

Novel Feelings: Emotion, Duration, and the Form of the Eighteenth-Century British Novel

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ABSTRACT

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One of the first features of the eighteenth-century novel to strike the modern reader is its sheer length, and yet critics have argued that these novels prioritize emotional experiences that are essentially fleeting. “Novel Feelings” corrects this imbalance by attending to ongoing emotional experiences like suspense, familiarization, frustration, and hope—both as they are represented *in* novels and as they characterize readerly response *to* novels. In so doing, I demonstrate the centrality of such protracted emotional experiences to debates about the ethics of feeling in eighteenth-century Britain. Scholarship on the sentimental novel and the literature of sensibility tends to locate the ethical work of novel feeling in short, self-contained depictions of a character’s sympathetic response to another’s suffering. Such readings often rely on texts like Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* or Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*, short works composed out of even shorter, often disjointed scenes in which the focal characters encounter and respond emotionally to the distresses of others. And yet, these fragmentary productions which deliberately deemphasize narrative connection between scenes do not provide ideal models for approaching the complex large-scale plotting of many eighteenth-century novels. Through my attention to larger-scale formal techniques for provoking and sustaining feeling throughout the duration of reading a lengthy novel, I demonstrate how writers from Samuel Richardson to Jane Austen taught readers to linger with feelings, particularly ones that might initially produce pain or discomfort. By challenging readers to remain within a feeling that refuses to be over, these novels demand a vision of ethical action that would be similarly

lasting—moving beyond the comfortable closure of a judgment passed or a sympathetic tear shed to imagine a continuous, open-ended attention to others.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
1. “Labouring in Suspense”: Paying Attention to Providence in Richardson’s <i>Clarissa</i>	27
2. “Leave, if Possible, <i>Myself</i> ”: Familiarity and the Limits of Sensibility in <i>Tristram Shandy</i>	70
3. Ladies in Waiting: Dependence and Delay in Frances Burney’s <i>Cecilia</i>	117
4. Learning to Live with Hope in Jane Austen’s <i>Persuasion</i>	169
Bibliography.....	215

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Introduction

The Feeling of Novel-Reading

“Length will be naturally expected...” —Samuel Richardson, Preface to *Clarissa*¹

“You accuse Richardson of being long-drawn-out! You must have forgotten how much trouble, care and activity it takes to accomplish the smallest undertaking, to see a lawsuit through, to arrange a marriage, to bring about a reconciliation. Think what you will of these details. They will always be interesting to me if they are true to life, if they bring passions to light and reveal people’s characters.” —Denis Diderot²

Throughout his *Eloge de Richardson* (1762), Denis Diderot attributes the intense emotional effects of Samuel Richardson’s novels to the interplay between specific elements of Richardson’s style and their deployment in a particular temporal pattern. Defending Richardson’s notorious prolixity, Diderot emphasizes Richardson’s “details” (what he later calls “this multiplicity of little things”), and claims that they are revelatory, not merely because they are the stuff of realism (what makes the novel “true to life”), but because their accumulation can help simulate the “trouble, care, and activity” of navigating lengthy and emotionally-fraught processes in readers’ lives: lawsuits, marriages, reconciliations.³ Diderot goes on to explain that the gradual build-up of detail which “bring[s] passions to light and reveal[s] people’s characters” also stokes the reader’s “impatient expectations,” “prepar[ing] our minds for the powerful effects made by great events.”⁴ Thus, for Diderot, the “powerful effects” of Richardson’s prose are carefully orchestrated by formal features which may seem insignificant taken alone but play into

¹ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin, 1985), 35.

² Denis Diderot, in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey Bremner (New York: Penguin, 1994), 86.

³ Diderot, 87. Diderot is also interested in the way that the novel can condense the experience of real life: “In the space of a few hours I had been through a host of situations which the longest life can scarcely provide in its whole course...I felt I had gained in experience” (Diderot 83).

⁴ Diderot, 87.

a lengthy and ultimately powerful sequence. After extolling the virtues of an apparently minor letter late in *Clarissa*, Diderot defends his choice by acknowledging that “to experience this delight you need to start at the beginning and read through to this point.”⁵ Diderot’s insistence that no letter, no detail can produce the appropriate emotional effect on its own suggests that at least where feelings are concerned, the whole may be greater than—or at least different from—the sum of its parts. Despite the temptation to consider Richardson’s novels as comprised of small pieces that accumulate over time, to really understand the emotional impact of *Clarissa*, Diderot proposes that one must see the whole novel as a contained emotional unit, whose smaller parts can only function appropriately as part of the larger experience.

Critical accounts of the eighteenth-century novel regularly attend to sudden and intense emotional experiences, explaining how novelists develop techniques to affect the kinds of novel-readers who “read for sensation (in order to be thrilled or to have their fibers shaken).”⁶ However, these accounts often lack a clear sense of the lengthy processes that prepare the way for—or follow in the wake of—such overwhelming emotions. The result is a paradox: the feelings critics privilege are relatively brief, but the novels that contain them are long. “Novel Feelings” works to correct this imbalance by attending to ongoing emotional experiences, both as they are represented *in* novels and as they are thought to characterize readerly response *to* novels. In particular, I suggest that valuable information about emotional response to eighteenth-century novels might be located not only in the primary source evidence left behind by actual readers, but also in the formal features of novels themselves, which are designed to orchestrate particular

⁵ Diderot, 94.

⁶ Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 117.

responses. Through my attention to larger-scale formal techniques for provoking and sustaining feeling throughout the time spent reading a lengthy novel, I aim to demonstrate how writers from Samuel Richardson to Jane Austen taught readers to linger with feelings, particularly ones that might initially produce pain or discomfort. By challenging readers to remain within a feeling that refuses to dissipate as expected, these novelists demand a vision of ethical action that would be similarly lasting—moving beyond the comfortable closure of a judgment passed or a sympathetic tear shed to imagine a continuous, open-ended attention to others.

Lasting feelings are certainly not the only emotions experienced by novel-readers. Intense but relatively short-lived sensations such as pity, fear, anger, or surprise certainly play a role in the novel's ethical project, and have been central to accounts of how fictions work on their audiences since Aristotle's *Poetics*.⁷ But this long history of critical attention to sudden overwhelming feelings has obscured the less flashy, but no less significant register of longer-lasting feelings that my dissertation seeks to foreground. I focus on a small sampling of “novel feelings” whose relationship to duration is particularly fraught. Suspense, familiarity, frustration, and hope name affective conditions fundamentally linked to—and primarily felt in response to—particular unfoldings of events in time. Rather than appear suddenly, only to discharge or exhaust themselves, they possess duration: they are characterized by their tendency to grow, develop, and change over time; they fall into protracted patterns or rhythms of intensity rather than spending themselves all at once; they ebb and flow, linger and persist; though they may reach peaks of intensity, they are not solely defined by them. Amidst a welter of eighteenth-century and contemporary terms for emotional experience, ranging from “passions” and “affections” to

⁷ On the brevity of aesthetic emotion, see Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) 6-7.

“sentiments” and “sensibility,” I make use of the term “feeling” because its contemporary connotations best evoke the range and complexity of mental and emotional processes that interest me in eighteenth-century novels.⁸ In its capaciousness, “feeling” captures something like the psychological complexity of “passions” as well as the fluctuation between the physical, mental, and emotional registers characteristic of “sentiment,” “sensation,” and their derivatives. Finally, it is not without value to a study of lasting emotions that the noun “feeling” evokes the present participle—the verbal form for signaling the kind of ongoingness that the group of feelings in which I’m interested fundamentally share.

While lasting feelings constitute one of the unique representational capacities of the novel as a literary form, they also present a methodological challenge to literary criticism. Fleeting feelings conveniently submit to the critical protocol of close-reading, which focuses at the small scale of the moment, but extended feelings escape the notice of a novel criticism overly dependent on close-reading—and a bird’s eye view of novelistic “form” as a static unity likewise neglects the temporality of feeling and reading that I hope to capture. In what follows, I endeavor to foreground feelings that develop and persist over time by contextualizing the work of local close-readings with an attention to larger-scale issues of order and pacing, ranging from questions of serial publication and shifts in focalization to the rhythmic alternation between

⁸ As Aleksandra Hultquist has recently noted, “feeling was *not separate* from action, movement, cognition, or rationality for an eighteenth-century mind. Eighteenth-century subjects speak of affections, appetites, feelings, passions, sensibility, and sentiment. All of these words had positive connotations as well as negative ones, and none were understood to be distinct from rationality or reason—they were reciprocally constructed concepts throughout the long eighteenth century.” Hultquist, “New Directions in History of Emotion and Affect Theory in Eighteenth-Century Studies,” *Literature Compass* 13, no. 12 (2016): 764, emphasis original. With the rise of affect theory, scholars regularly attempt to distinguish between affects (pre-individual, pre-cognitive, and capable of “circulating” more freely between individuals) and emotions (individualized and culturally-situated, a mode of registering and personalizing an affect). My own investment in the cultural situation of the feelings named by writers and readers of eighteenth-century novels, and the temporal development of “novel feelings,” is more in keeping with scholarship in the history of emotions; see Hultquist 763-4. For detailed overview of work in history of emotions, with some discussion of its relation to affect theory, see Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

scene and summary. This approach requires that I, like Diderot, consider the “multiplicity of little things” from a vantage point that emphasizes, not the details themselves, but the larger patterns or sequences into which they have been orchestrated. It is my hope, in doing so, to capture something of the dynamic process of reading—and being moved by—a novel.

The duration of reading and the problem of novel form

“The form of a novel—and how often a critic uses that expression too—is something that none of us, perhaps, has ever really contemplated.” —Percy Lubbock⁹

“Books have to be read (worse luck, for it takes a long time)” —E. M. Forster¹⁰

The novel’s length has proved a consistent challenge to critics seeking an account of novelistic form. This is because current critical methodologies tend to conceive of a text’s form as “that [which] can be made apprehensible all at once,” thus fundamentally opposing form and duration.¹¹ Recent work in novel studies has demonstrated the mismatch between implicitly spatial accounts of aesthetic form and the temporality of novelistic form, situating this not merely as “a *critical* problem, a question of inadequate descriptive vocabulary” but also as “a *historical* problem,” inhering in the methodological history of Anglo-American literary criticism.¹² Thus, Catherine Gallagher argues that most twentieth-century criticism adheres either

⁹ Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957; first ed. 1921), 3.

¹⁰ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1954; first ed. 1927), 13.

¹¹ Catherine Gallagher, “Formalism and Time,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2000): 230.

¹² Lorri G. Nandrea, *Misfit Forms: Paths Not Taken by the British Novel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015) 114. Nicholas Dames likewise argues that this tendency results from a deliberate “forgetting” of earlier (Victorian) modes of novel criticism which *did* attend to the experience of novel-reading and thus to issues of duration; this forgetting is set in motion by Henry James and codified by Percy Lubbock. See Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. 25-37.

to a small-scale formalism focused on style at the sentence level or to a large-scale formalism of structure which identifies basic patterns organizing a lengthy text; both methods “attest to our need to make the narrative object as short as possible.”¹³ The result is a contemporary “formalism of ephemerality,” particularly visible in the modernist novel but not culminating with it, in which “form is conceived as fleeting, exceptional, and interruptive of the literary work.”¹⁴ Mary Poovey traces a complementary trajectory in critics’ treatment of texts as organic wholes; she argues that the trope of the organic whole simultaneously helped to professionalize literary criticism and to relegate “the temporal experience of reading” to the purview of “amateur” readers.¹⁵ Poovey begins by noting that eighteenth-century critics like Samuel Johnson (and, we might add, Diderot) attended to texts’ formal features in order “to emphasize the effects that such features had on readers,” but successive generations of critics left the dynamic relationship between form and the reader to fall by the wayside.¹⁶

Percy Lubbock’s *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) plays a significant role in the story of how novel criticism sidestepped the problem of duration in order to focus instead on the question of form.¹⁷ Lubbock is best remembered, by Poovey among others, for his insistence on critical detachment as the necessary precondition to an understanding of novel form, and for his privileging of point of view as an ideally unifying characteristic of a novelist’s method.¹⁸ But the

¹³ Gallagher, 230.

¹⁴ Gallagher, 247-8, 247.

¹⁵ Mary Poovey, “The Model System of Contemporary Literary Criticism,” *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 3 (2001): 431.

¹⁶ Poovey, 418.

¹⁷ Lubbock is central to Poovey’s argument and to Dames’s; given his interest in thinking about the fleeting nature of literary form, he seems like a glaring omission from Gallagher’s.

¹⁸ See Poovey 428-31.

opening chapters of *The Craft of Fiction*, even as they set up Lubbock's bid for novel form examined and described by a detached critic, acknowledge the practical impossibility of disaggregating "the book itself" from "the fragments of a book" encountered in a given moment of reading or stored up piecemeal in a critic's memory.¹⁹ Like it or not, when we read, the book is "revealed little by little, page by page, and...withdrawn as fast as it is revealed"—a far cry from the "whole, complete and perfect," in which something like form might be seen.²⁰ The disinterested pose toward a novel which Lubbock recommends and practices throughout the remainder of *The Craft of Fiction* is clearly intended to diminish this problem of the novel's form, but Lubbock does not claim that it can overcome it: novel form, for him and for many of the novel critics in the century following him, exists paradoxically *beyond* the moment-by-moment experience of reading that nonetheless appears to actualize it.

This split has resulted in a post-Lubbock novel criticism that sees a novel's form and the dynamics of novel-reading as fundamentally at odds. Peter Brooks, for example, claims in his preface to *Reading for the Plot* that "the temporal dynamics that shape narratives in our reading of them" are anathema to the tools of "pure formalism," leading him to prefer the dynamic account of "force" he finds in psychoanalysis.²¹ Poovey critiques the process through which "textual effects that could be attributed to the reading experience, like 'conflict,' 'tension,' and 'resolution,' simply become formal features of a text's 'structure,' as if the dynamics of a text are formal features, not relationships established through the temporal process of reading."²² And

¹⁹ Lubbock, 3.

²⁰ Lubbock, 3.

²¹ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) xiii-xiv.

²² Poovey, 433n45.

yet, surely it is possible that the larger dynamic we call “tension” results from a combination of elements, some of which may be formal in nature. In my third chapter, for example, I demonstrate how narrative tension is created in Frances Burney’s *Cecilia* (1782), not only by the introduction of a heroine who is an unmarried heiress, but also by an early shift in focalization which reveals another character’s sinister plans for Cecilia’s future. The dynamic movement of point of view here grounds “tension” in a formal feature even as it interacts with thematic elements and reader response.

It is possible that Brooks’ and Poovey’s reluctance to see the “dynamics” they trace as related to “form” results, at least partially, from the difficulty in defining which elements of a novel get to count as “formal.” For my own purposes, I find it useful to conceive of “form” as a broad category whose “multiplicity of little things” interact and combine to work across different scales of the text; I am particularly interested in thinking about larger-scale notions of form that relate to narrative construction, proportion, and pacing; modes of narration and narrative focalization; and the tempo both of narrative prose and its occasional serial publication. Such an expansive use of the term is at odds with the relatively minor role that form is thought to play in accounts of the novel in general, and the eighteenth-century novel in particular. Lubbock himself suggests the possibility that “form, design, composition, have a rather different bearing upon the art of fiction than any they may have elsewhere.”²³ Ian Watt asserts that “the poverty of the novel’s formal conventions would seem to be the price it must pay for its realism.”²⁴ And Frances Ferguson has provocatively claimed that “free indirect style is the novel’s one and only

²³ Lubbock, 10.

²⁴ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 13.

formal contribution to literature”—if not the only formal element in the novel, then certainly unique to it.²⁵ Yet this contention, in particular, seems directly related to Lubbock’s continued influence in novel criticism. Not only does it reduce form to point of view, the work of free indirect discourse—what D. A. Miller describes as the “virtuoso performance, against all odds, of the narration’s persistence in detachment from the character, no matter how intimate the one becomes with the other”—is uncannily similar to the dance of differentiation Lubbock imagines being carried out “*at ostentatiously close quarters*” between the critical and uncritical elements of an individual’s experience of reading.²⁶ Free indirect discourse certainly has a role to play in accounts of novel form, but its elevation occasionally prevents us from paying attention to other significant features of omniscient narration, or other formal features of the novel generally.

Writing what we now call novels in a moment when the identity of “the novel” itself was an open question, eighteenth-century authors experimented with a diverse and ad hoc set of formal practices; the sheer variety and apparent chaos of formal features in many early novels challenges any conception of form as unity or whole. It is no coincidence that recent work on novel form which attends more closely to duration has grown out of deep engagement with eighteenth-century novels.²⁷ The fact that “eighteenth-century prose fictions are resistant to what

²⁵ Frances Ferguson, “Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2000): 159.

²⁶ D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or, the Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 59-60, emphasis original.

²⁷ Borrowing Mary Poovey’s use of “model system” in the context of literary criticism, we might say that the nineteenth-century European novel is the “model system” for narrative theory and novel criticism, and that this combined with a belief in form as organic unity has impoverished our ability to see form in earlier novels (see Poovey 409-11). For recent work that combines attention to eighteenth-century novels with attention to duration, see Nandrea; Deidre Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) esp. chap. 4, “Going Steady: Canons’ Clockwork,” 147-94; recent articles by Amit Yahav, in particular “Sonorous Duration: *Tristram Shandy* and the Temporality of Novels,” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 128, no. 4 (2013): 872-87, 1043; and Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and*

we *usually* think of as formal analysis” makes them well-suited for nudging us beyond our usual, overly-restrictive understanding of novel form.²⁸ Taking our cue from those eighteenth-century novelists who explicitly connected the duration of novel-reading to the novel’s formal features, we might attempt to conceive of form itself, not as static, but dynamic—a potential that can be located at points in the text itself, but one that is actualized and energized in different ways by different readers. In order to do so, “we must speak not of one principle of formal narrative organization but of many”—or, to revive a possibility that Lubbock details and rejects, we must develop a criticism that treats the novel “not as a single form,” but rather as “a moving stream of impressions...a process, a passage of experience,” grounded in a text which any reader could pick up, but inherently dynamic and multiple in its eventual performances.²⁹

Fleeting feelings and the limits of sensibility

“All our finer feelings are in a manner momentary, and no art can carry them beyond a certain point, either in intenseness or duration.” —Anna Laetitia Barbauld³⁰

“Oh! I feel an Emotion even while I am relating this...” —Parson Tickletext, from Henry Fielding’s *Shamela*³¹

English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), esp. chap. 7, “Defoe and Burney: The Unmaking of the Diurnal in the Making of the Novel,” 223-68.

²⁸ John Richetti, “Form and Formalism in the British Eighteenth-Century Novel,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 24, no. 2 (2011): 158; emphasis added.

²⁹ Richetti, 160; Lubbock, 14-15.

³⁰ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, “An Enquiry Into Those Kinds of Distress Which Excite Agreeable Sensations,” in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Elizabeth Kraft and William McCarthy (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2002), 204-5.

³¹ Henry Fielding, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. SHAMELA ANDREWS*, in *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies and rev. ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1999), 311.

A similar difficulty with thinking in terms of duration has undoubtedly impacted discussions of emotion in eighteenth century fiction, skewing them toward sudden intensities of feeling. Anger and rage elicit fear and surprise; the potentially lasting feeling of suffering is diffused by sympathy that produces a cathartic experience of pity; the homelier comforts of the beautiful give way to the grand sweeping scenes of momentary sublimity. Whatever the feeling, there is a sense that its expression is intense but self-exhausting—"in a manner momentary," as Barbauld would have it. Intense and often disorderly feeling is encoded in our critical designations for major subgenres of eighteenth-century fiction: amatory fiction explores the heights of erotic passion; the literature of sensibility evokes pity and compassion; the gothic novel deals in horror and terror.³² From the beginning, such intense feelings left the novel open to critique by those wary of its potentially overpowering effects. Novelists and favorable critics insisted (with varying degrees of sincerity) that novels only roused the passions "in the service of virtue," but as Fielding's Parson Tickletext suggests, such feelings could always be put to an illicit use by readers more interested in titillation than edification.³³ Fielding's send-up of *Pamela*'s enthusiastic readers exaggerates Richardson's own to-the-moment technique, suggesting that such a style reduces emotions to discrete and successive experiences ("I feel an

³² Stephen Ahern has recently traced these subgenres' shared preoccupation with emotional excess back to a shared inheritance from romance tropes, and argues that an understanding of continuities between amatory, sentimental, and gothic fiction can help critics understand the inherent ambivalence toward benevolent feeling in sentimental novels. See Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities: Romantic Excess and the Genealogy of the Novel, 1680-1810* (New York: AMS Press, 2007).

³³ John Hawkesworth, *The Adventurer* no. 16 (Saturday, December 30, 1752) in *Novel and Romance 1700-1800: A Documentary Record*, ed. Ioan Williams (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970) 197. The passage is worth quoting in full: "Precept gains only the cold approbation of reason, and compels an assent which judgment frequently yields with reluctance, even when delay is impossible; but by example the passions are roused; we approve, we emulate, and we honour or love; we detest, we despise, and we condemn, as fit objects are successively held up to the mind: the affections are, as it were, drawn out into the field: they learn their exercise in a mock fight, and are trained for the service of virtue" (Hawkesworth, 196-7). Here, the quickness of feeling is precisely what recommends it in moments when the "reluctance" of judgment might generate "delay." Diderot's *Eloge* uses similar language to explain the utility of strong feeling for Richardson's readers: see Diderot 82-83.

emotion...I feel another Emotion”) and consequently may not be able to serve Richardson’s lofty goals; what is at stake in the *Pamela* controversy is not just what novels ought to make you feel, but *how*, formally, they ought to go about it.³⁴ While the ethical potential of novel feeling has played a particularly central role in discussions of sentimental literature from Richardson onward, I want to suggest that current critical accounts which consider the ethics of feeling primarily in light of sensibility—and critical accounts of sensibility which consider it primarily as the province of brief but intense feelings—reduce the range of emotions that might play a significant role in readers’ ethical development. This becomes apparent in a brief consideration of David Hume and Adam Smith’s moral philosophy; most often used to support accounts of sentimental feeling and the fleeting nature of sympathy, even these theories additionally offer ways of thinking about emotional experience as having duration.

