach at times strains plausibility for even the most identificatory of readers. For example, even if we were to credit Schaffer’s argument that Lucy’s bigoted utterances “do not simply emanate from her internal character but are profoundly

⁸⁰ See e.g., Auerbach’s “Victorian Players”: “we are spectators in [Lucy’s] life, not sharers in it” (189); Hughes: The narrator courts “alienation” rather than connection and *Villette* “is a novel without mutuality” (716, 712); Green: “In *Villette*, all such intimate relations, including identification, are suffused with and finally foreclosed by the disintegrative operations of a particularly female form of identification” (101).

constrained by her vocational situation,” Schaffer provides no explanation as to why these offensive sentiments appear not only in the represented thoughts and actions of the precariously-employed character Lucy but also in the narration of her older, more autonomous and finally-secure counterpart. Moreover, Schaffer’s unaccounted for identification with Lucy works against her materialist argument, leading her to conflate the experiences of Lucy Snowe with other migrant caregivers working under markedly different circumstances. For instance, Schaffer is undoubtedly correct that *Villette* anticipates and even influences Jamaica Kincaid’s portrayal of migrant work in her 1990 novel *Lucy*, but her insistence on the equivalencies of the positions of the two Lucys papers over real differences in situation between a white woman emigrating from England to Belgium in the nineteenth century and a black woman emigrating from the West Indies to the United States in the twentieth. In perhaps its most egregious instantiation, Schaffer argues that “M. Paul’s racism [directed toward Lucy and her Englishness] is far more overt than anything Kincaid’s Lucy Potter experiences” (93).⁸¹

If Schaffer’s pro-Lucy reading bears traces of “disturbing insistence,” the critical account of Rosemary Clark-Beattie reads decidedly more like resentment. In her account, Lucy is not a victim of “quasi-colonizing campaign” but its perpetrator, as “*Villette* is structured by what might be called a colonialist impulse” (825). Clark-Beattie insightfully teases out the ways in which “Lucy’s relation to her own culture is itself fraught with contradiction” and the ways in which this complicates the novel’s stance on Catholicism, yet her account also ignores or at least fails to take seriously the direness of Lucy’s financial reality. Most strikingly, Clark-Beattie argues that Lucy’s decision to emigrate is based less in financial necessity than in a desire to support her ego. That is, “like many of her contemporaries, Lucy escapes her

⁸¹ While Schaffer does provide historical support for her contention that “in the Victorian imagination, being English was a racial as much as a national identity,” our acceptance of this position does not justify the kind of one-to-one comparison she goes onto draw between the treatment of Lucy Snowe and that of Lucy Potter. Schaffer also draws a quite questionable parallel between the “emigrationist rhetoric” and “campaign” of mid-nineteenth-century England and present-day “government programs encouraging citizens to go find work abroad, including the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration and similar programs in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Thailand” (88).

insignificance within English society by fleeing to a setting where her adherence to the mores of the very culture she has fled sets her apart, in her own mind, as superior” (825). Yet, the novel is quite clear about Lucy’s lack of opportunities for employment in England given her class status and indifferent education — even Lucy’s former nurse has no advice for her beyond an emigration that would transform her ability to speak English into a marketable skill. The novel further gives us no reason to doubt Lucy’s representation that she would have continued to toil in obscurity as Miss Marchmont’s companion for many more years had she been afforded the opportunity. Though Schaffer’s and Clark-Beattie’s versions of Lucy are at odds, they share a tendency to suppress the specificities of Lucy’s situation; in making such suppressions, they find themselves in good critical company.

These identificatory distortions, including those of Schaffer and Clark-Beattie, seem to cluster around the treatment of the novel’s famously ambiguous ending, in which Lucy hints but does not confirm that M. Paul dies in a shipwreck during his return journey to Villette. While critics tend to agree that M. Paul dies in the end of the novel (resolving one source of potential ambiguity), the meaning that they attribute to that ending tends to skew in opposing directions, with critics on both sides writing over Lucy’s expression of ambivalence over the course of her life has taken. On the one hand, many critics read the novel as, to quote Amanda Anderson, “the narrative of Lucy’s hard-earned bid for independence” (*Power* 52).⁸² For instance, Schaffer celebrates Lucy’s achievement of “the immigrant dream” of starting “her own business,” a new kind of happy ending for a new form of narrative (18). Kate Millett, even more strikingly, reads Lucy as achieving her freedom precisely in accordance with her plan. In her account, Lucy never intends to marry Paul but instead seeks to “beguile” him into first teaching her what she needs in order to

⁸² As Anderson persuasively argues, these “liberal feminist interpretations of the *Villette* that presuppose autonomy as the basis for Lucy’s self-fulfillment” do “not fully make sense” given Lucy’s continued and complex commitment to “positive forms of detachment” (*Power* 52, 53). They are further at odds with the position that narrating Lucy, who has presumably already experienced the self-fulfillment these critics attribute to her, takes on happiness — specifically that it cannot be cultivated like “a potato” (278). Notably, Lucy narrates this position in the present tense; her position has remained unchanged by her experience running her own school: “No mockery in this world ever *sounds* to me so hollow as that of being told to cultivate happiness” (278, emphasis mine).

open her school and then giving her the resources to do so (146). Helen H. Davis likewise argues that M. Paul's gift and subsequent death provides Lucy with necessary cover to express her professional achievement, "Lucy can hide her ambition and success under his benevolence and in loyalty to him. She cannot be condemned as an ambitious, self-serving woman because she did these things for him" (213). In celebrating Lucy's self-assertion, these critics read the politics of *Jane Eyre* over those of *Villette*. I suggest instead that *Villette* is a novel that allows the individual actions of Lucy to matter in a way that those of Caroline Helstone do not but that does not uncritically celebrate self-assertion. Rather, the novel's treatment of agency is much more nuanced, making space for the ways in which one's ability to take action or plan for the future might be limited by factors outside one's control. Indeed, Lucy herself only takes a proactive stance on making "some advance in life" in Chapter 31. She lays her "half a plan" to open a school in this moment not because she has come to realize the moral value of self-assertion but simply because her mental health has improved to such an extent that she is now able think more deliberately about her future (400).

On the other hand, many other critics read the ending as a depressing return to the start, notwithstanding the better situation — both financially and psychologically — that Lucy finds herself in at the end of the novel. For instance, Nina Auerbach claims "the plot of *Villette* is cyclical and Lucy ends as she began, estranged by shipwreck from her one possible home" ("Charlotte" 336). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar likewise describe Lucy as "from first to last a woman *without*" and *Villette* as "the most moving and terrifying account of female deprivation ever written" (399–400). In Clark-Beattie's account, Lucy, robbed of her colonialist fictions of martyrdom at last, ends the novel forced to accept "an unspectacular penury . . . as her due" (845). These interpretations likewise overwrite what we know to be true from a careful reading of Lucy's account. Notably, Lucy has given us no reason to believe that her life as directress of her own thriving school would mirror the "monastic" life she lives as an employee of Rue Fossette. For instance, we know from our experiences with Madame Beck that a directress of a school may "act according to her quite justifiable wont" so long as she does so "discreetly" (507). Through her financial

independence, Lucy has presumably gained the freedom “to take her pleasure at operas, or plays, or balls” and to otherwise “season her existence with a relish of the world” (507). Further, we know from early in the novel that Lucy at some point makes it back to London: “Since those days, I have seen the West-end, the parks, the fine squares” (54). These critical reductions of Lucy’s ending to only the positive (girl-boss-esque independence) or only the negative (spinster-esque loneliness) are themselves indicative of what we expect of the endings of identificatory tales: that they conclude either with endings of aspiration — thus giving us pleasure at the success of the character and the vindication of their choices, as in *Jane Eyre* — or tragedy — thus utilizing our affective connection with the protagonist to critique the social forces that have wronged them, as in *Jude the Obscure*.

As these critical distortions attest, *Villette* does invite strong identificatory relation with its heroine. Yet, those critical accounts that focus on Lucy’s withholding are right to notice a difference in method from *Jane Eyre*, in which Brontë figures and bolsters Jane’s identificatory pull by suppressing or scaling down the unrelatable, by presenting Jane as an impossibly coherent and in control subject, by othering those who stand in the way of her happiness, and by giving her an aspirational ending. In *Villette*, Brontë avoids these problematic strategies and instead attempts to figure identification anew, in ways that allow room for qualification, for specificity, for reticence, for ambiguity and for Lucy’s own ambivalence.⁸³

Identificatory Reticence

Critics who argue that Lucy Snowe courts readerly distances or alienation instead of identification often focus on her elisions. And in a way, this critical understanding of disclosure and intimacy makes intuitive sense, especially in light of the way Brontë figures identification in *Jane Eyre*. As a narrator, Jane presents herself as not only an impossibly coherent subject but also an open book. When she fails to narrate something, like her years at Lowood, she cheerily justifies the elision in terms of our interest.

⁸³ That is, the novel has space for Lucy to feel ambivalent about her life and those in it, which is a separate matter from inviting the reader to feel ambivalence toward Lucy herself.

Indeed, as I have noted, she tells us even those secrets she keeps from Rochester. As Raymond Williams describes, Jane offers us the level of disclosure we would expect from “a private journal” and adds to it “the awareness of the friend, the close one, the unknown but in this way intimate reader,” a combination that allows for the illusion of “the reader as writer, while the urgent voice lasts” (*English* 70). In *Jane Eyre*, then, disclosure operates as a means of creating intimacy, of facilitating identification.⁸⁴ Yet, does identification always require disclosure? In his essay on withheld speech in *Villette*, Ivan Kreilkamp productively prods the common critical assumption about the importance of Lucy “finding” her voice. He asks: “is silence always powerlessness, speech always power?” (340). Following his example, I would like to put pressure on another critical assumption that seems “so commonsensical as to go unremarked”: does disclosure always mean intimacy, does intimacy always mean disclosure? (340). Might reticence, like silence, be “of different kinds, and [breathe] different meanings” (385)? I suggest that disclosure is so effective at facilitating identification in *Jane Eyre* because the contents of the disclosure have been so carefully curated to attract identification. In other words, the disclosure of relatable content courts identificatory intimacy specifically because it is designed to invite a response of “me too!” from the reader. Yet, disclosure of other types may invite other responses from readers, including responses that insist on distance like, “I can’t imagine!” In *Villette*, Brontë refuses this editing of subject matter, this scaling of pain, this trap of relatability. In light of this refusal to compromise, disclosure does not necessarily facilitate the intimacy of identification but might instead invite the distance of pity and spectacle.

Critics have long been both fascinated and frustrated by Lucy’s elisions. Most strikingly, Lucy refuses to narrate the details of her inciting incident of her adulthood: the decimation of her family and

⁸⁴ Of *Shirley*, we might see the other side of the same relationship between access and identification, where distance is courted through the narrator’s refusal to provide insight into the character. Our desire to, for instance, feel with Shirley in her courtship plot is thwarted by the narrator’s choice to tell the story through the device of Louis’s notebook. It is difficult to feel close to Shirley when, like Louis, we are only guessing as to how she is feeling. Her decision to go against the wishes of her family to marry Louis presumably has rich emotional stakes for her, but we cannot access them. We can only watch from a distance.

finances, the disaster that renders her precarious and alone in advance of her travel to Villette.⁸⁵ Like Jane before her, Lucy skips over the eight years that follow the scenes of her childhood that open the novel. Yet, while Jane promises that we have not missed out on any event that will incite a “degree of interest” during the years she has decided to “pass . . . almost in silence” (72), Lucy cannot reasonably advance such a justification, given that the change in her material circumstances “cannot be concealed” from the reader if she is to continue her narrative (39). Yet, she seems determined to provide as few details as possible:

On quitting Bretton, which I did a few weeks after Paulina’s departure — little thinking then I was never again to visit it; never more to tread its calm old streets — I betook myself home, having been absent six months. It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred. Well! the amiable conjecture does no harm, and may therefore be safely left uncontradicted. Far from saying nay, indeed, I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather . . . A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest?

Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen overboard, or that there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time — a long time — of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished.

As far as I recollect, I complained to no one about these troubles. Indeed, to whom could I complain? Of Mrs. Bretton I had long lost sight. Impediments, raised by others, had, years ago, come in the way of our intercourse, and cut it off. (39)

Here, Lucy invites the reader to form her own “amiable conjecture” about the circumstances of her return to “the bosom of her kindred.” However, acceptance of this invitation requires that we ignore what we already know to be true — namely, that Lucy was stationed at Bretton not for her usual bi-annual “visit,” but instead for an extended stay, specifically because things were already not right at home: Mrs. Bretton had “come in person” to fetch Lucy from “her kinsfolk” because “she then saw plainly events coming” of

⁸⁵ Though critics often attempt to treat Lucy’s elisions as a group, I think this major, permanent elision works differently than her more temporary withholdings — like her refusal to let the reader know she has identified Dr. John as Graham Bretton — which she knows that she will have to reveal to the reader eventually. These temporary evasions seem to speak to Lucy’s continued commitment to her “shades of peculiarity” (119). I would also separate the disaster elision, which the reader cannot resolve, from the novel’s more superficially ambiguous ending, in which Lucy strongly hints that M. Paul has died.

which Lucy had only an unsettling but “faint suspicion” (7, 8). Strikingly, Lucy comes to “quit Bretton” not because the danger has passed, nor because a family member has “come in person to claim” her. Rather, the fourteen-year-old girl is alarmingly left to her own devices: “I betook myself home.” Indeed, Lucy cannot manage to hold together this already-crumbling illusion of “idle, basking” happiness for long. Yet, she still resists rendering the disaster of her life in literal terms, providing us instead with the metaphor of a shipwreck. Through this metaphor of the shipwreck, Lucy conveys the incredible pain of the disaster (the vividly rendered “icy pressure on lungs”), its drawn-out duration (“a long time” of dread, followed by “many days and nights” of disaster), and its devastating consequences, both in terms of her financial and familial support (“the ship was lost, the crew perished”) and in terms of her long-term mental health (“To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats”).

Several critics have characterized Lucy’s elision as an involuntary response to her trauma: she, in fact, cannot speak of what has happened to her.⁸⁶ Yet these accounts of the novel ignore that, per Rachel Ablow, Lucy “never suggests that [her secret] *cannot* be spoken” (*Victorian* 72). In fact, Lucy does speak the details of her family’s decimation within the space of the narrative — just not to us. After her breakdown over the school vacation, Lucy finds herself unexpectedly reunited with her estranged godmother, who asks her “many, many questions about past times” (198). Eager to remove the “impediments” to their intimacy, Lucy provides a detailed account of “gone-by troubles,” “causes of seeming estrangement,” and “single-handed conflict with Life, with Death, with Grief, with Fate” (198). From the Brettons, who were on intimate terms with Lucy’s family, it seems that even the particulars “cannot be concealed.” Critics have suggested that Lucy’s refusal to disclose the details of her familial disaster speaks to her “mistrust” of the

⁸⁶ See, for instance, Braun, who reads “Lucy’s literally unspeakable loss” through “the structures of traumatic experience” and identifies the “core dilemma” of the novel to be Lucy’s “inability to articulate her loss (189, 190, 197); see also Lawrence: “the true circumstances of [Lucy’s] painful situation are impossible to narrate” (461).

reader (Pond 791).⁸⁷ However, as we see here, Lucy does not base her decisions about disclosure on trust — indeed, Dr. John and Mrs. Bretton are surely less trustworthy than M. Paul, who seemingly remains in the dark — but on necessity. The Brettons, unlike the reader and M. Paul, need to know everything. What we do need to know about the disaster — its painfulness, its traumatizing effect on Lucy, its material consequences — she has conveyed to us through her metaphor. Indeed, as we already know that Lucy, who is a literal child when the disaster strikes, is no more at fault for its occurrence than the passenger basking in the sun of the deck is for the shipwreck, it is unclear what insight additional information would give to us. What would access to the details in all their goriness, in all their shame, enable us to understand about Lucy?

Rachel Ablow and Kristen Pond both contend that Lucy's elision works defensively,⁸⁸ allowing her, in Ablow's account, to resist "the normalizing tendency of sympathy" and, in Pond's reading, to challenge "the norms that exclude the other's story because it cannot be recognized within the bounds of conventional perception" (Ablow, *Victorian* 73; Pond 789). Both critics see Lucy as practicing avoidance in order to resist the diminishment of what Pond calls the "singularity" and Ablow calls the "irreducible specificity" of her experience (Pond 789; Ablow 74).⁸⁹ That is, Lucy keeps readers at a distance to forestall

⁸⁷ See, for instance, Ablow: "Brontë's novel can feel simply passive-aggressive, implying as it does that the reader is not worthy of the story it has to tell" (*Victorian* 72); see also Bock at 146 (discussing Lucy's "ambivalent" and at times "hostile" position toward the audience).

⁸⁸ We might also read this elision as a defensive choice not on the part of Lucy but on the part of Brontë, who had already been accused of being Thackeray's mistress due to both the "unfortunate" coincidences between his history and that of Rochester and the readerly eagerness to collapse the experiences of Jane Eyre into those of Brontë (Brontë, Letter to W.S. Williams 28 Jan. 1848, 101). By keeping Lucy's experiences of shame and destitution vague, she avoids the assignment of Lucy's specific experience of disaster to herself and her own family members.

⁸⁹ Though critics, including Ablow and Pond, have accused Lucy of fiercely guarding the uniqueness of her tragedy, Lucy herself seems much less interested in this kind of gatekeeping; the rosy "picture" conjured is called into question not only for Lucy but also for the "great many women and girls" who do not in fact pass "their lives something in that fashion" but are only "supposed" to do so by others. Lucy is insistent throughout the novel that her situation, though personally painful, is not so exceptional. For instance, facing homelessness (and not merely of the transcendental kind) after the death of Miss Marchmont, Lucy notes: "The possessor, then, of fifteen pounds; of health, though worn, not broken, and of a spirit in similar condition; I might still, in comparison with many people, be regarded as occupying an enviable position" (48). We might read in this critical insistence of Lucy's specialness, or, more specifically, of her desire to be special (see Clark-Beattie at 825), a readerly desire to disidentify with Lucy

the kind of identificatory overwriting that happens when, for example, readers of *Jane Eyre* “experience flashes of childhood memories” when reading the opening chapters (Hennelly 695). Yet, I am not so sure that Lucy’s choice to leave her experiences unspecified forestalls this type of identificatory overwriting so much as it enables it. To elaborate, I will return to the depictions of pain in the earlier novels. While Jane’s childhood troubles are scaled down to a relatable size in order to court our identification, Caroline Helstone’s much more extreme childhood horrors, about which Brontë is quite specific in *Shirley*, serve to block universalized readerly identification in their unrelatability. As I have suggested above, the narration of Caroline’s traumatizing childhood experience renders her not as a figure of readerly identification but as an object of readerly pity. I agree with Pond and Ablow then that Lucy’s elision works defensively. Yet, I argue that Lucy is not defending herself against readerly intimacy — that is, against being known and judged — but instead against the specific relation of the pitying reader to the character, which is not one of identificatory closeness but of distance, spectatorship, and prurience. Lucy’s disaster, if rendered in all of its painful specificity, risks reading less like Jane’s identificatory victimization and more like Nancy’s gruesome murder in Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*. In other words, our desire to know what happened to Lucy beyond what she tells us here is not an ethical desire to better understand Lucy in all her specificity but a voyeuristic desire to survey the wreckage of a crash, a distraction from and impediment to the identificatory project of the novel.

Indeed, we see Lucy reject this kind of relation not only in her dealings with us as readers but in her dealings with Ginevra, onto whom the readerly demand — “Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?” — is strategically displaced (341). In Lucy’s refusal to satisfy Ginevra’s “undisguised and unsophisticated curiosity,” we find a critique of any lingering desire of our own to pry into Lucy’s secrets (341). The question is transformed from “Why won’t Lucy tell us the answer?” to “Who are we to ask the question?” Lucy’s elision then does not represent a turn away from readerly closeness and identification but a solution

and her pain: an insistence not only on the distance between Lucy and the critic (“I am not like Lucy”) but also that this insistence on distance originates with Lucy (“Lucy insists she is not like me”).

to the representational problem that has haunted Brontë since *Jane Eyre*: the problem of how to represent the “truth” in all its “severe charm” without either alienating the reader or scaling down the pain she wishes to represent (Letter to Smith, Elder & Co., 12 Sept. 1847, 86).⁹⁰ In advancing this solution, Brontë lights up the complexities in the relationship between disclosure and identification. While critics have assumed that disclosure is the basis of intimacy, such that any failure to disclose creates distance, Lucy recognizes that a full disclosure of details can sometimes block identificatory relation by distancing the character through an unproductive emphasis on the singularity and spectacularity of their pain.⁹¹

Identificatory Abstraction

Yet a defense against a readerly relation that forecloses the intimacy of identification — like pity — does not in itself invite identificatory relation. How, then, does Brontë court identification with a heroine who insists on maintaining not only her secrets but also her “shades of particularity” (119)? If Brontë figures identification in *Jane Eyre* through a reliance on safe bets (the childhood victim finds their voice; the protagonist and the reader attempt to solve a mystery; the heroine marries the hero), in *Villette* she instead takes big swings, relying not on plot-driving action to court identification but on Lucy’s attempts to grapple with her own emotional experience, which are sprinkled across the novel in places where they often feel independent of the actions of the plot.

⁹⁰ In refusing George Smith’s recommendation that she revise the Lowood section of *Jane Eyre*, Brontë explained that she had neither time nor inclination to rewrite the section, adding: “Perhaps too the first part of *Jane Eyre* may suit the public taste better than you anticipate — for it is true and Truth has a severe charm of its own. Had I told all the truth, I might indeed have made it far more exquisitely painful — but I deemed it advisable to soften and retrench many particulars lest the narrative should rather displease than attract” (Letter to Smith, Elder & Co., 12 Sept. 1847, 86).

⁹¹ My reading of Lucy’s elisions resonates with that of Pond, who argues that Lucy’s silences “signal a certain resistance to readers’ desires for omniscience” (791). However, while Pond argues that Lucy’s elisions work to maintain an ethical distance between reader and protagonist while also courting identification with Lucy, I argue that readerly identification requires closeness but that such intimacy does not require full disclosure, which instead might interfere with it. Pond further suggests Lucy’s elisions “mark realist writers’ awareness of the difficulties inherent in representation through language,” yet I do not see these particular elisions as rooted in difficulty of representation, as we see Brontë take on such difficulty head-on elsewhere, for instance, in her representations of Lucy’s breakdown and of her drug-fueled adventure through the fête.

Let us consider, for instance, a moment Chapter 12 in which Lucy takes a break from the forward-moving narration of the plot to reflect on her emotional life during her early time at Villette. In terms of plot development, this chapter focuses on the mystery of the love letter thrown from a casement window into the secluded portion of the garden where Lucy is spending the evening. Lucy retrieves and reviews the letter just as Dr. John enters the garden to track it down. Yet, the drama of the mystery letter is undercut by the incredible intensity of the narration that precedes it.⁹² As Lucy, the character, sits alone in the garden contemplating the moon and stars, her narrating counterpart takes this opportunity to reflect on her younger self's mental state during this period:

Oh, my childhood! I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I *could* feel. About the present, it was better to be stoical; about the future — such a future as mine — to be dead. And in catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature. (120)

Lucy's emotional life, "the quick of [her] nature," is held in a "dead trance," yet it is not dead. Rather, it is vulnerable to awakening, both by thoughts "of past days" and, as the narrator goes on to describe, experiences of the natural sublime: "At that time, I well remember whatever could excite — certain accidents of the weather, for instance, were almost dreaded by me, because they woke the being I was always lulling, and stirred up a craving cry I could not satisfy" (120-21). In one such instance, Lucy exposes herself to a thunderstorm on the ledge of her window, as "too resistless was the delight of staying with the wild hour, black and full of thunder, pealing out such an ode as language never delivered to man — too

⁹² Indeed, even the skilled narrator has trouble managing the transition to the letter plot. In examining the incredible power of this passage, I do not mean to dismiss the way in which the second, transitional reworking of the tale spins out of Lucy's control. That is, in transitioning back to the story, Lucy attempts to distance the emotion of the passage from the character on the evening in question ("To-night I was not so mutinous, nor so miserable") by reworking the story of Jael and Sisera once again, with much less success. Specifically, she seems to lose control over her metaphors, introducing a "magic glass" and "something like an angel" before giving up the attempt and reverting to summary: "By which words I mean that the cool peace and dewy sweetness of the night filled me with a mood of hope: not hope on any definite point, but a general sense of encouragement and heart-ease" (121). Yet, that this second retelling is, in Christina Crosby's words "undeniably problematic" does not discount the legibility and power of the first (116).

terribly glorious, the spectacle of clouds, split and pierced by white and blinding bolts” (121). This “delight” is “almost dreaded” by Lucy because of its lingering effect on her emotions:

I did long, achingly, then and for four and twenty hours afterwards, for something to fetch me out of my present existence, and lead me upwards and onwards. This longing, and all of a similar kind, it was necessary to knock on the head; which I did, figuratively, after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples. Unlike Sisera, they did not die: they were but transiently stunned, and at intervals would turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench: then did the temples bleed, and the brain thrill to its core. (121)

In this quite remarkable passage, Lucy turns to the Old Testament tale of Jael and Sisera to illustrate in graphic detail the pain of this awakening of her emotional life. In the book of Judges, the Israelites have been suffering under the oppressive rule of the Canaanites for twenty years. God hears their cries for help and commands them, through the prophetess Deborah, to attack the Canaanites at Mount Tabor. The attack is successful, and Sisera, the captain of the Canaanite forces, is forced to flee the battlefield on foot. With the Israelite forces in pursuit, Sisera seeks refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Canaanite ally Heber. Jael provides Sisera with milk to drink, coverings under which to sleep, and a promise to keep a look out for his enemies. However, once Sisera falls asleep, Jael kills him by nailing a tent stake into his temple. For her act of violence, Jael is hailed by the Israelites as a heroine “blessed above all women” (Judges 5:24). Though Jael’s motivations for her violent act are left unspecified in the Book of Judges, modern retellings of the story, including those of the nineteenth century,⁹³ tend to figure Jael as an inspiring and identificatory figure, who is motivated by proto-feminist anger and a desire for self-assertion. In these renderings, Jael, like Jane Eyre, stands up to (masculine) authority to secure her own happiness.⁹⁴

⁹³ For instance, in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, nine-year-old Maggie Tulliver is inspired by Jael to act out her own feminist anger at the figures of authority in her life by driving nails into the head of her own Sisera stand-in, “a large wooden doll” she keeps in the attic (562). More recently, scholars have taken up the identificatory power of Jael for women readers in the United States (Job), in South Africa (Dickie), and in South Korea (Sakenfeld).

⁹⁴ Like Jane Eyre, Jael has inspired a variety of merchandise available for purchase on the internet, such as shirts, sweatshirts, and coffee mugs featuring a cartoon skull with a nail in it, accompanied by a caption like “Biblical Womanhood” or “I Nailed it Like Jael.”

Yet, when Lucy takes up this story, the “liberties” she takes work quite differently (Crosby 136). Specifically, in her rendering, she aligns herself with both Jael, the murderess, and Sisera, the unsuspecting victim. Thus, the act narrated, in which she attempts to murder her own desires, becomes self-harm. Unlike the Biblical Sisera, Lucy’s desires are merely stunned: uncannily, they survive the gruesome attack. Whenever these desires awake from their “intransient stupor,” they attempt to escape by removing the nails, forcing Lucy to repeat the initial act of violence “at intervals.” These attempts at escape are not only unsuccessful, but horribly painful, even more than initial “knock on the head”: it is not the first attack but rather the desire’s self-inflicted “wrench” of the nails from the temples that causes “the temples [to] bleed, and the brain thrill to its core” (121). This description of “the brain” as it “thrills to its core,” is so horrifying that, as Marit Fimland notes, it becomes “tempting to put aside the novel with revulsion” (152). To return to Brontë’s own words, it seems designed to “rather displease than attract” (Letter to Smith, Elder, & Co., 12 Sept. 1847, 86). Yet, as Rachael Ablow astutely recognizes, this vivid description of “aversive physical experience *forces* us to register [the pain of] Lucy’s experience”; that is, we may wish to put the novel down after reading of the thrilled brain, but it is, in a sense, already too late (85, my emphasis). We can’t unknow what we know about Lucy’s pain.

Rachel Ablow argues that this passage conveys “a sense of opacity: a sense that we are being given the outlines of some content, experience, or meaning to which we have no direct access; . . . and a horrifying sense of just how painful that experience is for Lucy” (84). Ablow roots this “sense of opacity” in Lucy’s unwillingness to disclose the particulars of her trauma: we cannot enter into Lucy’s troubles “because we have little or no knowledge of their cause” (85). Yet, to me, the nature of Lucy’s pain feels not opaque but rather all too knowable. We may not know exactly what has happened to Lucy, but it is unclear why we would need this specific knowledge to comprehend the pain of repressing “the quick of [one’s] nature,” of denying those desires too big to fit into one’s life, as determined by one’s material

circumstances.⁹⁵ Indeed, the cause of Lucy's pain is not beyond readerly knowledge but instead should be intimately familiar to any reader of the Victorian novel. Specifically, Lucy suffers from what Georg Lukács declares to be the paradigmatic condition of protagonists of the nineteenth-century novel: her soul is simply "wider and larger than the destinies which life has to offer it" (112). The "destinies which life has to offer" Lucy are, to be sure, limited by her specific circumstances — her gender, her class, her education, the time in which she lives — but at its great level of abstraction, Lucy's problem is the problem of the modern novel and of the modern individual. Lucy uses the familiar story of Jael and Sisera not to attempt to convey what is uncommunicable but instead to draw out specific elements of the familiar and hold them up to the light. In particular, the act of retelling draws attention to the ways in which the teller has made the story new. Through her retelling of Jael and Sisera Lucy draws out not just the intensity of her pain — which could have been conveyed through a metaphor of bodily pain without reference to this particular biblical story — but also the "horror of repetition" and that of self-infliction (Gilbert and Gubar 412). What is horrible about modern life — Lucy's and perhaps our own — is not merely that it crushes your desires but that it forces you to do the crushing yourself, not once, but over and over again. Under the circumstances, the familiar story of Jael's feminist self-assertion is not helpful to Lucy in the ways that it might have been helpful to Jane Eyre, who lives in a world in which asserting oneself works. Yet, Lucy does not merely discard what has come before as irrelevant to her life, as Brontë suggests in *Shirley*. Lucy instead tells the story anew to make it relevant.

Lucy's unsettling retelling offers us not an opaque sense of her uncommunicable pain but rather a clearer view into both her pain and our own. This scene is not a moment of distancing, uncommunicable specificity but rather an opening that demands identification from the reader; it is what underwrites the depictions of Lucy's specificities elsewhere. In light of the passage's identificatory purpose, Lucy's decision

⁹⁵ In the section that follows, I explore, in brief, the resonances between *Villette* and Rachel Cusk's novel *Outline* (2014), which is similarly reticent about the particulars of the protagonist/narrator's experiences. Cusk defends her elision on grounds similar those I have suggested here: "you know, you don't need to know what exactly happened to her because it's happened to all of us in one to form or another" (Winn).

to leave her desires undefined is an especially canny one. Indeed, this strategy of elision might itself have been inspired by the Jael's story as depicted in the Book of Judges, which leaves undefined Jael's motivation for killing her husband's ally, increasing her own identificatory availability.⁹⁶ The specific content of Lucy's desires⁹⁷ — for a creative life, as an artist or critic, or for a domestic one, as a housewife and mother; to be loved by Graham Bretton, or perhaps instead by Ginevra Fanshawe — are left to the reader's imagination. While the provision of the specific content of Lucy's desires risks attracting some readers and alienating others, the choice to leave these desires undefined allows the reader to fill them in with their own. This strategic under-determination enables for the intensely painful repression of these desires to speak not merely to the experiences of Lucy (as Ablow suggests), or even to those of every woman living under patriarchy (as is suggested by Gilbert and Gubar), but rather to those of every reader, or at least every reader willing to acknowledge their own relationship to the “miserable” and the “mutinous” (121). While Lucy risks losing readers along the way — in the twists of her allusions, in the gruesomeness of her imagery — the effect of the passage for the “genuine novel-reader” is an identificatory attachment stronger and more lasting than that invited by Jane's childhood victimization in the Red Room.

Identificatory Shelter

Indeed, the incredible identificatory power of these kinds of passages is bound up in their riskiness. Brontë is willing to risk that some readers will “put aside the novel” — whether literally or figuratively

⁹⁶ We can see this identificatory flexibility at work in the studies of Dickie, Jobe, and Sakenfeld. Jobe and Dickie, who study the identificatory power of Jael for women imprisoned for killing an abusive partner, note that their subjects often felt Jael's motivation for her action reflected their own. In other words, they believed Jael likely killed Sisera to put a stop to domestic abuse, perpetrated either by Sisera or Heber. However, in Sakenfeld's study, the Korean women she interviewed emphasized instead the imperialist context of the story, drawing parallels between the Canaanites's oppressive rule of the Israelites and the Japanese occupation of South Korea. These women believed that Jael was motivated to kill Sisera by her sympathy with the Israelites' anti-imperialist struggle.

⁹⁷ While Gilbert and Gubar read Lucy's longing for “something to fetch me out of my present existence, and lead me upwards and onwards” as a clear longing for death by suicide (412), I read it as a longing not for death but for a different life, one that can better accommodate her ambitions and desires — what Crosby calls “a fuller life” (123). Strikingly, Lucy herself describes the effect of the storm on her in terms of life, not death: “As for me, the tempest took hold of me with tyranny: I was roughly roused and obliged to *live*” (121, my emphasis).

through the maintenance of a strict boundary between themselves and the heroine going forward — in order to enable the rest to access not just the “severe charm” of Lucy’s truth but also of their own (Letter to Smith, Elder & Co., 12 Sept. 1847, 86). Indeed, it is this erection of a boundary on the part of the first group that, I believe, results in some of the mischaracterizations we see of the novel as not merely “intolerably painful” but of containing “nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage” (Martineau 172; Arnold 201). If we shy away from Lucy’s pain and our own, we cannot fully experience with her the triumph of her performance at the vaudeville, the fascination with the power of Vashti, the pleasure of the breakfast in the country with M. Paul. The novel becomes reducible to the moment of pain in which the reader jumped the identificatory ship. Yet, for those readers who do not disidentify but instead allow themselves instead to be, in Lavery’s words, “pierced to the inmost,” the enduring power of this moment makes available not only these other identificatory pleasures but also creates a kind of identificatory umbrella that provides shelter for all of the specificities and nuances⁹⁸ that might otherwise seem antithetical to an identificatory project, as we have explored through our analysis of *Jane Eyre* (xiii).

Indeed, Brontë, now confident of a readership, begins the novel not with a primal scene of identification but of specificity. We begin the novel immersed in the perspective of someone quite difficult to place. We leave the first chapter without having learned Lucy’s name, her age, or aims in writing to us. By chapter two, she has embarked upon an intensive “character-study” of a six-year-old reminiscent (for modern readers) of Rachel Cusk’s *Outline* (2014) in its extreme narratorial effacement⁹⁹ and of Sigmund

⁹⁸ I borrow this image of this shelter for specificity and the nuance from Sedgwick’s discussion of strong theory in her essay on reparative reading, in which D.A. Miller’s strong theory about the relationship between the novel and the carceral provides shelter for the “wealth of tonal nuance, attitude, worldly observation, performative paradox, aggression, tenderness, wit, inventive reading, obiter dicta, and writerly dicta” present in the *Novel and The Police* (135). In so borrowing, I do not necessarily mean to position identification as a sort of “strong theory” in itself, though, of course, identification shares with Sedgwick’s strong theories both “reach and reductiveness,” as well as the quality of knowing “some things well and others poorly” (130).

⁹⁹ Strikingly, early reviewers of *Villette* confessed feeling disappointed to discover that the author was not “going trace out the girlhood, courtship, and matrimony of such a curious, elvish mite” as Paulina, who they found to be “disproportionately interesting” (Unsigned Review: *Villette*. *The Athenaeum* 188; Unsigned Review: *Villette* and *Ruth*. *Putnam’s* 214). For a compelling account of the novel in its entirety as an exploration of “multiple forms of detachment, associated with a range of psychological states, cultural prescriptions, institutional practices, and intellectual and aesthetic modes,” see Anderson *Power* 46-62. These elisions in the early chapters of the novel,

Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) not only in its subject matter — how a child psychically manages the absence of a beloved parent — but in its tone of clinical detachment that seems designed to mask the writer's own affective investments.¹⁰⁰ The beginning of the novel encourages us to understand Lucy not by considering the specifics of her life experiences but instead through encountering her sensibility, her sensitivity, and her intelligence. Like Cusk, Brontë presents Lucy, not in terms of résumé of past experiences but in terms of what she notices. This is a strikingly different form of knowing than is offered by the chattiness of *Jane Eyre* (see Winn). Indeed, despite the critical focus on her reticence, Lucy provides us with a plethora of noticings and judgments, both in her relationships with others and in her aesthetic

including the one treated in the previous section, may then also encourage us to recognize this different kind of knowing. See also Lucasta Miller, comparing the “autofiction” of Cusk and of Brontë.

¹⁰⁰ In Lucy's case, the narrator's clinical detachment, remarkably strange for a child of fourteen, not only deflects from her own anxieties about the ongoing trouble at home but also masks (though incompletely) her romantic interest in the “faithless” Graham, who has ceased to make “very much of” her in the wake of Polly's arrival (19,7). The true extent of this interest during this time — of which we might see evidence in her questionably motivated encouragement of Polly's interruption of Graham and his friends — becomes clear only much later in the novel, when Lucy recalls the power Graham's portrait had over her during this final Bretton visit. In Freud's case, he too seems determined to disguise the nature of the relationship with his subjects and his own affective investments in the events that he narrates. Freud introduces his discovery of the nature of the fort/da game in the following way:

I have been able, through a chance opportunity which presented itself, to throw some light upon the first game played by a little boy of one and a half and invented by himself. It was more than a mere fleeting observation, for I lived under the same roof as the child and his parents for some weeks, and it was some time before I discovered the meaning of the puzzling activity which he constantly repeated. (8)

This framing makes it seem as if Freud has found himself in a situation similar to that of Lucy: due to “a chance opportunity” he has found himself in close quarters with a seemingly random child. Yet, what this description fails to disclose is that this child is not a stranger, as Polly Home is to Lucy, but rather his own grandchild and that the “mother” of the child with whom “the writer of the present account” discusses the boy's habits is his own recently deceased daughter. This feigned detachment, this clinical language, is not merely a feature of psychoanalytic writing. Strikingly, Freud writes elsewhere about his family in much more familiar terms, including in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Like Lucy, Freud betrays his investments. After analyzing the nature of his grandson's game and its import for psychoanalysis, he includes a curious footnote: “When this child was five and three-quarters, his mother died. Now that she was really ‘gone’ (‘o-o-o’), the little boy showed no signs of grief. It is true that in the interval a second child had been born and had roused him to violent jealousy” (*Beyond* n. 1, at 10). What are we to make of this footnote? What does this additional insight into the boy's life tell us about the nature of repetition compulsion? What does it mean that the game has worked so well? What is the relevance of the intervening sibling jealousy? Freud provides us with little sense of how this footnoted information relates to his theory, raising the question: why include it at all? Might we read in this footnote the same lingering, incompletely masked resentment of a child that we see in the early chapters of *Villette*? Might we see in both narrating Lucy in *Villette* and in Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* the same desire Freud's grandson acts on in the fort-da game — that is, the desire to distance oneself from a painful experience by staging its repetition under conditions in which one feels a sense of mastery?

criticism.¹⁰¹ Our access to Lucy is thus not necessarily more limited than our access to Jane Eyre but rather takes on a different emphasis.

This identificatory shelter provides greater room for the representation of complexity, for ambiguity, and for Lucy's ambivalence. Almost immediately, we find ourselves in a different novelistic world from *Jane Eyre*, in which Jane provides what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "objectified and finalized images of people" (182). Georgiana and Eliza Reed are rendered as flat and static as the "Cleopatra" and the woman in "La vie d'une femme" that Lucy encounters in the art gallery. Even the characters Jane adopts as her chosen family lack specificity: Who amongst even the most devoted of *Jane Eyre* readers could meaningfully differentiate Diana Rivers from Mary Rivers? In *Villette*, however, we find ourselves in a world of qualification, where such finalization is off the table. The difference is made clear from the first chapter, in which Mrs. Bretton provides Lucy with a familiar explanation of an unhappy marriage: a "sensitive" and "sensible" man taken in by a "giddy, careless . . . flirt" who makes him miserable (2-3). Mrs. Bretton goes on to explain that Mr. Home, the sensible man in question, is "fond of science and lives half his life in a laboratory trying experiments — a thing his butterfly wife could neither comprehend nor endure" (3). This story hits all the expected beats: we are enlisted on side of this moral, sensible man of science who has been made to pay for his momentary weakness in marrying this immoral "butterfly" (3). Yet, just as we begin to feel secure in our judgment of this couple, Mrs. Bretton introduces a complication: "'And indeed,' confessed [Lucy's] godmother, 'I should not have liked it myself'" (9).¹⁰² While

¹⁰¹ Lewes writes that "much of the book seems to be brought in merely that the writer may express something which is in her mind; but at any rate she has something in her mind and expresses it as no other can" (Unsigned Review: *Villette* and *Ruth*, *Westminster Review* 211). Yet, I maintain some of these inclusions, particularly the inclusion of her critical work on art and performance, are important for Lucy's self-(re)presentation. Notably, Lucy also gleans insight about the characters of others through hearing their impressions about art, including Graham, whose "branding judgment" of Vashti — "he judged her as a woman, not an artist" — looms large as his "callous" nature reasserts itself in his subsequent neglect of Lucy following the evening of the performance (289).

¹⁰² Later in the novel, Ginevra Fanshawe, the niece of the "butterfly wife," will substitute this familiar story out for another: Mr. Home, "a bear," "killed aunt Ginevra with unkindness" (298). Lucy characteristically does not seek to uncover the truth but rather lets the "paradox" stand (543).

comprehending, or at least enduring, the scientific commitment of one's husband had seemed like a morally-significant wifely duty, Mrs. Bretton's addition transforms it into an issue of personal preference. Perhaps, Mr. Home too was unreasonable; perhaps we cannot fully account for the dissolution of the marriage through the morality story that Mrs. Bretton first tells about it. This space for qualification, for nuance, and for unknowability is new to Brontë's identificatory work, and she takes full advantage of it. Indeed, even Lucy's most tightly held prejudices — for the English over Continental, for the Protestant over the Catholic — are repeatedly undercut by the specificity of her experiences, which fail to fall neatly along these lines.¹⁰³ Likewise, her declared preferences are often betrayed by her behavior. Lucy declares "I liked her" about the mild, acquisitive Paulina, yet she avoids becoming her paid companion, agreeing only to take a German class with her much in the way one might relegate an insistent acquaintance into a monthly brunch (411).¹⁰⁴ Meanwhile, Lucy claims to find Ginevra silly and rude yet consistently seeks out her company: Lucy "always contrived that [Ginevra] should be my convive" (261).¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the novel allows even the most objectified of characters to be portrayed with complexity.¹⁰⁶ After all, it is the silly,

¹⁰³ See Anderson, *Power* at 52: "Lucy experiences difficulty affirming the English ideals, especially when they are considered in isolation from the continental practices they oppose."

¹⁰⁴ In a striking moment, Lucy compares Paulina to M. Paul's spaniel, Sylvie. Lucy seems to realize that she may have gone too far in this comparison but reacts to this realization not by retrenching but by doubling down: "forgive the association, reader, it *would* occur" (460, Brontë's emphasis).

¹⁰⁵ Lucy's preference for Ginevra over Paulina stretches beyond the timeframe she narrates in the novel. In summarizing their respective futures, Lucy is strikingly blasé about the loss of Dr. John and Paulina's children: "Once even there rose a cry in their halls, of Rachel weeping for her children; but others sprang healthy and blooming to replace the lost" but admits to having been truly "frightened" upon receiving Ginevra's exaggerated reports of her son's "hooping-cough" and to having written "back pathetically" (483, 527).

¹⁰⁶ While throughout the narrative, Lucy provides much more nuanced portrayals of even those who engage in behaviors of which she disapproves or that cause her harm, this more subtle approach to character falters with the introduction of Madame Walravens, whose villainy seems to exceed any motive, rendering her more "evil fairy" ("Malevola") than person. Notably, with her introduction, Walravens brings characters about whom the novel has been quite ambivalent — Madame Beck is portrayed as both an unfeeling capitalist with a proclivity for surveillance and a capable business owner who serves as a useful example for Lucy in her own career ambitions; Pere Silas is an opportunist hungry for Lucy's conversion and also a sympathetic ear in her time of need — into the realm of unmitigated villainy. That Brontë abandons this more nuanced treatment of character only in the final volume suggests a capitulation perhaps to demands not of identification but of closure, even as she frustrates readerly expectations of the ending in other ways.

selfish Ginevra who first identifies Dr. John's great flaw: he furnishes others with qualities "such as [they] never had, nor intend to have" and pressures them to act in accordance with the identity that he has constructed for them (100). Lucy, who does not yet realize that Ginevra's Isidore is Dr. John, shrugs off Ginevra's insight. Yet, several hundred pages, Lucy will come to the same conclusion: "he wanted always to give me a role not mine" (352).¹⁰⁷ And like Ginevra, Lucy comes to prefer the company of a person with whom she can be at "ease," a person who more fully recognizes her desires, flaws, and humanity (352).

This additional space for nuance allows too for a different vision of politics. Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert claim that the "progressive deterioration in spirit and exuberance from Frances Henri [of *The Professor*] and Jane Eyre, who demand equality and life, to Caroline Helstone, who rarely voices her protest, is completed by Lucy's submission and silence, as if Charlotte Brontë equates maturity with an aging process that brings women a stifling sense of despair" (411). Indeed, for Gilbert and Gubar, the fault of the "submission and silence" lies with Lucy, who seems to "internalize the destructive strictures of patriarchy" (411). Yet, this account of Brontë's heroines — in addition to discounting Caroline's protests, which, as we have seen, are not so much infrequent as ineffectual — fails to take account of the change in the novelistic world that accompanies this change in the assertiveness of the heroine. Specifically, Frances and Jane can make their case for "equality and life" because they exist in a world where fate is on their side, where their voices are taken seriously. If *Shirley* explores the story of a woman learning that her world is not that of a heroine in a romance novel, *Villette* tells the story of a woman who is only too aware of her reality as one amongst the many. To paraphrase Lucy: Indeed, to whom could she complain? From whom might she demand life and equality? (39).

¹⁰⁷ Brontë again refers back to *Jane Eyre* in the moment of this revelation. Dr. John tells Lucy, "Why, had I been Nero himself, I could not have tormented a being inoffensive as a shadow," recalling Jane's early rebellion against her cousin: "You are like the Roman emperors! . . . I had read Goldsmith's History of Rome and had formed my opinion of Nero" (*Villette* 351; *Jane Eyre* 13). Through this comparison, Brontë suggests that Dr. John, like John Reed, is engaged in tormenting her heroine.

Strikingly, Lucy shares many of Jane's complaints. She resents that her employer treats her like a "useful machine," what Jane calls an "automaton," and believes that the object of her affections would "value" her if she were "intrinsically the same" but carried "the additional advantages of wealth and station" (399, 349). Yet, had she adopted Jane's preferred method of expressing these complaints — making a passionate speech — we, like Lucy, have reason to believe that these speech acts would not be met with a kiss and a proposal but rather with her quiet replacement both as the English teacher at Rue Fossette and as an invited guest to La Terrasse.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, we can see the extent to which Lucy fears dismissal from her position in her refusal to allow Dr. John to assign blame to Madame Beck for the conditions under which Lucy spends the "long vacation" and which leads to her breakdown and subsequent illness. During this time, Lucy was left almost entirely alone and was tasked with serving as the sole caretaker for Marie Broc, a disabled student who requires constant supervision and assistance (168). Critics have taken character Lucy at her word when she tells Dr. John that she believes "it is no living being's fault, and [she] won't hear any one blamed," except perhaps "[herself] and Fate" (207).¹⁰⁹ Yet in making this representation to Dr. John, Lucy is not failing to advocate for herself but is instead defending against the very real risk that Dr. John, accustomed to the

¹⁰⁸ One of the great insights of the novel is that we often suffer the greatest injury not at the hands of those who have failed in their duty to us, as Mrs. Reed and Mr. Rochester fail Jane, but by those who do not, strictly speaking, owe us much at all. As her godmother and god-brother ("if there be such a relationship"), Mrs. Bretton and Dr. John owe Lucy very little indeed (275). They have taken her under their wing out of kindness rather than obligation and thus can presumably withdraw their attentions as they wish, especially as she once she has recovered from her breakdown. Yet, this seven-week withdrawal, which occurs in the wake of Paulina's reintroduction to their lives, causes extreme pain for Lucy. She likens the experience to that of a prisoner condemned to "solitary confinement" (303). Yet, because the injury arises not from a dereliction of their duty to her, Lucy must instead shield it from them, applying the lesson she teaches Polly at the start of the novel: "don't expect too much of [them], or else [they] will feel you to be troublesome, and then it is all over" (37). While the Brettons remain blissfully unaware of the pain they have caused Lucy, the identificatory reader feels with Lucy as she reads Mrs. Bretton's breezily "sadistic" letter resuming contact and as she smiles to herself at the devastating realization that "it [had been] about three months since Dr. John had spoken to me — a lapse of which he was not even conscious" (Anderson, *Power* 56; *Villette* 348).

¹⁰⁹ See e.g., Green at 109: "*Villette* not only challenges readerly identification but also avoids social critique . . . Lucy more thoroughly [than Caroline Helstone] refuses to take on the 'Woman Question.' When she breaks down after being left alone, over the school vacation in charge of a disabled boarder, she insists that her situation 'is no living being's fault' and that the blame lies with 'a great abstraction on whose wide shoulders I like to law the mountains of blame they were sculptured to bear . . . Fate.'"

very different way the world treats him, will overstep his boundaries and cause her to lose her job. Indeed, in her narration, Lucy is quite clear that “these duties should not have fallen on me” and that Madame Beck should have replaced the departing care worker before leaving for her vacation (174). Lucy further suggests that the fault lies with Madame Beck not just for leaving Lucy with intensive, unrelenting care work for which she is ill-equipped, but also for failing to pay Lucy an amount that would allow her to travel and live independently, as the male professors do, during the vacation. Lucy has been quite explicit about the disparity in pay (“Madame raised my salary; but got thrice the work of me she had extracted from Mr. Wilson, at half the expense” (89)), as well as the resulting disparity in the ways that the male and female teaching staff spend their vacation (“While the other [female] teachers spend the vacation with their families and friends, every [male] professor quitted the city; some went to Paris, some to Bouemarine; M. Paul set forth on a pilgrimage to Rome” (172)). What renders Lucy vulnerable to “solitary confinement” and to this undercompensated, draining work during the vacation is both the unspecified disaster that has left her without family or friends and her status as a woman, which leaves her without the means to live independently (207). Lucy’s refusal to speak to Madame Beck about these injustices not only reflects her accurate assessment of her own precarity but also prevents the reader from displacing the entirety of a harm rooted in both individual neglect of duty and systemic oppression onto a single bad actor. Throughout Lucy’s narration rather than her speech, the novel is able to insist on the fault both of Madame Beck and of the social system that allows employers to pay women less than men for the same work and that discourages women from living and traveling independently. Indeed, if *Jane Eyre* celebrates the exceptional individual and *Shirley* cowers before the seeming inescapable totality of systemic power, *Villette* uses the space Lucy creates through her deployment of identificatory strategies to take account of both the individual and the systemic in its critique.

In conclusion, Brontë’s shifting relationship with the identificatory lights up the political, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of identification’s seductions and risk. In *Villette*, I have argued, Brontë figures identification anew, relying not on retrenchment and softening to create universal appeal but rather

abstraction and intensity. This riskier strategy, in which scenes of intense identification underwrite representations steeped in specificity and nuance, allows Brontë to create an aesthetic project more representative of her interests — the pain of repression, the tedium of labor, the complexity of subjectivity — and less compromised in its ethics and political critique. Yet, the continued overwhelming popularity of *Jane Eyre* relative to that of her other works, including *Villette*, suggests a limit to this approach to later work as revision. The tradition of the “fiction of special pleading,” with all its liabilities, continues to thrive, and, as Raymond Williams notes, Charlotte Brontë still “stands very obviously at [its] head” (*English* 73). In turning to the trajectory of George Eliot, we too will find an early identificatory novel that seems like it takes on a life of its own, in ways that are in tension with the author’s commitments. Like Brontë, Eliot will subsequently move away from identification after this novel, only to return to it anew in her late work. However, while Brontë attempts new methods of figuring identification in order to avoid the pitfalls of her early work, Eliot instead maintains the same methodology of the earlier work but does so through a structure that disguises and mitigates its compromising effects on her ethical vision.

CHAPTER 3: GEORGE ELIOT'S IDENTIFICATORY DISGUISE

In her final appearance of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72), Dorothea Casaubon refuses to share the story of how she came to be engaged to Will Ladislaw with her sister, Celia Chettam. Celia, who had come to Lowick with the intention of talking Dorothea out of her plans, has since resigned herself to defeat. Relieved of the burden of persuasion, she settles in for a sisterly chat:

Presently she said, 'I cannot think how it all came about.' Celia thought it would be pleasant to hear the story.

'I daresay not' said Dorothea, pinching her sister's chin. 'If you knew how it came about, it would not seem wonderful to you.'

'Can't you tell me?' said Celia, settling her arms cozily.

'No, dear, you would have to feel with me, else you would never know.' (821-22)

Dorothea thus theorizes a relationship between "to feel" and "to know," in which feeling is a necessary condition for knowing. Strikingly, Dorothea, whose greatest power has been her ability to affectively connect with others, apparently cannot generate this sustained experience of feeling with another through the mere act of telling, even with an audience as sympathetic and as "cozily" settled in as Celia. Thus, poor Celia, who has felt *for* her sister a great deal, is left in the dark. Unlike Celia, *Middlemarch* readers have been told the story of Dorothea and Will. Do we know it? In other words, has Eliot succeeded in that which Dorothea dare not attempt? If so, how did we come to feel with Dorothea, and what have we come to know through the experience? Is this theory of knowledge specific to *Middlemarch*, or even specific to Dorothea's story, or does it apply across Eliot's work? What does the creation of this sustained experience of feeling with (what I have been calling readerly identification) do for Eliot in terms of her ethical and political projects? In other words, if feeling with is necessary to certain kinds of knowing, what is the relationship between feeling with and the articulation of specific visions of the political and of the ethical?

In an attempt to answer these questions, this chapter tracks George Eliot's shifting relation to identification. In her earliest work, Eliot avoids identificatory relation by erecting a strict narratorial boundary between the affective worlds of reader and character. For instance, in *Adam Bede* (1859), the

reader is invited to sympathize with the troubles and joys of Adam, Hetty, Seth, Dinah and Mrs. Poyser but to do so only from a distance. In other words, we feel *for* these characters but not *with* or *as* them. This distance enables the reader to feel as if “he could not help liking all the characters in that history,” even where the desires of those characters conflict with one another, or where they act in ways that cause one another harm (Dallas 132). This widespread characterological likability enables Eliot to advance her ethical aim of generating a diffuse sense of fellow feeling in the reader, what E.S. Dallas calls “an increased sympathy with our kind” (132). Following *Adam Bede*, Eliot experiments with different forms of narration, moving away from masculine, human-scale figures who narrate her early work to the less embodied and thus less fallible narrators of her later work (D.A. Miller, *Jane Austen* 31). Written in the start of this transition, which coincides with the loss of Eliot’s anonymity, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) permits the affective experiences of the (still embodied but under-situated) narrator, the characters, and the reader to flow into one another, so that a new kind of relation becomes possible between heroine and reader: that of identificatory closeness. While readers have long been taken with the desiring, suffering Maggie Tulliver, I argue that Eliot did not intend for the specific intensity of this identificatory relation. Rather, this identification with Maggie comes about through the combination of the inconsistencies in narration, which permits readers more freedom to identify against the intention of the narrator, and the emotional intensity of Maggie’s experiences of victimization at the hands of her family, teachers, and friends. These instances of ill treatment, which cluster around the disciplining of Maggie’s gender performance in childhood, are both commonplace and devastating to Maggie’s sense of self. I suggest that Eliot is at once extremely interested in attending to the nuances of this process of childhood gendering and caught unawares at how affectively intense the representation of it will be for readers, who cannot forgive or forget the harms done to Maggie against the apparent expectations of the novel. In this way, our identificatory relation with Maggie compromises the ability of *The Mill on the Floss* to continue what we might think of as Eliot’s ethical “fellow feeling toward all” project. Rather, it advances a political critique of the constraints that limit Maggie’s future: the same constraints that make her own death feel so welcome to her, if not to the reader.

This gendered critique, I argue, is a part of Eliot's project in writing the novel, but its dominance over the ethical project has a distorting effect on both Eliot's ethical commitments and the aesthetic success of the project.

Newly alive to this risk of distortion of her ethical vision, Eliot is careful to avoid this kind of intense identification in her middle works. Instead, she works to emphasize the differences between her characters and readers through a variety of strategies, including by further separating her narrator from the state of embodiment. Strikingly, she also avoids centering ardent, desiring girls like Maggie. However, after shoring up her narratorial authority in these middle works, she returns to this figure in *Middlemarch*. Dorothea Brooke, unlike Maggie Tulliver, is not permitted to completely dominate the narrator's project of fellow feeling. Rather, Dorothea's storyline, which I argue relies on a disguised identificatory logic, advances Eliot's political project of critiquing the limits placed on girls and women that leave them without access to meaningful education and labor, while her ethical project of promoting sympathy is primarily bodied forth in the largely separate *Middlemarcher* plot. This split structure enables Eliot purposefully and effectively to promote Dorothea's identificatory power without compromising the wide-ranging sympathy and fellow feeling we are invited to maintain toward the majority of the characters who populate the town plot. That is, the novel's genius does not arise from Eliot balancing the claims of or managing the tension between the novel's political and ethical projects. Rather, it arises from Eliot's finding a way to advance these projects concurrently by separating them into two narratives that work very differently while appearing to be a part of a cohesive project.

Accidental Identification in *The Mill on the Floss*

In February 1859, George Eliot published her first full-length novel, *Adam Bede*, to great commercial and critical success. While Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life*, a short story collection published in 1857, had been positively reviewed, *Adam Bede* "made her reputation" (Carroll, Introduction 8). Indeed, *Adam Bede*, which follows a group of families living in the fictional Midlands village of Hayslope just before

the turn of the nineteenth century, enjoyed a “widespread popularity” upon its publication that was never achieved by any of her subsequent works, which may come as a surprise to the modern readers who tend to prefer Eliot’s later work (Carroll, Introduction 2). The runaway success of *Adam Bede* also came as a surprise to Eliot’s partner, George Henry Lewes, who had worried about its prospects prior to publication. Specifically, he expressed concern about the novel’s lack of an identificatory center, noting in his journal that readers “like to fancy themselves doing and feeling what the heroes and heroines do and feel” but “no one would care to be a merely upright carpenter” (Gettelman 41, quoting Haight, *George Eliot* at 273). And, as Lewes feared, readers were not particularly taken with the carpenter hero Adam Bede, nor with the heroine, Dinah Morris, a Methodist preacher with her unrelatably direct access to “the Lord’s will” (39). However, early readers discovered a star in Dinah’s aunt, Mrs. Poyser. Mrs. Poyser, as David Carroll describes, “was seized upon with cries of delight: she was quoted in Parliament; she was as great as the glorious Sam Weller” (8-9). Strikingly, Mrs. Poyser was not “seized upon” as a figure of identification but rather as a “set piece,” one “detachable” from its context in order to be enjoyed “without inhibition” (Carroll, Introduction 9). As Raymond Williams notes (derogatorily), we are invited to regard Mrs. Poyser not as a literary subject, what he calls an “active [bearer] of personal experience,” but instead as a literary object, not incarnated but rather “marvellously (or warmly, richly, charmingly) *done*” (*Country* 168, my emphasis).

Instead of identifying with any individual character of *Adam Bede*, early readers affiliated themselves with the embodied, masculine narrator,¹¹⁰ with whom they associated the previously unknown and presumed male author of the work. This figure, whom D.A. Miller describes as “a glamorization of some

¹¹⁰ The gender of the narrator is not particularly emphasized, but he is referred to as “Sir” by minor character Gedge in a conversation (202). The narrator of *Scenes of a Clerical Life* is likewise figured as a male member of the community looking back on earlier days. By the time of *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot’s practice of referring to the narrator in gendered terms has ceased. By the later novels, the narrator’s body is no longer represented and the narrator’s use of personal anecdote has been eliminated. For a detailed tracking of these narratorial shifts throughout the novels, see Barbara Hardy, *Particularities*, 126-46. As I do with Austen’s narrator, I refer to the narrator of Eliot’s post-*Adam Bede* novels with the singular *they* pronoun.

garden-variety male know-it-all” in the vein of “a learned magistrate, say, or a gossip clubman,” wields an authority rooted not in god-like stature (as in Austen) but in his experiences as a (male, well-educated, well-heeled) person in the world (*Jane Austen* 31).¹¹¹ The narrator of *Adam Bede* is figured as “an involved eyewitness recalling his past,” making him into “a kind of character” with whom readers might align themselves (Lanser 92). As Susan Lanser notes, through Eliot’s sizing of her narrator “down to a human scale, novel becomes story, the personal context of speaking and listening is implicitly engaged, and narrator and reader are established as a community” (92). Though he is also connected to the represented community, this narrator invites us to join him in regarding the characters from a distance, both perspectival and affective. As Gillian Beer remarks, “This dramatised male narrator can confidently set himself apart from the characters. He appears to master as well as sympathise with them” (59). Importantly, he creates and maintains this distance explicitly, figuring his relation to the reader from the start as that of a metaphorical “Egyptian sorcerer” (9). From this position of distance, we are encouraged to feel for the characters but not exactly with them. We are situated firmly outside the frame of this novelistic “Dutch painting” (195). Like the painting, the novel serves as a “source of delicious sympathy” (195). Throughout *Adam Bede*, Eliot maintains this clear affective boundary between the discursive plane that we share with the narrator and that of characters.

¹¹¹ More specifically, Miller assigns this characterization to the “noisy personalities of Fielding and Thackeray” (*Jane Austen* 31). He describes George Eliot as only “*simulating* such a figure” (*Jane Austen* 31, my emphasis). In using the word “simulating,” Miller associates Eliot with imitation in a way that is not shared by these male authors, even though we do not typically speak of Fielding or Thackeray’s narrators as if they were coextensive with their authors. What does it mean for Eliot to simulate what they apparently embody/bring to life authentically and how is this distinction related to her own gender identity and expression? Through this language, Miller seems to strangely echo the nineteenth-century commentators who felt betrayed upon the revelation of Eliot’s identity. Miller describes Eliot’s subsequent move away from the use of an explicitly male narrator after *Adam Bede* as a move toward authoritative femininity: she now “ventriloquizes the well-remembered voice of that all-knowing, all-understanding, and all-forgiving woman to whom — uniquely — everyone has been accustomed to submit: the mother” (31). I read this shift not as toward the embodied, feminine authority of motherhood but instead as away from embodiment and its entanglement with gender. I do think that Miller is correctly tracking an increased hesitancy on the part of readers to identify with the later narrators in the straightforward way they identified with the more human narrator of *Adam Bede*. Identification with the mother is, after all, always marked by ambivalence.

By the time George Eliot published *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) only one year later, such a narratorial position of casually-masculine, embodied yet authoritative distance was no longer available to her.¹¹² In the months following the publication of *Adam Bede*, Eliot, under the pressure of the Joseph Liggins affair, allowed her identity to be revealed to the public.¹¹³ “The public revelation that ‘George Eliot’ was not ‘a University man’ as ‘all the Oxford and Cambridge gents’ may have imagined, but ‘only a poor woman’ living in sin” had a predictably negative effect on the reception of Eliot’s work, including of the novel she had already published (Lanser 84, quoting Lewes, Letter to Barbara Bodichon, 5 May 1859).¹¹⁴ In writing *The Mill on the Floss*, which focuses on the childhood and young adulthood of a Midlands mill owner’s son and daughter in the 1820s and 1830s, Eliot thus had to renegotiate the relationships amongst narrator, characters, and readers. In linking this loss of narratorial position to the loss of the pseudonym, I do not mean to suggest that the changes in Eliot’s narration between novels can be exclusively accounted for in this way, only that the specific move away from gendered embodiment (and later embodiment altogether) cannot be separated cleanly from an understanding of the anticipated and actual shifts in the ways “George Eliot” as a figure was and would be read by her public.

Indeed, even without this loss of anonymity, Eliot would have likely renegotiated the relations between her narrator, characters, and readers after *Adam Bede* due to a recognition of the inherent limits of its rigid form. As Beer describes, “The pleurability of the text in *Adam Bede* derives from its fullness

¹¹² Beer reads Eliot’s first-person story “The Lifted Veil,” narrated by a man with the gift/curse of omniscience, as Eliot’s farewell to the male narrators of her early work in the wake of the revelation of her identity (59). Eliot temporarily stopped work on the in-progress manuscript of *The Mill on the Floss* to write this story.

¹¹³ As Rosemarie Bodenheimer describes, Eliot felt pressure to reveal her identity not merely because Joseph Liggins, a clergyman from the Midlands, was claiming credit for her work but because readers, upon hearing rumors that he had not been paid for the manuscript of *Adam Bede*, were raising funds by subscription on his behalf. Eliot thus felt an ethical obligation to shut down this nineteenth-century equivalent of a fraudulent Go-Fund-Me scheme (137-42).