Critics concur in using sensibility to name a broad cultural phenomenon beginning roughly in the 1740s and running through to the end of the century that linked moral rectitude with intense and theoretically unaffected public displays of feeling.³⁵ Sensibility, like the moral sense philosophy which provides it with its theoretical grounding, assumes a link between emotional delicacy and ethical sensitivity: the stronger one’s emotional reaction to distress, the more sensitive one must be to wrongs perpetrated against others.³⁶ However, even this

³⁴ Fielding, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. SHAMELA ANDREWS*, in *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, 311.

³⁵ The classic overview of sensibility, which discusses the challenges in defining the movement’s central terms, is Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986). Other particularly illuminating definitions of sensibility as a movement, particularly as it impacts the novel, can be found in Van Sant, esp. 1-15, and Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) esp. 5-48.

³⁶ For a recent and cogent overview of the relationship between sensibility and moral sense philosophy, see Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 32-41.

preliminary definition of sensibility begins to reveal the fault lines within what was far from being a monolithic culture. The high premium placed upon emotional display might encourage feigned sensitivity just as often as it rewarded real sensitivity, and indeed, many critics have read sensibility as an “emotional regime” more invested in policing the public performance of emotion than in ensuring that one’s feelings were genuinely moved.³⁷ Critical work on sensibility has latched onto this internal ambivalence in order to question the relationship between emotional experience and ethics in British culture. For all that sensibility promises an ethical way of living in the world, this “cult of feeling” distributes feeling unequally, reinscribing rather than overturning existing power relations between men and women, Britons and non-Britons, the wealthy and the impoverished, the free and the enslaved. Thus, for example, Lynn Festa emphasizes the ways in which sentimentality allows relatively privileged men and women in Europe to sympathize with individual sufferers of colonial violence (including slavery) without having to entirely oppose colonial projects.³⁸ Furthermore, numerous critics have narrated the rise of sensibility as a process that paradoxically devalues feminine feeling by making the expression of sentiment a masculine purview and recasting women as sentimental victims at best, dangerously emotional creatures at worst.³⁹ In this context, Ildiko Csengei’s desire “to explore

³⁷ On the concept of emotional regimes, see William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³⁸ Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), esp. 1-66. Other recent accounts in this vein have focused in particular on the work of sentimental rhetoric in antislavery discourse: see, for example, Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760-1807* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

³⁹ The classic works in this vein include G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s—Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Julie K. Ellison, *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

the factors that make it possible for self-interest, cruelty and violence to become constitutive aspects of the ostensibly benevolent, philanthropist ideology of eighteenth-century sensibility” both sets her recent monograph apart, and marks it out as an obvious culmination of critical interest in the dark side of sentimental feeling.⁴⁰

Such critical accounts regularly turn to David Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) and Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) to support their claims about the uneven distribution of fellow-feeling—often in ways that reduce the duration of individual sympathetic experiences until they appear practically instantaneous. However, even these touchstone theories of sentimental feeling articulate the significance of the weaker, less intense emotions Hume calls the “calm passions.”⁴¹ Furthermore, both authors treat the experience of feeling in narrative terms, tracing the trajectories of individual feelings as they gain or lose in intensity, and even insisting that sympathy itself—and the paradoxical relief from strong feelings that it can offer to one suffering—depends on the observer and sufferer jointly constructing an explanation for the sufferer’s feeling which takes the form of a narrative. This focus on a wide range of emotional intensities, and the narrative structure of emotional experiences seem worth reemphasizing as a starting point for a consideration of longer-lasting feelings and the role they play in the novel’s ethical program.

Hume’s description of his imperceptible transition from “philosophical melancholy and delirium” to sociable “amusement” concludes Volume I of the *Treatise* and sets the stage for his

⁴⁰ Csengei, 1. Other recent work has attempted to push back against or to resituate the dominance of sensibility and sentimental feeling in the study of eighteenth-century literature: see for example Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) and Wendy Anne Lee, “The Scandal of Insensibility; or, the Bartleby Problem,” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 130, no. 5 (2015): 1405-19, 1552.

⁴¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1984), 328.

theory of emotional moderation in volume II, “Of the Passions.” While Hume begins by dividing all feelings into “calm” and “violent” passions, he immediately admits that this distinction is “far from being exact,” and continues to offer two examples where feelings gradually change in intensity.⁴² The emotional experience provoked by poetry or music ought to be calm, but may “rise to the greatest height”; in contrast, the violent feelings “properly call’d passions, may decay into so soft an emotion, as to become, in a manner, imperceptible.”⁴³ Acknowledging the possible “rise” and “decay” of individual feelings, Hume not only emphasizes a spectrum of emotional intensities, but also draws attention to the ways in which the same emotion might be felt with varying intensity over time—highlighting the fundamentally durational element of emotional experience.⁴⁴ Feelings for Hume are not conditions defined by presence or absence, but *processes* defined by relative intensity that can shift and develop over the course of time, and as such they require at least minimally narrative description in order to be comprehended in full.

In Smith, the defusing of violent or intense passions by way of sympathy provides another model for viewing feelings as changing in intensity, and thus requiring narrative description. The experience of intense emotion actually provides a limit case for Smithian sympathy: although a sufferer of intense feeling desires “that relief which nothing can afford him but the entire concord of the affections of the spectators with his own,” the very nature of

⁴² Hume, 328.

⁴³ Hume, 328.

⁴⁴ For a detailed account of the relationship of calm and violent passions to reason, which considers what it means for a calm passion to “become, in a manner, imperceptible,” see Katharina Paxman, “Imperceptible Impressions and Disorder in the Soul: A Characterization of the Distinction between Calm and Violent Passions in Hume,” *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 13, no. 3 (2015): 265-78.

sympathy ensures that the spectator's feelings will always be "weaker in degree."⁴⁵ This means that the "entire concord" which the sufferer desires is only possible if the sufferer "[lowers] his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him," and "flatten[s]...the sharpness of its natural tone, in order to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him."⁴⁶ The sufferer's capacity to moderate his own feelings is thus integral to sympathy, and the relief of sympathetic concord may be partially due to the internal work of moderating suffering. Sympathy does not only help to create narratives about the dampening of emotion in others; for Smith, true sympathy cannot exist at all without the spectator's understanding of what has caused another's feeling, which allows him to judge the propriety of the other's response. Thus, one of the first steps in achieving sympathy is to imagine what has caused the other man's feeling, and the next step is actually to ask him to tell a story about "what has befallen" him.⁴⁷

Seen from this angle, both Hume and Smith offer ways to think about the lengthier processes of modulated feeling, even as they depict sympathetic reactions that may at times appear instantaneous. Thus, they provide an instructive reminder that even the relatively sudden feelings of pity and compassion were not thought to happen entirely in a vacuum. This understanding of feeling can shed light in particular on the relationship between the apparently sudden experience of fellow-feeling and the lengthier processes that provoke and sustain it. Laurence Sterne, for example, insists in a sermon on the Good Samaritan that although the Samaritan's response may seem "so instantaneous an effect, that you would think the will was

⁴⁵ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982) 22, 9.

⁴⁶ Smith, 22.

⁴⁷ Smith, 11. Csengei discusses the narrative element of Smith's sympathetic theory: see Csengei, 50-62.

scarce concerned,” in fact, this appearance stems from the fact that a truly compassionate soul is so invested in another person in the moment of pity that “she does not attend to her own operations, or take leisure to examine the principles upon which she acts.” Thus, we must not think of the Samaritan’s response as “mechanical”; instead, “there was a settled principle of humanity and goodness which operated within him, and influenced not only the first impulse of kindness, but the continuation of it throughout the rest of so engaging a behaviour.”⁴⁸

Somewhere between sudden feelings and settled principles, the lengthier emotional experiences both described and provoked by eighteenth-century novels offer an under-theorized but central starting point for considering the relationship between feeling, ethics, and novel form.

Keeping time with novel feelings

By recentering the durational experience of reading and feeling with novels, my project aims to address key questions in eighteenth-century criticism—What is the ethical value of feeling, and how does the novel mobilize emotion to larger ends?—from a new angle. Criticism can rely on established critical protocols such as close reading to trace the formal invocation of sudden feelings at the level of the scene; this is particularly true of fragmentary texts of sensibility such as Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* (1768) or Henry Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling* (1771), in which, Ann Jessie Van Sant suggests, “whatever coherence or continuity exists occurs in the reader’s experience, not in narrative form” and “the episode becomes the height of narrative achievement.”⁴⁹ However, to assume that the fundamental unit of emotional experience

⁴⁸ Laurence Sterne, *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (London: printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-Mall, 1760), I.iii.68-9.

⁴⁹ Van Sant, 117. Mackenzie wrote that he wanted *The Man of Feeling* to be “as different from the Entanglement of a Novel as can be,” suggesting his deliberate avoidance of the complexity of structure associated with lengthier novels (qtd. in Van Sant, 118).

in even lengthy novels is the episode, inset story, scene, moment, or tableau is to lose sight of the way in which lengthier novels foreground the necessity of contextualizing the emotions elicited by a given scene as part of a larger whole. In the summaries that link up scenes, in the events that are preparatory to a sentimental moment or in the slackened intensity of feeling's aftermath, the novel form allows less urgent feelings to emerge. While a focus on extractable moments undergirds important recent work on practices of quotation, reprinting, and anthologizing in the eighteenth century and beyond, it fails to capture the experiential duration of novel-reading and the feelings that may require far more time to develop and explore.⁵⁰

A smaller number of recent works have consciously attempted to theorize the place of lingering, low-intensity, or non-cathartic emotions in eighteenth-century British culture and in the development of novel form. In addition to critics who have devoted book-length studies to individual emotions such as boredom, curiosity and melancholy—as well as related states of mind such as attention and distraction—recent monographs by Lorri G. Nandrea and Deidre Lynch demonstrate the centrality of ongoing emotional experience to the novel's formal capacities and cultural work in the eighteenth century and beyond.⁵¹ Nandrea argues that the

⁵⁰ On the relationship between anthologizing and the practice of reading, see Barbara Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁵¹ See Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995); Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001); Allan Ingram et al, *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1800* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Margaret Koehler, *Poetry of Attention in the Eighteenth Century* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Natalie M. Phillips, *Distraction: Problems of Attention in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016). Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings*, while not explicitly discussing eighteenth-century fiction, provides an important exception to the trend of historicizing individual feelings rather than categories of feeling. Ngai's goal is to trace a set of "explicitly amoral and noncathartic" literary affects and recuperate them for their critical utility; while the feelings I trace are clearly *not* amoral, Ngai's category of the "noncathartic" has proven instrumental in conceiving of the feelings I trace here (Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* 6). Ngai's subsequent book considers an additional noncathartic feeling central to the development of aesthetic discourse in

ascendancy of teleological plotting and the justification of novel-reading as a vehicle for epistemological gain have retroactively impoverished our critical capacity to understand the workings of novels that do not neatly meet these requirements. Her account of *Robinson Crusoe*'s "cumulative plotting," for example, demonstrates how alternatives to teleological plotting produce different readerly feelings: rather than depending primarily on "suspense: what will happen next?" or "curiosity: what has happened here?", lengthy description of Crusoe's handiwork "requires readers to invest interest in the process of following along and finding out: in learning as an ongoing activity, an enjoyment, that is never definitively accomplished."⁵² Lynch's account of serial re-readers of novels complements Nandrea's account of cumulative plotting and the elevation of experience over instruction. For Lynch, records of repetitious novel-reading tell "a story of a literary attachment that is distinguished by its steadiness, constancy, and capacity to endure even when the thrill is gone"; Lynch accounts for this story by demonstrating how canonical texts of romantic aesthetic theory "[balance] a commitment to the excitements that set readers' pulses racing with a commitment to low-intensity, long-lasting affects."⁵³ Taken together, these projects demonstrate the significant explanatory power of an approach to eighteenth-century novel reading that foregrounds the experience of duration as a process valuable in itself.

Thus, "Novel Feelings" contributes to an ongoing conversation about the practices of critical reading, with a particular focus on how those reading practices may need to be adapted to

eighteenth-century Britain, that of "interest"; see Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), chap. 2, "Merely Interesting."

⁵² Nandrea, 5, 123. See especially chap. 3, "Sense in the Middle: Cumulative vs. Teleological Plotting," 111-43.

⁵³ Deidre Shauna Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) 149, 175.

provide purchase on the temporal component of form in the eighteenth-century novel. Scholars of the novel are unlikely to generate a new methodology capable of rivaling close reading, and I certainly make no such grand claims. However, in order to foreground the duration of novel-reading and the ongoing emotional experiences best invoked by this duration, I have worked throughout this dissertation to situate close-readings of individual sentences and scenes with reference to larger-scale elements of novelistic construction and pacing. This results in a few major strategies for critically reading novel duration that are developed across multiple chapters of this dissertation, the most fundamental of which is my decision to focus each chapter on a single novel and the lasting feelings it provokes and explores. While a dissertation chapter is still disproportionately smaller than an eighteenth-century novel, this admittedly narrow focus enables a more honest account of each novel in its own right.

Throughout these chapters, I emphasize the dynamic and relational elements of plotting—not just the sequential question of “what happens next,” but questions of relative pacing and development that take into account the tangled relationship between what has happened and how it is related to readers. Thus, I attend to the points in the narrative when different characters obtain significant knowledge, and track the disparities between the knowledge possessed by characters and the knowledge possessed by readers, as well as the process by which a reader retroactively discovers herself to have known less than a character for a significant tract of narrative. Such a moment occurs late in *Clarissa*, when the heroine’s authoritative explanation of an important but perplexing letter reveals how the reader, as well as the other characters, have been left in the dark for the last hundred pages. Clarissa’s clarification of her “father’s house” letter additionally draws attention to the way in which a novelist can manage overlapping plotlines and multiple narrators to produce a particular reading experience;

the effect of Clarissa's revelation is amplified by her relative absence as a narrator in this portion of the novel. In addition to these dynamics, I consider the way in which major plot events are clustered together in some portions of the novel but dispersed in others; how events echo or repeat themselves within an individual novel, and how repetitions retrospectively organize duration; and finally, how each of these features does or does not live up to the expectations about order and pacing embedded in the novel's apparent genre and shored up by intertextual references. Through these techniques, I consider individual scenes or moments as much as possible in relation to the novel's larger arcs, particularly as these overlap with or complicate each other.

Furthermore, I attend closely to narrative tempo, in particular the ways in which scene and summary can be extended, contracted, and ordered with respect to each other. Playful yet persistent commentary on pacing throughout the work of Fielding, Sterne, and others suggests the centrality of these questions to early novelists' understanding of their craft: in *Tom Jones*, for example, tempo is said to indicate the relative importance of the information reported, so that the reader "is not to be surprised if, in the course of this work, he shall find some chapters very short, and others altogether as long; some that contain only the time of a single day, and others that comprise years; in a word, if my history sometimes seems to stand still, and sometimes to fly."⁵⁴ Gérard Genette's division of narrative tempo into scene, summary, pause, and ellipsis serves throughout this dissertation as a diagnostic tool for describing the different speeds at which events are narrated, as well as the larger-scale rhythms caused by alternation between various available tempos, but I balance my use of his terminology with an attention to the idiosyncratic descriptors of narrative pace developed by individual eighteenth-century novelists—for example,

⁵⁴ Joseph Andrews 76-77; *Tom Jones* 131-2; *Tom Jones* 67-8.

Sterne's use of "digressive."⁵⁵ Related to the question of pacing, I pay attention to the internal divisions of a given novel into letters, chapters, volumes, or other demarcations. I consider how each unit organizes narrative and emotional response when considered on its own, how these individual units aggregate, modify, and extend feelings over time, and—for texts that are released in serial or installment form—how the publication timetable affects the reader's approach to the text.⁵⁶

Finally, as is common in a variety of work that engages with the history of reading and the history of emotion, I turn to primary source accounts of eighteenth-century readers to glean additional information about the rhythms, habits, and emotional experiences of individual novel-readers. However, I am equally invested in considering how novels themselves provide significant evidence about how one is expected to read them (and to feel about them). Eighteenth-century novels, in particular, regularly guide readers in the task of reading them: sometimes such guidance is explicitly offered up in the author's own voice (in prefatory material, footnotes, or personal correspondence); readers may also infer it through a running comparison of characters' reading habits, or by way of intertextual reference to characters or events in earlier novels. Such an approach does not, I want to emphasize, require us to unthinkingly assume that real readers behaved like ideal readers, any more than an approach based on primary source material requires us to take for granted the sincerity or universality of any firsthand account of reading or feeling. Nor does it imply that readers who miss out on a

⁵⁵ See Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 86-112 and *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 33-7.

⁵⁶ Such attention to serial publication has been admirably carried out in Tom Keymer's book-length treatments of *Clarissa* and *Tristram Shandy*, which expand seriality studies into the eighteenth-century and carefully delineate the idiosyncrasies of serial fiction prior to the Victorian period. See Tom Keymer, *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and *Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

novelist's cues, or who respond to formal features in unexpected ways, are "feeling wrong." In fact, by locating at least some of the impetus to emotional response in novelists' technical choices about language, pacing, point of view, and other formal features, my approach allows me to be sensitive to what Caroline Levine has termed the "affordances of form": while a novelist may turn to a particular set of techniques with one purpose in mind, the same technique can afford very different, sometimes even divergent readings.⁵⁷ For example, my first chapter explores how the strategies Richardson hoped would contain suspense in *Clarissa*'s third installment reacted in unforeseen ways with his installment publication scheme to encourage the negative reactions that the novel's tragic ending elicited. Thus, the unexpected or undesired responses to a novel are themselves important evidence for understanding the dynamic relationship between formal features and reader response.

Monique Scheer's recent work on "emotional practices" offers a complementary method for approaching texts as evidence for affective response. Combining work on the history of emotions with the practice theory of Pierre Bourdieu, Scheer defines emotional practices as "habits, rituals, and everyday pastimes that aid us in achieving a certain emotional state," and argues that a concept of emotions as practices significantly expands the field of evidence available to the history of emotions.⁵⁸ Even when no direct records of historical emotional practices exist, scholars can turn to "the objects used in emotional practices of the past" and read those objects for the guidance they may have offered earlier practitioners.⁵⁹ To say that novel-

⁵⁷ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) 6. For a general introduction to her use of "affordances," see 6-11.

⁵⁸ Monique Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion," *History & Theory* 51 (2012): 209.

⁵⁹ Scheer, 217.

reading is an emotional practice is *not* to assume that novels are used for the same emotional purposes by everyone—or even that the same novel creates the same feelings in everyone who reads it. But it does provide a way to think about what sorts of practices *typically* generate what sorts of feelings, without assuming that the correlation between practice and feeling holds true for all people, even people inhabiting the same historical period. Although “emotional practices exist because people assume that they usually work,” Scheer emphasizes that “part of the dynamic of performance is its unexpected outcome”—an attitude that links Scheer’s work in the history of feeling with Levine’s work on the changing capacities of literary form.⁶⁰

The project is organized chronologically and contains four chapters, each of which centers on a single novel and the literary techniques it mobilizes to generate feeling over time. In the first chapter, “‘Labouring in Suspense’: Paying Attention to Providence in Richardson’s *Clarissa*,” I argue that Richardson manipulates suspense to encourage his readers to develop practices of provisional interpretation and submission to a higher power that his view of providence requires. Taking *Clarissa*’s “father’s house” letter as a model for Richardson’s novel, I explore how a responsible author may delay or withhold information in order to provide readers with a controlled experience of decision-making in the face of uncertainty. The chapter concludes by examining Lady Elizabeth Echlin’s alternative ending to *Clarissa*, which critiques Richardson’s novel by changing its outcome. Echlin’s ending thus grapples with the contrary demands of remaining true to the providential orientation demanded by Richardson’s novel and alleviating the pain of suspense in the novel’s final installment.

⁶⁰ Scheer, 210-11, 210.

My second chapter, ““Leave, if Possible, *Myself*: Familiarity and the Limits of Sensibility in *Tristram Shandy*,” focuses on Sterne’s interest in the relationship of momentary impulses to lifelong habits. I argue that Tristram’s digressive narration functions as a literary correlative to the physiological and emotional delicacy known as “sensibility”—mimicking the sensitivity of the sentimental subject to external stimuli. While digression enables the set-piece sympathetic encounters with others that form sentimental literature’s episodic pulse, in *Tristram Shandy* it also works on a larger scale, in tandem with the novel’s irregular serial publication, to connect seemingly discontinuous moments of intense feeling to Tristram and, through him, to each other. While Tristram suggests that his habit of digression might let him leave himself behind for good, Sterne is more circumspect about such a possibility, foregrounding throughout the ways in which habit can prevent, rather than encourage, interest in and care for others beyond one’s familiar circle. Still, the reader’s experience of slowly developing familiarity with Tristram’s digressive narration, despite its initial strangeness, offers a more hopeful trajectory for familiarization.

My third chapter, “Ladies in Waiting: Dependence and Delay in Frances Burney’s *Cecilia*,” argues that Burney manipulates the large-scale pacing of the novel—relying in particular on shifts in narrative tempo and narrative perspective—in order to generate a sense of readerly powerlessness and frustration that she then aligns with Cecilia’s experiences in the novel. By structuring *Cecilia* around a series of delays, Burney encourages her readers to experience firsthand the dependence on others that organizes Cecilia’s life as a young unmarried heiress. Some of these delays occur at the level of plot, and are exacerbated for the reader by Burney’s manipulations of narrative tempo: for example, lengthy scenes in which Cecilia is prevented from exercising control over her own movements are related in a halting, stop-and-go

fashion that underscores her dependence on others, whereas prolonged summary after such scenes comes to signal relief from the demands of others. But an additional “delay” occurs in the knowledge disparity between readers and Cecilia, created by brief shifts in narrative perspective that reveal the secret schemes of the one guardian figure Cecilia trusts and respects.

My final chapter, “Learning to Live with Hope in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*,” traces the relationship between backstory, counterfactual conjectures, and the large-scale pacing of Austen’s final novel. While courtship novels tend to emphasize the satisfactions of closure, I argue that *Persuasion* challenges its readers to rethink the emotional and narrative implications of the courtship novel’s closural strategies in light of the reality that strong feelings which are meant to be fleeting might persist, and apparently closed stories might be reopened long after they ought to be narratable. Hope, for Austen, thus names an emotional orientation toward the uncertain and unpredictable future which is both harder and more painful than its alternatives (such as despair or resignation), and necessary if one desires to keep alive the possibility of a future happier than what one expected.

Thus, “Novel Feelings” traces an ethics of novel-reading which depends on process and extended duration to invoke lasting feelings, and to establish the value of lingering with them. The emotional experiences on which my argument depends are not particularly pleasant; to feel suspense in *Clarissa*, to be frustrated with *Cecilia*, or even to learn to hope alongside Anne Elliot, is neither an easy nor a comfortable task. And yet, it is my contention that the effort required to remain in sustained proximity to these novels, and to the fluctuating feelings they generate, can usefully mimic the ongoing effort required to live ethically, where ethics is understood as a continuous, open-ended, iterative, and provisional practice.

Chapter 1

“Labouring in Suspense”: Paying Attention to Providence in Richardson’s *Clarissa*

By most accounts, the conclusion of *Clarissa* (1747-8) pleased no one but Samuel Richardson. Readers had begged him from the first to change his tragic design and allow his heroine Clarissa to survive, but throughout the composition and publication of the novel, Richardson remained intent on her death and increasingly frustrated with a readership unwilling or unable to understand why the novel’s larger spiritual project required such a conclusion.¹ In the postscript to the first edition, Richardson goes so far as to condemn readerly demands for “poetical justice” as at odds with a true Christian understanding of the providence of God. By explicitly labeling the poetically just narrative arc of virtue rewarded as “anti-providential,” Richardson not only disavows the apparent spiritual implications of his first novel, *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded*.² He retrospectively frames *Clarissa* as a narrative committed to probing the uncomfortable implications of providential doctrine. Richardson’s Anglican contemporaries agreed that providential order did not simply ensure that good always prospers and wickedness always suffers; yet if the clamoring of *Clarissa*’s readers is taken as representative, Richardson had perhaps some grounds for his despairing remark, two months prior to the publication of

¹ For examples of readers’ pleas and lamentations surrounding Clarissa’s death, see Tom Keymer, *Richardson’s Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 200-7; Adam Budd, “Why Clarissa Must Die: Richardson’s Tragedy and Editorial Heroism,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 31, no. 3 (2007): 1-28; for readers accusing Richardson of working against providence, see Alex Eric Hernandez, “Tragedy and the Economics of Providence in Richardson’s *Clarissa*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22, no. 4 (2010): 599-630.

² Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin, 1985), 1495, 1497. References are to this edition. This chapter focuses on the first-edition text of *Clarissa* and thus cites only the shorter first-edition postscript. However, the expanded third-edition postscript (1751) continues to authorize my claims. For a discussion of providence vs. poetical justice in the third-edition postscript, see Hernandez, 604-9.

Clarissa's third and final installment, that "Religion never was at so low an Ebb as at present."³ *Clarissa* seeks to turn the tide in part by testing its readers to view even the most compelling counterexamples to providential government—the prosperity of the wicked, and the suffering of the good—as sanctioned by a God whose providential justice is at odds with the narrative justice labeled poetical.

In refusing a poetically just conclusion, Richardson strives to remind readers that even providential rewards and punishments in this life cannot predict the final judgment that awaits Christians after death. Critics have tended to mock Richardson for not realizing how stubbornly readers would resist the apparent tragedy of *Clarissa*'s death, and to see the postscript as too little too late. However, Richardson's manipulation of suspense throughout *Clarissa* trains readers in the practices of provisional interpretation that may help them come to terms with providence, even if providence cannot save *Clarissa*. Scholars tend to agree with Richardson's contemporaries that suspense and providence both generate emotional experiences characterized by anxiety and passivity, but Richardson counters these assumptions by linking suspense to the attentive interpretation of events still in progress. In this way, suspense helps readers come to terms with a narrative and a world in which providential judgments are comprehensible only in the afterlife, but in which the high stakes of life in the world require Christians to take ethical action even in the midst of uncertainty.

My discussion of Richardson's strategies for manipulating suspense and engaging readers' attention centers on a letter oft-debated by *Clarissa*'s readers past and present. After

³ Samuel Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, 26 October 1748, in *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 92. The postscript to *Clarissa* offers an additional source for Richardson's complaints about the waning religiosity of his own age: *Clarissa* is "designed to inculcate upon the human mind, under the guise of an amusement, the great lessons of Christianity, in an *age like the present*" (1495, emphasis original).

finally escaping the house in which Lovelace has imprisoned, drugged, and raped her, Clarissa wants nothing more than to delay his detection of her hiding place so that she may die in peace.

To these ends, she writes him the following short letter:

I have good news to tell you. I am setting out with all diligence for my father's house. I am bid to hope that he will receive his poor penitent with a goodness peculiar to himself; for I am overjoyed with the assurance of a thorough reconciliation through the interposition of a dear blessed friend, whom I always loved and honoured. I am so taken up with my preparation for this joyful and long-wished-for journey, that I cannot spare one moment for any other business, having several matters of the last importance to settle first. So, pray, sir, don't disturb or interrupt me—I beseech you don't—You may in time, possibly, see me at my father's, at least, if it be not your own fault.

I will write a letter which shall be sent you when I am got thither and received...
(1233)

Lovelace hastens to the countryside to await Clarissa's arrival at Harlowe Place—misinterpreting the letter just as Clarissa has expected. In fact, the letter Lovelace reads in reference to this world additionally employs the language of Christian allegory to relate Clarissa's belief in her imminent death and her hope that a reformed Lovelace may meet with her in her heavenly Father's house. The worldly reading is not so much incorrect as incomplete, but Richardson's strategy relies on readers privileging the worldly over the spiritual on their first reading, just as Clarissa's strategy relies on Lovelace doing the same. While Lovelace's misunderstanding delays his physical approach to Clarissa, readers' misunderstanding gives Richardson the opportunity to demonstrate the practices of gradual interpretation necessary to comprehend challenging texts whose meanings unfold over time.

The “father's house” letter, as it is often called, thus deliberately courts an incomplete understanding that allows Richardson to model an interpretive method better capable of generating an appropriate Christian reading, not just of this particular letter, but of *Clarissa* as a whole. While the warring interpretations offered by Lovelace and his correspondent Belford are eventually superseded by Clarissa's authoritative explanation, more than a hundred pages

separate the letter's initial appearance from its final decipherment. By generating and revising provisional interpretations while in suspense as to the letter's real meaning, and willingly submitting to authorial interpretation even if it differs from one's own, the ideal reader is made to practice a method of interpreting and acting under conditions of uncertainty that might allay suspenseful anxieties, even those generated by providence. Richardson describes this ideal reading practice in several places as "attentive" (1013)—a word that evokes the interplay of active focus (paying attention) and respectful submission (acting as an attendant, waiting upon) that Richardson ultimately connects, not only with the ideal reader, but with the ideal Christian subject.⁴ A clear understanding of providence requires the faithful Christian to live in some degree of suspense about his own salvation, since neither prosperity nor persecution will definitively mark him out as saved—but this does not mean that he ought to completely withhold judgment or forego action in this world. Thus, Richardson works to ensure that the suspense provided by *Clarissa* can model a practice of sustained attention and provisional interpretation in the midst of uncertainty that will help Christians navigate providential anxieties.⁵

⁴ Richardson additionally uses the term "attentive" in his correspondence to designate the kind of reading *Clarissa* demands, but which he fears no one will practice: "While the Taste of the Age can be gratified by a Tom Jones...I am not to expect that the World will bestow Two Readings, or One indeed, attentive one, on such a grave Story as *Clarissa*" (Samuel Richardson to Aaron Hill, 12 July 1749, in *Selected Letters*, 126).

⁵ For the importance of "attention" in the Christian thought of Richardson's contemporaries, see E. Derek Taylor, *Reason and Religion in Clarissa: Samuel Richardson and "The Famous Mr. Norris, of Bemerton"* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 54-8. Richardson's use of "attention" additionally situates him within a larger Christian discourse about "watchfulness," on which, see Matthew Kadane, *The Watchful Clothier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), esp. chap. 3, "That Single Word Watch" 43-83. Recent critical works on eighteenth-century literature have taken a cognitive studies approach to the issue of attention. Natalie M. Phillips distinguishes between a "unifocal model" of attention (which views distraction as a sign of weakness, or even sin) and a "multifocal model" which understands attention and distraction as two sides of the same coin; see *Distraction: Problems of Attention in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 4. Richardson's religious rhetoric of attention is clearly based on the unifocal model which Phillips sees as losing ground in the period, as essayists and novelists "increasingly sought to forge literary structures meant to *work with*, rather than reform, distracted readers" (Phillips 3). Margaret Koehler's work suggests that Richardson's nearest allies in the fight for readerly attention might be eighteenth-century poets, who also use literary form to train readers in practices of attention, and invest these practices with an ethical (if not necessarily religious) weight; see *Poetry of Attention in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

The affective and epistemological challenges of suspense that I trace throughout *Clarissa* ought to inform and expand our understanding of what Tom Keymer calls Richardson's "aesthetic of difficulty."⁶ According to Keymer, Richardson desires for the interpretive challenges created by epistolary narrative to engage readers in a process of active self-education: by "mak[ing] reading not simple but problematic...the reader's activity in addressing the resulting difficulties will itself be a source of instruction."⁷ My own reading of *Clarissa* builds on Keymer's work in two ways. First, while Keymer tends to emphasize the absence of Richardson's authorial voice from the epistolary text as a sign of "relinquishing control" to readers, especially in the novel's first edition, I focus more insistently on Richardson's use of paratextual materials and diegetic scenes of reading to script the reading practices his novel requires.⁸ Second, whereas Keymer locates the "difficulty" of Richardson's aesthetic largely in the cognitive realm, I insist on the affective difficulty of managing suspenseful anxieties. In my account, the attentive reader does not just need a better memory and a more active judgment; she also needs to discover how to involve her judgment even when "in the midst of present distresses" (1178) that tend to disable it.

Richardson manipulates the order and pacing of events in *Clarissa* to develop and maintain an ongoing experience of suspense in the novel's readers. He not only generates the emotional distress that accompanies extreme suspense, but also links this distress to the anxiety-inducing inscrutability of God's providence in this world, and demonstrates how an ideally

⁶ Keymer, 66.

⁷ Keymer, 68.

⁸ Keymer, 59. Keymer certainly agrees that "readers *in* the novel provide models for readers *of* it" (59), but his account leaves room for others to examine the particular ways in which this modeling functions, and to consider how it works in parallel to Richardson's paratextual interventions.

attentive reader might navigate either kind of distressing uncertainty. While Richardson's epistolary narration and installment publication often intensify readers' experience of suspense, his editorial apparatus provides an alternative temporal perspective on the novel which both alleviates suspense and models the work of the attentive reader, even before the gradual interpretation of the "father's house" letter offers a model within the text proper. Dissatisfied responses to the novel's conclusion, from epistolary comments to Lady Elizabeth Echlin's alternative ending, suggest that Richardson's aims backfired not because he failed to create and manipulate suspense, but because he failed to predict the variety of readerly responses such suspense could implicitly authorize.

Providence and the Ethics of Suspense

At its most basic, "providence" refers to the belief that God foresees and controls worldly events for the general good of mankind. Anglican divines of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries typically agreed that success or suffering in this world did not necessarily signify reward or punishment in the next, and that not all success or suffering could be viewed as providential. But the simple fact that events in this world might be read as signs, however obscured or tentative, of one's salvation, led to a proliferation of competing providentialist hermeneutics.⁹ I want to claim that the vision of attentive "labouring in suspense" (1178) that Richardson articulates in *Clarissa* serves as an intermediate route between two extremes of providential interpretation: on the one hand, the proponents of "poetical (*or, as we may say, anti-*

⁹ For a general definition of providence, and a discussion of the multiplicity of providentialist hermeneutics within early English Protestantism, see Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8-32. On Anglican homiletic writing about providence in relation to anxiety, see Lois Chaber, "'Sufficient to the Day': Anxiety in *Sir Charles Grandison*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 1, no. 4 (1989): 87-90.

providential) justice” (1497), who seemed to require the certainty of a simplified providence in which good is rewarded and evil punished; on the other hand, the anxious sufferers of deep providential uncertainty, for whom “the struggle to discern some pattern behind one’s violently swinging fortunes could induce an obsession, not to say neurosis, revolving around the unintelligibility of God’s predestinarian scheme.”¹⁰ Alex Hernandez has demonstrated the relationship between this former extreme and a belief in a “benevolent providential economy” that literalizes the rewards of poetical justice and proposes a mechanism for achieving them in the here-and-now.¹¹ In contrast, Lois Chaber clearly has the latter extreme in mind when she writes that “the doctrine of providential interposition...places humanity in a passive and helpless—that is, infantile—position.”¹² Richardson’s exemplary characters, including Clarissa herself, do occasionally express this level of providential anxiety; however, such “neurosis” ultimately overrides the capacity for attention that Richardson so clearly values.¹³ Though Richardson’s postscript objects most vocally to the oversimplification of providence into “poetical justice,” his encouragement of attentive interpretations of events still in motion requires a kind of mental agency at odds with infantile passivity. Thus, his didactic method in *Clarissa* aims to correct those for whom providential interpretation generates excessive anxiety, as well as those who take providence too lightly.

¹⁰ Walsham, 17.

¹¹ Hernandez, 602. I am fundamentally in agreement with Hernandez that Richardson’s belief in providence is at odds with the logic of early capitalism, for all that Max Weber insists on a link between capitalism and a “Protestant Ethic” that adds spiritual value to labor undertaken as part of one’s calling. As Hernandez demonstrates, Weber’s approach ignores the fundamental unpredictability at the heart of providence (Hernandez, 615-16).

¹² Chaber, “Sufficient to the Day,” 289.

¹³ Chaber addresses Clarissa’s providential anxieties in “Christian Form and Anti-Feminism in *Clarissa*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 15, nos. 3-4 (2003): 507-37. For further discussion of her argument, see below.

The real problem with these two extremes of providential interpretation lies in how quickly one could collapse into the other, and how each appears to rely on the other as its only possible solution or alternative. Richardson may mock those whose interpretations oversimplify the workings of God in the world, and yet to one teetering on the brink of an “unsearchable” providence (1375), a simplified vision of God’s interference in man’s affairs might prove an effective bulwark against paralyzing existential despair. Thus, while popular homiletic writing from the period does not directly espouse the simplified position, the defense of providential order occasionally leads Anglican writers to retreat from concrete examples of good people suffering and to dwell instead on examples of God’s “justice” that seem eerily aligned with the “poetical (*or, as we may say, anti-providential*) justice” Richardson rejects (1497).¹⁴ For example, in his *Discourse Concerning the Divine Providence* (1694), William Sherlock claims that “though every particular good man be not rewarded, nor every bad man punish’d in this World”—an accepted fact about providential government that might send the anxious believer spiraling into doubts about God’s presence or his own salvation—“yet the Divine Providence furnishes us with numerous Examples of Justice, both in the protection and defence of good men, and in the punishment of the wicked.”¹⁵ While Sherlock opens with a difficult truth, he continues to suggest that God intervenes in this world more often than not, and that moments of

¹⁴ Isabel Rivers, paraphrasing the Latitudinarian strain of Church of England doctrine, writes that “the religious man is holy and happy, prudent and wise, and rewarded here as well as hereafter”; see *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1:77. For more on the influence of latitudinarian doctrine in *Clarissa* specifically, see John A. Dussinger, “Conscience and the Pattern of Christian Perfection in *Clarissa*,” *PMLA* 81, no. 3 (1966): 236-45. For more on Anglican attempts to reconcile providence with a capitalist view of “reward,” see Hernandez 615.

¹⁵ William Sherlock, *A Discourse Concerning the Divine Providence* (London, 1694), 155. Chaber points to this passage in both “Sufficient to the Day” 287-8 and “Christian Form” 523 in order to emphasize the partial and incomplete nature of providence in this world (it is not simply a substitute for God’s judgment), but I am interested in the difference between what Sherlock actually claims about providence and the frequency with which his particular examples work to soften the blow of this claim.

providential deliverance might be read as divine reward. Such examples are to be drawn from “Sacred and Prophan Story, and our own observation”: while “Prophan Story” likely refers to secondhand knowledge of events purported to have really occurred, it certainly suggests that fictional accounts might also play a role in “vindicat[ing] the Justice of Providence,” and sheds light on the difficulty faced by Richardson’s readers in comprehending the conclusion of *Clarissa*.¹⁶ Because discussions of providence emphasized positive “examples” as confirmation of providential justice, apparently negative examples—like the suffering and death of the good Clarissa—might be difficult to assimilate into a simplified providential paradigm: even Job is discussed in ways that foreground his earthly, rather than heavenly, reward.¹⁷

Seen in this light, Clarissa’s suffering serves less as an example of providential justice than as a reminder that providence is no stand-in for eternal judgment. As Richardson wrote to Aaron Hill early in the novel’s composition, Clarissa is meant to be “so faultless that a Reader should find no way to account for the Calamities she met with, and to justify Moral Equity but by looking up to a future Reward,” presumably in heaven.¹⁸ These motives are restated in the postscript, in which Richardson insists that this world is merely “a state of *probation*”; mankind ought to “look forward,” not just beyond the end of Richardson’s novel, but beyond the end of

¹⁶ Sherlock, 156.

¹⁷ Sherlock discusses Job as an example of God’s willingness to let good men suffer, but qualifies this suffering by stating that “there should be very great and excellent Reasons for doing this; and the Goodness of God requires, that such good men should be greatly supported under their sufferings, and greatly rewarded for them... we know what was the end of Job, and how greatly God rewarded his Sufferings” (Sherlock, 144). For an account of how Job (the book and the character) marks out the challenges of assigning exemplarity in a variety of eighteenth-century British discourses, see Jonathan Lamb, *The Rhetoric of Suffering: Reading the Book of Job in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Martha J. Koehler addresses the “paradoxes of exemplarity” in Richardson’s novels partly by way of Lamb in *Models of Reading: Paragons and Parasites in Richardson, Burney, and Laclos* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 37-42. The challenges Job poses for exemplary readings do not end in the eighteenth century: Hernandez notes that Max Weber similarly elides Job’s trials to focus on his rewards (Hernandez, 616).

¹⁸ Samuel Richardson to Aaron Hill, 29 October 1746, in *Selected Letters*, 73.

life itself, since “(in the dispensations of PROVIDENCE) good and evil happen alike to ALL MEN on this side of the grave” (1495, 1496).¹⁹ Such statements would seem to work against Chaber’s insistence that the first half of *Clarissa* is “meant to be read as a Christian tragedy in which the heroine draws down the providential punishment of rape upon herself through her own sinful transgressions.”²⁰ After all, a straightforward equation between sin and worldly punishment seems to resemble “poetical justice” just as much as a straightforward equation between virtue and worldly reward. Chaber’s argument rests on the assumption that passivity is the Christian hero’s defining characteristic, and that Clarissa sins not just by leaving her father’s house, but by daring to act to secure her own deliverance. If Richardson believed that faith in providence always required Christians to watch and wait for God’s intervention, then Chaber’s account would provide the only plausible explanation. Yet in the concept of “attention,” I see Richardson developing a more nuanced account of what Christians ought to do in the face of uncertainty, one which calls the Christian reader to participate in the work of her own deliverance from suspense, and thus one in which acting for oneself cannot always be a sin. In another letter, Richardson depicts Clarissa as “naturally meek, altho’ where an Exertion of Spirit was necessary manifesting herself to be a true Heroine,” suggesting that Christian heroism inheres just as much in spirited exertions that are here opposed meekness as it does in such

¹⁹ Keymer suggests “the limited involvement of other hands” in the production of this postscript, noting that Richardson himself attributes the concluding paragraph to another writer in the novel’s third edition. Keymer additionally points out the similarity between the phrasing of one of the passages I have just quoted (“state of probation”) and William Warburton’s *Divine Legation*, though Keymer is inclined to attribute such similarities to Richardson reworking comments written by Warburton, rather than to Warburton actually writing the postscript. See *Samuel Richardson’s Published Commentary on Clarissa 1747-65*, ed. Tom Keymer; introduction by Jocelyn Harris (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998) 1:51-2. The second passage quoted represents Richardson’s parenthetical addition to Joseph Addison’s *Spectator* no. 40, which the first edition postscript reprints in full with minor additions of text and emphasis.

²⁰ Chaber, “Christian Form,” 517.

meekness itself.²¹ While the “Exertion of Spirit” to which Richardson refers is ambiguously located—does it issue in external action, or does it occur merely in the realm of internal grappling with spiritual matters?—Richardson’s repeated calls for an active, attentive readership suggest his investment in a providential hermeneutics that actively involves Christians in the process of responding to worldly events.

In his quest to help readers maintain the middle ground between providential anxiety and providential carelessness, Richardson relies heavily on suspense to create conditions of anxious uncertainty and train readers in responding to them. I take “suspense” to define an experience with overlapping epistemic and affective components: not merely an experience of not knowing, suspense encompasses the anxious prediction of proliferating future scenarios, the overpowering desire to know with certainty which scenario will actually take place, and the frustration that arises from the sheer impossibility of knowing the future in advance. The affective intensity of suspenseful experiences can vary widely, depending on what is at stake in gaining the knowledge one currently lacks; cases of providential suspense are particularly intense because, to a believer, they concern the highest possible stakes: the salvation or damnation of one’s eternal soul. Furthermore, like the attentive Christian’s experience of life in this world, a novel-reader’s experience of suspense is temporally quite complex: suspense simultaneously looks ahead to the future moment of its own undoing and situates this forward-thinking anticipation in a very specific present. An author can manipulate the temporal dimensions of suspense by providing, delaying, or withholding information; by speeding up or slowing down a sequence of events in process; or even by invoking dramatic irony, deliberately hiding information from some (characters or readers) while providing it to others.