¹¹⁴ Although Eliot and Lewes had consoled themselves that critics “couldn’t unsay their admiration” for *Adam Bede*, this turned out not to be exactly true (Lanser 94, quoting Lewes, Letter to Bodichon, 30 June 1859, 65). The *Athenaeum*, which had previously published a rave review of *Adam Bede*, reported on the revelation of the Eliot’s identity in a paragraph that remarkably claims *Adam Bede* “has no great quality of any kind,” as it is only “such as a clever woman with an observant eye and unschooled moral nature might have written” (Parlett 120-21).

of project, its having found a shape for activity. Yet within it also is a process of discovering that any delimited project is in danger of self-enclosure, that the framed picture, the pastoral, and the enclosed family must leave out or exclude too much” (65). Indeed, though Williams attributes the “doneness” of the characters in *Adam Bede* to Eliot’s failure to imagine fully the lives of working people within the constraints of the novel form she inherits, I suggest that this objectification has at least as much to do with the formal limits of the specific “sealed” off discursive plane of the narrator to which Beer draws our attention (Williams, *Country* 168; Beer 59).¹¹⁵ In other words, the representational problem Williams identifies — that Eliot treats these characters as objects instead of subjects — is rooted not (merely) in the limits of Eliot’s imagination and of the historically-specific novel form but in the constraints of the specific narrational structure Eliot takes up. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot allows the boundary to become porous, for the story to exceed the narrator’s frame. This porousness allows for what I, following Beer and Alicia Mireles Christoff, think of as an affective “overflow,” one enabled by the breaking of the discursive “seal” of *Adam Bede* (Christoff 46, Beer 59). Yet, as the word overflow suggests, in *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot does not exercise full control over the affective response of readers and their intensity within this new structure. As I will argue, this lack of control leads to unintended consequences for Eliot’s ethical project, as readers are swept away by the identificatory pull of Maggie as figured both through the sensitivity of the portrait of her childhood “girling” and the intensity and the breadth of her desires. To be clear, the novel intends

¹¹⁵ Williams treats the projects of *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* together, yet I would suggest that there is a greater difference between the two novels than he allows. In his reading, the rural working characters of the early novels are rendered “as a landscape,” with the exception of those privileged characters “with whom [Eliot] does really feel” and to whom she “gives her own consciousness, often disguised as a personal dialect” (257, 258, Williams’s emphasis). These “landscape” characters include both the aforementioned Poysers in *Adam Bede* and the Dodsons of *The Mill on the Floss* and these privileged characters (with whom Eliot “does really feel”) include Adam Bede and Maggie Tulliver. Yet, this second grouping, to me, feels unsatisfying, as Eliot never “does really feel” (or at least she does not invite us to feel) with Adam in the way she feels (or invite us to feel) with Maggie. Indeed, Adam strikes me as not markedly less “done” than the Poysers, and I would go so far as to argue that the positioning of the narrator in *Adam Bede* generates this “done-ness” effect across the board. Thus, in my reading, the doneness of the Poysers and the Dodsons is not a result of their similar class positions (which also seem to vary across the two novels to a greater extent than Williams acknowledges) but instead of two related aesthetic figurations: readerly identification with the narrator at the expense of all the characters in *Adam Bede* and readerly identification with the heroine at the expense of characters like the Dodsons in *The Mill on the Floss*.

for us to affectively connect with Maggie, to feel for her, even when she errs, and, in doing so, to recognize the injustices she faces. However, we are not meant to identify with her exclusively, in ways that cut off the possibility of attachment to the characters around her. That is, our unwillingness to detach from Maggie's perspective inhibits Eliot's project of extending fellow feeling not to a singular heroine but across a range of characters who differ from us and from one another. Thus, Maggie's overwhelming identificatory appeal compromises the balance between Eliot's political gender critique and her ethical extension of diffuse fellow feeling.

Breaking the Frame

From the first pages of *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot sets out a different kind of novelistic world than that of *Adam Bede*, not so much in terms of setting as of readerly position. While in *Adam Bede*, the narrator invited the reader to sit back and observe his work ("This is what I undertake to do for you, reader"), in *The Mill on the Floss*, we find ourselves instead immersed in the narrator's present-tense, dream-like state and overwhelmed with sensory details (AB 9). As we observe the workings of the mill, the narrator foregrounds their own desires ("I am in love with the moistness, and envy the white ducks") and their own uncertainty ("I fancy"; "seems to be"; "perhaps") (10, 11). Their relation to the heroine ("The little girl is watching it too") seems to be both more intimate and less determined than the casual acquaintanceship the previous narrator enjoyed with the inhabitants of Hayslope (10). Rather than addressing us directly, as in *Adam Bede*, the narrator seems hardly aware of our existence (AB 9). Instead, we feel like we are peering in on that which is intensely personal, sensuous, and intimate ("I remember those large dipping willows. I remember the stone bridge") (9). As Beer notes, "enclosure in another's dream — the creation of a meta-memory—is the project here" (96). No longer is there a secure boundary between the experiences of the narrator and that of the characters; we, along with the narrator, have broken through the frame.

After this immersion, we find ourselves transported to the study of the narrator, who awakens to find their arms "really benumbed," though these arms are not "resting . . . on the cold stone of this bridge"

but are instead pressing into the armchair where they sat “dreaming that [they were] standing on the bridge in front of Dorlcote Mill, as it looked one February afternoon many years ago” (11). The narrator quickly recovers their sense of purpose and transitions back to the work at hand: “Before I dozed off, I was going to tell you what Mr and Mrs Tulliver were talking about, as they sat by the bright fire in the left-hand parlour, on that very afternoon I have been dreaming of” (11). Yet the unsettling quality of the opening is never fully integrated into the narrative, nor is the relation of the narrator to the characters ever clarified. This new quality of fluidity between narrator, character, and reader facilitates this affective “overflow” in the way that the narrator — figured as both the dreamer and the teller — does not and cannot fully control. That is, even as the narrator reverts to a more traditional third-person register, they continue to be increasingly attentive to the affective lives of the characters, especially (though not exclusively) to that of Maggie. Embodied but not explicitly situated within a gender or class, they also have a looser grasp on discursive authority than their narratorial counterpart in *Adam Bede*. This looseness enables the reader to have both the sense of greater intimacy with the characters and a sense of increased freedom from the narrator’s readings of events, particularly where they conflict with the reader’s own affective attachments.

Of course, a more porous relation between narrator (and thus reader) and character need not necessarily lead to a novel that foregrounds identification. It is possible, if not common, for an author to invite readers to feel for characters through means that discourage any sort of stabilized, exclusive affective attachment to the experiences of a single character. Narratorial distance of the kind we have noted in *Adam Bede* is not the only safeguard against identificatory relation. Indeed, we have seen examples of other safeguards in this study already, including, Jane Austen’s strategic deployment of minor characters to qualify the appeal of her heroines in the first chapter. In the fourth chapter, I will examine a similar mechanism through an analysis of the character-to-character interactions in Thomas Hardy’s middle novels, which stave off readerly identification through the invitation of readerly ambivalence. Even so, ever since its publication, *The Mill on the Floss* has been received by readers as a novel that invites an intense identificatory relation between the reader and its heroine. As the reviewer for the *Westminster Review* put it,

“we cannot help loving Maggie” (140). Indeed, Maggie’s identificatory hold over readers has seemingly only grown stronger with time, as she has been absorbed into a lineage of, what Sarah Ahmed has termed, “willful heroines” (3).¹¹⁶

I have suggested that, in writing *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot did not intend for readers to be so powerfully and exclusively drawn to her heroine and that, in fact, Maggie’s hold on readers had a distorting effect on Eliot’s ethical vision. I argue that, in writing *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot sought not to blur the affective boundary between a narratively privileged character and readers but instead to enable readers to “*imagine* and to *feel* the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring, human creatures” (Letter to Charles Bray, 5 July 1959, Eliot’s emphasis).¹¹⁷ In the same letter in which she sets out this goal, Eliot derides both the “freethinkers” and the “orthodox” who wish to have “the most admirable character in the novel to be their mouthpiece” in the same vein as “an idle woman, with flirtations and flounces, likes to read a French novel, because she can imagine herself the heroine.” Imagining oneself as the heroine — itself a rough definition of identification — is thus positioned as fundamentally at odds with this project of mobile, wide-ranging sympathy. Rather than create an illusion of sameness with a singular hero, Eliot thus seeks to emphasize differences and to mobilize affective connections with the many erring creatures notwithstanding those differences.

¹¹⁶ Ahmed identifies Maggie Tulliver as the inspiration for her book *Willful Subjects*, describing her as “the object of considerable feminist desire and identification over time” (3). We can see such attachments to Maggie in accounts of readers, both real and fictional. For instance, of encountering Maggie for the first time, Simone de Beauvoir writes, “I recognized myself her” (Green 61, quoting Beauvoir at 140). Likewise, in Peter Rushworth’s 2005 novel *Pinkerton’s Sister*, protagonist Alice takes her adolescent identification with Maggie so seriously that it borders on obsession. As Rushworth’s narrator explains, for Alice, “the Maggie Tulliver period lasted far longer than the Jo March period. It probably never really went away” (212). Strikingly, (and in line with Ahmed’s “willful heroine” framework) Beauvoir, like Alice, situates her affective response to Maggie in relation to her response to Louisa May Alcott’s Jo March: “George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* made an even deeper impression upon me than *Little Women*” (Green 61, quoting Beauvoir at 140).

¹¹⁷ While this letter is often cited as a description of Eliot’s consistent and singular project over time, I think it makes more sense to treat it as a description of Eliot’s aim specifically for *The Mill on the Floss*, as it was written during the course of its drafting. I see Eliot’s projects as more varied and in more dynamic relation to one another than this description suggests.

Maggie's hold on the reader, however, effectively makes this kind of wide-ranging sympathy impossible. As described in Chapter 1, identification, in its intensity, insists on exclusivity, so that affective connections with those who oppose the identificatory subject cannot be forged or maintained. The *Westminster Review* critic who "cannot help love Maggie" tellingly concludes this thought with "indeed she is almost the only lovable person in the tale" (140). Remarkably, especially given the identificatory fervor surrounding *Jane Eyre* (1847), *The Spectator* reviewer claims, "We do not remember any novel where the interest so clearly centers around the one character, where every fact — the smallest — is read with deep attention, because it may affect her" (113). In this account, Maggie serves as the sole source of readerly interest while the other characters collectively comprise "a background dull and mean enough for a bright, bold, dark-eyed girl" (112). Strikingly, this lack of readerly interest in this "background" seemingly cannot be cured even by fine writing: "the sordid scenes at Dorlcote Mill — described with photographic truth and minute manner-painting worthy of Miss Austen — are still interesting only in their effect on Maggie" (112). This treatment of these characters as mere background jars with both Eliot's stated intention and with the achieved effect of *Adam Bede*. E.S. Dallas, reviewing *The Mill on the Floss* for *The Times*, identifies this lack of widespread likeability as a significant departure:

The reader [of *Adam Bede*] will remember at once that he could not help liking all the characters in that history. The general influence of the book was to reconcile us to human nature, to make us think better of our fellow men, to make us feel that in the weakest, there is something to be admired, in the worst something to be loved . . . The author, apparently afraid of repeating herself, and determined to avoid the imputation of representing the world as too good and sugary, now introduces us to a very different set of personages. (132)

Like his colleagues, Dallas takes issue not with the loveable Maggie but with the Dodsons, who he calls "stingy, selfish wretches, who give no sympathy and require none," and with Maggie's brother Tom with his "hard consistency" (132).¹¹⁸ Though Eliot read reviews only selectively after her identity became public,

¹¹⁸ The *Westminster Review* put it even more succinctly, declaring: "we cannot like Tom Tulliver" (144). Leslie Stephen seemingly disliked Tom to such an extent that he felt compelled to defend Eliot's brother from the association with his fictional counterpart: "the brother Tom, it is to be hoped, was at most vaguely suggested by the real Isaac Evans" (87). As A.S. Byatt notes, "dislike of Tom, and excessive indulgence toward at least Maggie the passionate child, is a common response in readers Victorian and modern" (xxxv-xxxvi). Eliot resented the implication that this dislike for Tom originated with her. In response to a review that argued Tom deserves better from his author, Eliot writes,

she did read Dallas's review and felt "rather alarmed" at its critique, especially in light of the reviewer's evident "generous spirit" and "high degree of intelligence" (Letter to William Blackwood 138). She expressed worry that Dallas's "misapprehensions . . . should be due to my defective presentation," and claimed that "Tom is painted with as much love and pity as Maggie, and I am so far from hating the Dodsons myself, that I am rather aghast to find them ticketed with such ugly adjectives" (138). How, then, might we account for this gap between the experiences of the readers and the express intention of the author?

For many critics, the answer lies in the autobiographical nature of the text. These critics, including F.R. Leavis, Bernard Paris, and Leslie Stephen,¹¹⁹ accuse Eliot of "over-identifying" with Maggie Tulliver (Paris 166).¹²⁰ That is, Eliot lacks the proper distance from Maggie in a way that distorts her artistic and ethical insight, so that we are faced with a troubling gap between "the character that George Eliot has actually presented" and "the one she thinks she has presented" (Paris 167). According to Leavis, Eliot shows "immaturity" in allowing her "hunger and need" to bring her too close to Maggie, who is "essentially identical with the young Mary Ann Evans," except that Maggie is "triumphantly beautiful" (42, 38-39). Maggie's representation is thus "a self-idealization" characterized by a significant "element of self-pity"

"Pray notice how my critic attributes to me a disdain for Tom; as if it were *not* my respect for Tom, which infused itself into my reader — as if he could have respected Tom, if I had not painted him with respect; the exhibition of the *right* on both sides being the very soul of my intention in the story" (Letter to John Blackwood 162 [Eliot's emphasis]). Yet, if Eliot seeks the credit for infusing the critic with respect for Tom, who should we credit with infusing the disdain so many other readers feel toward Tom?

¹¹⁹ Of these three critics, Stephen's reading seems the least distorted by his identification of what he refers to as the "subjective" in George Eliot. In particular, he acknowledges the positive effects of this purported subjectivity, that the way in which Eliot "throws herself so frankly into Maggie's position" enables Maggie to "glow with a more tender and poetic charm than any of her other heroines" (88-89). He is also more willing to acknowledge his own affective attachment to Maggie, which he identifies not as identification but as falling in love (89). Stephen's romantic attachment to Maggie (which may speak to his resistance to cross-gender identification) perhaps accounts for the intensity of his famous vitriol for his romantic rival, the "mere hairdresser's block" of Stephen Guest (104).

¹²⁰ This distaste Leavis shows for autobiographically-inspired works that foreground identificatory pleasures perhaps accounts for his quite remarkable treatment of Charlotte Brontë. In the introduction to *The Great Tradition*, he includes a "Note" on "The Brontës" which begins: "It is tempting to retort there is only one Brontë . . . The genius was Emily, of course." He goes on to note that Charlotte, "claiming no part in the great line of English fiction," has only "a permanent interest of a minor kind" due to her skill in the "rendering of personal experience" (27).

(42). In Paris's account, which builds on that of Leavis, this purported immaturity becomes pathologized, as Eliot cannot "fulfill the objectives [she] defined for her own novels" because she is not herself "psychologically healthy" (199, 198).¹²¹ In these accounts, Eliot identifies with Maggie and, in doing so, attempts to drag the reader along with her.

These accusations that Eliot is too close and thus too uncritical of Maggie are built on a misunderstanding of dynamics of authorial identification/self-representation.¹²² Authorial self-representation/identification has more in common with psychoanalytic accounts of identification, which are characterized by ambivalence, than with identification as experienced by readers within the space of fiction.¹²³ Indeed, to the extent that such an identification exists in *The Mill on the Floss*, I would locate it not in Eliot's idealization of Maggie but instead in the ambivalence the novel exhibits toward her after the scandal but prior to the flood. Specifically, Eliot seems to both to want to condemn "the world's wife" for punishing Maggie and yet also to lend credence to Maggie's sense that she is deserving of punishment (a suggestion, I will argue, that is not readily taken up by the reader) (509). The reader's closeness to Maggie is neither a function of Eliot's own identification, nor of the autobiographical nature of the novel. Instead it arises from the novel's foregrounding of gendering, a process which is clearly of great interest to Eliot and which may have been difficult for her to explore previously, given the confines of an intact masculine

¹²¹ One wonders whether Leavis and Paris believed, as Williams claims with respect to his own critique of Eliot, that they could "make these points in her presence" (*Country* 170).

¹²² Authorial identification strikes me as an imprecise name for this concept, as it seems to suggest that the creation of the character precedes the author's relation to it, as if the author first creates a character and then identifies with them. I prefer the term authorial self-representation, which suggest that the author imbues the character with some aspect of themselves within the act of creation.

¹²³ I suggest that these critics are displacing their own identifications with Maggie onto Eliot. That such a displacement has a damaging effect on one's understanding of the novel as a whole can perhaps be seen in Paris's claim that Eliot "presents Maggie so sympathetically because the perspective of the novel as a whole is that of the self-effacing solution at which she arrives by the end. The clue to life is total renunciation" (191). Reading the novel as endorsing renunciation as a sort of all-encompassing "Key" to life completely bypasses the social critique of the novel, which seeks to incite a readerly desire to make life more livable for people like Maggie. Indeed, renunciation is presented within the novel itself as an individualistic coping mechanism that is both partial and unsustainable over time.

pseudonym. Eliot's loss of her pseudonym thus not only subjects her work and her personal life to increased scrutiny but also frees her to explore topics that may have felt previously off-limits. Eliot fails to control our affective response to Maggie because she underestimates the profound way in which seemingly ordinary harms of gendering (and the failed attempts to resist it) would register to readers and then doubles down on this miscalculation by marshaling her narrator in ways that ensure we take Maggie's childhood emotions seriously.

It is perhaps not surprising that an author whose own childhood resembled that of Maggie Tulliver¹²⁴ would be concerned that readers might dismiss Maggie's desires and emotional experiences, that they would feel inclined to "pooh-pooh the griefs" of Maggie (*Mill* 71). To guard against the possibility of dismissal, Eliot renders Maggie's emotional life with great care and marshals her narrator to contextualize those experiences within childhood and, in so doing, to invite us to recall our own childhood miseries. That is, the narrator urges us to remember not only the "early bitterness" of childhood but its "intensity" (71). By insisting we imaginatively inhabit "these bitter sorrows of childhood! when sorrow is all new and strange, when hope has not yet got wings to fly beyond the days and weeks, and the space from summer to summer seems measureless," Eliot's narrator blurs the boundary between Maggie's affective experience and our own (40). Yet, primed by the Red Room of *Jane Eyre*, readers do not require this extra narratorial encouragement to affectively connect with Maggie. Indeed, many of us exceed Eliot's intention, not merely taking seriously Maggie's responses to these injuries but further turning our backs on those who have caused them.

Tellingly, early reviewers hailed Maggie Tulliver as a new *Jane Eyre* (see e.g., Unsigned Review, *The Spectator* 111; Unsigned Review, *Saturday Review* 127; Unsigned Review, *Guardian* 127). In particular, they noted the similarities between the concerns of the authors: "George Eliot has thought as keenly and

¹²⁴ Like Charlotte Brontë, Eliot reported scaling back the personal experiences she wrote into the novel. In 1867, Emily Davies recorded a conversation, in which Eliot told her, "In *The Mill on the Floss*, everything is softened, as compared with real life." According to Davies, "Her own experience was worse" (Haight, vol. 8, 465).

profoundly as the authoress of *Jane Eyre* on the peculiar difficulties and sorrows encountered by a girl of quick feeling and high aspirations under adverse outward circumstances” (*Saturday Review* 117). As this reviewer describes, the texts resemble one another in their centering of their heroine’s desires, what they call their “high aspirations”(117). Indeed, Beer argues that Maggie’s desires, like those of Jane, generate “the unremitting narrative urgency” of the novel (Beer 98). Maggie’s desires are not only intensely felt but expansive. Per Christoff, “Maggie is constantly wishing for more: for more attention from her brother, for more adoration from the people she loves, for more books, for a better education, for more opportunities than her provincial life can afford, for more music and ‘more instruments playing together,’ for more love, for more substantial contact with others, for things to be different than they are” (71-72). This yearning for more, especially where the specific content of that yearning is both expansive and under-determined, is, as I have suggested in the discussion of Brontë’s work, a key component of identificatory appeal. Further, like Jane, what makes Maggie irresistible to readers is not just the breadth and intensity of her desires but also the ways in which her desires are so violently curtailed, especially during her childhood.

Nevertheless, we might see why Eliot might have anticipated a less warm readerly reception for Maggie than that afforded to Jane Eyre. As discussed in Chapter 2, Jane, as heroine-narrator, tells her own story in a way as to fully justify her emotions and actions to readers. She is presented as both passionate and in control. Maggie, in contrast, is narrated by a third party and shares narrative space with her brother, whose experiences are, at times, representationally-privileged over her own.¹²⁵ Importantly, Maggie is also presented not merely as justifiably angry (like Jane) but also as vengeful, self-aggrandizing, and envious. She often acts in ways that hurt others who do not deserve it, as when she jealously pushes little Lucy in the cow-trodden mud. And, yet, perhaps counterintuitively (and importantly for our study), Maggie’s flaws are more attractive to many readers than Jane’s perfection, a preference to which Gwendolen Harleth gives voice in *Daniel Deronda*: “I have no sympathy with women who are always doing right. I don’t believe in

¹²⁵ For instance, we spend a great deal of time with Tom at school and at work, but Maggie’s education and work life take place off-page.

their great sufferings” (371). In Peter Rushworth’s 2005 novel *Pinkerton’s Sister*, the protagonist Alice identifies most strongly with Maggie at her most vengeful. Indeed, copying Maggie (who is herself modeling her behavior after the biblical heroine Jael), Alice takes up vengefully hammering nails into “a Fetish” of her own: “Maggie was clearly a girl who felt things the way that Alice felt things, and she embraced the phrase *that luxury of vengeance* — used to describe the hammering as a proof of fellow-feeling, humming along in unison with Maggie and Jael as the hammer rose and fell” (212). This is likely not the kind of “fellow-feeling” George Eliot had in mind in writing the novel yet it undeniably has power of its own. As Leslie Stephen puts it, comparing Maggie to her heroic predecessor: “I suppose that Dinah Morris would be placed higher on a scale of morality; but . . . I hold that Maggie is worth a wilderness of Dinahs” (88-89).

Maggie’s emotional outbursts and flaws are attractive not because they are always fully justified but because they arise out of “great suffering” and, in particular, the suffering of childhood. Like Jane, Maggie is victimized repeatedly throughout her childhood, in ways that are perhaps both intimately familiar and troubling to readers. In attending to this process of gendering, Eliot seemingly did not intend to frame it as in any way equivalent to the harms Jane suffers as a neglected child. Unlike Jane, Maggie is a loved, wanted, cared-for child. However, these people who love and care for her also function as her tormentors as they relentlessly work to (re)form her into a “good gell” (15). They form a “chorus of reproach and derision” that wears down Maggie’s resistance through “habitual depreciation” (73, 215). That the harms experienced by Jane and those experienced by Maggie work in similar ways for purposes of identification is telling. If *Jane Eyre*, as I argue in Chapter 2, demonstrates the efficacy of scenes of childhood victimization for inviting identification, *The Mill on the Floss* inadvertently reveals how the “ordinary” process of childhood gendering reads as childhood victimization when attended to in detail.

“All Wrong Somehow”: Gender Trouble in St. Ogg’s

In the 1990 Preface to *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler provides some additional context for the title of the work:

To make trouble was, within the reigning discourse of my childhood, something one should never do precisely because that would get one in trouble. The rebellion and its reprimand seemed to be caught up in the same terms, a phenomenon that gave rise to my first critical insight into the subtle ruse of power: the prevailing law threatened one with trouble, even put one in trouble, all to keep one out of trouble. Hence, I concluded that trouble is inevitable and the task, how best to make it, what best way to be in it. (xxvii)

For Maggie, as for Butler, “trouble is inevitable.” Indeed, even before she appears in the novel, nine-year-old Maggie Tulliver is in gender trouble. Her mind is “too ‘cute for a woman,” her hair too wild, her skin too brown (15). By the time “this small mistake of nature” appears, we have learned that Maggie’s gender failures will lead to trouble — what the Tullivers call “mischief” — not only for herself but also for her mother, as “her aunts will have it as it’s me spoils her” (16). Hailed as a “good gell” and “a little lady,” Maggie resists the role, declining to do “pretty patchwork” (which Maggie denigrates as “foolish work”) for an aunt she does not like (16). Shortly thereafter, Maggie learns that she will not be permitted to accompany her father to pick up her brother Tom from school, as “the morning was too wet, Mrs Tulliver said, for a little girl to go out in her best bonnet” (31). Maggie responds by dunking her head under water “in the vindictive determination that there should be no more chance of curls that day” (31). It is not in phrasing only (“no possibility of a walk that day”) that Maggie’s defiance calls to mind the rebellious outbursts of young Jane Eyre (*JE* 9).¹²⁶

Maggie’s unbothered defiance, however, does not, perhaps cannot last. As Butler describes, “that ‘girling’ of the girl” is not a one-time event. Rather, “that founding interpellation [‘it’s a girl!’] is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reenforce or contest this naturalized

¹²⁶ Like Jane, Maggie too finds aesthetic identification a powerful tool for expressing her sense of injustice. Taking up the same biblical story as Lucy Snowe (described in Chapter 2), she imagines herself as Jael, the woman who hammered a nail into Sisera, the leader of the Canaanite soldiers in the Book of Judges. In the place of Sisera, she has a doll that uses as stand-in for her enemies, including her mother and her Aunt Glegg.

effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm” (*Bodies* 8). If Maggie begins the novel largely impervious to this gendering effort, she is soon overwhelmed by its relentlessness. She cannot escape the running commentary from her mother and aunts about her hair, her skin color, her manners, and her inability to live up to the example set by her more gender-conforming, better-behaved, prettier cousin, Lucy. Maggie is repeatedly informed that the consequence of her failures to conform to expectations will be a loss of affection: “they’ll never love you any more” (31). By the time Maggie cuts off her always-offending hair a few chapters later, her motive is already split between rebellion (“the triumph she should have over her mother and her aunts by this very decided course of action”) and compliance (“she only wanted people to think her a clever little girl, and not to find fault with her”) (69-70). Through the experience of cutting her hair, Maggie learns the painful lesson that one cannot escape the process of being gendered by opting out. No one thinks she is a “clever little girl”; instead, she is told that she deserves to be “whipped” and “jailed” and that she will “break her mother’s heart” (73). With only her sympathetic father to “take her part,” poor Maggie is not only in trouble but also becomes troubled herself.

In response to this unending stream of criticism — this inevitable trouble — Maggie engages in compensatory fantasies. These fantasies too oscillate between her desire to dominate and her desire to conform. In one, she fantasizes about a kingdom of children, with a queen who looked “just like Lucy with a little crown on her head . . . only the queen was Maggie herself in Lucy’s form” (66). In another, which she attempts to enact in the wake of a particularly egregious failure to act like a good girl (“Maggie behaves worse than she expected”), she runs away to the “gypsies” with whom she is repeatedly associated by her aunts and mother due to her “brown skin” and her “half-wild” behavior. In her fantasy (though not in her attempt to enact it), she is welcomed not as a fellow member of the community but as their colonizing-queen (15, 112).¹²⁷ As Christoff describes, this particular fantasy makes clear “that femininity

¹²⁷ Like Christoff, I follow Eliot in using the term “gypsy” to be consistent with the usage in the novel, though I recognize that this term has contributed to a misnaming of the Roma people and has been deemed offensive by certain groups. See Christoff, n. 96, at 221 (including both a fuller account of this issue and additional resources on

cannot in fact be understood outside of class and racial difference, and perhaps even more specifically, outside of the context of its production in the context of empire, nation building, and its many migrations and diasporas” (106). While like Christoff, we might wish “that George Eliot had been able to think more incisively about racial difference,” the novel is nonetheless attentive to the ways in which gender and gendering is bound up in and inextricable from other forms of difference, including differences of race, class, and ability.

Indeed, throughout the novel, these forms of difference are strikingly described and experienced in terms of gender. When Tom Tulliver begins his lessons with Mr. Stelling, he is subjected not only to the humiliation of trying to learn subjects for which he has received insufficient grounding but also to the clergyman’s efforts to correct the way he exists in the world. In a “playful manner,” Mr. Stelling repeatedly intervenes to “correct his provincialisms and deportment” in order to discipline Tom into a presenting himself as a member of the class that his father hopes that he will join (143). At Mr. Stelling’s house, Tom feels “for the first time in his life” what his sister has been made to feel often: “a painful sense that he was all wrong somehow” (143). Burdened by his father’s desire for upward mobility, Tom is forced into an environment for which he has not been properly prepared. Yet, Eliot describes this experience of feeling “all wrong” not in terms of class but instead in terms of gender. Studying with Mr. Stelling, who refuses to “enfeeble” or “emasculate” his student by explaining or providing context “such as is given to girls,” Tom “became more like a girl that he had ever been in his life” (148). In parallel to what happens to Maggie through her girling, Tom’s “boyish self-satisfaction” is transformed into “girlish susceptibility” through

the modern Romani community). For an account of Eliot’s use of the trope of “the gypsy” in its Victorian context, see Nord 99-123. For an account of the disidentificatory potential of Maggie’s attempt to join “the gypsies,” see Christoff at 105-08. Notably, Christoff’s chapter seeks to open up the possibility of identification with Maggie for her “imagined reader,” who she describes as “the young woman of color who picks up *The Mill on the Floss* and sees herself at once reflected in and reviled by Maggie Tulliver” (107). Taking up Jose Muñoz’s account of “disidentificatory reception,” Christoff strives to make possible “a still valuable yet mediated identification” with Maggie for such a reader (106-07).

repeated blows to his confidence (149).¹²⁸ Likewise, Philip's disability is spoken about in gendered terms. When Tom wants to insult Philip, he claims that Philip's disability renders him "no better than a girl" (182). Moreover, though Philip attends the same educational program as Tom, he is described by Lucy and Mr. Deane as being "brought up like a girl" (438). In *The Mill on the Floss*, nearly all trouble is presented as gender trouble.

As our identification with Maggie is rooted in the breadth and intensity of her desires and the devastating ways in which they are curtailed, it is perhaps unsurprising that Maggie's primary disciplinarians, the Dodsons, are hated by readers. Even their post-scandal kindness to Maggie — Mrs. Tulliver leaving Tom to tend to Maggie, Aunt Glegg taking Tom to task for turning his back on his sister — strikes many readers as too little, too late. Yet, what has been discussed so far cannot account for the fact that, to quote the *Westminster Review*, "we cannot like Tom Tulliver" (144). After all, like Maggie, Tom is a victim both of an education ill-suited to his abilities and of Mr. Tulliver's financial downfall. Tom is presented as being injured by his "boying" in similar, if lesser ways, than Maggie is by her "girling." That the burden of being gendered falls more heavily on Maggie than on Tom is not Tom's fault. Why, then, do so many readers resent Tom, against Eliot's express intention? Critics often date dislike of Tom to his actions in late adolescence and early adulthood: to his unreasonable prohibition of Maggie's relationship with Philip or his cruel refusal to allow her to come home in the wake of the scandal ("You will find no home with me. . . . You don't belong to me") (503, see e.g., Stephen 98). It seems, after all, unsavory for an adult reader to express dislike toward a child. Yet, in inviting us to share in young Maggie's affective life and to take it seriously, Eliot also invites us to recall that, to quote Margaret Atwood, "little [children]

¹²⁸ Relatedly, Maggie's relation to femininity is changed by her own experience of downward class mobility. As a child, Maggie dismisses "the foolish work" of sewing (16). Yet in Volume III, we learn Maggie's sewing is now "exquisite" (393). As Maggie explains to Lucy, "It is a mystery easily explained. Plain sewing was the only thing I could get money by; so I was obliged to try and do it well" (393). Temporarily free from the drudgery of teaching, the previously tom-boyish Maggie also now delights in the social performance of femininity: "it was becoming very pleasant to dress in the evening and to feel that she was one of the beautiful things of the spring" (417). In other words, her experience of financial precarity has transformed dressing up from a tiresome duty to a desirable luxury to which she has limited access.

are small and cute only to adults. To one another, they are life-sized” (129). Through this affective structure, in which Tom is rendered life-sized, even as a boy. I suggest our (or at least my) dislike of Tom arises far earlier in the novel. Specifically, though we may share Maggie’s frustration with his jam puff tactics or feel discomfort at the unseemly pleasure he seems to get “punishing” his little sister, I argue what is unforgivable is the delight Tom takes in the violence of Maggie’s “girling.”

Maggie learns what it means to be a girl in the world not only from her mother and aunts but also from the men she encounters. She begins the novel frustrated by her father’s friend, Mr. Riley, who ignores her reading skills in order to criticize her book selection. Specifically, he declares Defoe’s *History of the Devil* to be “not quite right for a little girl” (21). Yet, if Maggie is disappointed to realize that Mr. Riley “thought her silly and of no consequence,” she suffers far worse injury at the hands of Tom’s teacher, Mr. Stelling. Tom, who has been miserable studying with Mr. Stelling, is relieved to have a visit from Maggie. She not only cheers him up but also helps him with his studies, in part by being unafraid to ask questions. Almost immediately, Maggie and Mr. Stelling are “on the best terms,” and she formulates a plan (158).