²¹ Samuel Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, 26 October 1748, in *Selected Letters*, 90.

Clarissa's epistolary form, coupled with its publication in three unevenly-spaced installments over the course of a year, certainly works to create suspense, but it additionally allows Richardson to contrast characters' modes of generating and experiencing suspense with his own practices and with his real-world readers' responses to them. In the process, he attempts to distinguish between ethical uses of suspense, like his own and *Clarissa*'s, which aim to encourage readers' spiritual and moral development, and unethical uses of suspense, like *Lovelace*'s, which seek to subordinate others through emotional manipulation. Narrative theorists interested in suspense have tended to envision it largely in the Lovelacean mode as a technique for manipulating audiences to undesirable ends—creating the pleasurable illusion of uncertainty only to reaffirm essentially conservative values.²² However, Caroline Levine's work on suspense and Victorian realism foregrounds its potential to train readers in ethical decision-making, since "care for others—ethics—requires a willingness to consider the ways that events will play out in the future."²³ Levine argues that suspenseful plots are key in producing this active, ethical orientation toward the future: "a speculation about outcomes is a hallmark of the middle of suspenseful plots, but it is just as much a hallmark of the subject who wants to take responsibility for a foreseeable succession of events."²⁴ Martha J. Koehler's definition of eighteenth-century suspense as "the combination of felt lack of knowledge with an expectant

²² Salient examples of this conservative model of suspense appear in Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974) and D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Caroline Levine rejects this model in her work on Victorian suspense, but claims it does apply to the eighteenth-century gothic novel; see Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003) 77-8.

²³ Caroline Levine, "An Anatomy of Suspense: The Pleasurable, Critical, Ethical, Erotic Middle of *The Woman in White*," in *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, ed. Caroline Levine and Mario Ortiz-Robles (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011) 209.

²⁴ Levine, "An Anatomy of Suspense," 209.

restlessness and an enforced delay of action, all of which can fetter the mind in a distracted state of dependency” may at first seem to confirm the essential passivity that numerous critics equate with readers experiencing suspense—the “fettered mind” does not seem capable of action.²⁵ But as Koehler argues with respect to *Sir Charles Grandison*, and as I intend to demonstrate with respect to *Clarissa*, the kind of suspense generated by Richardson actually encourages readers to break free from this fettering anxiety by attentively engaging with and responding to the text.

My insistence that suspense raises the stakes of readerly interpretation is partly in keeping with a long line of *Clarissa* criticism that foregrounds the difficulty—if not the impossibility—of correctly adjudicating between the novel’s various voices.²⁶ However, accounts that conclude by positing the novel’s essential indeterminacy miss Richardson’s point about the ethical necessity of interpreting such high-stakes events, no matter how provisional one’s interpretations may have to be. To see *Clarissa* as an unsearchable universe, in which one’s own interpretations do not ultimately matter because no “correct” interpretation exists, is to steer too close to the anxious paralysis of providential neurosis. By reconceiving of suspense as a challenging process in which a responsible author guides readers into an appropriate relationship to uncertainty, we begin to understand how the experience of suspense might train Richardson’s readers in habits of interpreting events still in progress, and how these habits could prove equally useful in moderating providential anxieties.

Richardson’s use of epistolary form in *Clarissa* offers unique opportunities for internally

²⁵ Martha J. Koehler, “The Problem of Suspense in Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison*,” *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 54, no. 3 (2013): 317.

²⁶ See esp. William Beatty Warner, *Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) and Terry Castle, *Clarissa’s Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson’s Clarissa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

representing and externally managing the way readers experience and make sense of suspense.²⁷ As Janet Altman notes, Richardson's famous technique of "writing to the moment" implicates the writer in a particular relationship to the future as well as the present: "This sense of immediacy, of a present that is precarious, can only exist in a world where the future is unknown. The present of epistolary discourse is vibrant with future-orientation."²⁸ Clarissa exists in an especially precarious present, but doubt and uncertainty are inherent features of all epistolary correspondence. The writer of a letter cannot know what will happen to herself, or to her correspondent, between the time it is sent and the time it is read—nor, as the waylaid letters and forgeries of *Clarissa* suggest, can she guarantee letters will be received and read by her intended correspondent alone. Indeed, Richardson's own discussions of "writing to the moment" emphasize its ability not only to create immediacy, but also to involve readers in the interpretation of ongoing processes of which their own knowledge is limited. In the preface to *Clarissa*, he connects "writing to the moment" with the practices of attentive interpretation he expects this style to encourage: "the letters on both sides are written while the hearts of the writers must be supposed to be wholly engaged in their subjects: the events at the time generally dubious—so that they abound not only with critical situations, but what may be called instantaneous descriptions and reflections, which may be brought home to the breast of the youthful reader" (35). Discussions of this passage have tended to focus on the way that "writing to the moment" links the "breast of the youthful reader" with the "hearts of the writers,"

²⁷ For the most recent comprehensive account of epistolarity in the eighteenth-century novel, see Joe Bray, *The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 2003) esp. chaps. 1 and 3. For a lucid account of critical debates over the function of epistolarity in Richardson's novels, and specifically in *Clarissa*, see Keymer, 1-56.

²⁸ Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982) 124.

considering their parallel agitation as the result of supposed immediacy. And yet the causal logic of this passage suggests that the “instantaneous descriptions and reflections” so often taken as the most important sign of “writing to the moment” are merely the textual symptom of “dubious” events and “critical situations.” The intersection of “dubious” and “critical” points to the heart of Richardson’s concern with appropriate interpretation of events in this world. Even when all events are dubious, the high stakes of such “critical situations” demand attention, as well as a challenging and provisional form of judgment. Richardson’s lament that “the World is not enough used to this way of writing, to the moment...& judges of an action undecided, as if it were absolutely decided” suggests how difficult it was for his readers to practice the kind of interpretation amidst uncertainties at which he aimed.²⁹ But it additionally demonstrates that the style of “writing to the moment” frequently seen as emphasizing the here-and-now is undergirded by experiences of uncertainty that require the present to be read in light of the future, as “an action undecided.”

Correspondents’ anticipation of an expansive future readership plays a key role throughout *Clarissa*, most notably toward the novel’s close, as Belford—recently designated Clarissa’s executor—begins the work of collecting the correspondence that comprises the novel. Yet even before Clarissa leaves her father’s house, she elaborates a theory of epistolary self-composition that positions her future self as an important audience. Threatened with the prohibition of her correspondence with Anna, Clarissa admits that she would keep writing letters even if forbidden to send them:

You have often heard me own the advantages I have found from writing down everything of moment that befalls me; and of all I *think* and of all I *do* that may be of future use to me—for, besides that this helps to form one to a style, and opens and expands the ductile mind, everyone will find that many a good thought evaporates in thinking; many a good

²⁹ Samuel Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, 14 February 1754, in *Selected Letters*, 289.

resolution goes off, driven out of memory, perhaps, by some other not so good. But when I set down what I *will* do, or what I *have* done on this or that occasion; the resolution or action is before me, either to be adhered to, withdrawn or amended; and I have entered into *compact* with myself, as I may say; having given it under my own hand, to *improve* rather go *backward*, as I live longer. (483)

Writing, for Clarissa, is a complex temporal activity that connects the past moment of her experience, the present moment of her reflective description, and the future moment of reading, acknowledging always that the letter's future audience is just as much herself as it is her correspondent.³⁰ Richardson hopes that his readers will establish a similarly rich relationship with the future. Thus, while epistolary form does serve to generate suspense, it ultimately supports Richardson's larger strategy to foreground the importance of actively interpreting and responding to "events at the time generally dubious."

Installment Publication and Controlling Suspense

Richardson's decision to publish *Clarissa* in three multi-volume installments over the course of a year complements the novel's interest in epistolary futurity and the suspense that is generated by waiting. The publication of the novel in parts mimics on a larger scale the arrival of letters in a correspondence one at a time, forcing readers to wait for installments of the novel just as characters wait for letters within the novel, and requiring the novel's readers to provide provisional interpretations of past material and to speculate about the future while waiting for the

³⁰ Such an approach to letter-writing also has clear parallels to practices of Puritan diary-keeping and spiritual autobiography, underscoring Richardson's desire to frame ongoing processes of textual interpretation as spiritually useful activities. The classic study of spiritual autobiography in relation to the eighteenth-century novel is G.A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). For a more recent account that complicates the link between diary and novel form, see Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996) esp. chap. 7, "Defoe and Burney: The Unmaking of the Diurnal in the Making of the Novel" (223-68). For recent and informative discussions of the historical link between spirituality and life-writing, see Andrew Cambers, "Reading, the Godly, and Self-Writing in England, circa 1580-1720," *The Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 04 (2007): 796-825, and Kadane.

next installment to appear. Work in the nascent field of seriality studies has tended to explore this dynamic in relation to the Victorian serial novel or the television series, but the conclusions drawn from work on these later genres frequently do not apply as easily to eighteenth-century novels published in parts—such as *Clarissa* and *Tristram Shandy*—or to later experiments in serial publication that took these earlier novels as explicit models.³¹ In fact, the serial publication of *Clarissa* provides a useful test case for expanding critical approaches to serial fiction in general, since Richardson's novel generates a familiar range of serial affects such as suspense, anxiety, and frustration, but often through unexpected or unfamiliar technical means.

We have reason to believe that *Clarissa* was substantially complete before its publication, though Richardson certainly still continued to revise the work over the course of the year in which the first edition was being produced.³² Rather than releasing the novel in small portions at relatively short and even intervals, Richardson published *Clarissa* in three uneven installments separated unevenly in time. In the first installment (volumes I and II), published in early December 1747, *Clarissa* is bullied by her family, who all wish her to marry a wealthy man for whom she has no affection. While they suspect Lovelace of trying to seduce her, *Clarissa* remains adamant in her dislike for him; however, *Clarissa*'s increasing desperation with her situation culminates in a plot by which Lovelace tricks her to escape from her father's household.

³¹ For an overview of serial publication prior to the Victorian period, see Tom Keymer, "Reading Time in Serial Fiction before Dickens," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 30 (2000). George Eliot's *Middlemarch* was published in multivolume installments at two-month intervals in a mode explicitly linked to Sterne's installment publication: see Tom Keymer, *Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 88-97. While Keymer does not comment on *Clarissa* as a potential inspiration, Eliot certainly knew the novel, and at least one reviewer of *Middlemarch* made an explicit comparison between the fervor caused by the publication of new installments of both of these novels. See R. M. Milnes, "ART. X.-Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life," *The Edinburgh Review* 137, no. 279 (1873).

³² For a detailed account of *Clarissa*'s composition history, see T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, "The Composition of *Clarissa* and its Revision before Publication," *PMLA* 83, no. 2 (1968). For a more focused account of the way that Richardson did revise the third installment of the first edition in response to reports of early misreadings, see Keymer chap. 4, "Forensic realism: The third installment, December 1748."

In the second installment (volumes III and IV), published five months later in April 1748, Clarissa quickly discovers that she has escaped from one captivity to another, as Lovelace blatantly attempts to coerce her when remains firm in her refusal to marry him. Clarissa manages to run away from Lovelace, but the second installment ends with a letter indicating that he has managed to track her down and intends to deceive her into returning to him. In the third and final installment (volumes V, VI, and VII), published around seven months later in early December 1748, Lovelace concocts an elaborate scheme that concludes with drugging and raping Clarissa. After a period of madness, Clarissa again escapes from Lovelace—this time for good—but she is overcome by a kind of wasting illness and eventually dies.

As this brief summary suggests, installment breaks in this novel do work to generate suspense by disrupting the movement of the narrative, but they also work to *contain* narrative tension in discrete units. Some of the most suspenseful sequences of events in the novel are not interrupted by installment cliffhangers, but rather are introduced and deciphered completely over the course of the novel's third installment—both the longest installment and the one that readers had to wait the longest to receive. Richardson's most sustained engagement with suspense thus begins, counterintuitively to models of serial suspense, at the moment when the novel has finally become a readable whole undisrupted by the enforced waiting generated by gaps in its publication schedule. The containment of this suspenseful sequence within the third installment suggests that Richardson—perhaps quite rightly—assumed that the suspense generated by Clarissa's rape, madness, escape, decline, and death was overwhelming enough without the added delay of an installment break. Thus, while Richardson generates a certain degree of suspenseful interaction with his novel by making readers wait for the next installment, he orchestrates the relationship between plot and installment breaks in such a way as to prevent

readers from dwelling for too long with the anxiety generated by some of the novel's most difficult events.

Resisting the Tyranny of Suspense

A central difficulty in discussing suspense in *Clarissa* lies in the apparent similarity between Richardson's techniques for generating morally efficacious suspense and Lovelace's techniques for generating a tyrannical kind of suspense that reinforces his power over others. In fact, a range of critics from the eighteenth century to the present have viewed Richardson as little better than a libertine in disguise, believing he receives the same kind of sadistic pleasure from Clarissa's "trials" that Lovelace does.³³ Lovelace certainly coerces his victims in a manner that accords with many narrative theorists' visions of suspense: his letters wield suspense like a weapon, cruelly manipulating his readers from a distance as he harasses Clarissa in person. Yet while Richardson insists that suspense can initiate readers' active interpretation of events still in progress, Lovelace's suspense seeks total control over its victims, rendering their actions ineffectual.

From the very first letter he composes, Lovelace plots to keep important information out of Clarissa's hands, while still providing Belford—and, through him, the novel's readers—with detailed outlines of his schemes. Both Clarissa and the novel's readers participate in the suspense generated by Lovelace's plotting, though to different degrees. Throughout the first two installments of the novel, Clarissa lacks sufficient information to suspect all of Lovelace's plots,

³³ For Lovelace on the trials of Clarissa, see esp. 429-31. Keymer discusses eighteenth-century responses to Clarissa that suggest "Lovelace is only the image of his author...and the moralist no more than a pervert" (Keymer, 152). More recently, Julie Park argues that *Clarissa* betrays a "significant identification between novelist and libertine"; see *The Self and It: Novel Objects in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 76.

but still mistrusts him. Readers of the novel, better acquainted with Lovelace's plans, still experience suspense since they cannot predict how his plans will turn out, or whether Clarissa will save herself from them. In such high-stakes scenarios, it becomes possible to experience suspense in response to a perceived knowledge differential in characters, even when the reader possesses all of the available information—especially since this information tends to increase, rather than diminish, the stakes of Clarissa's lack of knowledge. Thus, although the reader typically knows all there is to know about Lovelace's "*providences*," as he ironically labels his schemes to keep Clarissa in the dark, this knowledge tends to exacerbate suspense, and to situate Lovelace as its primary author (473).

In addition to the suspenseful schemes that unfold across multiple letters, Lovelace creates suspense within individual letters, frequently by abusing the technique of "writing to the moment"; while Richardson prizes the technique for encouraging a method of attentive reading that can coexist with uncertainty and appropriately respond to dubious events, Lovelace simply uses it as a crude tool to generate uncertainty in others. In one letter to Belford, he pauses partway through relating a climactic scene to comment on his epistolary style: "Thou'lt observe, Belford, that though this was written afterwards, yet (as in other places) I write it as it was spoken, and happened; as if I had retired to put down every sentence as spoken. I know thou likest this lively present-tense manner, as it is one of my peculiars" (882). Lovelace's pause to comment on the "immediacy effect" of his prose style of course ironically stalls such immediacy, jolting the reader abruptly out of the scene at a critical moment and forcing him to wait until Lovelace chooses to continue. This particular letter offers a clear connection between this mode of suspense and causing harm to others, since the scene Lovelace interrupts takes place right before he drugs and rapes Clarissa. In a distressed fit, on her hands and knees, Clarissa begs

Lovelace to have mercy on her: “What must her apprehensions be at that moment!” Lovelace marvels (881). Caught up in describing his ability to make Clarissa anxious through his physical presence, Lovelace interrupts his written account of the scene to show that he knows how to make Belford feel anxious, too.

Lovelace’s use of suspense is typified, however, not in this letter’s momentary pause, but in a slightly earlier letter which narrates the murder of his personified conscience in such a way as to allow Belford to think he has instead murdered Clarissa. Far from encouraging attention, Lovelace courts misinterpretation in order to toy with Belford’s emotions: “Dreadful news to tell thee!—While I was meditating a simple robbery, here have I (in my own defence indeed) been guilty of murder! A bloody murder!—So I believe it will prove—At her last gasp!—Poor impertinent opposer! Eternally resisting!—Eternally contradicting! There she lies, weltering in her blood! Her death’s wound have I given her!” (847-8) Only later in the letter does Lovelace explain that his unnamed female victim is his conscience, not Clarissa. It may surprise the reader that Belford never responds to this letter, but Lovelace’s equivocation neither leaves room for nor ultimately requires an interpretive response. It arouses a series of emotional responses and initiates a series of interpretive leaps, but ultimately renders them fruitless. Where clues toward the interpretation of Clarissa’s “father’s house” letter will be deployed over a lengthy period of time, allowing suspense to build and encouraging readerly attention, Lovelace’s letter is more interested in manipulating its readers’ emotions than in developing their ethical capacities.

In the absence of a theoretical model of suspense as anything other than a tool for exercising power and guaranteeing passivity, Richardson’s methods may seem to align with Lovelace’s. However, where Lovelace seeks to thwart his readers’ interpretive activity—his schemes only work if their targets remain ignorant—Richardson seeks to encourage it. Even

before the interpretation of Clarissa's "father's house" letter offers a prolonged model of attentive reading, Richardson's editorial notations train readers in practices of attention that might counterbalance the pains of uncertainty—sometimes by directly reminding readers of information they may have forgotten, but more often by providing cross-references to other letters. The reader who follows Richardson's citations back to previous letters (or, on more than one occasion, *ahead* to later letters) gains both a new perspective on troubling events in the "present" of their reading and a momentary reprieve from the headlong forward pressure of a suspenseful narrative sequence. Thus, Richardson associates attentive reading with a denaturing of suspenseful temporality that provides temporary relief from pressing pains.

Critics have tended to ignore Richardson's first-edition footnotes, training their attention instead upon the increasingly discursive footnotes, index, summary, and new letters Richardson added in the second and third editions.³⁴ Yet it is only when compared to the inflated apparatus of the second and third editions that Richardson's first-edition notes appear minimal. Careful consideration of *Clarissa*'s earliest paratexts reveals that Richardson's editorial fiction is, from the start, more than merely "a convenience to explain the provenance of the text,"³⁵ and that his first-edition footnotes serve subtler purposes than critics distressed by their expansion in later editions might assume. Richardson's cross-referencing footnotes encourage readers to reexamine past letters in light of current circumstances, foreshadowing his habit of responding to readers' complaints by referring them back to passages in the text: Keymer relates that "'I must question

³⁴ For a relatively neutral discussion of Richardson's editorial changes in later editions, see Shirley Van Marter, "Richardson's Revisions of *Clarissa* in the Second Edition," *Studies in Bibliography: Papers of the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia* 26 (1973): 107-32 and "Richardson's Revisions of *Clarissa* in the Third and Fourth Editions," *Studies in Bibliography: Papers of the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia* 28 (1975): 119-52. For analysis of these changes as foreclosing the play of interpretation that characterizes the first edition, see Warner, 181-8 and Keymer, 246-7.

³⁵ Keymer, 247.

your attention’ and ‘Be pleased to reperuse’ are two of the letters’ most characteristic phrases.”³⁶

Footnotes provide the attentive reader not just with reminders about specific factual information, but with textual locations of previous events, comments, and promises, so that the reader can do the work for the novel as a whole that Clarissa imagines doing within her own writing: comparing the past against the present and using it to adjust behavior in the future. In other words, Richardson’s first-edition footnotes script the actions of an ideal reader by guiding readers to the passages they would need to consider in order to make their own interpretations, rather than necessarily interpreting for them.

Richardson’s editorial apparatus models the patterns of attentive reading in the midst of suspense that he hopes his readers might learn; thus, at critical moments, it offers to allay suspense rather than to intensify it. The clearest example appears in the third installment, directly after the letter in which Lovelace announces to Belford that he has raped Clarissa. Between this letter and the one that follows, Richardson inserts into the body of the text the notice that “the whole of this black transaction is given by the injured lady to Miss Howe, in her subsequent letters, dated Thursday July 6. To which the reader is referred” (883). At a moment in the novel when events are most dubious and situations most critical, Richardson intervenes to assure his readers that they can expect a description of this event from a trustworthy source—even if, as it turns out, this description is about a hundred pages away. The note may at first increase readerly suspense, since the attentive reader will observe that the previous letter is dated June 13, and may wonder what will delay Clarissa’s explanation by almost a month. But by providing the date of Clarissa’s explanatory letter, Richardson tacitly enables impatient readers to skip ahead and relieve some of their suspense, even as he challenges the more orderly reader to trust and to wait

³⁶ Keymer, 65.

until the explanation appears in its own due time.

In fact, Richardson repeatedly uses footnotes to promise that currently confusing events will be explained “hereafter” (1246, 1247). The religious resonance of “hereafter” cannot have escaped Richardson, and it suggests another level on which we might read the relationship of footnotes to a narrative text. Though marginal, the footnotes position Richardson as the God of his written universe, surveying it from a sufficient distance to highlight its larger patterns and demonstrating a godlike knowledge of the text’s past, present, and future simultaneously; thus, they generate “local effects of nuance...that help reduce the famous and sometimes regrettable linearity of discourse.”³⁷ Leah Price has explored Richardson’s concerns that readers most interested in the novel’s suspenseful plot might speed straight through *Clarissa*, skipping and skimming rather than reading attentively; as a counter to such readerly speed, she proposes that “the sententious passages which pepper the novel are designed less (through their content) to inculcate specific moral lessons than (through their structure) to regulate the pace of reading.”³⁸ I am suggesting that the cross-referencing footnotes of the first edition constitute another method for regulating the pace of reading, aimed at inculcating the valuable and retarding practices of attention and reflection that characterize ideal Christians as well as ideal readers.

However, the same footnotes that rehearse the practices of attention Richardson hopes to inculcate demonstrate the author’s awareness of a paradox within his didactic method: his text must be the vehicle for constructing the ideal reader it requires. This paradox manifests most clearly in a late footnote that obliquely characterizes Richardson’s ideal “attentive reader.” The

³⁷ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 328.

³⁸ Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 21.

footnote comments on a sentence written by Clarissa to Anna, shortly after Clarissa has escaped Lovelace's captivity after the rape; Clarissa "wonder[s] how the vile Tomlinson" (Lovelace's accomplice) "could come at the knowledge of several of the things he told [Clarissa] of, and which contributed to give [her] confidence in him" (1013). In response to Clarissa's puzzlement, Richardson provides his readers with the following reminder: "The attentive reader need not be referred back for what [Clarissa] nevertheless could not account for, as she knew not that Mr Lovelace had come at Miss Howe's letters; particularly that on p. 586, which he comments upon on p. 636" (1013).³⁹ Richardson's use of the definite article in referring to "the attentive reader" seems to conjure this responsible figure into being. At the very least, it congratulates readers attentive enough to pause in the midst of an emotionally fraught letter to read a footnote. But by continuing to reveal what the "attentive reader" ostensibly already knows, Richardson acknowledges that not all readers will enter his novel prepared to read it, and that even those who identify with the "attentive reader" may require occasional reminders. After all, for a reader of the first edition who diligently bought and read each new installment as it was released, this footnote gestures back not only across three hundred pages of minutely descriptive text, but also across the seven-month span that separated the publication of the second installment and the third—a period during which even a careful reader might forget salient details. The "attentive reader" footnote thus foregrounds the work done by Richardson's cross-referencing footnotes generally: they simultaneously presuppose a reader attentive enough to pause and read them, and a reader inattentive enough to require the citations they provide.

Richardson's notes play an integral role in his scheme for generating an attentive

³⁹ Ross, the editor of the Penguin edition, silently emends all of Richardson's page references from the original editions so that the reader of Ross's edition can use these references to refer to the appropriate pages in that edition.

readership; they provide clarification, reminders, and even potential relief from suspense—but only to those who read them. Richardson does seem to understand this paradox and to make some concessions for the truly inattentive reader. For example, the note that follows Lovelace’s announcement of the rape is not only included in the body text, but also italicized and set off from the letters before and after it with thick horizontal bars. And while Keymer notes that “even in later editions the cautionary editorial footnotes in which [Richardson] sought to recover at least some control over interpretation are few and (in a text of thousands of pages) very far between,”⁴⁰ the frequent clustering of cross-referencing footnotes on the same page calls attention to the practice, even if only at intervals. Still, no amount of editorial notation can guarantee a reader attentive enough to read it, and it is perhaps in deference to the insufficiencies of the form that Richardson turns, in the third installment, to a plot arc that might show even inattentive readers how to appropriately interpret challenging texts under conditions of uncertainty.

Suspense and the Labor of Attention

Richardson’s strategies for guiding reader response culminate in the gradual interpretation of Clarissa’s “father’s house” letter during the novel’s final installment. This narrative sequence combines and amplifies techniques used elsewhere to heighten suspense and foreground the challenges of judgment, and perhaps most importantly, situates these techniques in the body of the text rather than relegating them to prefaces or footnotes. At a moment when the stakes of interpretation are at their highest, Richardson can no longer rely on subtler forms of guidance to ensure his readers read aright. The father’s house letter provides an opportunity for

⁴⁰ Keymer, 82.

Richardson to trace the final stages in Belford's development from Lovelace's rakish compatriot to Clarissa's attentive reader, providing the novel's most concrete example of what it would mean to read with attention.

Initially, when given the chance to withhold information from Lovelace, Belford gleefully uses Lovelace's tyrannical suspense against him: "I will make thee taste a little in thy turn of the plague of suspense; and break off, without giving thee the least hint of the issue of my further proceedings" (1068). Readers may participate in Belford's pleasure at "keeping [Lovelace] willfully, and on purpose to torment him, in suspense" (1049), but this impulse ought to be distinguished from Richardson's use of suspense to engage readers in actively interpreting and judging challenging cases still in progress. It is only as his friendship with Clarissa grows that Belford begins to consider suspense as something that one might actively work through, rather than passively suffer under. Shortly after he has been made Clarissa's executor, Belford writes to Lovelace, reveling in the anticipation of someday reading the letters Clarissa spends so much time writing. His rhapsodic predictions about her style recall Richardson's descriptions of writing to the moment:

Such a sweetness of temper, so much patience and resignation, as [Clarissa] seems to be mistress of; yet writing of and in the midst of *present* distresses! How much more lively and affecting, for that reason, must her style be, than all that can be read in the dry, narrative, unanimated style of persons relating difficulties and dangers surmounted! The minds of such not labouring in suspense, not tortured by the pangs of uncertainty about events still hidden in the womb of fate; but on the contrary perfectly at ease; the relater unmoved by his own story, how then able to move the hearer or reader? (1178)

Belford's focus on the "lively and affecting...style" that is paradoxically generated "in the midst of *present* distresses" echoes the preface's claims about writing to the moment as a style that links the heart of the writer to the breast of the youthful reader—and indeed, Belford's own style here is lively and affecting insofar as he is in the midst of suspense about what Clarissa's letters

will be like. But this very liveliness allows Belford to redescribe the ongoing experience of “critical situations,” as the preface calls them, in newly urgent and embodied terms. “Events still hidden in the womb of fate” echoes the preface’s “events at the time generally dubious,” and yet the metaphorical language of giving birth resonates on a visceral level. The pain of uncertainty is no longer couched in distant terms, but becomes as sharp, sudden, and world-shattering as a contraction or death throes.⁴¹ Likewise, the nebulous cluster of cognitive habits called “attention” solidifies in the image of “labor” that grounds this passage. Like a woman experiencing labor, the attentive reader experiencing suspense is both not in control and yet still required to participate in the process of bringing the future into being. While we should hesitate before labeling Belford as the perfectly attentive reader, Richardson’s willingness to ascribe to him the language of “labouring in suspense” suggests Belford’s growing understanding of the activity under suspense that attentive reading requires.

Belford’s description of “labouring in suspense” appears in the text shortly before Clarissa’s “father’s house” letter, as though arming readers with the vision of suspense they will need in order to perform well under the interpretive challenges to come. Unlike Lovelace’s view of suspense as a punishment to be passively suffered, the suspense that fills the gap between the appearance of Clarissa’s “father’s house” letter and her eventual explanation of its meaning models readerly labor in the form of sustained attention and interpretive decision-making. The letter’s initial inscrutability provides Richardson with a potential analogue, not just for the workings of his own novel, but for the workings of providence writ large. From this side of eternity—prior to God’s final authoritative “interpretation”—no settled explanation is possible.

⁴¹ According to the OED, especially in early uses, “pang” most frequently refers to the pains of childbirth or death. OED, qv. “pang,” def. n.1.a

And yet, despite the certainty of human ignorance compared to godly knowledge, Christians are still called upon to make an effort in this world—to pay attention, to work, to strive, even if the end of their striving remains fundamentally unknowable. The very fact that Richardson *does* provide his readers with the definitive interpretation of Clarissa’s letter, rather than forcing them to remain forever in suspense, makes it an imperfect model for a truly “unsearchable” providence. But then, Richardson’s goal all along has been to convince his readers that no model for providence can exist perfectly in this world—not even his novel—and that they must strive in hope of being granted a clearer understanding in the world to come.

Richardson organizes the sequence of events concerning the “father’s house” letter—from its first appearance in the novel, to its authoritative interpretation, to its fulfillment by Clarissa’s posthumous letter to Lovelace—in order to model how readers ought to approach the process of reading attentively in the midst of suspense. He begins by contrasting Lovelace’s simplistic reading of the letter with Belford’s more skeptical approach. Lovelace immediately takes the letter at face value; though the “generous change” of Clarissa’s sentiments surprises him, he readily excuses this apparent inconsistency of character: “what accounting for it is necessary? ...she forgives me” (1234). But while Lovelace rushes ahead with an interpretation based on personal wish-fulfillment, Belford insists that Lovelace’s reading is incorrect, even in the absence of a plausible alternative. Unlike Lovelace, Belford considers more than one potential interpretation of the letter—even exploring the possibility that Lovelace himself may have forged it to trick Belford—but eventually finds himself “altogether incapable of accounting for it in any shape” (1243). In this, Belford models the appropriate posture of a reader toward a confusing or difficult text, weighing the probability of multiple options and—crucially—preferring to prolong the process of interpretation when none of these options seem likely.

Although he is frustrated by his inability to understand the letter, he is nonetheless willing to admit that he cannot judge at present, and must wait patiently until his return to London from a friend's deathbed will allow him to petition Clarissa for an authoritative interpretation. Furthermore, Belford's claim to be "incapable of accounting for" the letter echoes Richardson's previously-quoted desire "that a Reader should find no way to account for the Calamities [Clarissa] met with, and to justify Moral Equity but by looking up to a future Reward" in heaven, suggestively aligning attentive reading and a true understanding of providential inscrutability.⁴²

Yet even when Belford returns to Clarissa's presence, her explanations do not immediately dispel his confusion or counter Lovelace's interpretation. Instead, Richardson allows the elliptical brevity of Clarissa's comments about the letter to suggest that she may have actually told an outright lie, a possibility Belford has previously entertained and rejected. When Clarissa admits that "Necessity may well be called the mother of invention—But calamity is the test of integrity," and hopes she has not "taken an inexcusable step," her anxiety prompts a reading of her "invention" as a fictitious story (1247). In response to this information, even Lovelace begins to suspect that the letter is "a stratagem to get [him] out of town" (1267)—and, as it turns out, he is not wrong. However, he is not entirely correct, either, and Belford's willingness to see even this essentially accurate reading as "an action undecided" prompts him to push Clarissa for the comprehensive answer he believes must exist to complement or contain Lovelace's accusation.

Clarissa's explanation, when it comes, both affirms the practice of readers like Belford who have remained skeptical of Lovelace's interpretations and suggests that more than mere skepticism is necessary to provide a correct interpretation. In conversation with Belford about

⁴² *Selected Letters*, 73.

her letter, Clarissa is surprised that neither he nor Lovelace has “found out [her] meaning,” as she considered it “so obvious” (1274). One hears in her phrasing something like an echo of Richardson’s own exasperation with inappropriate readings of his novel, and Clarissa requires of Belford the same corrective measure that Richardson prescribes his readers: the text of the letter must be read again. However, in a tacit acknowledgment of readerly insufficiency, Belford’s rereading of the letter offers him no clues, and he must beg Clarissa to interpret the text for him. Her explanation that “a *religious* meaning is couched under it” overrides and renders complete all previous explanations, even Lovelace’s essentially accurate reading of the letter as a stratagem (1274). The fact that the text of the letter leads Lovelace astray depends on his inability to think about spiritual matters rather than worldly ones; it presents a test of his ability to think in terms of a life after death, and ensures that if he cannot pass that test, he will have no access to Clarissa. It chastises readers of the novel as well, suggesting that thinking in terms of the afterlife is just as necessary to understanding *Clarissa* as it is to understanding the “father’s house” letter. Lovelace, intent on deflating the letter’s spiritual seriousness and reducing the allegory to the level of one of his own petty frauds, mocks what he sees as the incomplete fit of the allegorical vision to the actual text: “She is to send me a letter after she is in heaven, is she?” (1302) However, Richardson allows this objection only to counter it. After Clarissa’s death, Belford discovers Clarissa’s posthumous letters, including one to Lovelace “in performance of her promise that a letter should be sent [him] when she arrived at her Father’s house!” (1368)

Clarissa’s “father’s house” letter delays Lovelace, but it also slows down impatient readers who resist the labors required by interpretation; the scenes focused on the letter’s gradual interpretation foreground the kind of attentive reading that *Clarissa* demands. Richardson stages a showdown between conflicting initial opinions about the letter only to prolong the

development and testing of new hypotheses over time, situating attentive reading as a process of unfolding that requires a willingness to revise or elaborate upon previous judgments. Such practices may be mistaken for a kind of passivity because they require more intellectual than physical labor, and only gradually or occasionally generate any kind of external action, and yet this ever-shifting play of discovery and judgment over time constitutes the active labor of attention.

The inclusion of this letter in the novel's final installment demonstrates Richardson's own willingness to be provisional—to acknowledge that previous attempts at guiding his readers have failed, and that he must change tactics, just as he hopes that readers will learn to change their own insufficient interpretations. Only by revising their initial desires for “poetical justice” can readers approach the novel's conclusion from an appropriately providential mindset, understanding and accepting the deferral of reward and punishment to the next life, while still laboring attentively to understand events in this life. By delaying the letter's appropriate interpretation, and forcing readers to engage with competing interpretations along the way, Richardson foregrounds not the letter's actual meaning, but the efforts that it requires of its readers—and, in turn, the effort of faithful “laboring in suspense” that can exist despite and within uncertainty.

The Affordances of Suspense

In the final section of this chapter, I want to turn briefly to examine an alternate ending to *Clarissa* written by Lady Elizabeth Echlin sometime in 1749 and actually shared with Richardson years later in 1755 when they had become correspondents. Shocked by *Clarissa*'s rape even more than by her tragic death, Echlin took it into her own hands to revise the

“shocking circumstances leading to the catastrophe” which she found so objectionable in the original. Some critics have simply dismissed responses like Echlin’s as misreadings; others have blamed Richardson for naively fostering assumptions that his plot would not fulfill.⁴³ I turn to Echlin’s continuation primarily to assess how one contemporary reader understood and ultimately reacted against Richardson’s deployment of suspense. I do this because I believe it gives this a better idea of what Caroline Levine, borrowing from design theory, has recently termed the *affordances* of literary form. Initially meant to describe “the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs,” Levine extends the concept of “affordance” to the realm of aesthetic and social forms because of the way that it allows us to understand how a given literary form “can be put to use in unexpected ways that expand our general sense of that form’s affordances.”⁴⁴ Richardson’s techniques for generating suspense certainly afford the kind of readerly attention he desires to produce. But the same techniques additionally afford Echlin’s more resistant reading. Although it does not represent the response Richardson desired, Echlin’s continuation nonetheless responds in particularly sensitive ways to the patterns of suspense deployed by Richardson in the third installment of *Clarissa*. By rewriting this crucial installment, Echlin presents her readers with a powerful vision of “what potentialities lie latent—though not always obvious” within the strategies Richardson uses to manipulate reader response.⁴⁵

⁴³ Keymer addresses Echlin’s continuation pp. 214-8 but his assertion that, counter to Richardson’s intentions, “Echlin remains keen to restore the fiction of an active Providence” seems to lack nuance, since this “active Providence” certainly does not equate in any simple way with the “poetical justice” Richardson harangues in the first edition postscript. Most other readers who clamored for a poetically just ending in fact desired that *Clarissa* would survive, and perhaps even be rewarded with marriage to a reformed Lovelace; this ending Echlin seems uninterested in providing.

⁴⁴ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 6. For a general introduction to her use of “affordances,” see 6-11.

⁴⁵ Levine, *Forms*, 6

Echlin's continuation diverges from Richardson's *Clarissa* at the beginning of the third installment, immediately after Lovelace has arrived in Hampstead. Out of all of the alternate endings to *Clarissa* suggested by Richardson's contemporaries, Echlin's is particularly of interest to me not just because it is a full-fledged narrative alternative to the third installment, written like the original in epistolary form, but also because it is one of the few responses that does not simply change the ending of the novel by transforming it into a comedy, in which Clarissa lives and Lovelace is redeemed.⁴⁶ Echlin's ending differs from Richardson's original in a number of ways: her Clarissa is at once more knowing and more sentimentally passive; her characters are in general more allegorical; her plot wraps things up in tidier packages; her letters are less minutely detailed and her conclusion is immensely less prolix than the one it replaces. The largest deviation occurs in Echlin's prevention of a rape plot: in her version, Lovelace is presented with a perfect opportunity, but quails before the already-weakened Clarissa, whose physical illness has been brought on by his continued harassment. Clarissa still dies, but not before becoming the cause of Lovelace's sentimental conversion away from his rakish misogyny. The crucial changes, then, are made not to stave off Clarissa's tragic death but to prevent her rape, which Echlin describes to Richardson in a letter accompanying her continuation as an "odious invention," "so horribly shocking to humanity."⁴⁷ While preventing Clarissa's rape clearly runs contrary to Richardson's plans for the novel, the specific techniques by which Echlin

⁴⁶ For example Echlin's sister, Lady Dorothy Bradshaigh, proposes in her marginalia on the novel's first edition that in the event that the rape did not take place, Lovelace might be made to reform, though not to marry Clarissa, who is envisioned as happily living out the remainder of her life in the single state she so strongly desires throughout the novel. See Dorothy Bradshaigh, *The Annotations in Lady Bradshaigh's Copy of Clarissa*, ed. Janine Barchas and Gordon D. Fulton (Victoria, B.C.: English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 1998), 140-1.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Echlin, *An Alternative Ending to Richardson's Clarissa*, Schweizer anglistische Arbeiten = Swiss Studies in English, ed. Dimiter Daphinoff (Bern: Francke, 1982), 172, 173. Further citations will be made parenthetically in the text.

prevents it respond directly to the techniques of suspense prevalent in Richardson's second and third installments. As a result, Echlin's rewriting provides a clear insight into the "affordances" of Richardson's techniques for generating suspense.

Echlin's decision to initiate her rewriting with the beginning of the third installment suggests the degree to which Richardson's efforts to contain and control suspense in the third installment made it into a clear narrative unit for his readers. Once the wheels of the third installment are set in motion, there is no going back—so Echlin must ensure that they are never set in motion to begin with. She does this largely by changing the resonance of the "fire scene" that prompts Clarissa's escape to Hampstead at the end of the second installment. In Richardson's text, the fire scene greatly disturbs Clarissa, but in the absence of reliable outside information about Lovelace's schemes, she cannot ultimately be suspicious enough. Once Lovelace tracks her down, he is able to convince her to return to London with him through a series of stratagems which are clear to the reader in possession of both halves of the correspondence, but almost completely opaque to Clarissa. Since Lovelace has managed to intercept and even to forge letters between Clarissa and Anna, he can prevent Clarissa from discovering that the women who pose as his aunt and cousin are in fact prostitutes he has hired to play these roles. Even though the fire scene represents Lovelace's first serious attempt to rape Clarissa, in Richardson's novel, this does not correspond to an increased wariness about Lovelace's schemes—or if it does, it does not result in any action on Clarissa's part to better decipher them.

In Echlin's revision, however, the fire scene signifies to Clarissa herself in much the same way it does to the novel's external reader, who has unambiguous knowledge of the role Lovelace has played in orchestrating it. The first letter of Echlin's continuation represents a

Clarissa enraged by the degree to which she has already been duped, and vigilant against any future attempts:

you will tell me perhaps, Love is Blind; and I confess, I haue been strangely Blinded, but not with a foolish passion. it shocks me to tell you my Dear Miss Howe, that your unhappy friend has suffered her self to be imposed on, by not discerning, nor suspecting a Base design. had I been reasonably suspicious—I should long since haue made a material discovery. am now, greatly astonished at my past inconsideration; or rather, at my supine stupidity—nothing can Excuse, so weak a credulity but my innocency (Echlin 39)

Of course, in Richardson's novel, Clarissa's "innocency" extends into the literal sense of being without knowledge: there is no way that Clarissa, based on the materials and information to which she has access, could discover all of the plots against her, even if she could perhaps suspect them. In this way, Echlin has clearly failed to live up to Richardson's image of the "attentive reader" who not only remembers past plot details, but remembers which knowledge about those plots is actually possessed by different characters. In fact, the opening of Echlin's continuation feels almost like a direct rebuttal to the attentive reader footnote. That note specifically reminds the reader that Clarissa's lack of knowledge has kept her from suspecting Tomlinson's disguise, but in Echlin's hands, Clarissa's detection of Tomlinson as a fraud becomes the first major action of the text. Echlin's Clarissa does precisely what Richardson's Clarissa could not know to do: she questions Tomlinson about the members of her family that he has purported to be working for, and when he tries to change the subject, she pressures him until "conscious guilt appeared in his countenance" (Echlin 40).

I want to suggest that Echlin's implicit chastisement of Richardson's Clarissa for not being "reasonably suspicious" should not be seen simply as a misreading, but as a real possible result of the formal choices made by Richardson as he attempts to generate suspense. The attentive reader footnote suggests that readers will *not* be able to track who knows what, but it also seems to suggest that regular reminders might make up for poor memory. However,

Richardson does not appear to have taken seriously the possibility of Echlin's response, in which the greater knowledge of the reader is imaginatively transposed onto the character whose knowledge disparity has made her most vulnerable. Richardson's use of the double correspondence to create suspense backfires in a manner that falls entirely within the affordances of this form: the real reader, unlike the ideal reader, is left to question *why* Clarissa cannot see Lovelace's plans when they are, from a readerly vantage point, so obvious.

While Echlin preserves the third installment's narrative of Clarissa's death, her own production falls far short of Richardson's in terms of sheer length and attention to minute detail. Rather than reading this as a sign of Echlin's amateur status as writer, I want to suggest that the shortening of the third installment is as much a response to the demands of Richardson's suspense as her removal of the rape. By making the third installment proceed at a quicker pace, Echlin deliberately reduces suspense and avoids the kind of drawn-out deathbed scenes that caused so much anguish for Richardson's first readers—to the extent that, in her version, Clarissa's death takes place offstage. Her pacing thus reflects a desire to eschew suspense.

The third installment is greatly sped up by Echlin's more frequent use of summary and greater willingness to omit letters that are assumed to have been sent but that do not have direct bearing on plot (for example, no letters from Anna in response to Clarissa are included, and letters themselves are more likely to be summarized rather than transcribed in the correspondence of their recipients, with a few notable exceptions). To a close reader of Richardson's novel, the passing references to how much time has passed during the writing of a single letter in Echlin's text are often surprising: "'tis almost a whole week, since I began to write this," Clarissa exclaims in one letter; "three days are passt without my knowing any more," she summarizes in another (Echlin 58, 87). I find it difficult to imagine a Clarissa who could pass

three days with nothing to report for them, especially if those three days were spent *not knowing* something, as happens in this case. It would be much more in character for Richardson's Clarissa to obsessively pick over the layers of not knowing, to narrate the minute fluctuations of her anxiety in the absence of knowledge, and to generate a long list of suspicions with which to fill out three days' time. But it would also be more suspenseful, and the pains of suspense are something Echlin seems willing to go to great lengths to avoid.