She told Tom she should like to go to school to Mr Stelling, as he did, and learn just the same things. She knew she could do Euclid, for she had looked into it again, and she saw what A B C meant; they were the names of the lines.

“I’m sure you couldn’t do it, now,” said Tom; “and I’ll just ask Mr Stelling if you could.”

“I don’t mind,” said the little conceited minx, “I’ll ask him myself.”

“Mr Stelling,” she said, that same evening when they were in the drawing-room, “couldn’t I do Euclid, and all Tom’s lessons, if you were to teach me instead of him?”

“No, you couldn’t,” said Tom, indignantly. “Girls can’t do Euclid; can they, sir?”

“They can pick up a little of everything, I dare say,” said Mr Stelling. “They’ve a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn’t go far into anything. They’re quick and shallow.”

Tom, delighted with this verdict, telegraphed his triumph by wagging his head at Maggie, behind Mr Stelling’s chair. As for Maggie, she had hardly ever been so mortified. She had been so proud to be called “quick” all her little life, and now it appeared that this quickness was the brand of inferiority. It would have been better to be slow, like Tom.

“Ha, ha! Miss Maggie!” said Tom, when they were alone; “you see it’s not such a fine thing to be quick. You’ll never go far into anything, you know.”

And Maggie was so oppressed by this dreadful destiny that she had no spirit for a retort. (158-59)

In this scene, Mr. Stelling, the highest authority on education Maggie has ever encountered, deals her a staggering blow. Maggie is accustomed to having others, including Tom, place little value on her intelligence. As her father laments, “an over-’cute woman’s no better nor a long-tailed sheep, — she’ll

fetch none the bigger price for that” (15). Yet, she is not accustomed to having the very existence of her intelligence disputed, which Mr. Stelling does through his demotion of it to “superficial cleverness.” Read through a gendered lens, Maggie’s ability to decipher that which had eluded Tom about geometry all year — that the A, B, and C refer to the lines — is rendered irrelevant. Coming from a girl, such “quickness” is by definition “shallow.” In other words, though Mr. Stelling might “like her prattle immensely,” he has not taken and will not take her seriously as a scholar, a devastating revelation for Maggie (158). Maggie is, of course, not correct that “it would have been better to be slow, like Tom.” Instead, for her intelligence to be recognized, it would have to come from “a boy, like Tom.” Tom, who has likewise been made to feel “all wrong” by Mr. Stelling, also, to paraphrase E.S. Dallas, neither gives nor requires sympathy (Dallas 132). Surveying the devastation of his little sister, who has spent this visit making his life better, Tom feels absolute “delighted,” privileging his own sense of superiority over fellow feeling. This display of palpable joy at her “mortification” (“Ha, ha! Miss Maggie!”), is why I “cannot like Tom Tulliver.” In other words, it is the cruelty of his laughter in the face of Maggie’s “dreadful destiny,” more than his “hardened consistency” that cuts him off from the possibility of readerly fellow feeling.

It is nonetheless true that, prior to Mr. Tulliver’s financial troubles, nothing particularly extraordinary happens to Maggie: she is disciplined by her aunts and her mother, who wish to turn her into a little lady; she learns some hard truths about the opportunities available to her; she is jealous of her cousin and bullied by her brother. Still, nearly everyone in her world feels affectionate toward her and wants her to find success. Yet, the effects of these “ordinary” experiences of girlhood are nonetheless emotionally devastating for Maggie. In other words, as seen from Maggie’s perspective, an Aunt Glegg does not look so different from an Aunt Reed. The narrator invites us to share in Maggie’s emotional experiences but they also wish for us to inhabit their nostalgia for childhood joy and innocence. The intensity of our affective connection to Maggie, I suggest, makes this invitation difficult to accept, especially given the narrator’s loosened grasp on authority. The narrator asks us to linger over the idyllic setting and the affection between brother and sister. Yet, it seems impossible from a readerly standpoint to inhabit

fully Maggie's home life, with its hostility of her very sense of being, and the novel's nostalgia for this time in her life, no matter how beautifully rendered.¹²⁹ When the narrator asks us to join in their wistfulness for "that sweet monotony where everything is known, and *loved* because it is known," we might be tempted to demur (45, Eliot's emphasis). Maggie herself, unclouded by nostalgia and not knowing of the troubles to come, gives a much more qualified account of her childhood life: "my home is very pretty, and I'm very fond of the river where we go fishing — but I am often very unhappy" (117). Like Maggie, we cannot look past this unhappiness to join the narrator, who, after all, advances their interpretations from the more fallible position of personhood.

Borne Along the Identificatory Tide

Eliot's novels famously seek not only to generate a readerly sense of fellow feeling but also to provide a clear portrait of ethical duty and its violation. Maggie's identificatory power also poses problems for this aspect of her novel, as it courts what A.S. Byatt calls an "excessive indulgence" toward Maggie, particularly, I suggest, as her troubles increase (xxxvi). As a young adult, Maggie suffers from the downfall and later loss of her father. After the failure of her initial attempt renounce all desire, she finds herself unhappy and overtired from working in a "third-rate schoolroom" (400). The third volume of the novel is

¹²⁹ I suggest that Eliot's famous passage about childhood nostalgia is rendered more moving for its importation into Gerwig's adaptation of *Little Women*, where Jo reads it to Beth during their adulthood:

We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it, — if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lispings to ourselves on the grass; the same hips and haws on the autumn's hedgerows; the same redbreasts that we used to call "God's birds," because they did no harm to the precious crops. What novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known, and *loved* because it is known? (45)

In *Little Women*, childhood is not represented as a time free from conflict but it is also not presented as a time dominated by the kind of anxiety Maggie feels toward Tom, nor by the relentless gendering efforts of the kind spearheaded by the Dodsons. The March home, unlike the Tulliver home, offers the girls, to differing degrees, a partial shelter from the violence of gendering that they experience outside of it. In its original context, Eliot's meditation on the "thoughts and loves" of childhood follows a description of "one of their happy mornings" (44). Yet, beyond the fact that such mornings seem to be few and far between for the Tulliver children, this particular "happy" morning is nonetheless marked by Maggie's anxiety about inciting Tom's anger, so that even when she catches a fish, she is "frightened lest she had been doing something wrong" (44). It is difficult to dismiss Maggie's apprehensions as dramatic when we see her failures to be vigilant, as when she wins and then eats the bigger piece of jam tart, are met with unreasonable anger from Tom.

often criticized as departing too drastically from the two that precede it, leaving the reader with a sense of unevenness. We find ourselves suddenly transported to the Deane home, surrounded by the trappings of prosperity, where the discussions center around music recitals and charity bazaars. Yet, if it feels like a different kind of novel for us, this sentiment is shared by Maggie, who is, after all, only visiting before returning to her “real life” of difficult labor. Indeed, Maggie too has difficulties adjusting to the tone of the setting, seeming to forget that she has, as Lucy reminds her, “left that dreary schoolroom behind”:

“Yes,” said Maggie. “It is with me as I used to think it would be with the poor uneasy white bear I saw at the show. I thought he must have got so stupid with the habit of turning backward and forward in that narrow space that he would keep doing it if they set him free. One gets a bad habit of being unhappy.” (388)

Though we do not see Maggie’s labor, this likening of her work to “turning backward and forward” like a caged animal, cuts the reader already-attuned to Maggie’s suffering to the quick. How far Maggie has traveled from the “conceited little minx” with her ambitions of learning Euclid!

Our already-established identification with Maggie has profound implications for how we engage with the third volume, in which Maggie faces moral temptation in the form of her cousin Lucy’s almost-fiancé, Stephen Guest. Faced with her increasing attraction to the handsome, wealthy, musical Guest, Maggie seeks to remind herself of her commitments both to Lucy, who she loves, and to Philip Wakem, who she has promised to marry should her brother consent. Yet, these commitments waver, especially when their hypothetical sufferings seem to pale next to Stephen’s representations of his own lovesick blues.¹³⁰ Maggie begins to engage in what Fredric Jameson has termed (via Sartre) “*mauvaise foi*” and what

¹³⁰ Laura Green turns our attention to the scene in which Maggie refuses to finish reading de Stael’s *Corrine* because of her identification with Corrine, who she suspects will lose out (49). Maggie declares to Philip that she is “determined to read no more books where the blond-haired women carry away all the happiness. I should begin to have a prejudice against them. If you could give me some story, now, where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance. I want to avenge Rebecca and Flora MacIvor and Minna, and all the rest of the dark unhappy ones” (345). Offended by Philip’s (prescient) suggestion that she do the avenging herself by stealing away love from Lucy, Maggie clarifies her stance, disclaiming an identification based on likeness to one based on suffering: “But it isn’t for that, that I’m jealous for the dark women — because I am dark myself. It’s because I always care the most for the unhappy people; if the blond girl was forsaken, I should like *her* best” (346). Green reads Maggie, in this moment, as disclaiming “a primary, narcissistic identification” in favor of “an other-directed sympathy” (50). In Green’s terms, Maggie’s struggle is to maintain that “other-directed sympathy” in the face of her own suffering and temptation. But the novel renders even this position of caring “most for the unhappy people” as itself slippery and compromising. For instance, Maggie’s initial acceptance of Stephen hinges on his appeal to her “other-directed

Andrew H. Miller calls “casuistry downward” (Jameson 131; A. Miller, *Burdens* 95). Specifically, Maggie engages in the kind of bad faith self-colloquy, later made famous by would-be villains like Tito in *Romola* and Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*, in an attempt to justify taking the action that would secure her the objects of her desire (Stephen Guest and financial security).

There were moments in which a cruel selfishness seemed to be getting possession of her; why should not Lucy, why should not Philip, suffer? *She* had had to suffer through many years of her life; and who had renounced anything for her? And when something like that fulness of existence — love, wealth, ease, refinement, all that her nature craved — was brought within her reach, why was she to forego it, that another might have it, — another, who perhaps needed it less? (478, Eliot’s emphasis)

Here, Maggie’s *mauvaise foi* involves “a particular kind of inner prestidigitation” that “seems to involve speed — [she] must work very fast indeed to avoid the whole construction from falling apart” (Jameson 131). Maggie certainly does work quickly to abstract Lucy into an “another” and not just any other, but one “who, perhaps needed it less.” Yet, I suggest Maggie’s bad faith reasoning has a greater hold on us than the other such displays in George Eliot. We view the self-justifications of Bulstrode in *Middlemarch* or Tito in *Romola* (1862) from a critical distance: they may not be fully aware of what they are doing, but we are always-already alive to the bad faith of their displays, to the flimsiness of their constructions. Even the compelling Gwendolen Harleth’s display of *mauvaise foi* cannot convince us, even temporarily, that her marriage to Grandcourt is justified in light of the claims of Lydia Glasher and her own promise to respect them. We might sympathize with the newly financially-precarious Gwendolen as she pleads, “How can I help what other people have done?” (280). We might even acknowledge that, faced with the prospect of our own beloved mother spending her remaining years sewing table-cloth borders for pay, we might make the same choice, even though we know it to be the wrong one. Yet, Maggie’s reasoning is far more

sympathy” through the presentation of his own suffering: “Maggie was paralyzed; it was easier to resist Stephen’s pleading than this picture he had called up of himself suffering while she was vindicated; easier even to turn away from his look of tenderness than from this look of angry misery, that seemed to place her in selfish isolation from him . . . This yielding to the idea of Stephen’s suffering was more fatal than the other yielding, because it was less distinguishable from that sense of others’ claims which was the moral basis of her resistance” (486). Strikingly, the propensity of novel readers to care “most for the unhappy person” accounts for a great deal of Maggie’s own identificatory hold on the reader.

tempting. Surely, she is right that Lucy needs this marriage “less than she does,” that she would eventually get over it,¹³¹ and that, in any case, she would not be sentenced to another year of eating “watery rice-pudding” and teaching tiresome children (388). Would it be so bad for Maggie to accept Stephen? Isn’t it the case that Lucy and Philip have resources at their disposal to soften the blow, resources that are unavailable to Maggie? Indeed, after the scandal, both Lucy and Philip are quickly taken out of town to recover while Maggie lives out the consequences in St. Ogg’s. In this colloquy, Maggie gives voice not only to her desires but also to our desires for her. Shouldn’t, as Maggie earlier suggests, the artistic brunette sometimes get the happy ending? Maggie goes on to rebut her own seductive reasoning, in a manner of which we imagine Eliot approves. She dismantles her own construction as quickly as she once toppled Tom’s house of cards, calling our attention to its flimsiness as she goes. She resists the “cruel selfishness” of “temptation” in the same colloquy that names it (478). If, as Andrew H. Miller suggests, our experiences of Eliot’s *mauvaise foi* afford us the opportunity to perfect the reasoning of these characters, here, the identificatory reader does not perfect Maggie’s moral reasoning; she perfects ours (*Burdens* 96).

In this readerly lapse, we find our counterpart not in Maggie — whose ethical commitments are, in this moment, stronger than her desires — but instead in Aunt Gritty, at whose home Maggie is staying when Stephen Guest comes to plead his case. If Philip Wakem bodies forth our desire that Maggie give up renunciation and return to the pleasures of art, literature, music and friendship in Volume II, Aunt Gritty takes up our desire to offer Maggie leeway to chase those awakened desires in Volume III. Specifically, Gritty offers Maggie comfort rather than judgment, space instead of guidance. Maggie, fresh off of receiving the arm kisses that shocked reviewers, is eager to escape the temptation of Stephen by

¹³¹ Many critics have dismissed Lucy as Maggie’s gender-conforming foil who harbors no strong desires of her own. It is true that Lucy does not seem to share Maggie’s intense desire for Stephen, nor does she reciprocate Tom’s desire for her, but this does not necessarily mean that she has no desires of her own. Strikingly, though Elizabeth Ermarth claims that Lucy, unlike Maggie, accepts “her place willingly,” we do see her resist authority not in order to be with Stephen but instead to be with Maggie (590). We might linger for a moment on these questions: Why is Lucy so quick to forgive Maggie? Why is she willing to risk so much to see her? What do we really know about Lucy, beyond her prettiness and the fact that she is, as Stephen Guest recognizes, “a woman who was loving and thoughtful for other women . . . with long ruminating enjoyment of little pleasures prepared for them” (385)?

visiting her paternal aunt. However, the persistent Stephen follows her there and insists on talking to her alone. Her aunt, unsure what to make of it, lets it lie. In fact, Gritty, with “kind thoughtfulness,” sends Maggie’s cousins away to “wait anxiously to receive Maggie” on her own (469). Importantly, Gritty, Maggie’s likeness, represents one version of bleak future for Maggie — a bright but worn-out woman with more children than she can afford, who was long dependent on the largesse of a mercurial brother. Are we surprised that Gritty, ground down by the material realities of her life, thinks first not of propriety but instead of materiality? From her perspective, it “might be a joyful thing that Maggie had a rich and handsome lover” (469). When she is met instead with Maggie’s “wretched” cries and wishes to die, Gritty does not reprimand her for going off alone with a man to whom she is not engaged, a man who, in fact, has attached himself to another. She does not pry. She does not offer advice. She does not suggest that Maggie extend her stay in order to avoid further interaction with Stephen (469-70). Gritty, like the reader, is willing to let Maggie take some risks for the chance to attain the “joyful thing.” Gritty thus gives form to the readers’ desires for Maggie, including those desires that conflict with Maggie’s ethical commitments.

This readerly indulgence of Maggie’s desires leads many of us not only to not blame Maggie for being “borne along the tide” but to further resist the ways in which she blames herself, even as the novel seems to suggest that this self-blame is not wholly unwarranted. Because we cannot join Maggie in her self-blame, we also do not share her desire for annihilation. Maggie might find in the flood that what she so deeply desires: reconciliation, release, a return to the imagined home. But through our temporary alignment with Gritty (and its counterpart in our earlier alignment with Philip), we have counterintuitively learned to decouple our desires for her from her desires for herself, even when Maggie’s desires are the ones endorsed by the narrator.¹³² Indeed, as noted above, the narrator’s position after Maggie’s post-

¹³² There is another vocal contingent of readers whose identificatory attachment to Maggie plays out differently. These readers refuse to believe that Maggie would have done what she does in Volume III and thus blame George Eliot for having Maggie act out of character, especially under so slight temptation as Stephen Guest. Early readers of the novel seem overrepresented in this group, some of whom are perhaps less willing to credit the intensity of Maggie’s own sexual desires than modern readers (see e.g., Bulwer-Lytton Letter to John Blackwood, 121; Unsigned Review, *Guardian* 130). We might see their most colorful representative in Leslie Stephen, who claims that “George Eliot did not herself understand what a mere hair-dresser’s block she was describing Mr. Stephen Guest” (104). He

scandal return to St. Ogg's reads as a bit muddled, as Eliot seems torn between desiring vindication for Maggie and desiring her punishment. This expressed ambivalence primes us to diverge further from the narrator (and Maggie's) desires in the tragic conclusion. In narrating the death of Tom and Maggie, Eliot writes, "the boat reappeared, but brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted; living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love and roamed the daisied fields together" (542). The narrator thus offers us the fantasy of the longed-for return in the form of a death figured as a childhood of "love" and "daisied fields." Yet, in a novel that spends a great deal of time on childhood, we have never before seen any of "the days" referenced, nor do we recognize their emotional truth. As Elizabeth Ermarth asks, "When did they ever roam the fields in love?" (600). As Beer notes, "for Maggie, there can be no accommodation with society, because the community in which she has grown up, and the culture of which this is an expression, will accord her nature no recognition" (92). Once again, the identificatory reader cannot share a nostalgia for a world or a brother so hostile to Maggie, even if neither she nor her author seem to see it quite in that way.

Readers and critics have long criticized Eliot for declining to afford her heroines the freedom she obtained for herself in her real life through her work and relationship with Lewes.¹³³ However, if Eliot's primary aim were to leave the reader with an increased desire for that freedom (and for the social conditions necessary to support it), she could hardly do better than she does with the ending of *The Mill on the Floss*. Specifically, Eliot incites in the reader the desire for a freer, better life through our attachment to Maggie and then frustrates it. Maggie might wish for death, but we, who cannot join her, are left instead

goes on, "Do, I mentally exclaim, save this charming Maggie from damning herself by this irrelevant and discordant degradation!" (104). Though I disagree with them about the implausibility of a love-starved young woman falling for a handsome, rich suitor who seemingly finds her irresistible, the fire that critics like Stephen express toward the close of the novel registers the change in the affective world of the novel from that of *Adam Bede*. As F. R. Leavis notes, "we don't feel moved to discuss with any warmth whether or not . . . Dinah *would* really have become Mrs. Adam Bede. We are not engaged in such a way as to give any force to the question whether the marriage is convincing or otherwise; there is no sense of inevitability to outrage" (37, Leavis's emphasis).

¹³³ For an account of these critiques, see Zelda Austen.

with Maggie's unquenched desire for more. This seems like a much more effective strategy than Eliot rendering her own life as a happy ending, as if it had been experienced as an unmitigated triumph. Maggie's identificatory hold on readers thus makes Eliot's second novel a powerful critique of the violence of gendering and the devastating limits placed on even girls of extraordinary talent. However, it also has an unintentional distorting effect on Eliot's project taken holistically, which includes the encouragement of ethical reasoning and the promotion of sympathetic fellow feeling, not just for those attractive, desiring girls who yearn for more than what they have been given but even toward those who cause them trouble.

Disguised Identification in *Middlemarch*

Following *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot seems eager to avoid this distorting effect of identification. She never returns to identifiably autobiographical writing, nor does she ever again prominently feature childhood in her work. And, for a long while, she takes care not to center desiring, ambitious young women like Maggie. In the novels that follow, Eliot both further separates her narrators from the state of embodiment and emphasizes the differences between readers and her characters. As Beer notes, "George Eliot was no longer herself disguised by her man's name, so she re-clothed her characters" by, for instance, setting them back further into history, as in *Romola*, or situating them within a slightly different genre — the "something of a fairy-tale" of *Silas Marner* (1861) or the political novel in *Felix Holt* (1866) (Beer 116, Leavis 31). Strikingly, she also does not fully reinstate the affective boundary she set out in *Adam Bede*. Rather, in these middle works, she continues to experiment with ways of inviting connection between reader and character in ways that remain under her control. That is, by way of her newly disembodied narrative voice, she establishes both a less fallible, more God-like authority and a greater facility for mobility. Through these narrators, that is, Eliot can now move more readily not merely between divergent plotline and different characters but also through states of absorption and interruption, closeness and

distance, sympathetic engagement and critical detachment.¹³⁴ In these middle novels, Eliot both establishes her signature narratorial voice, with its humor, sharpness, and sympathetic outlook and figures it as a site of readerly connection in itself. The attractions of this narrative voice allow Eliot to strategically deploy it in ways that invite readers to come close to the characters without losing themselves in their affective experiences. It is this increasingly skilled and confident narrational style, now freed from the limits of embodiment (and, specifically, embodiment's entanglement with gender), that enables Eliot to return to the figure of the young ardent woman in *Middlemarch* (1871-72), a novel that like *The Mill on the Floss* is set in a fictional Midlands town in the late 1820s and early 1830s.

When she finally returns to this ardent, yearning young woman in *Middlemarch*, she does so with intention. I argue that Eliot now purposefully invites readers to identify with Dorothea Brooke and that she does so in order to advance a critique of the educational and vocational opportunities available for girls and women, even those who, like Dorothea, have access to significant resources and are relatively free from familial oversight. Remarkably, she marshals this identification with Dorothea not only to critique the status quo but also to advance a more direct call for political change, one that takes up the vision of politics Will Ladislaw articulates in his work for the Reform Bill. However, unlike *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot figures out how to advance this political project through identificatory means while simultaneously advancing her ethical project of inviting widespread sympathy across a range of different characters. How exactly does she manage this? *Middlemarch* famously originated as two separate narratives that Eliot later combined. After hitting a wall on her "study of provincial life" focused on the Middlemarchers, Eliot began a separate short story titled "Miss Brooke." Even in the novel's final form, in which Dorothea becomes increasingly imbricated in the life of the town in the final book, the two storylines remain strikingly distinct. Indeed, as David Carroll describes, early readers complained that Eliot

¹³⁴ For an account of the oscillations of interruption and absorption in *Middlemarch*, see Andrew H. Miller's "Middlemarch: January in Lowick." For an account of the way Eliot takes up and champions critical detachment and sympathetic engagement in *Daniel Deronda*, see Amanda Anderson's *Power of Distance*.

should have (re)separated the narratives “once it became clear to her that Dorothea and Lydgate were not to be romantically entangled” (31).¹³⁵ Why, then, does she join them? In other words, what does fusing these narratives do for Eliot? I argue that this commingled yet distinct narrative structure enables Eliot to achieve her conflicting ethical and political objectives. Specifically, Eliot advances her political project primarily through Dorothea’s narrative, which works on an identificatory logic. The Middlemarcher narrative, on the other hand, advances her ethical project of expanding and extending readerly sympathy across a varied set of people through its logic of narratological mobility. What is so striking about this structure is not so much the split itself, but the success with which Eliot disguises the differences between the parts, emphasizing thematic similarities and interconnectedness and masking the formal (and ethical) differences between the structures. In the sections that follow, I will discuss first the specifics of how Eliot creates this effect and then its payoff for the political project of the novel.

Why Always Dorothea

As we have seen in the first two chapters of this project, beginnings are often a privileged site of identificatory relation. Indeed, in his account of “protagonicity,” Jameson suggests that “whoever is given as the initial subject — observer or participant — will project an ‘identification’ and a protagonicity which only a good deal of irony — internal as well as external — can undo” (115). In Jameson’s formulation, as

¹³⁵ In *The One v. the Many*, Alex Woloch describes “*Middlemarch*’s remarkable character-system” in the following way: “It can be read in terms of a singular protagonist (Dorothea), a pair of coprotagonists (including Lydgate), a series of principal characters (including Mary and Fred, Will, Rosamond, Casaubon, and Bulstrode) or a manifold group of characters, extending from principals to nearly anonymous figures, who all compete for attention within the narrative web” (31-32). What I am suggesting is slightly different from the options he presents. I argue that the novel must first be read in terms of its split structure, as the two narratives utilize markedly different character-systems. While the character-system of the “Miss Brooke” narrative centers around “a singular protagonist (Dorothea),” the character-system of the Middlemarchers features “a manifold group of characters, extending from principals [(Mary, Fred, Lydgate, Rosamond, Mr. Bulstrode, Caleb Garth)] to the near anonymous figures who all compete for attention within the narrative web.” Indeed, the promotion of Lydgate to “co-protagonist” through his parallel experiences to Dorothea (bad marriage, failed idealist striving) is one of the great achievements of the novel, as it further serves to disguise the ways in which the two narratives work differently.

in Marilyn Butler's description of *Sense and Sensibility* included in Chapter 1,¹³⁶ readers are always-already in search of identification. In other words, they need not be persuaded to identify with the initial figure but rather to be actively dissuaded from doing so through "a good deal of irony." I suggest that Eliot shares this insight into the privilege of beginnings and uses it to her advantage, to make it appear that Dorothea is treated in the same way as characters in the *Middlemarch* plot. Importantly, in *Middlemarch*, we spent the first ten chapters immersed in Dorothea's world, among the characters that make up the majority of her storyline. Before we encounter Tertius Lydgate (in Chapter 10) or Rosamond and Fred Vincy (in Chapter 11), we have become acquainted with Dorothea, her sister, her uncle, her future brother-in-law, her future-first husband, and her future-second husband. Strikingly, in this first book, Dorothea is subjected to no small degree of ironizing by both the narrator and the other characters. Dorothea, like Maggie Tulliver, has no shortage of "inward fire" but, as compared to Maggie, she finds fewer sympathetic outlets for its venting, directing it instead toward the hapless Sir James Chettam (who is blissfully too in love to notice) and to her sweet, practical sister Celia, who quietly registers her sister's flaws and their effect on "family comfort" (21). Indeed, early readers were, like the residents of Middlemarch, split as to whether they favored the dominant, charismatic Dorothea or the "yoked" Celia, with her "private opinions," so that many early readers were disappointed to see Celia relegated to the status of a minor character upon the expansion of the novelistic world after Book 1 (15).¹³⁷

While we are invited to take seriously Dorothea's restlessness and longing — what Eliot calls her "soul-hunger" — the reader feels no inducement to join her in her ideas of marriage ("The really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you

¹³⁶ In Marilyn Butler's account of the novel, Austen makes a representational mistake in making Elizabeth too appealing despite her "morally defective outlook," undermining her own purportedly conservative project (217). In making this argument, Butler, like Jameson, takes identificatory reading for granted — "But, granted the reader cannot identify himself either with Darcy or Jane, where is his alternative?" (217). Identification is thus figured as a desire in search of an object.

¹³⁷ In reviewing the second volume for *The Spectator*, R.H. Hutton complains of "the absence of several of our favourites," including "the smooth, keen, commonplace Celia" (292).

wished it”) nor in her assessment of the charms of Mr. Casaubon, especially once Celia alerts us to the presence of his “white moles with the hairs on them” and his noisy manner of “soup-eating” (29, 20, 48). Indeed, the novel gives us an opportunity to observe Casaubon’s absurdity for ourselves through the inclusion of his proposal letter. As I suggest in Chapter 1, the letter is a privileged site for readers to join in on the game of interpretation for themselves. Our critical lens is especially necessary here, as Dorothea is otherwise occupied: “How could it occur to [Dorothea] to examine the letter, to look at it critically as a profession of love?” (44). It might not occur to Dorothea, whose “whole soul” is (disconcertingly) “possessed” in a way that leaves no space for critical reading practices, but, as we have the full text in front of us and are subject to no such limiting conditions, we can “look at it critically” for ourselves.¹³⁸ This ironizing in the first book thus does not leave us with the sense that we are Dorothea, or that she is us. Instead, as Barbara Bodichon put it to Eliot, we feel that Dorothea “is like a child dancing into a quick sand on a sunny morning” and that we are like spectators watching in “horror” (Bodichon Letter to Eliot, Dec. 10, 1871).¹³⁹ Even F.R. Leavis reports satisfaction with this ironizing treatment. He notes that while Dorothea’s plot (as previewed in the Prologue) represents a return to “a dangerous theme for George Eliot,” the ardent young woman is “now, we feel, seen by the novelist from the outside as well as from within” (73-74). However, to his great disappointment,¹⁴⁰ this ironizing treatment does not last beyond the

¹³⁸ Eliot’s publisher, John Blackwood, worried about the obviousness of the letter itself, writing to Eliot: “It is exceedingly funny. But I mean is it not too transparently so not to strike even a girl so devoted to wisdom as poor dear Dodo?” (quoted in Mead at 20).

¹³⁹ Readers were so taken with Dorothea after the publication of Book 1 that Eliot reorganized Book 2, which was originally to focus on only the Middlemarcher plot, to include the scenes of Dorothea’s honeymoon with Casaubon so as not to lose readers. See Martin 195-98.

¹⁴⁰ Leavis argues that, after the first volume, Eliot loses her way: “Dorothea . . . gives us Maggie’s case again, and Maggie’s significance: again we have the confusions represented by the exalted vagueness of Maggie’s soul-hunger; we have the unacceptable valuations and the day-dream self-indulgence” (77). I argue that the unironized representation of this “soul-hunger” is not evidence of an uncontrolled authorial identification, but instead a deliberate strategy to advance the political project of taking this kind of soul-hunger seriously, including by asking us to work for the social conditions under which it could take on meaningful form. To take a figure like Dorothea seriously through the intimacy of identification rather than to laugh at her from discursive distance is very much a part of the project, not a distraction from it. That Leavis finds this project to be inherently self-indulgent (and elsewhere embarrassing) perhaps speaks more to his own identifications and commitments than those of Eliot.

first book — past, that is, the point at which it risks dominating our strong instinct to identify with the “initial subject.”

Indeed, by the time we catch up with her on her honeymoon in Book 2, Dorothea has lost much of what we had been invited to treat with irony, including her intense religiosity¹⁴¹ and her full confidence in her own point of view. The sharpness of her temper also finds a more deserving target in Casaubon, who spends the honeymoon rebuffing both her attempts at intimacy and her efforts to support his work. Importantly, for purposes of identification, we meet her, as Jesse Rosenthal puts it, “in medias dolores,” that is in the midst of ongoing suffering (180). Strikingly, we first observe this pain from the outside, in this case through the perspective of Will Ladislaw, as he happens upon her in the Vatican. At this point, we have lost sight of Dorothea for eight full chapters, as the narrator has directed our attention to becoming better acquainted with the Middlemarchers. This delay on top of delay, like the strategic withholding of Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* analyzed in Chapter 1, only incites in us a desire for greater intimacy with Dorothea. Like Will, we want to see more of Dorothea, to understand more fully the conditions of her marriage and how she is managing them. By the time we catch up with her perspective one chapter or “two hours” later, we are, like the narrator, “sorry to [find] her sobbing bitterly” and eager to share in her “prompt resentment” at Casaubon for his coldness and his temper (192). Indeed, our inside view of the marriage, rendered largely though not exclusively through Dorothea’s point of view, primes us to join Will’s perhaps hyperbolic yet deeply felt “disgust” at “this dried-up old pendant, this elaborator of small explanations . . . having first got this adorable young creature to marry him, and then passing his honeymoon away from her, groping after his mouldy futilities” (105). Indeed, as we sit with Will in his disgust, Dorothea’s ethical awakening to Casaubon’s “equivalent centre of self” might well precede our own (211).

¹⁴¹ In Book IV, she confesses, “I used to pray so much — now I hardly ever pray” (392).