This is additionally clear in the discussions of Lovelace's conversion. While characters like Clarissa and Dr. Christian (a good divine invented by Echlin to tend to Clarissa at Hampstead and oversee Lovelace's reform) pay lip service to Richardson's own doubts about the possibility of a "speedy reformation," in Echlin's version of events, even such pious characters quickly find themselves proved wrong. Within a few letters, Dr. Christian's initially skeptical response to Lovelace's conversion—"time only can convince us"—has been transformed into enthusiastic support (Echlin 86). In a passage that seems to counter all of Richardson's views on the subject—at least his views after the publication of *Pamela*—Dr. Christian explains that "remorse, does not always take possession of the heart by slow degrees; and it is reasonable to suppose, that...sudden remorse has converted him at once, and stem'd the violent torrent of irregular passions" (Echlin 113). Thus, Echlin's reimagined fictional world is not just one in which characters commit different actions, but one in which things move at a different pace.

While Echlin may not be the attentive reader that Richardson desires to create, she does provide a fascinating example of what Eve Sedgwick has called a "reparative" reader, approaching Richardson's novel in a way that transforms it from a cause of painful suspense into a repository of comfort in a hostile world. Adapting concepts from Melanie Klein, Sedgwick

envision a mode of reading through which “it is possible in turn to use one’s own resources to assemble or ‘repair’ the murderous part-objects”—in Echlin’s case, the novel whose conclusion has so unnerved her—“into something like a whole—though, I would emphasize, *not necessarily like any preexisting whole*. Once assembled to one’s own specifications, the more satisfying object is available both to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort in turn.”⁴⁸

The paradigm of reparative reading may help us make some sense of Echlin’s decision to retain Clarissa’s death as a feature of her alternate ending. A closer look at the consequences of this death demonstrates that Echlin’s primary frustration lies in the apparent disparity between the strong emotional impact Clarissa’s death had on readers and its total inability to generate positive, lasting change in the treatment of good women within the novel and without. In effect, Echlin’s rewriting imagines a world in which the sentimental response to Clarissa’s death has not only positive spiritual ramifications for the novel’s readers (Richardson’s stated goal), but also moves representatives of an increasingly threatening patriarchy to take action to ameliorate the poor social condition of women.

Recently, Ruth Perry has provided a social-historical explanation for the outpouring of frustration at *Clarissa*’s tragic conclusion. Perry claims that Clarissa’s disinheritance touched upon a raw cultural nerve for female readers like Echlin because relatively recent changes in kinship structures had left many of these women facing situations of disinheritance and disempowerment that resonated deeply with Clarissa’s. The tragic ending of Richardson’s novel thus had such an extreme effect because it seemed to confirm the increasing foreclosure of

⁴⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) 128.

opportunities for women outside of marriage for the sake of family profit.⁴⁹ To a woman like Echlin, who belonged to a generation of women whose prospects and possibilities were increasingly limited by shifting paradigms of kin relations, *Clarissa*'s conclusion offered a serious shock, a terrifying picture of what it meant to live as a woman in her world, terrifying because increasingly accurate. In response, Echlin imagines a *Clarissa* that could provide hope rather than despair for herself and for the other women who share her position, even as she appears to have internalized enough of Richardson's insistence on the "hereafter" that she does not enable Clarissa to survive to see her legacy.

For Richardson, the third installment is a place to once and for all test the attention of his readers, ideally ensuring that they close the book having been persuaded into a providential mindset. But for Echlin, a more concrete gain is required. Although Echlin follows through on Richardson's intentions in the sense that she concludes the novel as a tragedy, rather than giving into a notion of "anti-providential justice," she envisions Clarissa's legacy as taking material form in provisions for other potentially vulnerable women who survive her. These provisions are not Clarissa's legacy in the literal sense of being made by Clarissa in a will—in fact, Echlin's version of the third installment focuses on the writing of wills by Clarissa's father, her uncles, and Lovelace—but it is clear that all these wills serve as means "to make Miss Harlowe reparation," as Lovelace puts it (Echlin 112). They do so by paying forward to future generations of women the care and respect that Clarissa should have been shown in her lifetime, and as such they represent a larger change in the functioning of the patriarchy that Echlin clearly desired—going beyond a simple return to earlier models of kinship in which families exerted more care for

⁴⁹ Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See chap. 1, "The Great Disinheritance," esp. 66-8.

their dependent daughters, and in fact requiring these patriarchs to extend that care to the daughters that no one of importance will own. Clarissa's father and uncles settle a great deal of their fortune on Clarissa's faithful childhood nurse and the nurse's son, whose future place in society they intend to secure by promoting a marriage between himself and one of Clarissa's maternal cousins—distinguished because she stood by Clarissa when the rest of her family abandoned her. Lovelace, meanwhile, leaves one of his estates to be transformed into a kind of asylum for the rehabilitation of rakish men and fallen women—"such sincere male-converts, and real Magdalens—that are friendless, and destitute" (Echlin 166).⁵⁰ Thus, Echlin uses Clarissa's death to entail real changes in the world she leaves behind—changes that she clearly hopes will protect new generations of vulnerable women, even as they rely on patriarchal benevolence to do so. The universe Echlin desires to alter, then, is not just the fictional one, in which Clarissa is subject to rape, but the real one, in which more women than Clarissa have difficulty surviving.

It may be tempting to see Clarissa's death, as Richardson did in his comments to Echlin, as frankly unnecessary. However, even if Echlin agrees with Richardson that heaven is better than this world for women, she resists the necessity of this fact. Instead of allowing Richardson's suspense to keep her focused on the uncertainties of salvation in the hereafter, Echlin is determined to use Clarissa's death as a way to entail real changes in the world she leaves behind. Rather than waiting for her own individual future "reward" in heaven, Echlin focuses on envisioning changes that will empower and protect new generations of formerly vulnerable women.

Tellingly, Sedgwick's description of the reparative impulse deals heavily with the way it

⁵⁰ For a discussion of Clarissa's father's and uncles' wills, see Echlin, 141-4; for Lovelace's legacy, see Echlin, 165-6.

disrupts expected temporal sequences: “Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did.”⁵¹ In rewriting the third installment of *Clarissa*, Echlin does not merely entertain the possibility of a “different past”—she brings it into being for herself in order to generate a more productive future. In fact, Sedgwick’s concluding definition of reparative reading practices as “the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them” seems to dovetail with the politically liberating possibilities Levine sees in the affordances of literary and social form.⁵² Ultimately, Echlin’s desired “reparations” are made in ways that are simultaneously worldly and future-oriented—a combination Richardson himself does not seem capable of envisioning, but that the future orientation of suspense enables Echlin to delineate.

Clarissa’s ascendance over Lovelace in the novel’s final installment allows Richardson to reaffirm the value of providential suspense and to disavow the self-defeating irresponsibility of Lovelace’s tyrannical model. Unlike Lovelace, who tampers in damaging and self-interested ways with the knowledge of others, Richardson suggests that Clarissa’s allegorical letter, despite its self-interested aspects, is also capable of reforming those who read it right. Ultimately, Belford’s depiction of the uncertainty and suspense he expects to see in Clarissa’s letters is less

⁵¹ Sedgwick, 146

⁵² Sedgwick, 150-1. In fact, my interest in thinking about the way that reparative reading might interact with suspense comes from a footnote in Levine’s “An Anatomy of Suspense” where she briefly discusses Sedgwick and suggests that “[w]hat is odd about suspense...is that it is *both* paranoid *and* reparatively pleasurable” (Levine, “An Anatomy of Suspense” 213). I certainly see this strange admixture in Echlin’s response to *Clarissa*.

descriptive of Clarissa's true emotional state of "patience and resignation," and more relevant to the state of anticipation she ultimately enforces in her readers—a state which Richardson desires to put to moral use. Thus in *Clarissa*, Richardson desires for laborious work to characterize the process of readerly interpretation as well as authorial creation. An appropriate "labouring in suspense" would foreground, not the pain of anticipation, but the effort that Richardson expects his readers to exert while suspended between confusion and a future moment of clarity. Richardson ultimately employs Clarissa's allegorical letter to allow his readers to envision suspense as dynamic rather than static, and the text as a production requiring the labor of both its author and its readers to fulfill its aims, even if the reader's labor should be appropriately subordinated to the author's. While Richardson's changes to subsequent editions of the novel reveal that not all readers exerted their efforts as he would have wished, his continued work on *Clarissa* suggests his own providential belief that some future text might be able to fulfill the unsuccessful aims of the first one.

Chapter 2

“Leave, if Possible, *Myself*”: Familiarity and the Limits of Sensibility in *Tristram Shandy*

Looking back on Laurence Sterne’s work in her 1810 preface to *The British Novelists*, Anna Laetitia Barbauld describes both *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) as early and influential works in the tradition of sensibility:

They exhibit much originality, wit, and beautiful strokes of pathos, but a total want of plan or adventure, being made up of conversations and detached incidents. It is the peculiar characteristic of this writer, that he affects the heart, not by long drawn tales of distress, but by light electric touches which thrill the nerves of the reader who possesses a correspondent sensibility of frame. His characters, in like manner, are struck out by a few masterly touches. He resembles those painters who can give expression to a figure by two or three strokes of bold outline, leaving the imagination to fill up the sketch; the feelings are awakened as really by the story of *Le Fevre*, as by the narrative of *Clarissa*.¹

Barbauld may claim that Sterne’s method of “affect[ing] the heart” through momentary intensities is “peculiar” to himself, and yet the language she uses to describe Sterne’s work and its effects places him firmly within a larger literary phenomenon. From the middle of the eighteenth century, the “culture of sensibility” privileged intense emotional response to scenes of distress as signals of benevolence and virtue. The literature of sensibility, as Barbauld observes and as critics continue to emphasize, teems with emotions that are sudden and fleeting, dissipating almost as soon as they have been created and leaving the expectant reader biding her time until the next “light electric touch” of intense emotion arrives as a shock to her system. Often comprised of disconnected episodes—“conversations and detached incidents”—such texts move from moment to moment, from feeling to feeling, with little need for “plan or adventure.” As Barbauld’s description of Sterne suggests, rather than privileging plot, these novels focus on particular kinds of characters—the suffering men and women who provoke strong feeling, and

¹ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, “On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing,” in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Elizabeth Kraft and William McCarthy (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2002), 403.

the central “man of feeling” around whom these sufferers congregate, and whose presence as the observer of repeated sentimental encounters becomes the glue that holds together a patchwork of episodes and incidents.

Barbauld’s comments treat both of Sterne’s major works simultaneously; however, the vision of sensibility I have extrapolated from her remarks seems far more appropriate to *A Sentimental Journey* than to *Tristram Shandy*. As the later work, *A Sentimental Journey* fits more neatly into the critical consensus about the timeline of sensibility. But more to the point, while both texts appear to avoid “long drawn tales of distress,” *Tristram Shandy* is nonetheless notoriously “long drawn”: it dwarfs the slimmer volumes of *A Sentimental Journey*, and its uneven serial publication in five installments spread across nearly eight years only increased the time it would have taken its first readers to make their way from start to finish. *Tristram Shandy* certainly does not prolong a distressing tale in the manner of *Clarissa*—it does not depend in the same way on suspense as a motor for readerly engagement with plot, and indeed, it fails to have much of a plot at all in the traditional sense—and yet its sprawling and digressive length challenges us to consider what changes about our experience of the “light electric touches” of sensibility when we encounter them as part of a particularly lengthy reading experience.

In this chapter, I argue that digression provides the formal key to understanding how Sterne negotiates between sudden intensities of feeling and the long drawn experience both of reading such a dilatory text and becoming accustomed to its peculiar style. Digression ultimately helps Sterne develop a nuanced response to two related challenges of sensibility that were particularly pressing for writers hoping to engage the feelings in the practice of ethical instruction. The first has to do with the extent to which sensibility is innate or learned. In literature of the period, “sensibility” names both a type of behavior—the sympathetic, often

charitable response to the distress of others—and an inborn, physiologically-rooted “delicacy” or sensitivity that promotes this behavior.² While the behavior might be learned or expanded, the underlying delicacy that produces it may be outside the individual’s control, even as it seriously predetermines the individual’s capacity for feeling; thus, Barbauld suggests that Sterne’s sensibility will only affect “the reader who possesses a correspondent sensibility of frame.” This challenge is certainly present throughout *Tristram Shandy* in the moments where Tristram and others attribute emotional responses to physiological causes that seem beyond individual control.

But even writers who thought that appropriate sentimental behavior toward others could be learned faced a challenge in explaining the role sentimental fiction might play in this affective education. Proponents of this literature suggest that by promoting the reader’s vicarious experience of sympathy for sufferers, texts such as Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) and Henry Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling* (1771) could potentially provide a training ground in fellow-feeling. But other writers in the eighteenth century and since have questioned how, exactly, one is meant to transform a momentary experience of sentimental feeling evoked by a novel into a longer-term practice of emotional sensitivity to the real life distresses of others. In fact, while Barbauld’s 1810 preface to *The British Novelists* praises Sterne’s sentimental touch, in an earlier essay, Barbauld presents herself in a skeptical posture toward sentimental fiction:

Much has been said in favour of [representations of agreeable distress], and they are generally thought to improve the tender and humane feelings; but this, I own, appears to me very dubious. That they exercise sensibility is true, but sensibility does not increase with exercise. By the constitution of our frame our habits increase, our emotions

² For a recent treatment of the problem of sensibility as innate vs. learned, see Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). For the significance of “delicacy” as a term in the sentimental lexicon, and one that ought to be considered alongside “sentimental” and “sensibility,” see Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3-4.

decrease, by repeated acts; and thus a wise provision is made, that as our compassion grows weaker, its place should be supplied by habitual benevolence. But in these writings our sensibility is strongly called forth without any possibility of exerting itself in virtuous action, and those emotions, which we shall never feel again with equal force, are wasted without advantage. [...] The being affected with a pathetic story is undoubtedly a sign of an amiable disposition, but perhaps no means of increasing it. On the contrary, young people, by a course of this kind of reading, often acquire something of that apathy and indifference which the experiences of real life would have given them, without its advantages.³

Barbauld here distinguishes between the “exercise” and the “increase” of sentimental feeling; while she does not deny that the literature of sensibility produces the desired emotional response, she emphasizes that there is an inverse relationship between feeling and intensity. Because “our emotions decrease...by repeated acts,” a long course of sentimental reading, while it may help to signal one’s “amiable disposition,” ultimately runs the risk of producing “apathy and indifference.” Barbauld’s proposed solution to this problem is to rely on “habit” as a support to sentimental feeling, because unlike emotions, “habits increase...by repeated acts.” A “habitual benevolence,” while it relies on feeling to develop, may not require feeling to sustain itself. However, she remains skeptical toward the literary representation of distress, since such literature calls forth feeling in a context that makes it impossible to act upon: the objects of pity for which one feels compassion in a sentimental novel are themselves fictional and cannot receive one’s charity. Barbauld’s account of decreasing emotional intensity attributes to repetition what Hume’s account of calm and violent passions in the *Treatise of Human Nature* attributed to the simple passage of time, but both agree that the primary characteristic of feeling is not to last—creating an obvious problem for an ethics based on sensibility. I want to suggest that Sterne, like Barbauld, turns to the power of habit as a force capable of prolonging or

³ Barbauld, “An Enquiry Into Those Kinds of Distress Which Excite Agreeable Sensations,” in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 206.

extending the sensitivity to others that characterizes sentimental “delicacy.” Barbauld’s concern with the distinction between real life and fiction still stands—readers of Sterne’s novel cannot complete benevolent charitable actions toward the characters whose suffering is technically fictional—but the challenging literary text that Sterne produces does require more “active” work, and over a lengthier period of time, than the momentary exercises of sentimental feeling that Barbauld sees as the primary benefit of sentimental fiction.

Tristram Shandy’s digressions offer one possible mechanism for learning sensibility in the way that they manage the relationship between intense moments of emotional response and the long drawn experience of reading a lengthy text. They do so both by modeling the habitual reoccurrence of feeling, and by stringing together scenes of intense sensation with quotidian distractions that emphasize the challenge of remaining focused on the distresses of others for any real length of time. Tristram’s digressions often swerve suddenly away from what we might dubiously label the “main plot” of the novel, formally registering not only Tristram’s susceptibility to distraction but his susceptibility to be distracted from his *own* life’s story by the presence of *other people’s stories*. In this way, *Tristram Shandy*’s willingness to digress might be read as a formal corollary to sensibility, providing the text of the novel with a mechanism for expressing its sensitivity to the presence of others. Digression does not necessarily prolong our momentary encounters with others, but it does allow a great number of people (and texts) to worm their way into this book, formally asserting that a single man’s Life and Opinions may be best understood, not as a history of himself, but as a history of his encounters with and shaping by others.

And yet, if digression demonstrates Tristram’s (and *Tristram Shandy*’s) receptivity to new people and ideas, and suggests habit as a tantalizing solution to the problem of sensibility,

Sterne's treatment of habit-formation in *Tristram Shandy* suggests that he is less sanguine about this possibility. If Tristram is to be believed, his habit of digression does not result from a gradual transformation of benevolent impulses into a sustained practice. Instead, Tristram attributes both his digressiveness and his philanthropy to accidents that nonetheless have an immediate and lasting effect on his constitution. The novel opens by claiming that Tristram's distracted style of narration results from his parents' distraction at the moment of his conception, which has permanently disoriented his animal spirits. Later, Tristram claims that the whole of his formal education has done less for his moral education than the observation of his uncle Toby's good will towards a fly. This moment appears to challenge those who might rely on sentimental literature—or any literature, for that matter—to inculcate ethical practices. Tristram downplays deliberate education provided in part through literary study, and elevates instead the power of “one accidental impression.”⁴ If this is the case, then any claim that Sterne's novel could produce a deliberate ethical effect on its readers would be suspect at best. Certainly, there are other examples in the novel of momentary accidents leaving lasting marks—sometimes literally, as in the case of Tristram's sash-window circumcision—while deliberate long-term projects (like Walter's obsessive research into names, birthing methods, and child-rearing practices) utterly fail to take effect. Tristram certainly possesses instinctive or habitual practices aligned with sensibility, and yet these practices result from accident rather than any deliberation, either on his part or his father's.

However, a closer look at Tristram's accidental course in philanthropy suggests that this emphasis on the momentary accident may not tell the entire story. At the point when Tristram

⁴ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Melvyn New (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), II.xii.100. The Penguin Classics edition uses the text of Melvyn New's authoritative Florida Edition. Further citations of this edition by volume, chapter, and page number will appear parenthetically.

recalls the scene involving the fly, Walter has just angrily dismissed Toby's obsession with military fortification, and Tristram is at great pains to demonstrate that while Toby is a courageous man, he is also "a man patient of injuries" who "had scarce a heart to retaliate against a fly" (II.xii.100). What readers might expect to be a cliché turns out to be a generalization from actual observed behavior, and Tristram follows by describing how this trait played out before his eyes "one day at dinner," and reflecting upon the impact of that moment:

I was but ten years old when this happened;—but whether it was, that the action itself was more in unison to my nerves at that age of pity, which instantly set my whole frame into one vibration of most pleasurable sensation;—or how far the manner and expression of it might go towards it;—or in what degree, or by what secret magick,—a tone of voice and harmony of movement, attuned by mercy, might find a passage to my heart, I know not;—this I know, that the lesson of universal good-will then taught and imprinted by my uncle *Toby*, has never since been worn out of my mind: And tho' I would not depreciate what the study of the *Literas humaniores*, at the university, have done for me in that respect, or discredit the other helps of an expensive education bestowed upon me, both at home and abroad since;—yet I often think that I owe one half of my philanthropy to that one accidental impression. (II.xii.100)

At first, Tristram's attempt to explain why this moment has had such a large effect seems to bode ill for any deliberate attempts at ethical education. While he cannot explain the "secret magic" definitively, the possibilities he suggests depend on a combination of his own attunement to Toby's behavior and certain qualities of that behavior—such as "manner and expression," "tone of voice and harmony of movement"—which cannot possibly be translated to the printed page without leaving something behind.⁵ If philanthropy must be learned accidentally and in person, a deliberate attempt at such education mediated through novelistic representation may have no hope at making an impression. However, elements of this description suggest that Tristram's

⁵ Lorri G. Nandrea reads this scene to a slightly different effect in *Misfit Forms: Paths Not Taken by the British Novel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015) 72-3. Rather than suggesting that the text demonstrates the impossibility of reproducing such an impression in the absence of presence, Nandrea reads it in the context of typographical attempts to "overcome the distances between bodies writing introduces" (72). In this approach, "the text inflects itself upon the physical sensibilities of the reader; it affects the senses directly, becoming less a *sign* for a stimulus external to it than a stimulus in itself" (73).

“accidental impression” is not quite as haphazard as it may seem, and that it may in fact offer salient information about the kinds of conditions under which such “accidents” are most likely to take place. First, it seems significant to note that the account is framed as a retrospect; while Tristram “often” thinks back to this “one accidental impression” as the cause of half his philanthropy, it is much easier to remember a vivid moment than to account the effects of a gradual process. And second, Tristram’s account deemphasizes the enabling conditions of this “accidental impression,” which could not have resulted unless Toby was such a constant and familiar presence in his young nephew’s life. The scene takes place at the family dinner table, contextualizing this indelibly instructive moment against the background of familiar habits and shared proximity. Even if moral education can only happen accidentally or unintentionally, a sustained familiarity with other people may be the necessary precondition for letting those accidents have such a lasting impact.