As the novel continues, Dorothea's identificatory appeal only grows. We feel trapped alongside her in a marriage that forces her to "shut her best soul in prison, paying it only hidden visits, that she might be petty enough to please [her husband]" and admire her struggles to retain her commitment to sympathy and repair in the face of such pressures (426). After Casaubon's death, Dorothea's appeal is figured primarily not through her continued victimization but instead through her recognition and expression of her romantic desire for Will Ladislaw. Catherine Gallagher describes this shift as a move between the sub-categories of latter-day Therasas Eliot sets out in the *Prelude*. Specifically, Gallagher argues that, after Casaubon's death, Dorothea switches from those latter-Therasas whose ardor is directed toward "a vague ideal" (the tragic Theresa) to those whose ardor is directed toward "the common yearning of womanhood" (the lapsed Theresa) (70). This "transmutation" takes place when the loyal Dorothea learns what we already know: that her husband added a humiliating codicil to his will specifying that she will lose her inheritance should she marry Will Ladislaw. This "violent shock of revulsion from her departed husband" enables her to access what we have long suspected she has been repressing: "a sudden strange yearning towards Will Ladislaw" (490). As Gallagher describes this shift from tragic Theresa to lapsed Theresa as not "just another standard deviation from the saint" but rather "a dramatic enlargement of the referential category" (70). That is, "Dorothea's plot is retrieved for general reference" by this instillment of particular desire for a specific person, by her "becoming real" (and our desire for it) (70). This turn toward the erotic — what Gallagher calls "the erotics of particularization" — enables, I suggest, a new way of inhabiting Dorothea, of accessing her desires, which now have an explicitly bodily dimension. It is this turn toward the erotic that also offers one of the sites of readerly pleasure for Dorothea's story: the vicarious-experienced thrill of sexual charge between Will and Dorothea.¹⁴² This thrill of sexual tension is in contrast to the ways we

¹⁴² This emphasis on Dorothea's erotic desire for Will Ladislaw in particular, and the narratorial encouragement (often mistaken for George Eliot herself being in love with Will) that we too inhabit it, makes accounts that read the novel as a sort of missed connection between Lydgate and Dorothea so strange. Tellingly, such accounts often focus on how Dorothea would be an enabling partner for Lydgate, one who would devote resources as well as "wifely help" to his work (836). For instance, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar write, "Dorothea, with her need to find a cause to which she can dedicate her energies and her money, might have found a high purpose through Lydgate's aspirations, just as with her support he might have found the time and the belief he needed to pursue his research, a

are invited to share in the relationships in the Middlemarcher plot. We might be moved by the love triangle between Mr. Farebrother, Mary Garth, and Fred Vincy. We are further invited to understand that sexual attraction played a major role in drawing the ill-suited Lydgate and Rosamond together. Yet, in neither case are we asked to inhabit this attraction for ourselves. The pleasure that Dorothea's remarriage plot offers, then, is a pleasure that is specifically identificatory in nature. That readers are invited to both indulge in this identificatory pleasure and simultaneously to feel that this life with Will is still not quite enough for "so substantive and rare a creature as Dorothea" is a remarkable achievement on the part of Eliot (836).

Identification Disguised as Sympathy

Dorothea thus dominates our interest and our sympathy within the context of her narrative. Henry James famously describes *Middlemarch* as a novel in which Lydgate and Dorothea each serve as the sun "within their own Independent solar system" (353). I argue instead that while Dorothea's plot operates on this solar system model, in which the characters are stuck in her orbit, Lydgate exists within a more competitive characterological system of Middlemarchers, where characters conspicuously exceed the roles that they play in relation to Lydgate (353).¹⁴³ Indeed, the characters that populate Dorothea's narrative —

consummation many contemporary reviewers of *Middlemarch* devoutly wished" (519). Though they set this out as a mutually-beneficial arrangement, the emphasis is on Lydgate, who currently receives none of the aforementioned support from Rosamond. Strikingly, Will likewise provides "a cause" to which Dorothea can devote herself in the form of reform. Dorothea's problem is not that she chooses a second husband who is not wise but rather that she wishes ("poor child") "to be wise herself" (64). Indeed, it is difficult to see how Lydgate with his "spots of commonness" and his "temper [which] never became faultless" would have made a better partner for Dorothea than Will (150, 835). As Amanda Anderson describes, there is something about Will "that affirms [Dorothea's] being in a powerfully enabling way . . . a letting-be that powerfully counteracts the starving non-recognition from Casaubon" (*Bleak* 75). These Lydgate-Dorothea shippers have much in common with those who, like Leslie Stephen and Henry James, find Will to be unsatisfactory. In both cases, we might find an identificatory reticence either to identify with Dorothea full stop or a reluctance to follow that identification into inhabiting Dorothea's erotic desire. We might track a similar failure to follow an identificatory character into the erotic in those accounts that wish that Maggie Tulliver had accepted Philip Wakem's proposal, as if the relative ethical or intellectual merit of one's prospective partners were the only consideration for entering into a romantic relationship. Through these identificatory relations, Eliot enables us to take erotic desire seriously, while also not allowing it to subsume the whole category of desires (for vocation, for a better world, for an education).

¹⁴³ While I focus primarily on the ways in which Eliot makes Dorothea's identificatory narrative look like the Middlemarcher narrative, we might also notice the strategies by which she makes the Middlemarcher narrative appear more like the narrative of Dorothea. Strikingly, Eliot has long been accused of being unfair to or of expressing an

Lady Chettam, Sir James, the Cadwalladers, even Mr. Brooke — are much less developed and much less demanding of our sympathy than the characters of the *Middlemarcher* narrative. These upper-class characters of Tipton and Lowick, in other words, hardly exercise any affective pull of their own. Those who do have more of a claim on our affection and sympathies — Will, Celia, Tantripp — are, after the first book, nearly unequivocally on Dorothea's side, often (like the identificatory reader) exceeding her own positions on, for instance, the gravity of Casaubon's errors or how little Dorothea owes to his memory after his death.¹⁴⁴ While I have thus far attended to Dorothea's power as a figure of identification, I have yet to explore how Eliot, who, as noted above, quickly abandons her ironizing treatment of Dorothea, maintains the illusion of parallel structure beyond the first book. Specifically, while Dorothea's plot, as we have seen, works to advance an intense, exclusive identification with Dorothea, the *Middlemarcher*

unseemly dislike toward Rosamond Vincy. While some explained this disparate treatment away as a purported inability of Eliot to extend the same degree of sympathy to conventionally feminine, beautiful women as she does to others, I think we might instead read the narrator's treatment of Rosamond (and the resistance it incites in so many readers) as an attempt to present the Lydgate marriage in similar terms as that of the Casaubons. That is, it is possible to read the Lydgate marriage as another example of one partner who is ambitious and sympathetic falling prey to a selfish, narrow spouse, yet, as the readerly resistance to the purported mistreatment of Rosamond attests, this account does not quite capture our experience of the marriage, including the ways in which Lydgate is a far less responsive and less humane partner to Rosamond than Dorothea is to Casaubon. I suggest that Eliot creates this dissonance (where we feel more for Rosamond than the narrator apparently does) purposefully, at once lending support to the apparent cohesion of the project (two co-protagonists who are struggle with difficult spouses), while also figuring Rosamond as a person who too is hurt by the "conditions of an imperfect social state."

We might also see an attempt to make the *Middlemarcher* narrative resemble Dorothea's in Eliot's introduction of Mary Garth. Mary, who comes into the novel just as Dorothea's presence is waning, offers the possibility of a secondary identificatory relationship for readers disappointed to see Dorothea temporarily fall out of view. As R.H. Hutton notes in his review of Book 3 for *The Spectator*, "this part raises a hope that we shall have in Mary Garth a figure at least as powerful as Dorothea Casaubon" (296-97). Notably, if Dorothea takes Maggie Tulliver's state of great yearning, Mary Garth seems to take on her precarity and Letty Garth, to whom we will return, the trials (rendered now with a lighter touch) of being "girdled." Notably, Dorothea and Mary never meet within the novel, so that readers who feel attached to both are never put in the position of feeling that these connections conflict with one another.

¹⁴⁴ Tantripp, Dorothea's maid since her girlhood, serves a similar function to Aunt Gritty and Philip in *The Mill on the Floss*. For instance, it is Tantripp who first jokingly wishes for Casaubon's death, and Pratt, Mr. Casaubon's butler and Tantripp's future betrothed, who gives us the license to laugh along:

"I wish every book in that library was built into a caticom for your master," said Tantripp to Pratt, the butler, finding him in the breakfast-room. She had been at Rome, and visited the antiquities, as we know; and she always declined to call Mr. Casaubon anything but "your master," when speaking to the other servants.

Pratt laughed. He liked his master very well, but he liked Tantripp better. (481)

narrative is defined by the narrator's sympathetic mobility, in the way in which it moves from character to character, asking us to feel with them in turn. How then does Eliot make it seem as if Dorothea's identificatory plot works in the same way as the fellow feeling generating plot of the *Middlemarchers*? I suggest that Eliot does so through several strategies, including the striking and much-lauded narratorial turn toward Casaubon and an emphasis on Dorothea's ethical achievements, particularly at the novel's close.

In one of the most celebrated passages of *Middlemarch*, the narrator noisily transitions from Dorothea's perspective to that of her first husband. However, counter to readings that celebrate this move as an ethical achievement, I suggest that this famous passage and the turn that follows it serve only to reinforce our identification with Dorothea at the expense of Casaubon. In Book 3, Eliot's narrator interrupts themselves, mid-sentence, to insist on a shift in perspective:

One morning, some weeks after her arrival at Lowick, Dorothea — but why always Dorothea?¹⁴⁵ Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage? I protest against all our interest, all our effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look blooming in spite of trouble; for these too will get faded, and will know the older and more eating griefs which we are helping to neglect. In spite of the blinking eyes and white moles objectionable to Celia, and the want of muscular curve which was morally painful to Sir James, Mr. Casaubon had an intense consciousness within him, and was spiritually a-hungered like the rest of us. He had done nothing exceptional in marrying — nothing but what society sanctions, and considers an occasion for wreaths and bouquets. It had occurred to him that he must not any longer defer his intention of matrimony, and he had reflected that in taking a wife, a man of good position should expect and carefully choose a blooming young lady — the younger the better, because more educable and submissive — of a rank equal to his own, of religious principles, virtuous disposition, and good understanding. On such a young lady he would make handsome settlements, and he would neglect no arrangement for her happiness: in return, he should receive family pleasures and leave behind him that copy of himself which seemed so urgently required of a man — to the sonneteers of the sixteenth century. (278)

¹⁴⁵ Critics often reproduce this question in essays that center Dorothea. See e.g., Catherine Gallagher ("In concentrating on Dorothea to the exclusion of her placement in a semantic field of characters, I am following the lead of the novel's narrator, but I want (like her) to note that we might also ask, why always Dorothea?" ("George" 74)); D.A. Miller ("Better than any other (why always Dorothea indeed?), her case points to the incompatibility of a transcendent, totalizing desire with its actual medium" (*Narrative* 150)). In my account, within the context of her own narrative, that it is always Dorothea is by Eliot's specific but suppressed design.

As Alex Woloch notes, this interruption typically has been read as “an overt ethical intervention,” one that highlights “the importance of sympathetically imagining events from others’ perspectives” (Woloch 45; A. Miller, “*Middlemarch*” 159). In some accounts, this formal intervention also takes on a political valence. For instance, Woloch likens it to the fight for “suffrage,” and Jameson describes it as Eliot’s “attempt at justice and equal rights for all her characters” (Woloch 45, Jameson 110). Thus, in these accounts, Eliot’s narrator enacts Eliot’s own ethico-political ideal by extending attention and sympathy to Casaubon and inviting us to follow in their example. We can see what is compelling about this description: it fits in neatly with Eliot’s self-described ethical project of “amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot” and resembles the logic of the *Middlemarch* plot, which promotes wide-ranging sympathy through an especially mobile narrator (“Natural History” 54). Indeed, it may be helpful for some readers to keep in mind the ethical importance of attending to those who are no longer “blooming” when they are asked to turn their attention away from Mary, Fred, Rosamond, and Lydgate in order to attend to the troubles of Bulstrode for such an extended period in Book 7. Yet, this characterization does not account for the way this interruption and subsequent turn toward Casaubon work within the context of Dorothea’s plot or even on their own terms.

This professed turn is remarkable not merely because the narrator is calling attention to a function that they usually perform without fanfare but also as they seem to be suggesting that we are, at least partially, in charge of directing narrative attention. To put it another way, one plausible readerly response to the narrator’s query, “But why always Dorothea?” is “Why are YOU asking ME?” That is, the critique is appears to be directed at us but necessarily includes the narrator, who is the one, after all, responsible for directing our attention. As Andrew H. Miller notes, in schooling the reader, the narrator thus functionally “schools herself” (“*Middlemarch*” 159). Some critics read this self-correction as evidence of an extremely high level of ethical rigor. For instance, John Mullan writes that “*Middlemarch* is so careful to correct any habit to side with one person rather than another that the narrator even corrects herself.” I want to suggest that this self-inclusion on the part of the narrator does not speak to a high-level of rigorous,

ethical self-scrutiny but instead gives voice, and thus license, to a shared attachment. Specifically, the abruptness of this self-interruption draws our attention to the fact that both we and the narrator have been stuck on Dorothea. By so noisily turning our attention to Casaubon — in a manner that seems to anticipate our protestations — the narrator reiterates Dorothea’s power over us and herself. This turn toward Casaubon thus speaks our desire, one apparently shared with the narrator, for it to be “always Dorothea” (or, if not always Dorothea, at least not ever Casaubon). I suggest that we might reasonably question the narrator’s motive in placing Dorothea’s “blooming,” “young skin” in such close proximity to Casaubon’s spindly legs and “white moles.” The insults may originate from Celia and Sir James respectively,¹⁴⁶ but what purpose does their repetition here serve if not to reiterate that the prospect of this couple “making copies” is a rather stomach-turning one — that is, if not to reaffirm our identification with Dorothea at the expense of Casaubon? Indeed, if the narrator is asking us in good faith to extend our sympathies to Casaubon, immediately giving voice to his private justification of “the younger the better” hardly seems like a promising place to begin. This passage, I argue, works not to extend our sympathies to Casaubon but instead to maintain the appearance of a wide-ranging sympathetic project while advancing an identificatory one.

Our subsequent forays into the inner life of Casaubon seem equally compromised. We are given strikingly little new information about Casaubon. We don’t learn, for instance, of anything in his past (an abusive parent? a school bully?) that could help to account for his incapability of human intimacy.¹⁴⁷ Rather, we receive only confirmation of what we have already learned from Will: that Casaubon lives in crippling fear of criticism, that he has wasted his life on a project that is doomed for failure, and that he

¹⁴⁶ As Woloch notes, Eliot’s inclusion of minor characters Sir James and Celia in this passage ironically reinforces Dorothea’s own centrality (n. 3, 347-48).

¹⁴⁷ Strikingly, the novel seems extremely uninterested in how the events occurring in characters’ pasts prior to the novel inform their present way of being in the world. Rebecca Mead, for instance, reports feeling frustrated as a teenager upon reading the sentence that informs us of the deaths of Dorothea and Celia’s parents. “How can Dorothea and Celia, who are different ages, *both* be characterized as “about twelve years old” when their parents die? (39).

can never allow himself to be “liberated from a small hungry shivering self” long enough to truly enjoy anything, much less to sympathize with others (280). Unlike Dorothea, Casaubon has not thought at all about his partner’s experience of their marriage, as he clearly has not yet “begun to emerge from” that “moral stupidity” that consists of “taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves” (211). Our increasing access to Casaubon in the lead up to his death does little to encourage any closer relation, as he spirals into jealousy and takes actions so selfish that they ultimately free even Dorothea, with what Will calls her “fanaticism of sympathy,” from any lingering sense of duty to his memory (219). Indeed, Dorothea’s “little act” writing out her refusal of his final wish to continue his work is so satisfying because Casaubon never could leave his own perspective long enough to “see” that she “could not submit” to him “by working hopelessly at what [she had] no belief in” (539).

Why, then, has this “bravura achievement of sympathy with Casaubon” been so unanimously celebrated? It is true that Casaubon has “an uneasy lot at best,” and that it rightfully has claims on our pity, though I would distinguish this narrow, distancing pity from the true sympathy we are invited to feel for so many of the characters in the *Middlemarcher* plot (280). The attachment to this turn might also be related to the content of Casaubon’s anxieties — that his peers are lying about having read his work, that the young people around him are laughing at him, that his life work is useless (if only he had learned German!) — which seem particularly likely to be shared by many of the academics who provide the readings. Eliot herself admitted to identifying with Casaubon, which has further bolstered the sense of his rendering as an extreme ethical achievement (Mead 164; A. Miller, “*Middlemarch*” 161). Yet, as I have described in the previous section, authorial self-representation/identification is not characterized by sympathy and intimacy, as much as by ambivalence. Indeed, imbuing a character with one’s own worst anxieties about the limitations of one’s work and one’s way of being in the world and then having those limitations not only laid bare but also relentlessly mocked by the other characters would seem to perhaps serve a therapeutic purpose — for instance, repeating a bad experience on one’s own terms in order to feel a sense of mastery over it — but I am not convinced that it serves an ethical one, for either author or

reader. I would suggest the readerly attachment to this particular turn comes in part from the illicit pleasure — available to both those who see aspects of themselves in Casaubon and to those who do not — of knowing that we are enacting Casaubon’s own worst nightmare. In characterizing this turn toward Casaubon as an ethico-political intervention, Alex Woloch and Fredric Jameson both treat narrative attention as a good in itself, a “right” that is desired. Yet, we know Casaubon’s soul to be of “that pitiable kind which shrinks from pity, and fears most of all that it should be known” (279). Considering the “suspicious dread” he feels toward the prospect of his nineteen-year-old bride looking over his work, we can easily imagine how he might feel about being read by such a formidable mind as that of George Eliot’s narrator (279). What is remarkable about this passage, then, is not that it forms a core part of Eliot’s ethical project in itself but that it appears to fit into the ethical project of the *Middlemarchers* narrative, in which narratorial and readerly sympathy is mobile and available to all, while actually supporting the project of Dorothea’s narrative: identification with a heroine who has been wronged not by, as Will would have it a “dragon,” but only by a sad man whose limited and limiting view of the world has been propped up by “what society sanctions” (278).

Dorothea’s own ethical achievements provide further cover for the differences in the narrative logic. That is, what the narrator exemplifies through their extradiegetic sympathetic mobility in the *Middlemarcher* narrative, Dorothea demonstrates intertextually through her interactions with others, again obscuring the difference between the logics of her narrative and the *Middlemarcher* plot. While Dorothea’s generous nature and her “impulse toward moral repair” are highlighted throughout the novel, especially in relation to Casaubon, the emphasis on them markedly increases in the final book, where she undertakes several narratively privileged and endorsed acts of fellow feeling (Anderson *Bleak* 74).¹⁴⁸ Though the novel also endorses ethical characters in the *Middlemarcher* plot, most prominently Caleb Garth, Mary Garth,

¹⁴⁸ Notably, Dorothea is significantly less featured in the later volumes of the novel before dominating the final book and *Finale*. Jameson suggests this increasing absence speaks to a “waning protagonicity” that fits with Eliot’s commitment to equal rights for characters (113). However, in advancing this argument, he does not account for her resurgent dominance at the close of the novel.

and Mr. Farebrother, the prominence of Dorothea's outreach to Lydgate and Rosamond in the final book has led critics to identify Dorothea as bodying forth the novel's "ethos," in which "what matters is precisely the effect of one's ethical being on those around one" (Anderson *Bleak* 74). While I agree that Dorothea's ethical orientation is certainly endorsed by the novel,¹⁴⁹ I also think that these moments of ethical outreach also serve a key role in maintaining Eliot's novelistic structure. That is, Dorothea's actions in the final book not only associate her with the narrator's project in the Middlemarcher narrative but further emphasize the thematic connections between the two parts through Dorothea's own imaginative identifications with both Lydgate and Rosamond.

As D.A. Miller analyzes in detail, the representations of Dorothea's ethical actions in the final book are messier than is generally acknowledged. That is, while critics often praise these scenes as glimpses of transcendent fellow feeling, these interactions are marked by misunderstanding, tied up in personal charisma, and wrapped up in concerns of ego (see *Narrative* 170-94). I suggest that this messiness speaks to Eliot's desire to emphasize the thematic similarities between the two parts of the novel in a final attempt to make the novel work as a coherent whole while also inviting us to see the ways in which the imaginative parallels Dorothea draws between her experiences and those of Lydgate and Rosamond are imprecise. In the messiness of these scenes, we might also see Eliot's attentiveness to the messiness of identifications between people, where fellow feeling is marked by rivalry and the inescapability of difference. In her initial act of outreach toward Lydgate, Dorothea is so eager to assist because she so strongly identifies with his desire "to lead a higher life than the common, and to find out better ways" (764). In spite of the different contexts, she sees his failure as a reflection of her own: "There is no sorrow I have thought more about than that — to love what is great, and try to reach it, and yet to fail" (764). Lydgate too is

¹⁴⁹ I am unsure whether Dorothea's ethical program, which is so largely dependent on what D.A. Miller calls her "overwhelming force of personality" is necessarily favored over that of Mr. Garth or Mr. Farebrother (*Narrative* 184). It is true that Dorothea expresses "dislike" for "this cautious weighing of consequences, instead of an ardent faith in efforts of justice and mercy, which would conquer by their emotional force," but I am not sure the novel goes quite so far (733).

uncharacteristically open with Dorothea about his struggles because he feels that she understands “what sort of bond marriage is,” though their respective marriages are also very different from one another (765). These identifications, which are maintained through strategic abstractions (troubled marriage, frustrated ambitions), are both powerfully felt and enabling to both parties. It is true, of course, that Lydgate and Dorothea have both failed in what they meant to do, and that they have both suffered in unhappy marriages. But these failures in marriage and vocation are also different in kind (and in relation to one another) in ways that are important for the political program of the novel. Notably, the novel invites us to notice the difference between the two parties, even in this moment of “generous sympathy.” That is, Dorothea and Lydgate, even in this moment, mis-take one another. Dorothea reads Lydgate’s amused smile at her “childlike grave-eyed earnestness” as earnest “encouragement of her plan” (768). Lydgate, likewise, figures Dorothea as a kind of “Virgin Mary” without erotic desires and (in his “commonness”) assigns her characteristic ardor to the influence of her late husband: “Casaubon must have raised some heroic hallucination in her” (768, 769). These moments of misunderstanding encourage us to see the limits of this imagined perfect fellow feeling, even as they also encourage us to draw thematic parallels across the two parts in ways that disguise their different logics.

After leaving Lydgate, Dorothea is determined to offer comfort and encouragement to Rosamond, who she assumes is lonely, as she was lonely in her own marriage. However, upon finding Rosamond and Will in a compromising position, Dorothea seems to find a limit to her fellow feeling. She abandons her mission and spends a night indulging in rage and sorrow. In the light of the morning, however, Dorothea recovers this determination by putting herself through a program of abstraction and identification. She forces herself “to live through that yesterday morning deliberately again,” considering it from angles other than her personal experience: “Was she alone in that scene? Was it her event only? She forced herself to think of it as bound up with another woman’s life — a woman towards whom she had set out with a longing to carry some clearness and comfort into her beclouded youth” (787). In other words, Dorothea rewrites the scene in the form of fiction, in which she, as the narrator, can shift the perspective (“But why

always Dorothea?”) to make the lights and shadow fall differently. In this scene, Dorothea thus takes up the narrator’s sympathetic mobility within her narrative. Through this imaginative exercise, Dorothea manages to ask herself, “What should I do — how should I act now, this very day, if I could clutch my own pain, and compel it to silence, and think of [the others involved]?” (787).¹⁵⁰ Strikingly, before she comes to her final resolution to go to Rosamond, she fortifies herself through an additional act of abstraction, imaginatively transforming the family she sees from the window — the “man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby” — into a representation of that “involuntary, palpitating life” that she “could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining” (787). Figuring herself as a participant in “the largeness of the world,” that is, she feels liberated from the limits of her own position (787). This scene thus not only draws our attention to the similarities between Dorothea’s process and the narrator’s actions within the *Middlemarcher* plot, creating a sense of cohesion but further opens our eyes to the enabling functions of abstraction and identification, shortly before we will be asked to take them up for ourselves in the Finale.

However, in returning to “save” Rosamond, Dorothea finds she “had counted a little too much on her own strength” (793). The self, it turns out, is not so easily left behind. Strikingly, and perhaps counterintuitively, her inability to control this “wave of her own sorrow” is what enables her to breakthrough Rosamond’s “cold reserve” (796). Under the influence of Dorothea’s emotion, Rosamond experiences “the first great shock that had shattered her dream-world in which she had been easily confident of herself and critical of others” (796). Rosamond, sobbing, admits that Will has feelings only for Dorothea (797). Upon hearing this revelation, Dorothea experiences “immense sympathy without

¹⁵⁰ The imaginative process that Dorothea undergoes at the window does seem more plausible as a replicable ethical program than her face-to-face interactions, as it speaks to an ongoing commitment to seeking detachment from one’s own perspective in order to find a position from which to offer fellowship. Notably, though this exercise gets Dorothea out the door, she cannot maintain this detached perspective once faced with Rosamond directly. In *Daniel Deronda*, Daniel likewise has a “habitual shame at acceptance of events as if they were his only,” yet he too cannot maintain this detached perspective in the face of his estranged mother (528). As Amanda Anderson argues, Daniel’s resistance to his mother is “overdetermined,” yet also indicates a limit to this particular approach to ethical action (*Powers* 142).

check” for the woman who, like herself, “had been in a shipwreck” of a difficult marriage (798). Yet, again, the extent of this mutual understanding and mutual experience is overestimated by Dorothea. Rosamond, who is less experienced with sympathy or identification than Dorothea, is influenced more by the intensity of Dorothea’s emotion and her own lingering guilt over Will’s reproach. Like with Lydgate, Dorothea feels that she and Rosamond have entered into a shared state of fellow feeling, yet we know that to not be exactly the case: “With her usual tendency to over-estimate the good in others, she felt a great outgoing of her heart toward Rosamond, for the generous effort which had redeemed her suffering, not counting that the effort was a reflex of her own energy” (798). Thus, this ethical action too is more idiosyncratic, complex, and ambivalent than we might expect if it were meant to serve as an example of a coherent ethical program. Though “not ideally beautiful,” these actions not only set in motion the conclusions of both parts of the novel but also allow Eliot to draw connections both between Dorothea’s ethos and that of the narrator within the *Middlemarcher* plot, as well as to reiterate the thematic similarities of Dorothea’s narrative and that of the Lydgates (838).

The Politics of Identification

Set in the period leading up to the passage of the First Reform Act (1832) and written shortly after the passage of the Second Reform Act (1867), *Middlemarch* heavily features politics at both local and national level. While the Middlemarchers fight over the chaplaincy of the hospital, Mr. Brooke embarks on an ill-fated attempt to run for Parliament. Will spends much of the novel writing on behalf of reform in *The Pioneer* and ends up “an ardent public man, working well in those times when reforms were begun with a young hopefulness of immediate good which has been much checked in our days, and getting at last returned to Parliament by a constituency who paid his expenses” (836). Will and Lydgate argue over the importance of moral purity in political representatives, and Bulstrode and Lydgate avoid the sensitive subject of Raffle’s death by debating “the chances of the Reform Bill in the House of Lords” (712). After the Reform Bill is thrown out, Mr. Cadwallader talks to Sir James “with a trout-fisher’s dispassionateness

about the prospects of the country,” while “the ladies also talked politics, though more fitfully” (813). Yet, representing politics and engaging in politics are different matters. How then does *Middlemarch* do politics? Many critics maintain that it simply doesn’t. As Amanda Anderson notes, the novel’s focus on and endorsement of Dorothea’s ethos has led to a “long-standing sense that Eliot’s most privileged register is the ethical one” (*Bleak* 74). Such accounts, as Henry Staten describes, often view *Middlemarch* as a mere continuation of the “antipolitical, moralizing” project of *Felix Holt* (993).¹⁵¹ The critics who do see *Middlemarch* as advancing “a different understanding of action and commitment” than is espoused in *Felix Holt* often center their analysis around the character of Will Ladislaw, who also features heavily in this account (Anderson *Bleak* 71). For Raymond Williams, Will Ladislaw, a free man, is the “single thread that has come loose from the web, but that [Eliot] insists is there, running beyond Middlemarch as she herself ran beyond it” (*English* 93). As “a thread to the future,” Will thus represents “a hope, a possibility beyond what [Eliot] had to record in a hardening clearly seen world” (93, 94). In Staten’s account, Will is a vessel for the “potentially disturbing political energies” that also find form in the scenes that depict working-class anger, such as Dagley’s confrontation of Brooke or Timothy’s argument with Mr. Garth. For Anderson, Eliot endorses both the ethos of Dorothea and the political vision of Will and, through their respective representations, “marks the difference between ethics and politics” (Anderson *Bleak* 75).

Like this second group of critics, I see Will as bodying forth a more positive, and more progressive, vision of politics than is usually associated with Eliot. Strikingly, Will not only works on behalf of reform, first as a journalist and then as a politician, but also offers within the space of the novel a specific, compelling articulation of liberal politics. In the aforementioned debate with Lydgate, who claims Brooke

¹⁵¹ As Staten notes, these accounts, which include Catherine Gallagher’s *Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, Deidre David’s *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy*, and David Cottom’s *Social Figures*, take up the terms of William’s critique of *Felix Holt* in *Culture & Society* in order to extend it to *Middlemarch*. However, as discussed in the following body paragraph, Williams himself does not see *Middlemarch*’s engagement with the political as working within these terms (Staten 993).

is unfit for office, Will theorizes a more impersonal vision of politics, in which what matters is whether a politician is himself “good” but whether he is “good enough for the occasion”:

“Wait for wisdom and consciousness in public agents — fiddlestick! The only conscience we can trust to is the massive sense of wrong in a class, and the best wisdom that will work is the wisdom of balancing claims. That’s my text — which side is injured? I support the man who supports their claims; not the virtuous upholder of the wrong” (465).

Will thus sets out a vision of politics that is based on “a fundamental insistence on eliminating wrongs beyond the individual case” and which “requires a claim for recognition of, and participation by, a class of people” (Anderson *Bleak* 76). This vision of politics is, as Anderson notes, unassimilable to Dorothea’s ethos and utopian plans and, as Staten describes, is further in tension with the political vision espoused by the character of Felix Holt, who shares Lydgate’s critical view of “making people believe that society can be cured by a political hocus-pocus” (Staten 994, *MM* 466). Nonetheless, Will’s politics are endorsed in various ways by the novel. For one, Will wins the argument, as Lydgate finds himself “checkmated” by Will’s case for the necessity of advancing progress by using the tools at hand (466, Staten 996). His political vision is further legitimized by Dorothea, who spends her life providing “wifely help” to his political work, liking “nothing better, since wrongs existed that her husband should be in the thick of a struggle against them” (836). In this way, she offers an “ethical endorsement” of his conception of and work on behalf of the political (Anderson *Bleak* 75).

While I agree with Williams, Anderson, and Staten that Will bodies forth a positive and progressive account of politics than is generally associated with Eliot, I want to suggest that Dorothea plays a more central role in the novel’s political vision than mere endorser (as in Williams and Anderson) or joiner (as in Staten, who claims that in the Finale, Dorothea’s ardor is absorbed into Will’s political energies). Specifically, the vision of politics that Will articulates asks us to attend “to the massive sense of wrong in a class” and to “support the man who supports their claims.” In articulating this vision, Will is speaking within the context of the proposed Reform Bill. Yet, this conception of politics is mobile, ready-made to be applied to injustices in any form: “That’s my text — which side is injured?” It is this mobility and this

focus on class-based harm that I suggest makes Will's articulation so attractive to and useful for Eliot, who uses it to make the case for the injured class in which she is most interested: Dorotheas.

In the Finale, the narrator forces us to “quit” Dorothea, into whom we no longer have any particular specific insight. Notably, Dorothea, unlike Celia, Rosamond, Sir James, and Lydgate, is not quoted within the Finale. What we learn of Dorothea's life — that it is filled with “emotion” and “beneficent activity,” that it is marked not by regret over marrying Will but instead by a lingering sense of her own failure — we learn from the position of the outsider (836). We find ourselves instead lumped in with the “many who knew her” who think “it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in certain circles as a wife and mother” (836).¹⁵² (While Eliot offers us the consolation of Dorothea's “incalculably diffusive” effect of the world, we who have felt her effect on us to be “incalculably concentrated” cannot be satisfied (838)). Yet, in this “limit” to our time *feeling with* Dorothea, we are also offered a “beginning” (835). Specifically, now that we are located further outside of Dorothea's perspective, we are invited to see the ways in which she mis-frames her failure by framing it in individualistic terms: “if only she had been better and known better” (835). From our now more detached position, we can see more clearly the extent to which “the determining acts of her life” were themselves determined by “the conditions of an imperfect social state” (838). Indeed, we also cannot state “exactly what else was in her power she ought rather to have done” (836). Eliot uses this newly detached perspective, as well as our previous attachment to Dorothea, to figure us anew, as the “insignificant people” who “with our daily words and acts¹⁵³ are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas” (838). In doing so, we are not asked to attempt to recreate the conditions of the past of St. Theresa and

¹⁵² Who comprises this many, if not us? Surely, this group includes more readers than Middlemarchers, who speak of her as “a fine girl who married a sickly clergyman, old enough to be her father, and in little more than a year after his death gave us his estate to marry his cousin — young enough to have been his son” (837)

¹⁵³ This reference to “daily words and acts” could be read as a turn away from the political process to something like interpersonal sympathy. Yet, the lively political focus of *Middlemarch* demonstrates that ordinary people participate in politics through “daily words and acts” all the time.

(strangely) Antigone,¹⁵⁴ as “the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone” (838). Instead, we are asked to look forward, to imagine what social conditions would support the flourishing not of Therasas but of Dorotheas. Luckily, we have at hand a theory of politics tailored to just such an occasion.