Taken at face value, Tristram’s digressions can only offer an incomplete or disappointing answer to the question of how literature might enable habits of sensibility. However, the reader’s experience of growing familiarity with Tristram’s style offers a different approach to the problem of coming to care for and feel along with others. Tristram’s digressiveness is an established fact when the novel begins, and one that does not change perceptibly over time—but the reader’s experience of digressive style develops from surprise and strangeness to familiarity and understanding as the reader pieces together the tics and quirks that govern this initially unfamiliar, but not altogether unruly style. In fact, coming to terms with Tristram’s digressions requires the reader to acknowledge that the rules of literary style and novelistic convention already familiar to her are not the only rules capable of producing a novel. The process of coming to terms with this fact undoubtedly takes time, and does not work in the same way for all

readers: some of Sterne's early reviewers were pleased enough with his digressive style's novelty, but tired of it after several volumes. And yet, whereas Tristram's own accidental education seems to produce a sensitivity to others that cannot be deliberately learned, the reader's slow and uneven process of familiarization with Sterne's digressive style models a process of sentimental education open to all: an ongoing exercise in overcoming discomfort with what is strange or unexpected in order to develop a greater understanding of—if not necessarily affection for—what was initially foreign. Thus, by viewing sensibility in relation not just to momentary bursts of feeling but to questions about the habits and practices that might make one susceptible to impression, Sterne ultimately tackles the key question of how a momentary act of benevolence becomes repeatable, and whether literature can predispose readers to form habits of benevolence, rather than simply exercising their benevolent impulses in a series of fleeting moments.

Learning to become familiar with strangers

To argue that Sterne's idiosyncratic style functions as a training ground in familiarity goes against the grain of much criticism of Sterne, which regularly situates Sterne as an anachronistic outlier whose work, far from counting as a novel, instead "defamiliarizes" the comfortable conventions of novelistic prose. This approach is frequently rooted in Viktor Shklovsky's influential essay "The Novel as Parody: Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*," though as Tom Keymer notes, it has been taken up and expanded by more recent critics, who approach Sterne either as a throwback to earlier conventions of Augustan wit or a modernist *avant la lettre*.⁶ In

⁶ Viktor Shklovsky, in *Theory of Prose*, translated by Benjamin Sher (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990): 147-70. It should be noted that, while the most popular English translation of this essay for many years translated Shklovsky's coinage *ostraniene* as "defamiliarization," Sher's translation makes use of his own coinage, "enstrangement," in order to better capture the robust meaning of *ostraniene* as "a process or act that endows an

recent years, however, scholars such as Stuart Sherman and Deidre Lynch have followed Keymer in countering this trend. They do so by recontextualizing *Tristram Shandy* within mid-eighteenth-century print culture, drawing attention to the serial publication that enabled the novel to be insistently *of its time*, and—most significantly for my own purposes—considering Sterne’s defamiliarizing techniques in the context of their repetition throughout the lengthy course of one’s reading.⁷ As Lynch has recently observed, Shklovsky’s account does not seem interested in considering “what becomes of the distinctive temporality of defamiliarization—the suddenness, for instance, with which the participant in aesthetic encounter is jolted into a new reflexive awareness of the device’s arbitrariness—when that interruptive practice gets sustained and reiterated across a lengthy work.”⁸ Lynch argues that we must read *Tristram Shandy* in light of the duration of reading that is capable of making even enstrangement familiar to us, no longer disconcerting but habitual, even comforting.⁹ In her focus on “the habit-*forming* functions that novels have been able to perform,” Lynch draws on Sherman’s account of the ways in which early newspapers and novels alike required their readers to develop what Sherman calls a “habit of habitation: of alternately dwelling within and stepping out of a print narrative as it developed,

object or image with ‘strangeness’ by ‘removing’ it from the network of conventional, formulaic, stereotypical perceptions and linguistic expressions (based on such perceptions)” (Sher, “Translator’s Introduction” in Shklovsky xix). Sher confidently proclaims that “‘Defamiliarization’ is dead wrong!” as a translation; however, it is also a translation that has been taken up by later critics, and it is in the spirit of this later criticism that I use the term, rather than as the definitive statement of Shklovsky’s own argument. On this later criticism’s tendency to read Sterne as an anachronism (either behind or ahead of his time), see Tom Keymer, *Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4-11.

⁷ On serial publication, see Keymer, *Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel* chap. 4, “Serializing a Self,” esp. 113-32.

⁸ Deidre Lynch, “The Shandean Lifetime Reading Plan,” in *The Work of Genre: Selected Essays from the English Institute*, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol (Cambridge, MA: English Institute in collaboration with the American Council of Learned Societies, 2011): para. 161.

⁹ Lynch, para. 161.

regularly, or variably, over large arcs of time.”¹⁰ Lynch connects *Tristram Shandy*’s habit-forming potential primarily with Sterne’s interest in representing “a small circle [of characters] who are wholly used to one another, inveterate creatures of habit who have never not been familiars.” However, in light of her larger argument that even enstrangement may become routine, it seems equally plausible to read Sterne’s interest in habitual comfort as part of a larger project which contains within it room to consider how the comforts of habit might come to inform those otherwise shocking scenarios when strangers *do* “meet up initially.”¹¹

My own argument seeks to bring Lynch and Sherman’s work to bear on questions about Sterne’s relationship to the literature of sensibility. I am interested in whether the comfortable habits of familiar fellow-feeling Lynch sees operating at Shandy Hall and Sherman conjures up in the image of regular reading (of newspapers or of novels) could possibly be expanded to include encounters with the truly strange, foreign, or unsettling. Do such familiar habits simply prevent these kinds of interlopers from being seen at all? Critical accounts of sensibility have long acknowledged its dangerously radical potential: taken seriously, a truly delicate sensibility could operate across lines of class, race, and nation, unsettling established social barriers by way of emotional response, and leading perhaps to an undifferentiated mob as interested in feeling rage as in feeling sympathy.¹² Yet while eighteenth-century writers regularly expressed fears of sensibility in terms that related it to mob violence, most contemporary critics have tended to emphasize the *limits* of fellow-feeling, demonstrating how frequently sympathy fails to appear, or even how its appearance as expected may work to conserve intensely unequal, but

¹⁰ Lynch, para. 161; Stuart Sherman, “‘My Contemporaries the Novelists’: Isaac Bickerstaff, Uncle Toby, and the Play of Pulse and Sprawl,” *Novel* 43, no. 1 (2010): 108.

¹¹ Lynch, para. 174.

¹² See for example Csengei, 30-1.

comfortably “familiar” power disparities between subjects and objects of feeling. These critics emphasize that even when sympathy manifestly “succeeds” in generating an emotional response, this success may help to maintain the boundaries between the sympathetic observer and the pitiable sufferer, rather than breaking them down.

Such an understanding of sensibility sheds light on the vexing failures of familiarization in Sterne, helping us to see within his digressive practice not only the impulse to transform momentary experiences of fellow-feeling into lifelong habits of care for others, but also the difficulty of extending those habits of care beyond one’s familiar circle. Sterne is clearly invested in sensibility’s rhetorical force, its ability to evoke and manipulate strong emotions in the interest of creating a greater receptivity toward others, particularly those who suffer unjustly. But *Tristram Shandy*’s most memorable sentimental set-pieces—the death of La Fever, or Tristram’s encounter with Maria of Moulines—suggest the limitations of fellow-feeling when confronted with serious problems (Toby cannot prevent La Fever from dying, Tristram cannot relieve Maria of her madness). Such scenes may reduce encounters with strangers into mere opportunities for sentimental indulgence, reasserting a hierarchical distance between self and other in the interests of preserving an insulated sense of the “familiar” against all incursions of strangeness. Lynn Festa, in her work on the role of sentimentality in the construction of eighteenth-century colonial empire, has argued that “in distinguishing between subjects and objects of feeling, the sentimental seeks to define what is proper to the self and what can be shared by or exchanged with others: it polices the division of self from world. [...] By governing the circulation of feeling among subjects and objects, sentimentality helps to define who will be

acknowledged as human.”¹³ Because sympathetic subjects feel *for* suffering “objects,” the sympathetic exchange reinforces existing hierarchies of race, gender, and class, strengthening barriers that keep strangers at arm’s length.

Critics of sensibility have thus made it clear that fellow-feeling can “fail” in several ways: it might not occur at all, or might weaken as barriers are placed between the observer and the sufferer; it might succeed in name by producing an emotional response, but that feeling may be mobilized to keep the other at arm’s length; and it may, at times, flatten out differences between individuals in the name of emotional connection. This last danger has been most recently and thoroughly treated by Lorri G. Nandrea, who additionally develops a taxonomy of fellow-feeling based on the underlying power relations she identifies as producing it. While noting that sympathy, sentimentality, and sensibility are frequently used interchangeably within the period, Nandrea assigns each of these terms to a specific mechanism that prompts emotional response to another’s pain.¹⁴ Drawing on Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, she uses “sympathy” to refer to the production of fellow-feeling that depends on and essentially reinforces difference between a sympathetic observer and a pitiable sufferer: as she puts it, “Common suffering seems to unify the participants and work to eradicate difference, yet beneath this apparent ‘concord’ lies distinct inequality.”¹⁵ Sympathy only occurs between people whose feelings (and, at least implicitly, whose access to power) are fundamentally different, creating a hierarchical relationship. The observer can only experience sympathy by imaginatively changing

¹³ Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 3. For Festa’s discussion of Sterne, which focuses on the relationship between sentimentality and commodity exchange, see 67-110.

¹⁴ Nandrea, chap. 1, “Typing Feeling: Sympathy, Sensibility, and Sentimentality” esp. 50-60.

¹⁵ Nandrea, 53.

places with the sufferer and considering what he himself would feel if put in that position—which is always bound to be different from what the sufferer actually feels.¹⁶ Where sympathy has the tendency to reinforce difference, the dynamic of “sentimentality” emphasizes sameness and repetition: “sentimentality is associated with feeling that is precisely *not* individual,” and with feelings that repeat or sustain themselves; paraphrasing Robyn Warhol, Nandrea notes that sentimentality “does not produce catharsis,” but rather depends on repeating the same tropes with minimal difference in order to produce the same kinds of familiar feelings.¹⁷ As a result, sentimentality often emphasizes the kinds of feelings and struggles that are common to all, even as this frequently results in a failure to acknowledge individual difference and the role that it plays in establishing the systems of oppression that cause some to suffer more than others.

In contrast to the limitations of both sympathy and sentimentality, Nandrea’s description of the dynamic she names “sensibility” aligns with the ideal receptivity and responsiveness to others that I have claimed as Sterne’s ethical project. While sensibility in Nandrea’s understanding depends on difference, it does not seek to create a hierarchical relationship in which one person feels *for* another across this difference; instead, it “destabilizes identity, transgressing the boundary of *each* subject...the relation between self and other turns on

¹⁶ What Nandrea calls “sympathy” thus has much in common with what Festa terms “sentimentality,” though Festa distinguishes between the experience of feeling (which she terms “sympathy”) and the literary practices through which the experience of that feeling is troped (which she terms “sentimentality”); see Festa, 6. The use of “he” as a pronoun for the observer is intentional: Nandrea notes that the paradigmatic sympathetic exchange is between a sympathetic man and a suffering woman—“The position of mastery in the sympathetic exchange, the ability to indulge in *another’s* pain that permits the sense of a soul within, is defined as the masculine subject position while the woman is the object who permits him to feel—the object who cannot join but can only be joined with (or abandoned), who is difficult to turn away from but who cannot turn herself away at all” (Nandrea 53). The description of sympathy that I have just quoted is part of Nandrea’s reading of Yorick’s encounter with the beautiful madwoman Maria in Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey*.

¹⁷ Nandrea, 58, 57.

alteration rather than imitation or identification.”¹⁸ From this perspective, difference appears interesting and valuable in itself rather than as something that must be minimized or overcome in order to reach some final end.¹⁹ And in fact, with sensibility, there *is* no final end. Reading a scene from *A Sentimental Journey* between Yorick and a beautiful Grisset, Nandrea emphasizes the non-teleological quality of such exchanges: “This lateral turning of traveling glances is not going anywhere, not building toward anything; the penetrating looks do not gather toward some climactic end. Like the activity of counting pulses which precedes these glances..., and the structure of the novel that recounts these encounters, the intermittent contacts form an open series that might continue indefinitely, just stop, or be disrupted by something else. They will not, ever, arrive at ‘closure.’”²⁰ Instead, in a framework that seems especially relevant to a consideration of *Tristram Shandy*’s progressive digressions, Nandrea suggests that “what is gained, in the process, is the process.”²¹

Seen through this taxonomy, the very familiarity that Lynch champions as inherent to Sterne’s literary form and essentially familial cast of characters may stand as one of the major challenges to the novel’s ability to achieve an ideal sensibility. Indeed, a perpetuated familiarity stands on the side of what Nandrea terms “sentimentality,” reiterating what is similar in a way that elides the recognition of difference—and there are certainly moments when Tristram’s “universal good-will” seems uncomfortably like a “one-size-fits-all” model of fellow-feeling.

¹⁸ Nandrea, 67, emphasis added.

¹⁹ Nandrea, 67, 59.

²⁰ Nandrea, 77.

²¹ Nandrea, 85. In Nandrea’s reading, “Sterne’s texts deliberately turn away from the desires inscribed by sympathy—with its insistence on the imperial power of the individual imagination—and sentimentality, with its affective attachments to sameness and familiarity” (Nandrea 86), but she acknowledges—and I want to emphasize—that they do not always succeed in doing so.

However, as I move on to read the work of digression on the early volumes of the novel, I want to suggest that the ongoing, open-ended process of familiarization—as opposed to an already-established familiarity—can demonstrate the sensibility that Nandrea describes as “an attraction to being affected” by others.²² While *Tristram Shandy* clearly demonstrates the dynamics of sympathy and sentimentality in addition to sensibility, my own focus on the text’s investment in strangers necessarily leads to a focus on sensibility, the only dynamic Nandrea sketches which does not center or consolidate the self, but destabilizes or decentralizes it instead.

A digression upon digression

Tristram Shandy’s digressions work to make such an idealized sensibility possible—if not necessarily infinitely sustainable. Digression’s wandering pathways demonstrate the sentimental delicacy Tristram celebrates as “true Shandeism,” while playfully soliciting the kind of patience that serves as the necessary precursor to the experience of such expansive fellow-feeling (IV.xxxii.303). In this way, they push back against critical standards for digression in the eighteenth century, which typically expected literary digressions to possess a demonstrable use-value, either as discrete moments of entertaining distraction, or as apparent swerves away from the main plot that could nonetheless be seen retrospectively as necessary to that plot’s larger aims. While Sterne clearly believes in the value of Tristram’s digressive style, such a style is not so simply instrumentalized to any particular purpose; any value to digression must be discovered in a haphazard or roundabout fashion, developing over time and relying a great deal on the subjective experience of an individual reader. By locating digression’s value in the ongoing act of reading, rather than in its subordination to the construction of a coherent teleological plot,

²² Nandrea, 75.

Sterne suggests that the novel's moral "ends" may be best achieved by eschewing a vision of ends-oriented narrative "progress" entirely. Digressions may make *Tristram Shandy* into a relatively plotless novel, but commentary on digression enables Sterne to posit a different progressive trajectory for the novel that depends instead on the reader's open-ended familiarization with the novel's style. A reader's developing familiarity with digressive style may be deliberately pursued, but it is more likely to occur in the background as a result of sustained proximity—much in the same way that Tristram's familiar relationship to his uncle Toby depends on their sharing a dinner table. Because "recognizing Style is a process that requires a certain degree of commitment: it does not come to us in one piece; it takes place in time," no one digression (no one chapter, no one volume or installment) could produce this effect on its own; however, "the novel's very length, the fact that reading it takes time, gives the genre a special relationship to the act of recognizing style."²³ What is true of the novel as a genre seems especially true of *Tristram Shandy*, a novel whose open-ended serialization stretches out the production of ongoing familiarization.

While recent work on Sterne has made it easier to see his digressive style in light of the processes of reading it enables, the first volumes of *Tristram Shandy* provided a serious challenge to their eighteenth-century readers and critics, whose expectations of digression were implicitly oriented towards the immediate rhetorical purpose that digressions might serve. When digression failed to entertain, or to cleverly enhance the central plotline or argument in a particular text, it became little more than a nuisance. For example, eighteenth-century discussions of the epic regularly censured two devices closely associated with digression: episode, viewed as extraneous because it narrates a plot event not directly connected to the main

²³ Nandrea, 20, 23.

thrust of the story, and commentary, extraneous because it represents the narrator speaking in his own voice to comment on the actions of the narrative at hand.²⁴ In this vein, Sir Richard Blackmore claims that unconnected episodes make a poem “imperfect and vicious, its Unity being broken,” and paraphrases Rapin’s observation that “the Episode of the Voyage of *Telemachus* in the *Odysseus*, which has no relation to the main Action, and contributes nothing to the Return of *Ulysses*, or the Events that follow’d it, is superfluous, and no integral part of the Work.”²⁵ Joseph Addison, writing about Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in *The Spectator*, condemns Milton for having “admitted of too many Digressions” that privilege the narrator’s reflections over the movement of the narrative: “Digressions are by no means to be allowed of in an Epic Poem. If the Poet, even in the ordinary course of his Narration, should speak as little as possible, he should certainly never let his Narration sleep for the sake of any Reflections of his own.”²⁶ While the early novel does not regularly aspire to the unity of epic, novel critics were equally willing to question novelists’ decisions to digress: Henry Fielding defends his right to the “digressive Essays” that comprise the introductory chapters of each book of *Tom Jones*, but critics from the eighteenth century to the present have remarked on apparently digressive elements of the novel’s plot, most famously the Man of the Hill episode.²⁷ Because digressions

²⁴ “Episode” is a term frequently used in eighteenth-century discussions of the epic, several of which are quoted below. I borrow the term “commentary” from Wayne C. Booth, whose definition of commentary as anything the narrator relates “in addition to a direct relating of events in scene and summary” fits well with the types of intrusions that eighteenth-century critics censure; see *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 55. For a discussion of commentary in *Tristram Shandy* and imitators of Sterne, see Booth, 221-4, 234-40.

²⁵ Sir Richard Blackmore, “An Essay on the Nature and Constitution of Epick Poetry,” in *Essays Upon Several Subjects* (London, 1716) 53.

²⁶ Addison, *Spectator* 297, Saturday Feb 9, 1712.

²⁷ For background on the critical distaste for this episode, as well as a defense of its significance, see Ruth Mack, *Literary Historicity: Literature and Historical Experience in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), chap. 2, “Fielding and Historical Character,” esp. 72-6. For a recent discussion of Fielding’s plot that is specifically invested in the work of digression, see Darryl P. Domingo, *The Rhetoric of Diversion in*

literally take the reader “out of the way” of the main story, they are seen as essentially removable. In fact, the line diagrams that Tristram draws to represent his progress in the first five volumes of the novel—with their loops, squiggles, and zig-zags deviating wildly from the presumably non-digressive baseline of the “line drawn as straight as I could draw it, by a writing-master’s ruler” (VI.xl.426)—seem like a perfect visual representation for the messiness of digression that critics like Blackmore and Addison want to clean up.

Critics of digression seem upset by the inefficiency of digressive style, critiquing digression for failing to demonstrate its clear utility; and yet digression’s proponents expected digression to prove useful as well, though on different grounds. As Darryl P. Domingo has demonstrated in his wide-ranging study of digression in the years leading up to *Tristram Shandy*, the digressive mode was increasingly associated with the pleasurable distraction of contemporary urban diversions.²⁸ Literary digression thus developed strong associations with entertainment, and became a significant tool particularly in commercialized forms of writing. Many of Sterne’s initial readers expected such diverting novelty from *Tristram Shandy*, as the reviews which I will examine in this chapter’s next section demonstrate. However, Domingo cautions us that Sterne’s use of digression marks “not the end point of the tradition I have been tracing, but the beginning of a distinct tradition that views digression as a device through which to withdraw from the proto-capitalist public sphere and pursue a more rarefied form of pleasure in intellectual play and, especially, fellow-feeling.”²⁹ Thus, while Tristram regularly speaks of his “digressions,” and while I will do the same throughout this chapter, it is worth bearing in mind that Sterne’s use of

English Literature and Culture, 1690-1760 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), chap. 4, “‘Pleasantry for thy entertainment’: Novelistic Discourse and the Rhetoric of Diversion” esp. 190-213.

²⁸ Domingo, “‘Unbending the mind’: Introduction by Way of Diversion,” 1-25.

²⁹ Domingo, 218.

digression in *Tristram Shandy* performs different functions from digressions in earlier literature. Some of this difference has to do with the scope of digressions within Sterne's novel. Unlike most of the digressions that are labeled as such by Sterne's contemporaries, the digressions in *Tristram Shandy* are not minor; they do not bring the reader back to where they began; they are not self-contained, but sometimes spawn a series of additional digressions. Thus, where earlier critics may glibly propose removing the story of Telemachus from *The Odyssey* on the grounds that it would streamline the epic's overall design, no such removal of digression seems possible in *Tristram Shandy*. But perhaps more importantly, as Domingo suggests, the rhetorical purpose of digression in *Tristram Shandy* seems fundamentally different from earlier uses, in part because it deemphasizes entertainment in order to foreground the contingency of human community instead: as Domingo puts it, "Instead of unbending the minds of individual readers, Shandean digression cultivates their sensibility and gives occasion to 'universal good-will.'"³⁰ Exactly *how* digression accomplishes this cultivation of sensibility will be the subject of the remainder of this section.

As Tristram notes early on, "Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine;—they are the life, the soul of reading;—take them out of this book for instance,—you might as well take the book along with them" (I.xxii.63-4). The joke is, of course, that even a reader who has only made it through the first twenty chapters of *Tristram Shandy*'s first installment would be hard-pressed to distinguish between what counts as digression and what does not, so emphatically has Sterne refused the conceit of digression as extraneous and thus removable. But it is by naming digression as the sunshine, life, and soul of *reading*—rather than of the book—that Sterne stakes his strongest claim for the value of his style. To see digression as excisable is to assume that the

³⁰ Domingo, 219.

apparently enjoyable portions of a text are quite literally “beside the point”; readers may be entertained by digression, but are nonetheless best served by straightforward story, with a logical succession of scenes each equally necessary to prepare them for the climax and conclusion. And yet, as Sterne’s emphasis on the relationship between digression and the ongoing act of reading ought to remind us, it is not always possible to tell digressions apart from “straightforward story” while still immersed in the act of reading. The extricability of digression, then, is only visible in hindsight—and thus, in a way, each new piece of information encountered by a reader is treated in the moment of encounter as though a digression.