Eliot then leaves us in the Finale with an articulation of a specific class: “Dorotheas.” Strikingly, we “know” this class to be injured because we have “felt” those injuries for ourselves, specifically through the “feeling with” of readerly identification. Thus, in my reading, Dorothea is not (merely) the embodiment of ethics to Will’s embodiment of politics but rather the representative of the class in need of political representation. Notably, by the time Eliot switches Therasas out for Dorotheas, we have been primed to accept the substitution. As Gallagher notes, “Despite her compelling realization and her overwhelming particularity, by the end of the novel, Dorothea’s referential power has, if anything, increased, so that when the category of ‘Dorotheas’ replaces the former category of ‘Therasas,’ we recognize it” (“George” 69). Eliot has not only increased Dorothea’s referential power through, for instance, the turn toward the erotic, but has also worked to maintain the broadness of the class, through an emphasis on the ordinariness of Dorothea’s experiences and by leaving her qualities and skills under-determined. For instance, we might recall that Eliot’s narrator renders Dorothea’s “weeping” on her honeymoon as “not unusual” and “tragic” only “in the very fact of its frequency” (194). We might also consider the way in which the narrator corrects the raptures of Will and Naumann over Dorothea’s beauty by noting, “Certainly all Tipton and its neighborhood, as well as Dorothea herself, would have been surprised at her beauty being made so much of. In that part of the world Miss Brooke had been only a ‘fine young woman’” (217). (In other words, the narrator leaves us without a firm answer to the question, “Was she beautiful or not beautiful?”). Unlike Maggie Tulliver, whose extraordinary intelligence is emphasized through a comparison with Tom, the novel seems hesitant to be too specific about the nature of Dorothea’s abilities. We know, for instance,

¹⁵⁴ I read this late inclusion of Antigone as an instruction to construe the new class of Dorotheas broadly, in the way Therasas is broadened to include Antigone.

that Maggie is good at Latin because Tom is terrible at it, that she is quick because he is slow. For Dorothea, we have no reference point. Is it extraordinary that she grasps the basic structures of Latin through her work with Casaubon, or is this the ordinary result of copying out documents every day? These gestures toward and openness to the ordinary are, I suggest, deliberate. For the class of “Dorotheas” to be a meaningful group for political purposes, in other words, it cannot be coextensive with the class of Georges or even Maggies — that is, a class only for the extraordinary.¹⁵⁵ In other words, Dorothea Brooke may or may not fall within the class of Maggies, but Maggie Tulliver is most definitely a Dorothea. Indeed, she is specifically one of the Dorotheas who “present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know” (838). In this way, Dorothea is presented as a (particularly privileged¹⁵⁶) representative of a broad class, a class to which the reader may or may not belong outside of the space of fiction, but on behalf of which we have asked to fight regardless.¹⁵⁷ That is, these future Dorotheas require not (merely) the fellow feeling Eliot champions through the *Middlemarcher* plot but rather the systemic, more

¹⁵⁵ Yet, it is also a risk to situate Dorothea’s abilities within the realm of ordinary: although readers of *Middlemarch* are more likely to be of ordinary abilities than otherwise, many people, as we know, prefer to think of themselves as special. We might see the negative effects of this strategy in Leslie Stephen’s reading of Dorothea as having “a slight touch of stupidity” (177). This “slight touch of stupidity” has implications not merely for his reading of the ending, in which he seems “the pity” that “there was nothing for her to do” but rather than inhabit that sense of disappointment, he instead consoles himself by “reflecting that, after all, she had a dash of stupidity and that more successful Therasas may do a good deal of mischief” (180).

¹⁵⁶ Dorothea notably faces neither money problems nor particularly strong familial oversight. Though her first marriage makes her miserable, its end also leaves her in still a better position in terms of familial independence and resources to undertake a vocation. Yet, despite this uniquely independent position, Dorothea, with her “toy-box” education is still unable to determine upon and engage in meaningful work (86). This position, in which gendered constraints are presented as more easily separable from financial and familial constraints than is generally the case, allows Eliot to make the case on behalf of Dorothea that is more obviously situated within the sphere of the political.

¹⁵⁷ While I focus on the way in which Eliot bodies forth her gender politics through this identification with Dorothea, we might also see the laborers who are included only briefly in the novel as another such class in need of political representation. Strikingly, in her representation of old Timothy Cooper, Eliot suggests that the plight of the rustic workers cannot be addressed through ethics (at least as embodied by the endorsed figure of Mr. Garth, who cannot counter Tim’s “undeniable truth” about the lack of benefit the railroad creates for the little people). Rather, these kinds of harms are presented as requiring not individual fellow feeling but large-scale political action. Our identification with Dorothea further opens us up to the recognition of these injuries, as she is herself sensitive to the horrors of income inequality (“we deserve to be beaten out of our beautiful houses with a scourge of small cords — all of us who let tenants live in such sties as we see round us”) and seeks a bolder path of redistribution (31).

impersonal relief offered by the vision of liberal politics Will sets out in order that we might take it up for ourselves.

In this way, we can see Eliot's return to identification in *Middlemarch* as an attempt to address that which escapes the limits of sympathetic fellow feeling: systemic inequality. Through first inviting readers to identify with Dorothea and then (re)constituting her as the representative of a broader injured class, Eliot provides not only a critique of the constraints placed on girls and women but a way forward. Through this split structure, disguised as a coherent project, Eliot is thus able to marshal the power she stumbled upon through her narratorial experimentation in *The Mill on the Floss* toward more productive, more explicitly political end. That is, if the end of *The Mill on the Floss* leaves identificatory readers with unquenched desire for a world more supportive of flourishing for girls and women like Maggie, *Middlemarch* leaves these readers with this same desire and, strikingly, suggests what they should do with it. Through Dorothea's narrative, Eliot thus foregrounds not the importance of interpersonal fellow feeling, but the question of what a properly "prepared" life would look like for a Dorothea and a call to fight for it.

CHAPTER 4: THOMAS HARDY'S IDENTIFICATORY COMPROMISE

Throughout his early career, Thomas Hardy found it difficult to shake the near constant comparison of his novels to those of George Eliot. Indeed, a reviewer for the *Spectator* even suggested that Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) was penned by Eliot herself (*Life* 100). While reviewers focused on the similarities in subject matter between his novels and those of Eliot, particularly their focus on working people in living in rural communities, Hardy, who took issue with both Eliot's storytelling and her depiction of rural working people, suggested instead that readers might be unconsciously picking up on a shared vocabulary arising out of their respective readings of philosopher Augustus Comte (*Life* 100). However, beyond subject matter or vocabulary, the two authors strikingly share a commitment to specific novelist forms. As Barbara Hardy notes, Eliot and Hardy "are the only great Victorians who never use the autobiographical narrative convention" in their novels, favoring instead the use of a third-person omniscient narrator (*Particularities* 142).¹⁵⁸ This shared commitment to third person narration, I suggest, also speaks to a shared concern about the ethico-political potential and limits of readerly distance and to a shared desire to more closely manage the readers' relation to the novelistic world and, in particular, to the characters.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ As noted in the previous chapter, Eliot's short story, "The Lifted Veil," features a first-person narrator who nonetheless retains the omniscience so central to Eliot's third person narrators. Hardy's story, "The Poor Man and the Lady," is also written in first person, though it was never published (Hardy, *Particularities* n. 12, at 144). *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, which was first published under the name of Hardy's second wife, is also written from the perspective of a third party, though it was primarily authored by Hardy himself. Recent editions seek to restore the text to the form of the manuscript at the time of Hardy's death. See Millgate Introduction, x-xi.

¹⁵⁹ In drawing this connection between third-person narration and management of distance, I do not mean to suggest that it is impossible for a novel narrated in the first person to keep the reader at a distance. However, I do think that readers are especially inclined to "project a protagonicity and identification" with a first-person narrator (who is, after all, by definition "the initial character" presented to them in a particularly privileged way) that "only a good deal of irony — internal as well as external — can undo" (Jameson 115; see also the discussion in Chapter 3 at 154-55). Notably, while readers may be initially inclined to identify with first-person narrator/protagonists over characters narrated by a third party, I suggest that the authority of (especially a disembodied, godlike) third-person narrator

In the previous chapter, I examined the identificatory trajectory of Eliot, who struggled to find a novelistic form through which to articulate simultaneously her political critique of the constraints placed on the lives of girls and women and her ethical commitment to the encouragement of diffuse fellow feeling. In the present chapter, I suggest that Thomas Hardy likewise faced difficulty in managing the tension between two projects that seemed formally at odds with one another, both in terms of the character-system and the affective proximity/distance best suited to their respective advancements. However, unlike Eliot, Hardy's resolution was not to find a way to work around the tension between the projects but rather to switch his emphasis from one project to the other over the course of his career. Specifically, Hardy seeks both to represent rural working-class people in ways that show them to be as complex and as distinct from one another as their urban middle-class counterparts (who happen to comprise the bulk of Hardy's readership) and to invite those middle-class readers to take seriously the material circumstances under which rural working people live and work and, in particular the ways in which those circumstances render these people unfairly vulnerable to exploitation and unjustly limit their access to opportunities for flourishing. Notably, both these ethico-political commitments stem from an interest in rendering the lives of rural working-class people with care and precision, especially given their limited inclusion in earlier novels of the English countryside.¹⁶⁰ These commitments also pose a representational challenge to Hardy in terms of managing the differences in language amongst rural working-class people he represents, his narrator, and his urban middle-class readership.

does offer the author a place from which to bolster support for and identification with a character, in ways that can be more effective at encouraging the collapse of distance between reader and character than a first-person narrator.

¹⁶⁰ As is mentioned in Chapter 3 and will also be discussed here, Raymond Williams argues that it is Hardy, not Eliot, who brings rural working people into focus in the English novel. Hardy likewise found Eliot's representations of rural working people to be imprecise. In response to the reviewer's suggestion that *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) was authored by Eliot, Hardy wrote "why the author [that is, Hardy himself] could never understand . . . she had never touched the life of the fields: her country people seemed to him, too, more like small town folks than rustics" (*Life* 100).

In this chapter, I will analyze Hardy's negotiations between these two projects: that of individuating rural working characters, disintegrating the stereotype of the indistinguishable, doomed "Hodge"; and that of inviting readers to imaginatively inhabit the circumstances under which such characters live and work in order to attend to the ways their lives are constrained by precarity and adherence to social convention. In so analyzing, I propose we begin this study, not with the author's early work, as in the previous chapters, but instead with what, I argue, is the precise moment Hardy switches his emphasis from the first project to the second in his penultimate novel, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). From our examination of this moment of transition in *Tess*, we will then travel back in Hardy's trajectory to consider his second novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), which I suggest typifies his early work in both its narrator's maintenance of distance between reader and character and its foregrounding, both representationally and affectively, of speakers of dialect. I will then *The Woodlanders*, one of Hardy's mid-career "return of the native" novels, in which he still maintains a distance as to discourage readerly identification. However, he now figures that distance not through the narrator but through his characters, who exhibit their complexity in ways that invite our ambivalence rather than our sympathy. Finally, we will turn to Hardy's post-transition novel *Jude the Obscure* (1895). While *Tess* bodies forth both of Hardy's projects, if only to expose the limits of advancing the first at the expense of the second, *Jude* represents Hardy's turn away from representing rural communities to calling readers to imaginatively inhabit the material circumstances facing Jude Fawley, his most identificatory protagonist. Indeed, Hardy is so intent on courting readerly identification with Jude that he undermines much of the work of his earlier novels, rendering the rural working people Jude encounters, especially those who speak in dialect, "indistinguishable" as well as "retrogressive and unmeaning" (*Tess* 117). In *Jude*, Hardy thus compromises his first project through his reliance on strategies of identification to advance the second.

The Transition in *Tess*

In 1883, Thomas Hardy published an essay titled “The Dorsetshire Laborer” in *Longman’s Magazine*. In the essay, he undertakes two tasks: one, to disabuse his urbane, middle-class readership of its notion of “the farm-labouring community” as “a uniform collection of concrete Hodges” and two, to reflect upon the shifting material conditions under which labor and familial life take place within such a community. These shifting conditions include, among others, the improvements in wages instigated in part by the organizing efforts of trade unionist Joseph Arch, the increasing demand for mobile laborers, the accelerating industrialization of farming, and the systemic eviction of the rural families of expiring life-holders — that is, those rural community members who generally worked outside the farms in blacksmithing, carpentry, and higglerly (252).¹⁶¹ Strikingly, in advancing this first task of attending to the diversity of rural communities, Hardy invites his reader to imagine a person, situated in similar circumstances to themselves, who takes a journey to “a retired district” of Dorset and resides for a period of six months in this rural community of working people (252). This person both comes to see the incredible diversity within this community that they had previously imagined to be monolithic and begins to recognize that dialect is not “a vile corruption of cultivated speech” but instead “a tongue with grammatical inflection rarely disregarded by his entertainer” (254). In *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891), Hardy saves us the trouble of imagining this person for ourselves: he presents him to us in the form of Angel Clare. Specifically, in the third phase of the novel, Tess Durbeyfield seeks a fresh start working as a milkmaid at Talbothays Dairy. Upon her arrival, she finds twenty-six-year-old Angel Clare, a parson’s son turned farmer-in-training, already in residence. In situating this educated young man within the rustic

¹⁶¹ Although “The Dorsetshire Labourer” is often classified as a merely descriptive essay (see e.g., Merryn Williams at 103), I, like Fred Reid, read it as evincing a proto-progressive politics through its attentiveness to shifts in material conditions and its critical analysis of the effects on those subject to them. For a fuller account of Hardy’s essay as “a political mediation on early globalization” that “opens the way to an alignment of new thinking, reformist, socialistic, later to be dubbed ‘progressive,’” see Reid 177-87.

environment, the narrator repurposes the prose from the imagined journey Hardy proposes in “The Dorsetshire Labourer”:

The longer Clare resided here the less objection had he to his company, and the more did he like to share quarters with them in common.

Much to his surprise he took, indeed, a real delight in their companionship. The conventional farm-folk of his imagination — personified in the newspaper-press by the pitiable dummy known as Hodge — were obliterated after a few days’ residence. At close quarters no Hodge was to be seen. At first, it is true, when Clare’s intelligence was fresh from a contrasting society, these friends with whom he now hobnobbed seemed a little strange. Sitting down as a level member of the dairyman’s household seemed at the outset an undignified proceeding. The ideas, the modes, the surroundings, appeared retrogressive and unmeaning. But with living on there, day after day, the acute sojourner became conscious of a new aspect in the spectacle. Without any objective change whatever, variety had taken the place of monotonousness. His host and his host’s household, his men and his maids, as they became intimately known to Clare, began to differentiate themselves as in a chemical process. The thought of Pascal’s was brought home to him: “*A mesure qu’on a plus d’esprit, on trouve qu’il y a plus d’hommes originaux. Les gens du commun ne trouvent pas de différence entre les hommes.*” The typical and unvarying Hodge ceased to exist. He had been disintegrated into a number of varied fellow-creatures — beings of many minds, beings infinite in difference; some happy, many serene, a few depressed, one here and there bright even to genius, some stupid, others wanton, others austere; some mutely Miltonic, some potentially Cromwellian — into men who had private views of each other, as he had of his friends; who could applaud or condemn each other, amuse or sadden themselves by the contemplation of each other’s foibles or vices; men every one of whom walked in his own individual way the road to dusty death. (117-18)¹⁶²

In this remarkable passage, Hardy thus assigns Angel precisely the experience he describes in the essay he drafted eight years earlier. Strikingly, through Angel’s experiences, he also gives us a plausible account of his project of the early novels: to bring us close to those whom we might otherwise consider to be beneath our interest, to compel us through sustained proximity to reconsider our prejudices, and to enable us to see through the “typical and unvarying Hodge” to the “number of varied fellow creatures” of differing

¹⁶² In “The Dorsetshire Labourer,” Hardy writes:

For the nonce, the very sitting down would seem an undignified performance . . . But living on there for a few days the sojourner would become conscious of a new aspect in the life around him. He would find that, without any objective change whatever, variety had taken the place of monotony; that the man who had brought him home — the typical Hodge as he conjectured — was somehow not typical of anyone but himself . . . The great change in his perception is that Hodge, the dull, unvarying, joyless one, has ceased to exist for him. He has become disintegrated into a number of dissimilar fellow-creatures, men of many minds, infinite in difference; some happy, many serene, a few depressed; some clever, even to genius, some stupid, some wanton, some austere; some mutely Miltonic, some Cromwellian; into men who have private views of each other, as he has of his friends; who applaud or condemn each other; amuse or sadden themselves by the contemplation of each other’s foibles or vices; and each of whom walks in his own way the road to dusty death. (253-54).

beliefs, minds, and dispositions. Though our journey involves not a six-month residency but instead a few hundred pages spent with Hardy's characters, we might nonetheless see Angel Clare as the fictional embodiment of Hardy's ideal reader. That is, Angel is (like most of Hardy's readers) a member of the educated middle class but is nonetheless open to reconsidering his preconceived notions when afforded the opportunity to do so. Though this project works, in part, through affective connection — "a real delight in their companionship" developed and sustained over time — the closeness required is not that of readerly identification. That is, Hardy brings us close to these rural, working characters not so that we will notice the similarities between ourselves and them — an identificatory, if not universalizing, project — but instead so that we will recognize the differences amongst the would-be Hodge. In other words, the shared ground Hardy seeks to establish is not of emotional experience but instead of complexity and variety. This closeness thus requires a maintenance of a certain distance, a perspective that remains outside of any single character, so that we have the distance from which to compare them to one another and recognize them as "beings infinite in difference," who hold "private views of each other." Strikingly, we might begin to see the tensions inherent to this project even in the passage that describes it. Angel's overcoming of class-prejudice, his acceptance of his "fellow-creatures," seems somewhat at odds with the tenor of his thoughts, with their verbatim quotations of Pascal and references to Milton and Cromwell. The narrator and Angel share this language — language that, Hardy presumes, is also shared by the reader; after all, he declines to supply an in-text translation of the Pascal. Yet, this language is not that of the would-be Hodge. Indeed, this passage at once sets out Hardy's early and middle novelistic project and typifies one source of dissonance Hardy must navigate in bodying it forward: specifically, that he writes mainly about working-class people in rural communities but his writing is consumed primarily by an educated, cosmopolitan readership.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ For an in-depth discussion of this dissonance, see Raymond Williams, *The English Novel*, at 97–101.

Significantly, while this “Hodge-disintegration” project (and its related defense of dialect) is clearly foregrounded in Hardy’s early and middle novels, it is not particularly apparent in the first two phases of *Tess*. Indeed, early representations of Tess’s childish, heavy-drinking, dialect-speaking parents and her numerous, nondescript siblings would seem likely to have the opposite effect on Hardy’s typical readers, confirming their worst suspicions about the working people living in rural communities. That is, our focus is not directed toward the ways in which Liza Lou Durbeyfield differs from Abraham Durbeyfield, or how Mrs. Durbeyfield is distinct from Mrs. Rolliver. Rather, we are encouraged to see how Tess — responsible, beautiful, the top of her class — is special in ways that put her at odds with the “unspeakable dreariness” of her homelife (20). Thus, like the Dodsons in *The Mill on the Floss*, the Durbeyfields seem to form the “background dull and mean enough” for the bright, motivated heroine to stand out (Unsigned Review: *The Mill on the Floss*, *The Spectator* 112; *Tess* 27). Even Tess’s two best friends remain nameless, serving only to emphasize her rightful position as “the middle one,” the center of their (and our) attention (37). As with Maggie, we care only for Tess.

Yet, through this articulation of Angel’s experience, the narrator seems to speak the novelistic Hodge-disintegration project back into existence. That is, Angel’s (re)introduction into the novel ushers in not merely a new phase but “a new aspect” of the novel (*Tess* 117). Specifically, the novel opens up in ways that make it feel like Hardy’s early work: that is, those novels in which this ‘Hodge disintegration’ project is privileged. At Talbothays Dairy, Tess indeed does find her fresh start. The shift in her surroundings coincides with a shift in the character-system in the novel. Tess makes friends with her fellow lovelorn milkmaids — Marian, Izz, and Retty — and finds a home of sorts with Dairyman Crick and his wife. As they did for Angel, these characters, unlike Tess’s family members, soon “differentiate themselves” and emerge as novelistic subjects in their own right. We are now encouraged not to neglect Tess but to feel also for Izz, as she longingly kisses Angel’s shadow, or for Crick, when the butter fails to come from the churn. We can now attend both to these new characters and to the sensory experience of the surroundings. Indeed, the scenes for which Hardy is most famous — those “where action and event give way to

description and to sensation” — are clustered in this portion of the novel, including Tess’s “most celebrated” walk through the overgrown garden, where the “thistle-milk and slug-slime” stain her skin (Christoff 32-33; *Tess* 132). The labor of the dairy is presented as time-consuming and difficult but not in the overwhelming, soul-crushing way of Tess’s later work with the threshing machine in Flintcomb Ash. Importantly, at the dairy, the labor is shared: when the butter is found to have a twang, Dairyman Crick falls to his knees to search for blades of garlic in the grass alongside the rest of them. Further, this labor serves not as a distraction from the novel’s romantic plot but is instead its way forward. Angel Clare flirts with Tess “[ranging] the cows” so that out of the ninety-five cows at the dairy, Tess is sent the “eight in particular — Dumpling, Fancy, Lofty, Mist, Old Pretty, Young Pretty, Tidy, and Loud — who, though the teats of one or two were as hard as carrots, gave down to her with a readiness that made her work on them a mere touch of the fingers” (*Tess* 121). We are invited to recognize, alongside Angel, that “wherever a mode of life is neither noxious nor absolutely inadequate, there springs up happiness” (“Dorsetshire Labourer” 253). In this middle section of the novel, the local tales of Dairyman Crick’s recall the early novels not only in their showcase of dialect but also in their inter-textual references. In Crick’s most prominently-featured tale, in which a man cutting across a field cleverly escapes a charging bull through his fiddle playing, the hero is none other than his acquaintance William Dewy, who readers might recognize as Dick’s grandfather in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. In this middle section of the novel, we thus find a reprise of the earlier form, including its emphasis on Hardy’s initial ethico-political project.

However, this return is short-lived. Angel marries Tess, only to reject her cruelly upon her confession of her previous impregnation by Alec D’Urberville, who had raped¹⁶⁴ her when she was sent by her parents to “claim kin” as a seventeen-year-old girl. From this point, the novel returns to its former bleakness, or as the *Daily News* termed it, its “Tessimism” (Hardy, *Life* 258, 265). The critic for the *Saturday*

¹⁶⁴ I refer throughout this chapters to Tess’s experience with Alec D’Urberville on the Chase as a rape, though it has been termed a “seduction” by others, including contemporary readers. For an account that seeks “to shift and disrupt the limits” of the discourse around the seduction/rape binary in relation to *Tess* (1272), see Rooney 1269-78.

Review complained, “except during the few hours spent with cows, [the novel] has not a gleam of sunshine anywhere” (205). This resumption of bleakness, I suggest, exposes a limit to Hardy’s first project as taken in isolation. Angel is happy enough to expand his view of rural working people beyond the “pitiable dummy known as the Hodge” but he is unwilling to take the material circumstances of Tess’s life seriously, in the way upon which Hardy insists in the second half of “The Dorsetshire Labourer.” Angel’s rejection of Tess is overdetermined by his subscription to Victorian gender norms, with their emphasis on purity. Yet, it is also rooted in an unwillingness to imaginatively inhabit the conditions Tess describes, to take seriously the gendered and classed pressures under which she became a “maiden no more” (Phase II). That is, Angel is happy to take in the local color, to make his fellow workers his “companions,” but he is unwilling to even attempt to identify with Tess, whom he claims to love. He does not, for instance, attempt to imagine himself as a child put into a situation for which he had been ill-prepared and, subsequently, forced to bear out incredibly painful consequences. Instead, he sidesteps such considerations by declaring Tess to be a different person than he imagined: “the woman I have been loving is not you” but “another woman in your shape” (229). While Tess seeks to contextualize her experiences by insisting upon her youth (“I was only a child”) and situating them within her community, where such occurrences are not rare and are often overlooked by future romantic partners, he insists on viewing it within the context of her ancestral D’Urberville lineage (230). Thus resituated, Tess’s experiences appear not as the foreseeable result of a vulnerability arising out of her youth, gender, financial precarity, and lack of education but instead as evidence of the classic D’Urberville “want of firmness”: “decrepit families postulate decrepit wills, decrepit conduct” (232). In doing so, Angel attempts to transform what is an act of punching down (applying middle class and patriarchal standards to a person who is vulnerable in ways not shared by members of the middle class) into one of punching up (a middle-class critique of an aristocratic failure of regulation). In contrast, the class-dimension of her vulnerability is, in fact, entirely clear to Tess herself, as we have heard her articulate it upon her return home from the D’Urbervilles:

“O mother, my mother!” cried the agonized girl, turning passionately upon her parent as if her poor heart would break. “How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house

four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me!" (82)

Unlike the "ladies" with their instructive novels, poor Tess was left to "fend" for herself, as she "never had the chance in learning in that way." Without such resources, she is left at the mercy of parents, who would rather subject her to risk in hopes of attaining financial security ("if he don't marry her afore he will after") than prioritize her wellbeing and bodily autonomy, much less support her dreams of becoming a village schoolteacher (53). Angel's abandonment of Tess, which repeats that of her parents in sending her to the D'Urbervilles, also announces the shift in Hardy's concerns. That is, he moves away from the focus on Hodge-disintegration in order to prioritize what Angel refuses to undertake for himself: inhabiting the material conditions under which women like Tess must work and live. Through Angel, Hardy revitalizes the project of Hodge-disintegration only to reveal its limits. After this betrayal, the novel returns to its earlier mode. The character-system narrows once again: what we hear of Izz, of Marian, even of Angel Clare is now interesting only in its relation to Tess.

Removed from the Dairy, where labor continues much as it did when Tess's own mother worked as a milkmaid, Tess is subjected to precisely the shifts in rural labor that Hardy identifies in the second part of "The Dorsetshire Laborer." After using Angel's money to thatch her parents' roof, Tess takes a new job at Flintcomb-Ash, "a starve-acre place," where the labor is more intensely physical and industrialized (248). In a harrowing scene, she undergoes the experience that Hardy describes in his essay: that of being forced to feed the threshing machine from "morning until night," despite her unfitness for the task ("Dorsetshire" 246). After returning home to attend to her sick parents, she loses her father, and with him, the life-hold on their home. Like the other former "liviers" Hardy describes in the essay, the Durbeyfields "would have been glad to remain as weekly and monthly tenants of the owner" but, like so many others, are denied for reasons of landlord self-interest dressed up in concerns about "morality": in this case, Tess's earlier out-of-wedlock pregnancy ("Dorsetshire" 269). Forced to join the Old Lady's Day migration in order to "seek refuge in the boroughs," the Durbeyfields are left "houseless and landless," far

removed from their community supports (“Dorsetshire” 269). When their arrangements for rented rooms fall through, the direness of this situation leaves Tess, who has been consistently resistant to the offers of her rapist Alec D’Urberville since his reappearance at Flintcomb-Ash, newly vulnerable to his advances. While Tess struggles through these new realities of work in the country, Angel Clare remains callously indifferent to the realities of her life, failing both to write to Tess (who he has forbidden to write to him) and to ask his parents whether the proudly independent Tess has reached out for financial support. Indeed, Angel only returns to Tess once he faces difficulties of his own in Brazil, difficulties that render him newly open to (re)considering his commitment to middle-class conceptions of purity that exist outside of considerations of gendered and class precarity and social pressures.

Angel’s abandonment of Tess thus marks an end to Hardy’s commitment to the project of Hodge-disintegration to the extent it conflicts with his project of inviting readers to imaginatively inhabit the material circumstances of working people. This new emphasis requires not only a different, more centralized character-system but, importantly, a more intimate relationship between middle-class reader and lower-class character than the mere “companionship” required for Hodge-disintegration.¹⁶⁵ That is, Angel’s failure to see what Hardy presents as the truth about Tess stems from his inability to grasp her as real, as Hardy requires of us as readers. Even before his betrayal of her, Angel experiences Tess as “the merest stray phenomenon,” “a rosy, warming apparition” (129). To the reader, however, Tess is “an existence, an experience, a passion, a structure of sensations” (91). As Alicia Mireles Christoff notes, “throughout the novel, there is a notable urgency behind Hardy’s efforts to make Tess real” (29). To accept Tess as “real” is to take her humanity seriously in a way Angel fails to do. Yet, it nonetheless does not feel

¹⁶⁵ With respect to Tess, the shape this relation takes on is not precisely identificatory, as it is in *Jude the Obscure*. Elsewhere in this project, I have criticized those who, in the face of an invitation to identify across gender difference, instead declare themselves to be in love (or not in love) with the heroine, as if this were the central question the novel was asking of them. See e.g., Leslie Stephen’s account of falling in love with Maggie Tulliver (104; *Readerly Identification*, Chapter 3, note 119 at 135); and the *Guardian* review of *Villette*, where the reviewer specified that he would “respectfully decline . . . the honour of an intimate acquaintance” with either Jane Eyre or Lucy Snowe. (194; *Readerly Identification* Chapter 2, note 65 at 81).

precisely accurate to describe this readerly relation to Tess as identificatory, even as the intensity for which we feel for her goes beyond mere sympathy or companionship. Strikingly, Hardy seems to ask that we relate to Tess not as identificatory reader but instead as a lover. Unlike Angel, we, however, are eager to enter into her history, to sympathize with her troubles, and to accept her as she is. We are asked to recognize her purity, as Angel fails to do. In inviting us to fall in love with Tess, rather than to identify with her (which, surely, would not require quite so many mentions of her womanly curves or of her “mobile, peony mouth”), Hardy also leaves space for us to see, in the ways she cannot, how Tess is hurt by her own internalizations of social standards and by the shame that manifests in a reluctance to ask for help (14). This relation to Tess also enables us to recognize and judge the ways in which Angel fails Tess in harsher terms than she does herself. Notably, this kind of incitement of romantic desire seems more fickle¹⁶⁶ and troubling¹⁶⁷ than identificatory relation, which may explain Hardy’s shift to more explicitly identificatory strategies in *Jude the Obscure*, which I will go on to explore in detail in the final section of this Chapter. However, we must first attend to the early and middle work that I have suggested is specifically recalled by Tess’s summer at the Dairy in order to understand the context and stakes of Hardy’s shift to identification in *Jude*.

¹⁶⁶ Readers certainly responded to Tess as a real person, but in so doing, they reached conclusions that were not always in line with those invited by Hardy. In his autobiography, Hardy reports accounts of multiple parties “fighting across [the] dinner-table over Tess’s character” (*Life* 269). While he was amused to learn of Duchesses and statesmen arguing with one another over Tess, he expressed frustration over this inability to control readerly responses in response to the reviews: “How strange that one may write a book without know what one puts into it — or rather the reader reads into it! Well if this sort of thing continues no more novel-writing for me. A man must be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at” (*Life* 259).

¹⁶⁷ As Elaine Scarry notes, readers have often found Hardy, or his narrator, to be in love with Tess (113). Hardy himself acknowledged that he had “lost [his] heart to her as [he] went on with her history” (Letter to Sir George Douglas 249). Yet, critics and readers have also been troubled by the way the novel sexualizes its heroine. See e.g., Bayley at 183 (exploring the narrator’s erotic investment in *Tess*); Boumelha at 120 (implicating the narrator in Tess’s violation due to those erotic desires); Silverman “History” (providing a Lacanian reading of Tess as the “privileged object of the male gaze” constructed by Hardy (19)). C/f Christoff at 42 (writing against such accounts to suggest that the novel offers Tess a “holding environment” as defined by D.W. Winnicott). I suggest that Hardy’s figuration of our readerly relation with Tess does involve an uncomfortable coincidence of our desires (and those of the narrators) with those of Angel and, perhaps even more troublingly, those of her rapist Alec D’Urberville. Yet, as Christoff suggests, our relation to Tess is also characterized by a tenderness and a sense of her as “real” in ways that are not shared by Alec and Angel.

Distance and Overflow in *Under the Greenwood Tree*

In 1871, Thomas Hardy published his second novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the first to be set in Wessex. The novel is made up of two interlinking plots. In the first, Dick Dewy, the educated son of a tranter, seeks to win the heart of the new school mistress, Fancy Day. In the second, the Mellstock Quire, consisting of male singers and male players of string instruments, struggles against being made redundant by the new organ-enthused pastor, Mr. Maybold. These plots are closely intertwined: Fancy is the organist poised to take over the parish's musical performance; Dick is a choir member, alongside his father and grandfather; and Maybold is Dick's rival for Fancy's hand in marriage. This early novel is unique within Hardy's oeuvre both for the happiness of its ending and the prominence of its representation of dialect, which it presents not as "a vile corruption of cultivated speech" but instead "a tongue with grammatical inflection rarely disregarded by his entertainer" ("Dorsetshire" 254). This lightness of tone and inclusion of dialect has attracted criticism, not least from Hardy himself.¹⁶⁸

One notable detractor of *Under the Greenwood Tree* is Raymond Williams, who elsewhere champions Hardy for the successful incorporation of rural working people into the English country novel (*English* 106). Specifically, Williams argues that a "change in literary bearings" between Jane Austen and Eliot and again between Eliot and Hardy allows for the "persistent rural disturbance" that had been invisible in Austen to become "blurred" in Eliot and, ultimately, "into focus" in Hardy (*Country* 166). While in Austen, "to be face-to-face . . . is already to belong to a class," in Eliot's novels, the lower-class people of the countryside become a part of the story (166). Though Williams acknowledges that "it is good to see the farmers and craftsman and almost the labourers," he criticizes the ways in which, in Eliot's novels, these characters operate more "as a landscape" than as "active bearers of personal experience" (168). In the previous chapter, I discussed this critique particularly in the context of *Adam Bede*, in which Eliot struggles,

¹⁶⁸ In the Preface to the 1912 edition, Hardy expressed some regret that "this little group of church musicians" was "penned so lightly, even so farcically and flippantly at time," noting "the inevitable reflection that the realities out of which it was spun were material for another kind of study" (162-63).

per Williams, to individuate rural working people, representing them instead in a “choral mode” (178). According to Williams, Hardy avoids Eliot’s missteps in his mature novels. However, in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Hardy merely repeats them, presenting only “an external observation of customs and quaintness, modulated by a distinctly patronising affection” (*English* 106).¹⁶⁹ In particular, Williams takes issue with Hardy’s “prolonged literary imitation of traditional forms of speech,” which encourages readers to treat his characters as “a tradition rather than human beings” (107).

Like the quality of “doneness” exhibited by Eliot’s characters in *Adam Bede*,¹⁷⁰ this “external” quality of Hardy’s novel is rooted in its form. That is, like Eliot in *Adam Bede*, Hardy offers in *Under the Greenwood Tree* what he himself characterizes (in the subtitle) as a “Rural Painting of the Dutch School.” In other words, Hardy offers his readers the experience of these characters from a distance, as if the readers were viewers of a painting within a frame. As in *Adam Bede*, the narrator and reader exist on a separate discursive plane from the characters, giving the world of the novel a “sealed off” quality (Beer 59). For Hardy and for Eliot, this “Dutch painting” form solves a problem: specifically, the problem of language that Williams identifies, in which the language shared by the author and reader is not that spoken by the characters. This solution, however, comes with the “patronising” quality Williams identifies, in which the characters are not novelistic subjects in whose experiences we share, but instead read as objects “done” by the narrator.

And indeed, within *Under the Greenwood Tree*, many of the “rustics” operate within what Williams refers to (disparagingly) as the “choral mode.” These characters almost always appear as a group and are often deployed to comic effect. The reader’s sense of these dialect speakers as an unindividuated chorus is further courted by their group identity as a literal choir. Further, their thoughts, where represented by the

¹⁶⁹ Relatedly, Patricia Ingham remarks that the dialect speakers of *Under the Greenwood Tree* provide “comic effect only” (352).

¹⁷⁰ See Williams, *Country* at 168: “It is often said about the Poysers in *Adam Bede*, as about the Gleggs and the Dodsons in *The Mill on the Floss*, that they are marvellously (or warmly, richly, charmingly) done. But what this points to is a recurring problem in the social consciousness of the writer.”

narration, are focalized, not through any choir member individually but through the group *as a group*. For instance, in the moment where “the school-girls” make the unprecedented move of singing during the Christmas mass, without the express invitation of the choir, we are informed:

Now this had never happened before within the memory of man. The girls, like the rest of the congregation, had always been humble and respectful followers of the gallery; singing at sixes and sevens if without gallery leaders; never interfering with the ordinances of these practised artists — having no will, union, power, or proclivity except it was given them from the established choir enthroned above them. (33-34)

Interestingly, while this statement is written in standardized English, it expresses a view of the girls that is held by the choir members — Mr. Penny, Mr. Bowman, Mr. Dewy, and Mr. Spinks — but that, importantly, is not shared by the narrator, with his particular insight into the willful Fancy Day. Notably, this moment of free indirect discourse is immediately followed by verbal statements by each of the choir members listed above, confirming these sentiments in their own (dialect-inflected) words. This doubling-back of the representation of this particular point of view suggests an anxiety on Hardy’s part about rendering the thoughts of dialect-speaking characters, even taken as a group, in this translated manner. It is perhaps due to this anxiety that the narrator rarely enters the thoughts of any of the choir members (excluding Dick), except through this collective mode. Like Eliot, Hardy opts instead to present these rural working men primarily through their speech. In place of providing direct insight into their inner lives, the narrator provides us with observations of their outwardly expressed attitudes and mannerisms — information that we could have gathered for ourselves had we been on the scene (and as observant as Hardy’s narrator). For instance, Hardy’s narrator tells us of Mr. Penny, who resumes his speech “regarding the boot *as if* that alone were his auditor,” and of his wife, who spoke “in a running tone of complacent abstraction, *as if* a listener were not a necessity” (18, 45, my emphasis). These amusing “as if” clauses do not support a view of these characters as “active bearers of their own personal experience,” so much as

humorous caricatures or vessels for the expression of views held by what Dick calls “the common world” (85).¹⁷¹

Even as Hardy is reluctant about representing the inner lives of these rustic characters directly, he, unlike Eliot, allows the experiences of two such characters to break out of the novel’s formal frame, for their emotions to bleed through the porousness of its boundary. In doing so, Hardy invites the reader to relate to these affectively-privileged characters in a more intimate manner, though not quite in the sustained way required for identification. These moments of affective overflow, in a novel where distance is otherwise so strictly maintained, are particularly notable not only for our understanding of this early novel, but also for the ways in which they foreshadow Hardy’s ethico-political strategies in his middle novels. Specifically, in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Hardy privileges the emotional experiences of the dialect-speaking fathers of Dick and Fancy respectively over those of the upwardly-mobile, educated young lovers themselves. Through Hardy’s figuring of these parent-child relationships, we leave the novel attached not to these young people but instead to their dialect-speaking fathers, Reuben Dewy and Geoffrey Day, as they struggle to lovingly and responsibly parent their adult children across differences in language and education. Notably, the affective pull of these two characters is figured through scenes in which they continue to speak in dialect, an achievement enabled by the prominence of dialect throughout the choir plot. For instance, let us consider a scene between Dick and his tranter father, in which the two discuss the state of Dick’s fraught courtship of Fancy:

“Weh-hey!” said the tranter. ”I tell thee what it is, Dick. That there maid is taking up thy thoughts more than’s good for thee, my sonny. Thou’rt never happy now unless th’rt making thyself miserable about her in one way or another.”

“I don’t know about that, father,” said Dick rather stupidly.

¹⁷¹ Yet, even as Hardy lumps these characters together and provides only an “external” view of their lives, their joint struggle to maintain the choir nonetheless takes up nearly half of the novel and unfolds largely through speech rendered in dialect. As Ken Ireland notes, the climatic chapter in which the choir members confront Parson Maybold in his home has the highest percentage of direct speech — ninety-eight percent, excluding speech tags — of any chapter in any Hardy novel (29). Remarkably then, in this chapter, Hardy solves the problem of his narrator and his characters speaking differently, not by standardizing the speech of the characters to align with the narration, but by having his narrator cede the floor, leaving the reader to have to grapple with dialect for themselves.

“But I do . . . ‘Od rot the women, ‘tis nothing else wi’ ‘em nowadays but getting young men and leading ‘em astray.”

“Pooh, father! you just repeat what all the common world says; that’s all you do.”

“The world’s a very sensible feller on things in jinerl, Dick; very sensible indeed.” (85)

Here, Hardy plays into our expectation of the type of humorous, broad advice the dialect-speaking Reuben will have to offer to his more sophisticated son (“The world’s a very sensible feller on things in jinerl”). We expect both his old-fashioned views (“‘Od rot the women”) and his educated son’s dismissal of them (“Pooh father!”). And yet, as the conversation continues, Hardy works to unsettle our preconceived notions:

“I wish I was as rich as a squire when he’s as poor as a crow,” [Dick] murmured; “I’d soon ask Fancy something.”

“I wish so too, wi’ all my heart, sonny; that I do. Well, mind what beest about, that’s all.”

“Supposing now, father . . . I did think a little about her . . . don’t you think she’s a very good sort of — of — one?”

“Ay, good; she’s good enough . . . but I can’t see what the nation a young feller like you — wi’ a comfortable house and home, and father and mother to take care o’ thee, and who sent ‘ee to a school so good that ‘twas hardly fair to the other children — should want to go hollering after a young woman for, when she’s quietly making a husband in her pocket, and not troubled by chick nor chiel, to make a poverty-stric’ wife and family of her . . .”

“For about the same reason that you did, father, I suppose.”

“Dang it, my sonny, thou’st got me there!” And the tranter gave vent to a grim admiration, with the mien of a man who was too magnanimous not to appreciate artistically a slight rap on the knuckles, even if they were his own.

“Whether or no,” said Dick, “I asked her a thing going along the road . . . And then she said nothing for a quarter of a mile, and then she said she didn’t know. Now, what I want to know is, what was the meaning of that speech?”

“The meaning of that speech is,” the tranter replied deliberately, “that the meaning is meant to be rather hid at present . . .”

“But what d’ye think she really did mean?” said the unsatisfied Dick.

“I’m afeard I am not o’ much account in guessing, especially as I was not there when she said it, and seeing that your mother was the only ‘ooman I ever cam’ into such close quarters as that with.”

“And what did mother say to you when you asked her?” said Dick musingly.

“I don’t see that that will help ‘ee.”

“The principle is the same . . .” (85–86)

Despite Dick’s accusation that “all” Reuben has to offer is out-of-date generalizations, Reuben proceeds to selflessly empathize with his son (“I wish so too, wi’ all my heart”), to offer him practical advice about his plans (“I can’t see what the nation a young feller like you . . .”), to respond generously to Dick’s check on his advice (“Dang it, my sonny, thou’st got me there!”), and to provide a thoughtful and accurate reading of Fancy’s purposefully opaque response to Dick (“The meaning of that speech is . . . that the

meaning is meant to be rather hid at present”). While we might expect to find ourselves aligned with Dick, given his youth, higher level of education, and status as the hero, it is instead Reuben who attracts our attention and affection with his fatherly empathy and kindness. Indeed, even Dick overcomes his initial resistance toward Reuben (“Pooh, father!”) to insist on the value of his father’s advice and to position his father’s past experiences as relevant to his own dilemma (“the principle is the same”). That the more sophisticated Dick takes his father seriously encourages even the most cosmopolitan readers to do the same. Through scenes like this one, Reuben, who already loomed large as the most vocal member of the choir emerges from “the Hodge” not only, to use William’s terms, as “an individual bearer of personal experience,” but also a character “with whom [we] really do feel” (169). In so emerging, he cuts through the distance Hardy figures between the reader and novelistic world, a privileged status that the affectively-flat Dick strikingly does not share, notwithstanding his structural centrality to the plot.¹⁷²

Geoffrey Day likewise emerges as a character “with whom [we] really do feel” through his relationship with his daughter, though their relationship is considerably more fraught than the one between Dick and Reuben. While the Dewys experience closeness across difference, the interactions between Geoffrey and Fancy dramatize the painful, distancing effect intrafamilial difference can create. The distance between this educated daughter and her gamekeeper father — and its attendant anxieties — are on full display in an early scene in which Dick joins the Day family for lunch:

“Why don’t your stap-mother come down, Fancy?” said Geoffrey. “You’ll excuse her, Mister Dick, she’s a little queer sometimes . . . She d’belong to that class of womankind that become second wives: a rum class rather.”

“Indeed,” said Dick, with sympathy for an indefinite something.

“Yes; and ‘tis trying to a female, especially if you’ve been a first wife, as she hev . . . you see her first husband was a young man, who let her go too far; in fact, she used to kick up Bob’s-a-dying at the least thing in the world. And when I’d married her and found it out, I thought, thinks I, ‘Tis too late now to begin to cure ‘e; and so I let her bide. But she’s queer — very queer, at times!”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Yes: there; wives be such a provoking class o’ society, because though they be never right, they be never more than half wrong.”

¹⁷² While recent critics have reduced Reuben Dewy to comic relief (see Ingham 352), early reviews singled out his portrayal as a particular achievement of the novel. In fact, Horace Moule’s 1872 review remarkably identifies Reuben as *Greenwood’s* “principal character” (18).

Fancy seemed uneasy under the infliction of this household moralizing, which might tend to damage the airy-fairy nature that Dick, as maiden shrewdness told her, had accredited her with. Her dead silence impressed Geoffrey with the notion that something in his words did not agree with her educated ideas, and he changed the conversation. (76)

In this scene, we witness a breakdown in communication between Geoffrey and his daughter. We feel his desire to please her and his anxiety about embarrassing her, even in front of a suitor he deems unsuitable. Again, while we might expect to empathize with Fancy — the beautiful, educated heroine — in this moment, we turn against her in favor of her eager-to-please father, as she is the cause of his discomfort. Geoffrey's emotions though bleed through the affective boundary Hardy erects between reader and character, resonating even with those readers who might share Fancy's discomfort with his "household moralizing." This sense of feeling with Geoffrey, even at the expense of Fancy, takes on a more sustained form during Fancy's hunger strike, which she undertakes to convince Geoffrey to allow her to marry Dick. Here, even as we want the young people to get together, our sympathies again cannot lie fully with Fancy as we follow Geoffrey on his panicked journey around town to figure out what is going on with his child. As Geoffrey desperately questions Fancy's food vendors, we feel for his suffering. Through our experience with the panicked Geoffrey, we are made to understand the full costs of Fancy's methodology, even as Fancy herself, the heroine of her own love story, remains blissfully unaware.

In an influential reading of the novel, J. Hillis Miller argues that Fancy and Dick, with "their acute self-awareness and longing for some higher joy," deliberately separate themselves from their provincial families and community. Specifically, the lovers "detach themselves from immersion in a thick background of speech and live out their more dramatic lives in the context it provides" (107). In Miller's account, then, the dialect-speaking characters serve as mere "context" (or, to use Williams's term, "landscape") for the love story of the more educated, more feeling characters. Yet, Miller fails to account for ways in which Hardy brings forward the affective lives of Reuben and Geoffrey, especially given the relatively slight hold the lovers have on our affections — a hold that becomes even slighter once Fancy Day reveals the full extent of her social ambition and flightiness by accepting Parson Maybold. Indeed, in the final scene of the novel, Hardy once again courts, not sympathy, but ambivalence for his heroine. At her wedding to

Dick, Fancy, filled with “educated ideas,” seeks to police the speech of both of her father and her future father-in-law: “The propriety of every one was intense by reason of the influence of Fancy, who . . . had strictly charged her father and the tranter to carefully avoid saying ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ in their conversation, on the plea that those ancient words sounded so very humiliating to persons of newer taste” (155). Fancy’s notion of the “humiliating” nature of dialect puts a harsh light on her snobbery. In this final scene, Hardy chooses to have his narrator again call into question our commitment to his heroine in order to align us with Reuben and Geoffrey. Indeed, if we leave the novel with the sense Fancy does not deserve her happy ending, it perhaps has more to do with her slights to Reuben and Geoffrey, with whom we have really felt, than with her unconfessed lapse in fidelity to Dick. In his middle novels, Hardy again will take up this strategy of inviting ambivalence to keep us at a distance from those whose perspective and experiences we might be tempted to appropriate for ourselves.

Ethical Ambivalence in *The Woodlanders*

In Hardy’s middle novels, he keeps his readers at a distance, but this distance is figured differently so as to be no longer “externalizing.” As discussed above, in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the narrator and reader are figured on a separate discursive plane than that of the characters. We are largely kept out of the fray, which enables us to enjoy and even laugh at the characters from the perspective of narratorial distance. Notwithstanding the presence of these more intense moments of feeling with Reuben and Geoffrey, we are primarily aligned with the narrator himself than with any of the characters. In *The Woodlanders*, this distance between reader and character is enforced, not by the narrator, who now brings us close to the interior lives of the characters but instead by the characters themselves, who operate in ways designed to invite our ambivalence. That is, the narrator does not place us at a distance from these characters: the characters invite us to seek this distance for ourselves. Strikingly, this ambivalence is not figured as a series of oscillating scenes, some of which invite us to desire a closer relation with a character experience and

others that drive us away. Rather, Hardy manages this distance by oscillating between intimacy and detachment within the unit of the scene.

Strikingly, in Hardy's later novels, dialect and its speakers are increasingly marginalized. As Hardy relegates the consistent speakers of dialect to advancing the plot or commenting upon it, the possibility of individuation for rustic characters all but disappears. The rustics become, in Ingham's formulation, "not characters observed but part of the novel's machinery."¹⁷³ This marginalization of dialect thus solves the problem Hardy shared with Eliot, of "the break in the texture" of the novel caused by the difference between the characters and the narrator/readers in terms of language (Williams, *Country* 168). By not including dialect, that is, Hardy is more able to give an "internalized" view of his characters and the community. Yet, even as language difference disappears as a problem of form, it recurs thematically. That is, even as habitual dialect speakers are forced into the margins of the narrative, linguistic difference continues to inform the identities of, and power dynamics between, the characters in the novels that follow *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

The Woodlanders begins with the return of an educated young person to the community in which they were raised. This specific type of return recurs throughout Hardy's novels, perhaps most notably in (aptly-named) *The Return of the Native* (1878). In Raymond Williams's exploration of Hardy's affinity for this theme, he focuses on Hardy's treatment of the returner, the educated young person with whom Williams and (he assumes) we so deeply identify. For Williams, Hardy's "return" novels explore "what happens to us, really happens to us, as we try to mediate those contrasted [educated and customary] worlds . . . as we go back to our own places, our own families, and know what is meant, in the idea and the feeling by the return of the native (*Country* 198). While Williams attends beautifully to Hardy's nuanced portrayals of the emotional lives of the young returners navigating this dissonance, he gives short shrift to Hardy's

¹⁷³ As Alex Woloch reminds us, a character who serves as machinery may still be key to the workings of the novel (24–25). Further, as Rosemary Jann notes, "even when Hardy uses [dialect speakers] as devices to advance the plot, we can often find them motivated by aims that run counter to those of the . . . higher status characters" (415). Nevertheless, the individuation and subjectivation so prized by Williams are no longer available to the rustics.

equally compelling accounts of the struggles facing those to whom they have returned. Indeed, Hardy insists on this balance specifically through the affective means I have already mentioned: the strategic courting of readerly ambivalence that keeps us from falling into one perspective or from valuing the affective experiences of one character over another. Strikingly, Williams's account overlooks this ambivalence by quickly switching his focus from the returners of Hardy's middle novels — Clym Yeobright, Grace Melbury — to Jude Fawley of *Jude the Obscure* (1895), a substitution to which we will return in the following section on *Jude*. While Williams unpersuasively attempts to bring Jude into this lineage of native returners, I instead suggest we look, not forward in Hardy's trajectory, but backward. Notably, Hardy's middle novels develop a subject already present in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Though this early novel is generally not included in the "return of the native" tradition, Fancy Day is not merely arriving in Mellstock to take the school mistress position but returning to the community where she lived prior to entering into "training" and becoming filled with "educated ideas" (18, 155). That Fancy is the precursor to these returners should enliven us to the possibility that they are presented not as purely identificatory figures but rather as flawed, complex ones, whose reintegration into the community may well invite scorn as much as fellow feeling.

In *The Woodlanders*, Hardy presents us with the sylvan community of Little Hintock, where social relations are necessarily fluid because "intermarriages were of Hapsburgian frequency among the inhabitants" (23). In the inciting incident of the novel, Grace Melbury, the daughter of a timber-merchant, returns from school to her father's home. Like Fancy Day before her, she arrives home with "educated ideas" and catches the eye of multiple potential suitors, including her childhood sweetheart Giles Winterborne and a newly-arrived doctor, Fitzpiers. She also faces the burden of her father's social ambitions. In *The Woodlanders*, however, the source of Melbury's ambitions is fleshed out beyond those of

Geoffrey Day. Indeed, Melbury, a figure who is aligned with dialect,¹⁷⁴ described it in detail to his employees on the day of Grace's return:

"I heard you wondering why I've kept my daughter so long at boarding-school," resumed Mr. Melbury . . . "Hey?" he asked, with affected shrewdness. "But you did, you know. Well, now, though it is my own business more than anybody else's, I'll tell ye. When I was a boy, another boy — the pa'son's son — along with a lot of others, asked me 'Who dragged Whom round the walls of What?' and I said, 'Sam Barrett, who dragged his wife in a chair round the tower corner when she went to be churched.' They laughed at me with such torrents of scorn that I went home ashamed, and couldn't sleep for shame; and I cried that night till my pillow was wet: till at last I thought to myself there and then — 'They may laugh at me for my ignorance, but that was father's fault, and none o' my making, and I must bear it. But they shall never laugh at my children, if I have any: I'll starve first!' Thank God, I've been able to keep her at school without sacrifice; and her scholarship is such that she stayed on as governess for a time. Let 'em laugh now if they can: Mrs. Charmond herself is not better informed than my girl Grace." (27)

In this stunning speech, Melbury unburdens himself of what is clearly an emotional episode for him, even many years after its occurrence. The power this incident has over Melbury draws our attention to the pain inherent in this type of humiliation, which is rooted in the stigma of dialect and local knowledge. Melbury cannot overcome his shame, even as an adult who recognizes the error was "none o' [his] own making." In a similar moment in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard, another dialect-aligned figure, humiliates his stepdaughter, Elizabeth-Jane, for her occasional slippage into dialect. Elizabeth-Jane recognizes that she has been "treated roughly" by Henchard, yet, like Melbury, she cannot help but feel ashamed of her "defects" (144). Melbury's shame, like that of Elizabeth-Jane, is bound up in a view of dialect as lesser than standardized English and of communal knowledge as lesser than classical knowledge. Notably, young Melbury doesn't respond to the question, "Who dragged whom round the walls of what?"

¹⁷⁴ This scrubbing of dialect from the body of the narrative calls our attention to the dialect that remains — most notably, in the speech of Melbury. This alignment of Melbury with dialect figures meaningfully into our understanding of his character and of the relationship between him and his daughter, Grace. Though Melbury's speech is only slightly more touched with dialect than that of Marty South, his lapses into dialect are notable in a work where dialect in any form is so rare — especially as his dialect-inflected words seem to reverberate through the narrative. For instance, Melbury's assessment of "a rimy morning" is reinforced and escalated by Creedle's response: "I don't care who the man is, 'tis the rimiest morning we've had this fall" (27). In the same way, Melbury's accusation that Giles has brought them to "a regular randy-voo" is underlined by Creedle's subsequent assertion, "bachelor men shouldn't give randys" (65, 73). Indeed, the reader must refer back to Melbury's earlier use of "randy-voo" — recognizable as a dialect rendering of "rendezvous" — in order to grasp the meaning of Creedle's otherwise indecipherable "randys." Giles, in contrast, consistently refers to the gathering, even in his thoughts, as a "Christmas party" (58).

with an acknowledgement of ignorance. Rather, he answers confidently with a piece of village gossip. This “ignorance” that so shames Melbury is, we recognize, not ignorance at all. The parson’s son may believe the only correct response to the riddle is the one he learned in school: *Achilles* dragged *Hector* round the walls of *Troy*. And yet, the riddle is underdetermined: there is no reason that the blanks could not be correctly filled-in in another way, using other forms of knowledge. Through Melbury’s tale, we see, even as he does not, that dialect and local knowledge are viable alternatives, and not inferior ones, to standardized English and knowledge of the classics. Strikingly, while we feel with Melbury in his shame, which draws us in close, the scene also courts our ambivalence, encouraging us to maintain our distance. Why doesn’t Melbury provide his employees with more context for the riddle? Doesn’t he care that they might not understand? Is he, in other words, taking advantage of a captive audience to speak to himself aloud? Like his other listeners, we are unsure of how to account for the combination of “high indifference” and “humble emotion” in this complicated man — a man who, shortly after this speech, is determined to ignore the resumed conversation of his employees as “became a well-informed man” (28).¹⁷⁵ Through this courting of our ambivalence, Hardy figures Melbury both as a victim of class prejudice and as a perpetrator of it, as — like Henchard in *The Mayor* — a speaker of dialect but no defender of its value.

Melbury’s complicated relation to his own complicated class status greatly informs his relationship with his educated daughter, Grace. Melbury not only feels pride in Grace’s accomplishments but also claims them as his own through a patriarchal understanding of the father-daughter relationship. Even as he warns Giles that Grace may no longer find Hintock satisfactory, Melbury’s “tone evinced a certain exultation in the very sense of that inferiority he affected to deplore; for this advanced and refined being, was she not his own all the time?” (31). Melbury’s desire to control Grace and to appropriate her accomplishments strains their bond. For instance, we might turn to a breakdown of communication that

¹⁷⁵ While Melbury sees himself as existing on a separate plane from his employees, they do not share this view. For instance, the dialect-speaking Grammer Oliver explicitly connects Melbury’s emotional experience with her own: “I don’t think maister’s slept at all well to-night. He’s anxious about his daughter; and I know what this is, for I’ve cried bucketfuls for my own” (25).

occurs shortly after Grace's return, as the father and daughter are examining financial records. When Grace expresses surprise at the sum of money spent on her education, Melbury responds:

"I didn't want you to look at those — I merely meant to give you an idea of my investment transactions. But if you do cost as much as they, never mind. You'll yield a better return."

"Don't think of me like that," she begged, "a mere chattel."

"A what? Oh, a dictionary word. Well, as that's in your line, I don't forbid it, even if it tells against me," he said good-humoredly. (81)

Here, even as Grace and Melbury are both speaking in standardized English, we see that they are, in fact, speaking past one another. Melbury doesn't know the meaning of Grace's word, "chattel." Yet, rather than seeking out the meaning and engaging with her ideas, he revels in the pleasure that she knows such a word at all — a knowledge that, after all, he views as belonging to himself. Melbury is more interested in the appearance of her education — that she can use elevated language — than its content — that she has her own ideas about the terms of their relationship. The tension underlying this scene bubbles over in a subsequent argument, which takes place after Grace has married — on Melbury's advice — the feckless Fitzpiers instead of the loyal Giles. While the argument begins with a disagreement over whether Grace should confront her husband's lover, Felice Charmond, it quickly expands in scope to include Grace's education and Melbury's quest for upward mobility:

[Melbury:] "You ought to care. You have got into a very good position to start with. You have been well educated, well tended, and you have become the wife of a professional man of unusually good family. Surely you ought to make the best of your position."

[Grace:] "I don't see that I ought. I wish I had never got into it. I wish you had never, never thought of educating me. I wish I worked in the woods like Marty South. I hate genteel life, and I want to be no better than she."

"Why?" said her amazed father.

"Because cultivation has only brought me inconveniences and troubles. I say again, I wish you had never sent me to those fashionable schools you set your mind on. It all arose out of that, father. If I had stayed at home I should have married —" She closed up her mouth suddenly and was silent; and he saw that she was not far from crying.

Melbury was much grieved. "What, and would you like to have grown up as we be here in Hintock — knowing no more, and with no more chance of seeing good life than we have here?"

"Yes. I have never got any happiness outside Hintock that I know of, and I have suffered many a heartache at being sent away. Oh, the misery of those January days when I had got back to school, and left you all here in the wood so happy. I used to wonder why I had to bear it. And I was always a little despised by the other girls at school, because they knew where I came from, and that my parents were not in so good a station as theirs."

Her poor father was much hurt at what he thought her ingratitude and intractability. He had admitted to himself bitterly enough that he should have let young hearts have their way, or rather

should have helped on her affection for Winterborne, and given her to him according to his original plan; but he was not prepared for her depreciation of those attainments whose completion had been a labor of years, and a severe tax upon his purse. (200–201)

Here, Grace strikes her father where he is most vulnerable, calling into question the very accomplishments so central to his sense of self. We recognize Melbury was wrong to exert control over his daughter in the past and is wrong to seek to do so here. Indeed, even as he admits his error in pressuring Grace to marry Fitzpiers instead of Giles, he rapidly revises his position from “he should have let young hearts have their way” to the rather less sympathetic “rather [he] should have helped on her affection for Winterborne, and given her to him.” And yet, we cannot help but to feel his pain as he realizes not only that Grace does not value an education that has cost him dearly but also that her education is not the triumph against humiliation (“Let ‘em laugh now if they can”) that he had imagined it to be. Within this scene, we are thus both asked to feel deeply with Melbury and to regard how he marshals those feelings from a critical distance.

And Melbury is not the only party to this argument about whom we are invited to feel deeply ambivalent. Grace is certainly right to repent the snobbery that left her vulnerable to her father’s persuasion regarding her suitors; and yet, Grace repeats her error in the moment of its renunciation. She overcorrects, erasing the meaningful advantages her education and family position have afforded her. We, who have spent significant time with orphaned and financially-precarious Marty — a dialect-aligned figure like Melbury — know that Grace is wrong to say that she would be happier if she “worked in the woods like Marty South.” Grace may have come to “hate genteel life, and want to be no better than she,” but to be no socially better than Marty and to be faced with the harsh realities of Marty’s life are different propositions. Grace, unlike Marty, does not know what it is like to work through the night, to work until her hands blister. Like Angel Clare, Grace Melbury remains blissfully ignorant of the material realities of financially precarious working women like Marty. If Melbury embodies the harmful traditions of the rural community through his view of his daughter as his to dispose of at will, Grace embodies the indifference of the educated elite to the lived realities of the working class — a flaw highlighted by her subsequent

disgust for the public house to which Giles takes her. The tension present in this relationship between Melbury and Grace — two simultaneously flawed and attractive figures — persists throughout, and seemingly extends beyond, the novel. Indeed, this tension informs even their final represented interaction, in which Melbury, leaving his daughter to reconcile with Fitzpiers, tells her, “‘You are your own mistress,’ in tones which seemed to assert otherwise” (327).

In representing this ambivalent relationship between two compromised characters, Hardy teases out the nuances of the return of the native. He carefully represents the ways in which everyone involved must grapple with the differences — in viewpoints, in education, in speech — between themselves and those they love. Writing a dialect-aligned character as a protagonist enables Hardy to develop a more emotionally complex relationship across linguistic difference than we see in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, even as the actual dialect represented is quite limited. Our view into Melbury’s anxieties as a figure living on the linguistic and financial border¹⁷⁶ provides an emotional weight to his position, even as the novel invites us to be critical of his possessiveness. Hardy leaves us with an impression of what these types of struggles look like where the players are flawed and the stakes are high — stakes that are informed by the distance between the dialect-associated Melbury and his daughter who may or may not have been “educated into something quite different” (162). This careful management of distance through characterological ambivalence enables Hardy to explore complicated questions with care. For Hardy, the story of the return of the native belongs both to the educated returner and to those equally complex and flawed people once left behind — both to the speaker of standardized English and to the speaker of dialect.

To return to our initial discussion of Hardy’s dual (and, at times, dueling) projects, this reliance on ambivalence and the distance it creates enables readers to take these characters as individuals rather than as members (or escapees) from the Hodge. Indeed, the novel invites us to see these characters not as *like*

¹⁷⁶ While Melbury is an employer, he is nonetheless in a much less stable position than the truly wealthy of the community, like Felice Charmond. Though Melbury’s business is currently profitable, Hardy makes clear that he does not have much of a safety net due to his investment in Grace’s education.

us but instead as complex and complicated individuals with concerns that in some ways map onto our own and in some ways diverge from them. For instance, this distance allows Hardy to attend to the embodied affinity that Melbury, Marty South, and Giles Winterborne share for the woods through their work in them — an aliveness to the land that is inaccessible both to Grace and to the vast majority of Hardy’s readers. While *The Woodlanders* might seem to sideline the commitment to dialect Hardy demonstrates in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, it nonetheless opens up opportunities for Hardy to represent these rural working characters as fully individuated novelistic subjects without collapsing their experiences into those of his middle-class readers. Interestingly, this emphasis on disintegrating “the Hodge” does not entail a turn away from attending to the material circumstances that constrain these characters, as we have already mentioned in terms of the realities of Marty South’s working life, the realities to which Grace fails to attend. Further, the inability of Grace to obtain a divorce from Fitzpiers due, in part, to her class status and gender,¹⁷⁷ not only keeps her apart from Giles but indirectly leads to Giles’s untimely death. Nonetheless, there is certainly none of the emotional fire to which Hardy attends in reporting the readerly response to *Tess*, fire that burns even stronger in the reactions to *Jude the Obscure*. *The Woodlanders* thus presents with a more ethical figuration of distance, which does not other the rural workers in the way of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, nor does it allow for the middle-class reader to take up or overwrite these characterological experiences as their own. However, the marginalization of this text within Hardy’s novelistic oeuvre both by his contemporaries and by modern readers perhaps suggests a limit to this maintenance of distance, which denies the reader the pleasure of identification and fails to convey the same sense of political urgency associated with his late work.

¹⁷⁷ Under the “new law” (The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857) on which Melbury pins his hopes for Grace’s freedom from Fitzpiers, a husband could divorce his wife for adultery through the newly-created Probate and Divorce Court, but a wife could only divorce her husband in such a court on the grounds of adultery compounded by another matrimonial offense, such as cruelty or desertion for over two years. Otherwise, she would have to obtain a private act of parliament, an exorbitantly expensive procedure unavailable to a woman like Grace.

The Compromises of *Jude the Obscure*

Biographer Michael Millgate suggests that Hardy, emboldened by his “sufficiently large and sufficiently stable” income coming from royalties and the commercial success of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, “seems to have determined from the first that in *Jude*, his final novel, he would say his say without hesitation or compromise, denounce, once and for all, those denials of educational and sexual justice, of simple humanity, that he saw as widely present and everywhere implicit in the British class system, and give expression at last to feelings which had been simmering in his memory and his imagination” (*Thomas Hardy*, 346). This sense of *Jude* as a novel “without compromise” abounds throughout the critical literature. I suggest that such accounts define compromise too narrowly. That is, in writing *Jude*, Hardy does not strike a compromise with members of the literary establishment or with his middle-class readers. Indeed, both middle-class readers and the literary establishment perhaps would have preferred a novel with a less overwhelming bleakness and/or fewer child murders. Rather, the compromise he strikes is with himself. Specifically, in order for Hardy to write the most identificatory version of *Jude*, he compromises his earlier project, with its bold defenses of dialect (and its speakers) and its commitment to disintegrating the Hodge into numerous beings of “infinite difference.”

I have argued that *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *The Woodlanders* comprise two stages of an ethico-political project undertaken by Hardy to represent working-class people of rural communities as subjects within the country novel. In particular, these early and middle works advance, to differing degrees, a defense of dialect as a meaningful, spirited language and a disintegration of “the Hodge” stereotype that prioritizes the portrayal of rural working people as complex and rural communities as internally diverse. In the middle novels, we also see Hardy move toward an increased attendance on the material conditions and social conventions that constrain the lives of people in these communities, including inequities in the divorce laws (through Giles and Grace) and financial precarity due to low and unequal wages and a lack of a social safety net (through Marty South). We have also seen, through our introductory engagement with *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, that, in his late period, Hardy switches the emphasis from Hodge-

disintegration/dialect defense to bringing home to readers the often stark and shifting realities of rural working people's lives. In executing this switch, he invites readerly connection to an unprecedented degree in *Tess*, where readers are asked to feel with Tess in the vein of a (better) lover. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy includes no Hodge-disintegrating interlude nor any of the sensory moments of suspension we find in *Tess*. Instead, Hardy doubles-down on this change in emphasis by inviting readers to identify with Jude Fawley, whose hold over readers is figured seemingly without regard for its effects on Hardy's earlier commitments. By inviting readers to share Jude's affective experiences, Hardy also invites them to inhabit his material conditions, including the ways in which his life and prospects are constrained by the unjust system that restricts access to higher education to the wealthy, as well as the restrictive social norms around marriage and sexuality. Indeed, *Jude* was considered to be so effective in cultivating identification with those who, like Jude (and like Hardy), were denied a university education due to "pecuniary means" that Hardy's readers maintained that "when Ruskin College [at Oxford] was subsequently founded [in 1899], it should have been called the College of *Jude the Obscure*" (Hardy, "Postscript" 467-68). I argue that in *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy turns away from ambivalence and toward identification to offer us an iteration of the social problem novel: one where the protagonist serves as a sort of class-action named plaintiff, a person who represents the similarly-situated in the most appealing manner possible.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ This class-based structure resembles the class-based vision of liberal politics that I have argued that Eliot advances through Lydgate on behalf of Dorothea in *Middlemarch*. Yet, Eliot importantly decouples readers from Dorothea to figure them, not as (or not only as) members of the class Dorotheas but as those responsible for preparing the world for the flourishing of future Dorotheas. Thus, in Eliot's vision, we are figured as those who must engage in politics for ourselves. Hardy, however, does not decouple us from Jude at the end of the novel — the boundary between us and Jude remains blurred up to and beyond his tragic death. In this way, we are not (re)positioned as those who must engage in politics to eradicate injustice but are invited to still think of ourselves as the victim of the injustice, whether or not this is true of our positionality in real life. This sense of victimhood is particularly attractive for readers, but I would suggest that it is also risky in that it invites the kind of overwriting we see in Raymond Williams's account (discussed below). Indeed, this risk may exceed what we find in Williams. It may encourage even those of us who are situated similarly to the insensitive Head of Biblioll College to indulge in the solace of victimhood. Because of this insistence on identification, *Jude*, I suggest, positions its protagonist more like a named plaintiff in a class action than a class representative in a vision of politics that centers around the legislative, which puts less representative emphasis on any single class member. In this formation, the reader is invited to serve both as plaintiff and as judge, though what they should do once they reach a judgment is less clearly laid out than in Eliot.

This identificatory turn, I suggest, represents a fundamental shift away from the Hodge-disintegration project of *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *The Woodlanders* and thus requires both different narrative strategies — specifically, more reactionary ones — and new compromises. In order to represent working-class men kept out of university, Jude must be — like any effective named plaintiff — both representative and affectively compelling. In other words, we must see ourselves in Jude to take his pain personally. To create this effect, Hardy hoards readerly empathy for Jude, limiting the extent to which we are permitted to feel with, or even for, any other character. Hardy keeps us laser-focused on Jude’s victimization, which occurs at the hands of his aunt, his childhood employer, his first wife Arabella, the dean at Christminster, and even the love-of-his-life, Sue Brideshead. To ensure the intensity of this identification with his protagonist, Hardy uses every tool at his disposal, including those that operate by catering to his readers’ prejudices against working-class people and their manner of speaking. Leaving behind his commitment to dialect and its speakers, Hardy now weaponizes dialect to give stakes to Jude’s injury by associating dialect and its speakers with inexplicable violence, cruelty, and coarseness. That is, Jude’s denial of a Christminster education is felt so deeply by the reader specifically because of the apparent unsuitability of his lower-class community, with its crude dialect speakers and constraining traditions. Indeed, Hardy’s treatment of dialect speakers renders Jude’s would-be community so unseemly that Hardy effectively disarms those readers, who, like the Head of Biblioll College, would be otherwise inclined to “advise” Jude that his interests would be best served by “remaining in [his] own sphere” (117).

Perhaps taking his cue from *Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the Floss*, Hardy begins his novel with a scene of childhood suffering. Notably, in figuring this scene, Hardy sets out a troubling dichotomy between standardized speech (good) and dialect (bad). In the novel’s opening scene, Schoolmaster Phillotson’s gentle, standardized farewell — “I sha’n’t forget you, Jude . . . Be a good boy, remember; and be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can”— is juxtaposed with the “sudden outcry” of Jude’s dialect-speaking aunt — “Bring on that water, will ye, you idle young harlican!” (10-11). The oppressive nature of dialect speakers is confirmed through the eleven-year-old boy’s subsequent interaction with his employer,

Farmer Troutham. Jude, who has been hired to scare the birds away from Troutham's crops, decides to feed them instead. As with Jane Eyre, Jude finds himself in trouble because of an enabling identification. While Jane identifies with the Roman subjects mistreated by Nero, Jude identifies with the birds he is meant to scare: "He sounded the clacker till his arm ached, and at length his heart grew sympathetic with the birds' thwarted desires. They seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them. Why should he frighten them away?" (15). Strikingly, the aspects of the birds that appeal to Jude in identifying with them — their "thwarted desires" and their victimization by the world at large — are the very same ones through which Hardy figures Jude's own appeal. In this scene, Jude's standardized English, "Poor little dears! You *shall* have some dinner — you shall" is interrupted by a violent beating at the hands of Troutham, who mocks Jude's speech before shifting into dialect himself: "'Eat my dear birdies' indeed! I'll tickle your breeches, and see if you say 'Eat my dear birdies' again in a hurry!' And you've been idling at the schoolmaster's too, instead of coming here, ha'n't ye, hey?" (15). These acts of cruelty directed toward a child by the adults entrusted with his care are as incomprehensible to us as they are to the sensitive young Jude, who, as Chapman notes, "speaks as unrealistically as Oliver [Twist]" (Chapman 22). We know little about the motivations of these dialect-speaking adults and even less about their personal experiences. This association of dialect with inexplicable violence and standardized speech with kindness, of course, is troubled later in the novel, with the cold rejection Jude receives from the dean at Christminster and the careless cruelty of the undergraduates he encounters. Nonetheless, its early figuration capitalizes on biases that readers may hold against non-standardized speakers and allows them to reverberate throughout the novel as a whole.

Even beyond this early suffering, Jude is marked out for our identification for the breadth and intensity of his desires. While Tess (heartbreakingly) dreams of being a schoolteacher, Jude's dreams are more ambitious, encompassing and extending beyond Latin and Greek and Christminster. In perhaps the exemplary description of the identificatory hero, Hardy specifies that "his dreams were as gigantic as his surroundings were small" (22). It is the shape and intensity of these desires that so draws Raymond

Williams to Jude and that lead him to misread the return of the native plot as the story of the returner alone. Specifically, in identifying the “return of the native” as the animating “crisis” of Hardy’s novels, Williams turns not to *The Woodlanders* or even to *The Return of the Native*, but, instead to Hardy’s “latest and deepest novel.” Though the plot of *Jude* centers around the rejection of Jude from Christminster, Williams begins by encouraging us to think of ourselves as a Jude who was “let in” to the university “as Jude was not” (198). That is, Williams asks us to imagine ourselves as in the position not of Jude but of himself. With this “offer” of education, however, “comes another idea: that the world of everyday work and of ordinary families is inferior, distant; that now we know this world of the mind we can have no respect and of course no affection for that other and still familiar world” (198). “If we retain an affection” for our home, Williams tells us, Hardy’s fictionalized Oxford — “Christminster — has a name for it: nostalgia.” And, “if we retain respect, Christminster has another name: politics or even more dreaded ‘sociology’” (198). Williams uses this hypothetical to attend to Hardy’s interest in the “classical experience of upward mobility,” which includes linguistic code-switching between dialect and standardized English and feeling torn between one’s affection for and one’s frustration with one’s more traditional, more conservative family members. Noting that *The Woodlanders* and *The Return of the Native* share these concerns, Williams concludes that “we need not be tempted, as so often and so significantly in recent criticism, to detach *Jude the Obscure* as a quite separate kind of novel” (201).

Yet, the concerns that Williams identifies are not the concerns of *Jude the Obscure*. That is, these “classic experiences of upward mobility” are present for Clym Yeobright, for Grace Melbury, and even for Fancy Day. Yet, they play no role in *Jude*, in which Jude has neither access to the kind of educational opportunities necessary to create this distance between himself and his family nor a family from whom to feel distanced. That is, even if we accept Williams’s counterfactual — that Jude is let into Christminster — the character Jude would still not be caught between two worlds, nor conflicted about his ambition and his affection for his home community. On the contrary, Jude, who spends his childhood being subjected to seemingly inexplicable verbal abuse from the adults in his family and neighborhood, has no basis for

affection for the customary way of life and its participants. Indeed, Jude's rejection from Christminster has such high stakes specifically because his own would-be community has already failed to accommodate him. Hardy may represent "what happens to us . . . as we try to mediate those contrasted worlds of customary and educated life" in his "return of the native" novels, but this is certainly not his topic in *Jude* (198). For a critic so attuned to nuance and specificity in Hardy, here, Williams tellingly seems to overwrite the history of Jude with his own. That is, the blurring of the affective boundary between reader and Jude Fawley leads Williams to rewrite the novel in terms of his own. In other words, Williams overlooks the actual returner novels not because they do not fit into his argument — indeed, they are much more appropriate examples of the concerns he identifies — but because he does not identify with their protagonists. Yet, this identificatory overwriting is at least as much a fault of Hardy as Williams. In his figuration of Jude, Hardy collapses the distance between Jude and the reader. He encourages us to think of our suffering, and of our own thwarted desires, and even to assign them to Jude where they do not really fit.

We leave the early part of the novel with a sense of the desiring, attractive Jude as oppressed and mistreated in ways similar to the ways in which Tess was oppressed and mistreated prior to her arrival at the D'Urbervilles. If Hardy affirmatively figures Jude's identificatory pull through these compelling portraits both of his victimhood and his desires, he also plays defense to an extent that we have not yet observed in this study. For instance, we have discussed the distorting effect identification can have on the characters surrounding the identificatory character, especially in relation to *The Mill on the Floss*. Yet, only in *Jane Eyre* have we observed an author treating that distortion not as an unintended effect of identification but instead as an active means through which to figure identification itself. In his defensive clearing of the field, Hardy, I suggest, goes perhaps even further than Brontë. Specifically, he first utilizes his readers (presumed) prejudice against working people who speak in dialect to highlight Jude's specialness and his victimization. He then uses those instances of victimization to set out the (later-undermined) scheme discussed earlier, where dialect is associated with the bad and standard speech with the good. He finally

uses that schema to actively undercut our affective connections to non-Jude characters at key moments in the text.

After these early scenes with Jude's aunt and abusive employer, Hardy reiterates the association of dialect with violence at various points throughout the novel. Sue and Jude are repeatedly injured by the dialect speakers they encounter — from the churchwarden who tells the folktale that loses them their jobs at the church in Aldbrickham to the landlord who insists Sue and the children vacate his lodgings in Christminster. Indeed, the link between dialect and violence is figured most memorably through the novel's most shocking act of violence, perpetrated by its most surprising dialect speaker. Little Father Time, Jude's eldest son, spends most of his childhood abroad, is raised by non-dialect-speaking adults, attends school, and enters the novel speaking as formally as young Jude (or *Oliver Twist*). "I suppose they didn't know I was coming," an eight-year-old Time calmly informs the ticket collector who asks why his friends failed to meet him at the station (277). When the collector asks, "Who is your friends?" the boy demurs, "Mother didn't wish me to say" (277). Time's overly-formal speech upon his arrival makes his subsequent turn toward "the Wessex-tongue" all the more shocking (311). Three years after the conversation at the station, Time speaks again, this time to tell his birthmother, "You be the woman I thought wer my mother for a bit, till I found you wasn't" (311). This striking change in Time's speech, unaccounted for by his upbringing or schooling, occurs mere chapters before he kills his younger half-siblings and dies by suicide. Indeed, we may read Time's haunting final note — "Done because we are too menny" — as a reminder both of his youth and of his affinity for dialect (336).¹⁷⁹ Through Time's turn toward dialect, the novel not only reinforces the correlation between violence and non-standardized speech, but also encourages us to view Time not as an individual child whose death has a claim on our sympathy independent from its effect on

¹⁷⁹ In its non-standardized spelling and grammar, Time's note recalls the self-authored will of the dialect-aligned Michael Henchard in *Mayor*: "That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me. & that I be not bury'd in consecrated ground. & that no sexton be asked to toll the bell. & that nobody is wished to see my dead body. & that no murners walk behind me at my funeral. & that no flours be planted on my grave, & that no man remember me" (*Mayor* 367).

Jude, but as one of the “menny” disposable dialect-speaking characters of the novel.¹⁸⁰ In this manner, the novel ruthlessly redirects our attention to the “true victim” of the tragedy: Jude, who suffers both the loss of his children and subsequent abandonment by the grief-stricken Sue (who is then herself troublingly excised from the novel’s conclusion).

Hardy thus figures this association of dialect with violence and then deploys it in order to limit our sympathy for other characters at key moments in the text. Phillotson, for instance, begins the novel as a hero to Jude. Strikingly, Jude desires closeness with his schoolmaster to such an extent that its expression reads like/as romantic desire: “‘You,’ he said, addressing the breeze caressingly ‘were in Christminster city between one and two hours ago, floating along the streets, pulling round the weather-cocks, touching Mr. Phillotson’s face, being breathed by him; and now you are here, breathed by me — you, the very same’” (23). Yet, as we know, identificatory connection demands exclusivity, especially in moments where the character is in conflict with those around him. Thus, for Jude to continue to hold such identificatory power over us after he begins his affair with Phillotson’s wife, Sue, Hardy must ensure Phillotson ceases to be a heroic figure. The war on Phillotson takes place on a number of fronts. First, Phillotson, upon encountering Jude again, immediately breaks his promise from the opening scene by failing to remember him. Further, while Phillotson’s appearance was previously unspecified, he is now identified as a figure of repulsion, and not just for his wife: Aunt Drusilla informs Sue, “There be certain men here and there that no woman of any niceness can stomach. I should have said he was one. I don’t say so now, since you must ha’ known better than I — but that’s what I should have said!” (190-91). Most strikingly, Phillotson is transformed into a figure unworthy of Sue through his slippage into non-standardized speech. Following Sue’s first kiss with Jude, she returns to her husband who, we learn for the first time, many pages into their relationship, pronounces her name “Soo” instead of “Sue” (220). This phonetic rendering is presented

¹⁸⁰ Hardy also declines to differentiate the younger children. He does not provide the names of the boy and girl killed by Time. Of Jude and Sue’s youngest child, born prematurely following the funeral for the other children, we chillingly learn only “that it, like the others, was a corpse” (341).

twice in his speech in this conversation — a key moment of transition, leading up to Sue’s desertion of Phillotson — and then abandoned. Indeed, once Phillotson has agreed to let Sue live with Jude — once, that is, we no longer need him to appear unsuitable — her name in his mouth is no longer represented phonetically: “Soo” becomes “Sue” once more. This type of deviation from standardized speech recurs throughout this key period of transition. For instance, when Phillotson meets his friend Gillingham, the two slip into dialect while discussing Phillotson’s troubles with Sue. Gillingham talks of “lumpering” up the hill to visit Phillotson, while Phillotson recalls “toling” Sue out for walks when she was his much-younger employee (229). The narrator explains, “though well-trained and even proficient masters, they occasionally used a dialect-word of their boyhood to each other in private” (229). Critics have tended toward a dialect-positive reading of this scene. Dennis Taylor writes that Gillingham’s use of “lumpering” reflects a “sophisticated attempt to diminish [Phillotson’s] intrusiveness,” while Ingham argues that the astonishing emergence of dialect in the scene is “accounted for” by boyhood habit combined with Phillotson’s emotional state (Taylor 181; Ingham 358). Specifically, Ingham reads this scene as a demonstration of both dialect’s “‘delicate ability’ to express the deepest feelings” and Hardy’s “acceptance of dialect as an alternative form of speech to standard English” (Ingham 358, 359). Yet, these explanations seem unable to account for what Ingham herself recognizes as the “disproportionate impact” of this use of dialect figured “through its very unexpectedness” (Ingham 358). Why dialect at this moment? If it is rooted in Phillotson’s emotional state, then why is it Gillingham who initiates it? And why does it come at a moment where Phillotson himself is admitting, for the first time, having knowingly taken “advantage of [Sue’s] inexperience” and of his position as her supervisor (229)? The timing of this turn to dialect suggests that, rather than presenting dialect in a positive light, Hardy is instead utilizing the earlier figured associations of it with violence and cruelty to temporarily lessen Phillotson’s readerly appeal in order to divert our affection to the proper couple. Phillotson must allow Sue to leave for the plot to proceed, but Hardy can’t risk the reader sympathizing with Phillotson’s plight, nor lionizing his selflessness. Thus, Hardy eliminates these risks by introducing Phillotson’s unattractiveness, by reminding us of his predatory

behavior toward Sue, and, ultimately, by lowering him through dialect. We agree with Phillotson's decision to let Sue leave, yet this scene suggests that it is nonetheless an outrage both that Phillotson is in the position of determining Sue's fate and that Gillingham, who will later call Sue "a little hussy," is allowed to play any part in the decision (252). The subtlety of these attacks on Phillotson is deliberate. In (re)forming our conception of Phillotson, Hardy must strike a delicate balance: we must both understand Phillotson to be undeserving of Sue and, at the same time, recognize him as another victim of class-based educational access. Hardy must strike this balance, so that we do not confuse Phillotson for (or conflate him with) either the true hero, Jude, or the true villains, the elitist university and the close-minded working-class community.

This narrative clearing of the field, effected here and elsewhere through Hardy's deployment of dialect, leaves the reader wholly focused on the plight of Jude. Yet, it also has a strange effect on his characterization. If some readers leave the novel with an urge to write a harshly-worded letter to their university dean regarding the plight of the working man, others are left with the strange sensation that, in the words of Marta Figlerowicz, Jude appears "to have been given too much narrative space" (3). In *Flat Protagonists*, Figlerowicz argues that, contrary to Alex Woloch's theory of character — in which "characters are always implicitly richer and more complicated than a novel has room to show us" — there are some protagonists who are just not "consistently interesting" enough to meet the demands of "plentiful narrative attention" (13). Figlerowicz generously reads Hardy as deliberately creating this mismatch between Jude's appeal and the amount of narrative space he is afforded in order to provide commentary on the difficulties of social rebellion. Yet, if we read *Jude* as an attempt to promote the democratization of education by any means necessary, including the (mis)treatment of dialect and its speakers, Jude's "flatness" reads differently. Specifically, to advance an airtight case, Hardy must write a character who is identificatory and representative. Through his early work, Hardy makes the argument that his characters are deserving of our attention specifically because of their complexity. Here, however, Hardy cannot risk our ambivalence and thus cannot risk making Jude particularly interesting or exceptional, nor can he afford to let us turn away

from him, even for a moment. Strikingly, in this way, Jude does not function as a fully individuated subject in the way of Hardy's earlier protagonists. Hardy's unwillingness to allow the reader space to feel sympathy for characters other than Jude also gives the novel a strangely coercive quality. This coerciveness is perhaps what Lesley Goodman is picking up on when she selects *Jude* as the "paradigmatic case" for her theory of "rebellious identification" — a readerly experience in which the reader illicitly feels sympathy for a character against the design of the author (164). In Goodman's example, a reader of Jude would engage in rebellious identification by aligning her sympathies with Jude's coarse first wife, Arabella, instead of with the long-suffering Jude. Yet, for a reader to rebel, she must first be constrained by the author, a possibility that only exists in a project like *Jude the Obscure*, where the author insists upon a specific identificatory response on the part of the reader. For instance, it is difficult to imagine what rebellious identification would look like for readers of *The Woodlanders*, in which the author encourages the reader to feel ambivalent about nearly all of the characters. Unlike in his earlier work, in *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy leaves no space for readerly ambivalence or for the complexities of speakers of dialect or even of Jude himself.

Thus, even as Hardy works to achieve the social change he so desires through recounting the tragic tale of Jude, he does so by trading his formerly robust commitment to dialect and to the representation of the diversity of rural communities for a singular commitment to his hero. Hardy advances a compelling case for making the university accessible beyond the moneyed class and for a loosening of the social conventions around marriage and sexuality, yet his compromised portrayal of dialect speakers represents not just a turn away from earlier commitments — a shift from one set of projects to another — but an undermining of his previous efforts to disintegrate the Hodge into beings of "infinite difference." While Hardy spends the majority of his novelistic career committed to undoing the harmful stereotypes associated with the "Hodge" through nuanced portrayals of rural dialect speakers, he ends it by reinforcing them in order to insist on an intense and exclusive identification with his flattened hero in *Jude the Obscure*.

CODA: IDENTIFICATORY FUTURES

What ties together the authors of this study is thus not a specific approach to courting or resisting identification but rather a shared self-reflexivity toward identification itself. This self-reflexivity, as we have seen in this study, takes different forms. For Jane Austen, this self-reflexivity manifests in experimental play with novelistic form. Through her experiments with identificatory structure, Austen achieves new and more ambitious ways of articulating her materialist, proto-feminist project. Austen's realization of an identificatory structure particularly suited to this project in *Sense and Sensibility* and her perfection of it in *Pride and Prejudice* together comprise not the end of her engagements with identification but merely the moment at which bolder experimentation begins. For Charlotte Brontë, this self-reflexivity takes the form first of over-correction and then of careful recalibration. We have attended to the traces of Brontë's anxiety over the identificatory seductions and compromises of *Jane Eyre* and her attempt first to leave identification behind and then to figure it anew. That is, in *Villette*, Brontë seeks to work beyond the limits of identification as figured in *Jane Eyre*. If Austen searches for new ways into her ethico-political project through shifts in identificatory structure, Brontë instead pursues a new identificatory structure in order to avoid further compromising her ethico-political commitments. Yet, in achieving this less-compromised figuration of identification, Brontë cannot simply erase her past missteps; as we have noted, the ingenuities of *Villette* have been and continue to be overshadowed by the success of the more straightforwardly pleasurable and more ethically problematic *Jane Eyre*. This inability to escape the success of the past leaves Brontë as the uneasy head of the "fiction of special pleading" tradition (Williams, *English* 73).

After these first two chapters, we turn to a pair of figures — George Eliot and Thomas Hardy — whose illustrious novelistic careers both typified and, ultimately, marked the close of the Victorian period. Indeed, Henry James once declared that *Middlemarch* "sets a limit . . . to the development of the old-fashioned English novel," while modernists often claim *Jude the Obscure* as the first modernist novel (359). Strikingly, Eliot and Hardy both begin their careers with narratives that center rural communities written

from the perspective of distanced narrators. In taking up this structure, both authors keep their middle-class readers at an affective distance from the rural working-class people the novels represent. As they move into their middle novels, both authors abandon this maintenance of narratorial distance, yet they both also remain skeptical of inviting identificatory relation. Eliot enters into identificatory writing only by accident. In shifting her narratorial structure and her subject matter after the revelation of her identity, she inadvertently figures Maggie Tulliver as a heroine so identificatory that she pulls readers away from the other characters and even from the endorsed viewpoint of the narrator. Anxious to avoid this distorting effect of identification on her ethical project of courting diffuse fellow feeling across difference, Eliot backs away from identification in her middle works. Yet, in *Middlemarch*, Eliot returns to the risks of identification with an improved sense of how to manage the affective response of her readers. Specifically, she sets out a split novelistic structure that allows her to take advantage of the pleasures and political potency of identificatory connection without abandoning her earlier ethical project. In other words, in her late work, Eliot returns to identification but does not allow her readers to indulge in that relation in ways that would be distorting to her ethical vision. Hardy, as compared to Eliot, stays away from identification for much longer. That is, in his middle works, he continues to privilege distance but he begins to invite that distance not through narratorial structure but through character-to-character interactions that court readerly ambivalence. Indeed, it is Hardy more than any other author in this study who fully recognizes the power of ambivalence to forestall identificatory connection. He uses this insight to insist that readers recognize these characters as complex and as different both from one another and from the reader. Yet, Hardy abandons this ethical insistence on distance in order to privilege affective connection in his last two novels. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* thus mark a change in Hardy's focus from his ethical Hodge-disintegration project to his political case for mitigating the injustices of rural working life under the accelerations of capitalism and for class-based reforms of higher education. In switching his focus, Hardy disconcertingly turns his back on his earlier commitment to distance and complexity to lean into the at times distorting power of identificatory connection.

The rich, complex career trajectories of these four authors have been simplified and flattened both by modernist narratives that associate nineteenth-century realist novels with embarrassingly uncritical calls for identification and by institutional pressures that incentivize those who teach literature to privilege the identificatory novels of these authors over those novels more insistent on distance and historical specificity. Notably, the pressure on teachers of literature to make their classes marketable, including by assigning works that students find accessible and by focusing less on historical periods and more on readerly pleasure seem only to be increasing. In particular, as English Departments face increasingly severe austerity measures that leave the vast majority of those who teach with heavier workloads and less job security, there are fewer opportunities for these educators to attend to this experimentation and complexity in their teaching or to engage with it in their research. Under such pressure, it is little wonder that the ambivalence and experimentation of these novelists has been overlooked. Indeed, we might consider this critical writing over of the dynamism, self-reflexivity, and innovation of these authors' novelistic trajectories to be the ultimate act of identificatory overwriting.

It is thus particularly apt that we end this study with *Jude the Obscure*, a work that more than any other in this study invites identificatory overwriting. Unlike Eliot and Brontë, Hardy ends his novelistic trajectory with his most universally identificatory novel. Notably, he undertakes none of Austen's measures to ensure this dive into identification does not jar with his ethical commitments, nor does he attempt, in the manner of Brontë or Eliot, to pursue ways of otherwise mitigating the distorting effects of identification. Rather, as we have seen, he allows identification to dominate over nuance and specificity, including the specificity of Jude himself. Remarkably, *Jude the Obscure* has been singled out by literary critics as a work of (proto-) modernism. For instance, in *Reading the Modern British and Irish Novel 1890–1930*, Daniel R. Schwartz claims that “in many ways, but especially in the complexity of its psychology, *Jude the Obscure* is the first modern English novel” (39). In Samir Elbarbary's recent account, *Jude the Obscure* is not merely modern but rather “a precursor to post-modern writing” (202). This common characterization of *Jude* as a work that specifically looks toward the future of the novel instead of one that reflects or engages

with the norms of its own time should strike us as odd when we consider the novel's investment in identificatory logic. That is, in its heavy reliance on readerly identification, *Jude the Obscure* would seem to be the paradigmatic Victorian novel based on the criteria of modernist critics like L.C. Knights. What could be more embarrassing, more middlebrow, more *Victorian* than the ways in which this novel encourages "an emotional identification of the reader with hero or heroine" (Knights 25)? The classification of *Jude* as particularly modern further suggests that the identificatory distinction Knights draws between the Victorian novel and the modernist one cannot be the correct one. That is, whatever is left behind in the transition from the Victorian to the modernist (engaging third person narrators? overstuffed plots?) does not include identification, which persists throughout modernism and into our current moment.

Indeed, this false relegation of identification to the Victorian period is harmful to our understanding not only of the work that novelists were performing in the nineteenth century but also of the identificatory experiments of novelists working in other periods. That is, the perceptions of readerly identification as embarrassingly simple and as contained within the nineteenth century limit our ability to draw connections between novels within the nineteenth century and those beyond it. For instance, if we write off *Mansfield Park* as a conservative outlier in Austen's oeuvre, we will miss its relation to George Eliot's innovation in *Daniel Deronda*. That is, in *Mansfield Park*, Austen innovatively decouples narrative attention from affective appeal. In so experimenting, she sets the stage for George Eliot to separate affective appeal from novelistic endorsement. Specifically, Eliot imbues the affectively-flat Daniel with the "reflective dialogism" she seeks to champion and concentrates the novel's identificatory power in the more ethically-compromised, yet irresistible, Gwendolen Harleth (Anderson, *Powers* 121). Moreover, if we were to cordon off these nineteenth century works from those of later periods, we might overlook the ways in which they lay the groundwork for further identificatory experimentation in novels like Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) or Zoë Heller's *Notes on a Scandal* (2003), in which the otherwise abhorrent protagonist/narrator is endowed with a troubling affective appeal.

Attending to readerly identification in its specificity allows us not only to see continuities across these supposed breaks but also to have different conversations about the works themselves. For instance, while a work like *Lolita* is often discussed primarily in terms of the “unreliability” of its first-person narrator, I would argue that this term does not get at what is so striking about the novel’s particular affective structure. In other words, what is so compelling about the novel is not merely that the narrator is unreliable in Wayne Booth’s sense — that is, that Humbert diverges in some way from Nabokov’s implied author — but also that we are, at least to some extent, invited to identify with this non-endorsed figure nonetheless (158). That is, this invitation to identify is issued not in order to promote an ethical sense of sustained fellow feeling across difference but rather to create a sense of complicity on the part of the reader in Humbert’s misdeeds. In this way, *Lolita*’s deployment of identification differs from the deployments of the novels in this study. Critics have, of course, found ways to discuss this discomfiting identificatory appeal — we might think, for instance, of James Phelan’s distinction between estranging and bonding unreliability. Nonetheless, it seems that this critical conversation would benefit from the understanding that this kind of identificatory experimentation does not originate after the nineteenth century. Rather, it builds upon the earlier novelistic experiments of figures like Austen and Eliot. It is not, in other words, that the modernists were newly skeptical of identification and that Nabokov later gave that skepticism a new form. Rather, both modernists and contemporary writers were taking part in an ongoing novelistic tradition of skepticism toward affective connection and of formal experimentation around its invitation — a tradition that was already well underway in the nineteenth century.

Moreover, treating identification as a remnant of the nineteenth century discourages us from taking a critical stance toward identification in our own moment. That is, what has dissipated is not aesthetic identification but our skepticism of it. We lack, I suggest, the self-reflexivity modeled by Austen, Brontë, Eliot, and Hardy toward the possibilities and limits of an ethics and a politics rooted in and advanced through a fantasy of sameness. Indeed, I would suggest that, if anything, uncritical identification is more common in the narratives of this particular moment in history than in those of the nineteenth

century. Indeed, identification seems to offer precisely the absorptive immediacy that Anna Kornbluh argues is characteristic of the dominant style not of the nineteenth century but of this moment of “Too Late Capitalism” (see Kornbluh, *Immediacy*). What these nineteenth-century novels have to offer in such a moment is not merely the specific contents of their ethico-political critiques but also a way of thinking through the possibilities and limits of an ethics and a politics rooted in and advanced through an illusion of sameness. In other words, these novels both theorize and model a reflexivity toward the affective power of identification and its costs. They also encourage us to experiment in order to achieve ways of connecting that are better, less harmful, and more supportive of flourishing. By rejecting the relegation of concerns about identification to the nineteenth century, we can better understand not only the diverse projects of nineteenth century novels but also the ethical and political concerns of the current moment and the possible role for the aesthetic in their advancement.

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