The phrase I’ve quoted above, in which Sterne announces the inextricability of digression from his text, demonstrates this process as it occurs on the smallest scale of Sterne’s sentence structure.³¹ The dashes highlight the grammatical independence of each clause, but the impact and meaning of the phrase develops as one makes links across those dashes, seeing the division they apparently indicate as connection instead. The long dash that follows “sunshine” discourages the reader from thinking that “sunshine” (or “life,” or “soul”) will take a prepositional phrase, so that the appearance of *reading* at the end of the second clause may take one by surprise. The move from proclaiming digressions to be the life and soul of reading to the (apparently serious) imperative to “take them out of this book” may provide more uncertainty—what direction is the sentence going in?—before the “for instance” offers up the briefest signal that one must prepare for another reversal after the final dash. In reading this short passage—as

³¹ For other approaches that consider how Sterne’s sentences mimic his larger-scale digressions, see Pat Rogers, “Zigzagging Shandy: Sterne and the Aesthetics of the Crooked Line,” *English: The Journal of the English Association* 42, no. 173 (1993): 104-5; Jessica Matuozi, “Schoolhouse Follies: Tristram Shandy and the Male Reader’s Tutelage,” *ELH* 80, no. 2 (2013); Amit Yahav, “Sonorous Duration and the Temporality of Novels,” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 128, no. 4 (2013); and Natalie M. Phillips, *Distraction: Problems of Attention in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

in reading Sterne's novel—you don't really know where you're going until you get there. It is my contention that Sterne's digressions intensify this experience, and mobilize it in order to foreground the gradual meaning-making process of reading. Rather than placing a premium on racing through to the point from which one may judge what is central and what is extraneous, the regularity of digression encourages readers to allow meaning to accrue piecemeal without concerning themselves overmuch about where all of this information will go. That, after all, is something they'll know when they get there.

Despite Tristram's claim that all of his digressions are "progressive too,—and at the same time," a closer inspection reveals that Tristram's definition of "progress" has less to do with straightforward temporal movement through a particular plot, and more to do with the way that events narrated haphazardly and out of order may nonetheless progressively familiarize the reader both to the characters who populate these events and to the character and style of the narrator who relates them (I.xxii.63-4). Tristram's commentary on his digressive style retards the pace of reading in much the same way as his digressions themselves. Especially in the novel's first installment, these moments of commentary not only require readers to slow their progress through the text, but counterintuitively associate this very slowness, not with boredom or difficulty, but with the pleasurable course of a leisurely journey or a burgeoning friendship. While such delaying tactics may seem to fall in line with critical accounts like Shklovsky's that emphasize Sterne's investment in "laying bare the devices" that ordinary novels depend on, Tristram's insistent linkage between digression and processes of familiarization suggests that the readerly self-consciousness about pace and plot produced by such "defamiliarization" is ultimately valuable as a precursor to a deeper familiarity. Only by mobilizing readerly self-

consciousness about novelistic pacing and plot can Sterne test and reshape readers' expectations about what kind of "progress" they can expect to achieve through the act of reading.

From the start, Tristram asserts that his style—particularly his willingness to follow his own tangential trains of thought and proffer his "opinions" more readily than his "life"—is the vehicle through which the reader will attain familiarity with Tristram himself, and even with other important characters in Tristram's life. Right before Tristram hares off on his first extended digression (concerning the background of the midwife who will attend at his birth), he admits that his readers may find it strange that he has informed them "exactly *when* I was born" without yet explaining "*how*" (I.vi.11), and justifies this delay in a direct address to an imagined reader:

besides, Sir, as you and I are in a manner perfect strangers to each other, it would not have been proper to have let you into too many circumstances relating to myself all at once.—You must have a little patience. I have undertaken, you see, to write not only my life, but my opinions also; hoping and expecting that your knowledge of my character, and of what kind of a mortal I am, by the one, would give you a better relish for the other: As you proceed further with me, the slight acquaintance which is now beginning betwixt us, will grow into familiarity; and that, unless one of us is in fault, will terminate in friendship. [...] Therefore, my dear friend and companion, if you should think me somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out,—bear with me,—and let me go on, and tell my story my own way:—or if I should seem now and then to trifle upon the road,—or should sometimes put on a fool's cap with a bell to it, for a moment or two as we pass along,—don't fly off,—but rather courteously give me credit for a little more wisdom than appears upon my outside. (I.vi.11)

Through a textual sleight of hand that speeds up and makes visible the process of familiarization, the "perfect stranger" of the first sentence has become "my dear friend and companion" a few sentences later. It is as though the future tense Tristram employs to describe the process of this growing acquaintance represents a future at only a moment's delay from the present, and thus one that has already come to pass by the time he claims the reader as his friend. The progression insinuated by Tristram's increasingly familiar forms of address additionally foregrounds the temporal component of the reader's movement through this passage. The speed of this

transformation may be exaggerated, but Tristram's promises of patience rewarded suggest that the reader's investment of time has already begun to pay off by the end of the paragraph in which it has been requested. Friendship established, Tristram can ask even more of the reader—no longer simply “patience,” but “credit”—and can request this courtesy specifically with regards to the elements of his digressive narration that have occasioned this digressive address to the reader to begin with. The passage not only foregrounds the temporal progress of familiarity at the heart of reading, but may also reorient the reader's expectations about the kind of progress to be found in this book. What “proceed[s]” in this passage is not the plot of Tristram's life, which is conspicuously left hanging, but the acquaintance between character and reader. Furthermore, this process “terminate[s]” not in the potential future conclusion of the text, but in the ongoing experience of friendship. Thus, commentary on digression allows Sterne to challenge the reader's opinions as to what might count as “progress,” locating this progress as much in the reader as in the text being read.

Later in the same volume, after having delivered a lengthy digression about his aunt Dinah's marriage to a coachman, Tristram famously claims that his digressions are simultaneously digressive and progressive. The passage contrasts the explicit characterization of Tristram's aunt Dinah with the gradual background depiction of some of Toby's characteristics, and in doing so draws attention to the ongoing process of familiarizing oneself to fictional characters, and perhaps also to real people:

For in this long digression which I was accidentally led into, as in all my digressions (one only excepted), there is a master-stroke of digressive skill... I constantly take care to order my affairs so, that my main business does not stand still in my absence.

I was just going, for example, to have given you the great out-lines of my uncle Toby's most whimsical character;—when my aunt *Dinah* and the coachman came a-cross us, and led us a vagary some millions of miles into the very heart of the planetary system: Notwithstanding all this, you perceive that the drawing of my uncle Toby's character went on gently all the time;—not the great contours of it,—that was impossible,—but

some familiar strokes and faint designations of it, were here and there touch'd in, as we went along, so that you are much better acquainted with my uncle *Toby* now than you was before.

By this contrivance the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too,—and at the same time. (I.xxii.63-4)

The resulting vision of digression is one in which the process of familiarization is deliberately slowed down to engage readers in doing work they might not even realize they are doing. While Tristram cannot provide the “great out-lines” or “great contours” of Toby’s character, this actually seems to be for the best if one primarily places value on process. For Tristram to provide those outlines or contours would be to rob the reader of the activity of discovering them for herself, building outward from the “familiar strokes and faint designations” of Toby’s character that are “gently” interwoven with the story of his sister Dinah’s scandalous marriage. The resulting method of becoming acquainted with Toby is quite different from the more direct method of learning about Dinah; it requires more work from the reader, who must participate in interpreting those strokes and designations “here and there touch’d in” and inferring from them that larger “outline” that has not yet been drawn. And it leaves room for incompleteness and error—the reader’s inferences may not be correct—even as it also implies that there is time enough for those errors to be discovered and corrected. Hence, it is just such gradual touches that build toward the reader’s knowledge, not just of style, but of character, and that Tristram suggests form the real value of his digressive style.

However, it is worth noting that even in the novel’s first volumes, some of Tristram’s discussions of digression have a harder time balancing between “digressive” and “progressive” forces than these attempts at gradual familiarization may initially suggest. In fact, perhaps the most famous description of Tristram’s digressive practice simultaneously aligns digression

strongly with a desire to be affected by others, and proceeds at a narrative pace that makes it challenging for the reader to keep up. Tristram's comparison between a digressive "historiographer" and an ends-oriented "muleteer" may metaphorically recast the writing process as a kind of sentimental journey, but it also demonstrates how challenging it is to allow familiarity to develop gradually when the objects and people with whom one could become familiar are "endless." Tristram introduces the figure of the muleteer initially in order to demonstrate why writing his own history is proving a far more challenging endeavor than he had imagined:

Could a historiographer drive on his history, as a muleteer drives on his mule,—straight forward;—for instance, from *Rome* all the way to *Loretto*, without ever once turning his head aside either to the right hand or to the left,—he may venture to foretell you to an hour when he should get to his journey's end;—but the thing is, morally speaking, impossible: For, if he is a man of the least spirit, he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes along, which he can no ways avoid. He will have views and prospects to himself perpetually solliciting his eye, which he can no more help standing still to look at than he can fly; he will moreover have various

Accounts to reconcile:

Anecdotes to pick up:

Inscriptions to make out:

Stories to weave in:

Traditions to sift:

Personages to call upon:

Panegyrics to paste up at this door:

Pasquinades at that:—All which both the man and his mule are quite exempt from. To sum up all; there are archives at every stage to be look'd into, and rolls, records, documents, and endless genealogies, which justice ever and anon calls him back to the reading of:—In short, there is no end of it;—for my own part, I declare I have been at it these six weeks, making all the speed I possibly could,—and am not yet born:—I have just been able, and that's all, to tell you *when* it happen'd, but not *how*;—so that you see the thing is yet far from being accomplished. (I.xiv.34-5)

Here, the traveling historiographer's "road" is not merely equated with the story he tells, but with the process of information-gathering that familiarizes the writer with his subject, a necessary precursor to his familiarizing the reader with it. As a result, it isn't clear what the goal or endpoint of the historiographer's journey might be—or indeed if there is one. Certainly, it cannot

be as concrete as the muleteer's endpoint at Loretto. Thus, what is "morally speaking, impossible" is not just predicting the time of arrival at the end, but perhaps even knowing the exact location of that endpoint prior to arriving at it.

However, more important even than the goal of the historiographer's journey is what Tristram suggests will always distract him from it, and in a sense replace it. The extended metaphor seems to superimpose a journey through an unknown landscape upon a journey through the archives, the primary distractions provided by an odd mix of books and people, each of which seems on the verge of blending into the other. The initial mention of the historiographer's desire to follow "this or that party as he goes along" invokes the overarching metaphorical conceit of travel to suggest that the historiographer's primary distractions are the parties of fellow-travelers he meets upon the road, but the list that interrupts the more expected paragraphs of prose is initially organized, not around people, but around documents. The continual changing tack between texts and people allows these categories to hazily merge into one another, until it becomes more and more difficult to tell which is the tenor and which is the vehicle. Such commingling of texts and people seems particularly relevant in the broader context of the literature of sensibility, in which the exchange of stories between travelers and strangers typically functions as a key moment in the development of sentimental connections. Seen in this light, the "stories" and "documents" the historiographer collects on his digressive journey appear like material stand-ins for the people who have produced them, the physical traces these other lives have left behind, allowing his journey to digress not only through space but through time as he encounters people from the past as well as the present. We might read the "man of the least spirit" who "can no more help standing still to look at [views and prospects] than he can fly" as

an early “man of feeling,” his interest and curiosity piqued by his encounters with others, his natural sensibility demanding that he pause on his journey.

And yet the expansive desires of the digressive historiographer, which have already broken the structure of the prose paragraph, threaten to transform the entire text into a list of the kinds of books and people one must encounter in order to write a story. While the format of a list certainly “brings in variety” by enumerating multiple encounters, it also flattens out the potential differences between them (I.xxii.65). Given the time to examine each list item separately, nuance might emerge, but listing and summary both tend to encourage a rapid reading. Tristram concludes this passage with the promise “not to be in a hurry;—but to go on leisurely, writing and publishing two volumes of my life every year,” and yet this metaphor gives an early glimpse of how haste—or an explicit endpoint—might intervene to speed up a digressive writer’s rambling pace, and disable a digressive reader’s desire to build familiarity with a wider circle of acquaintance (I.xiv.35).

A taste for novelty

I have suggested that Sterne’s digressions and meta-digressions in the early volumes of Tristram Shandy simultaneously bombard readers with what is strange and with paradigms for familiarizing themselves with that strangeness, working to transform the potential discomfort of novelty into a more comfortable and ongoing familiarity—not only with Tristram’s digressive style, but also with the characters it allows Tristram to sketch. The slide from style to character demonstrates how we might relate the process of reading *Tristram Shandy* to the process of developing emotional sensitivity to others. Just as we must have patience with Sterne’s idiosyncratic narrator if we are to “end in friendship,” a certain willingness to let other people

take up our time is a prerequisite for true sensibility. The ideal reader Tristram envisions is one who has the time and inclination to follow where he is led, even if the paths he travels down are unfamiliar or apparently beside the point. Such an ideal reader bears a strong resemblance to someone engaged in an exchange of ideal sensibility, and it seems plausible that learning how to develop familiarity even with a text (or a person) that maintains its strangeness or difference might help one become a better sentimental subject. And yet, as Sterne makes clear, this process is easier said than done. Tristram's insistence on a growing friendship with the reader assumes as its precondition that the reader "must have a little patience"—but what if he does not? The problem is only magnified by how frequently Tristram's own insistence that he is catering specifically to readers' desires betrays Sterne's awareness that he is doing anything but: "I know there are readers in the world," Tristram says, "as well as many good people in it, who are no readers at all,—who find themselves ill at ease, unless they are let into the whole secret, from first to last, of every thing which concerns you" (I.iv.8). While Tristram claims that he is telling his story "from first to last" in deference to these readers' interests, it is clear that even if this is a common desire, Tristram takes it too literally by beginning with the moment of his own conception. Thus in the stated interest of preventing readerly unease, Tristram's explanation of his exceptionally minute and digressive style foregrounds precisely those elements of the novel that might make readers "ill at ease" to begin with. The question becomes, then, how the reader "ill at ease" with Sterne's novelty might transform into the reader who is willing, despite discomfort, to respond with patience.

In fact, many of Sterne's critics seem to put the lie to the argument I have been developing about the familiarizing effect of digressive style: instead of finding that digressions generated a comfortable familiarity ending in friendship, a number of reviewers proclaimed

instead that the continued repetition of digression progressively wore away the novelty which was the novel's only real attraction. Viewing the text as an amusement which can only deliver entertainment by providing something new, these readers find themselves bored by the text once that novelty is no more. There are any number of reasons why these reviewers might have reacted differently to the novel than Tristram's effusive promises of friendship predict, and I do not intend to survey these in detail.³² Instead, in what follows, I want to examine a series of critical responses that expressed boredom with digression in order to establish the difficulty of producing the desired response, and to consider what the disparity between Sterne's bored readers and Tristram's ideal reader-friend can tell us about the relationship between novelty and sensibility.

Reviews of the novel's early volumes mostly agree in labeling digression as surprising, extravagant, or novel, but while a few reviews echoed Tristram's request for patience, even reviewers who enjoyed the opening installment cautioned Sterne against repeating his digressive antics for too long.³³ In the earliest published review of the first installment, William Kenrick wrote favorably of Sterne's digressive style, but added that "it would not be amiss...if, for the future, he paid a little more regard to going strait forward, lest the generality of his Readers, despairing of ever seeing the end of their journey, should tire, and leave him to jog on by himself."³⁴ A more critical Edmund Burke, reviewing the same volumes for the *Annual Register*,

³² Matuoizzi suggests that it has to do with these men's training in a particular mode of scholarly reading: see Matuoizzi 489-90.

³³ The *Critical Review* recommended the work to its readers, "desiring they will suspend their judgment till they have dipt into the second volume"; another unsigned notice claimed that *Tristram Shandy* "affects (and not unsuccessfully) to please, by a contempt of all the rules observed in other writings, and therefore cannot justly have its merit measured by them." In Howes, ed. *Sterne, the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1974), 52, 53.

³⁴ William Kenrick, in Howes, ed. *Sterne, the Critical Heritage*, 47.

proclaimed that “digressions, so frequently repeated, instead of relieving the reader, become at length tiresome.”³⁵ For both of these reviewers, digression is not the problem on its own; rather, the frequency of repetition makes the reader “tire” of the book. David Hume likewise found the novel repetitive, writing to a friend, “*Tristram Shandy* may perhaps go on a little longer; but we will not follow him. With all his drollery there is a sameness of extravagance which tires us. We have just a succession of Surprise, surprise, surprise.”³⁶ Hume’s “sameness of extravagance” initially appears a paradox, but the “surprise, surprise, surprise” that follows pinpoints the difficulty of feeling an emotional response as strongly for the second (or third, or thousandth) digression as one did for the first. Focused on the shocking extravagance of digression, these critics acknowledge the strong effects of novelty while articulating their belief that the entertainment it provides will necessarily be short-lived.

In their emphasis on the diminished returns of novelty, Kenrick, Burke, and Hume agree with several of the central propositions put forth by Alexander Gerard in his *Essay On Taste* (1759). The first “simple principle” of taste that Gerard describes is that of novelty: a “pleasant sensation” that comes about when the mind is “forced to exert its activity, and put forth its strength, in order to surmount any difficulty,” such as the understanding of an object or text previously unknown.³⁷ However, novelty is fundamentally relative; “when the same object recurs very often to our view”—often enough to produce boredom, or even disgust—even a relatively uninteresting new object “frees us from the pain of satiety and languor” caused by the

³⁵ Edmund Burke, in Howes, ed. *Sterne, the Critical Heritage*, 106.

³⁶ David Hume, in Howes, ed. *Sterne, the Critical Heritage*, 147.

³⁷ Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste. By Alexander Gerard, M. A. Professor of Moral Philosophy and Logic, in the Marischal College of Aberdeen. With Three Dissertations on the Same Subject. By Mr. De Voltaire. Mr. D’Alembert, F.R.S. Mr. De Montesquieu* (London, 1759) 3.

repetition of the first object.³⁸ In this way, “novelty can bestow charms on a monster, and make things pleasant, which have nothing to recommend them but their rarity.”³⁹ Burke’s review of *Tristram Shandy* in fact continues by making a claim very similar to this one: the novel may not be particularly adept at maintaining readerly attention through digression, but it is nonetheless “an original work,” and because it has been published “at a time, when a tame imitation makes almost the whole merit of so many books,” its “attempt at novelty” ultimately charms more than it would in a different literary climate.⁴⁰ From this perspective, the problem is not only that novelty doesn’t last, but that what we perceive as novelty may only initially shock because it stands out, not because it possesses any value beyond this momentary surprise.

The contingent and potentially fleeting nature of novelty reappears in Gerard’s discussion of sensibility, a term he primarily uses to describe one’s sensitivity or susceptibility to being influenced by “objects of taste.” Gerard begins his chapter on sensibility by announcing that it is “less than any other of the qualities of good taste *improvable* by use,” since “habit...gradually *diminishes* the vivacity” of our perceptions, much in the same way that habitual repetition counteracts novelty.⁴¹ Like Barbauld, who will later insist that “our habits increase, our emotions decrease, by repeated acts,” Gerard places repetition and vivacity at odds.⁴² And yet, unlike Barbauld, Gerard notes the paradoxical experience in which “an extensive acquaintance with the beauties of art and nature heightens our relish for them” rather than diminishing it—a fact which

³⁸ Gerard, 7.

³⁹ Gerard, 9.

⁴⁰ Burke, in Howes, ed. *Sterne, Critical Heritage*, 106.

⁴¹ Gerard, 107.

⁴² Barbauld, “An Enquiry Into Those Kinds of Distress Which Excite Agreeable Sensations,” in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 206.

cannot be accounted for by a simple equation between repetition and the deadening of feeling.⁴³

Such an apparent contradiction leads Gerard to complicate his explanation of how sensibility relates to novelty and repetition. To prove his point, he once again runs a thought-experiment he developed earlier, in which the same object is brought forward regularly to the viewer. However, this time, the experiment produces a different result:

Were the *same* object, however excellent, to be continually presented to our taste, it must soon lose it's charms: first becoming indifferent, and then disgusting, by the languor, which a continual identity of exercise would introduce. Hence no natural scene, no production of art or genius can please us long, except every new survey discovers beauties unobserved before, or gives us additional assurance of it's perfection. But the objects of taste are infinitely various. One who indulges it is continually changing his subjects, and feeling pleasures or pains really distinct, though in the highest degree analogous. He thus preserves a sort of *novelty*, which tends to keep up the original vivacity of his perceptions, and the continual employment of taste produces some *effects*, which compensate, nay, often overballance the gradual decay of sensibility by repetition.⁴⁴

The passage offers two overlapping accounts of how prolonged acquaintance could deepen, rather than deaden, perception and response: first, by suggesting that some critics are capable of discovering nuance in an object whose novelty appears to have been exhausted; and second, by suggesting that *true* objects of taste must be sufficiently complex or dynamic to enable this ongoing process of uncovering novelty within the already-familiar. Indeed, this passage itself demonstrates what this opening up of variety might look like: while the first sentence replays the account of diminishing returns familiar from the opening pages of the *Essay*, and the sentence that follows appears as though it will continue along this track, that second sentence changes tack with an “except” that opens up the possibility for a new reading of Gerard’s own earlier theories. Newly surveying his own earlier proposition, Gerard himself “discovers” an exception

⁴³ Gerard, 108.

⁴⁴ Gerard, 108-9.

“unobserved before,” which may give the reader “additional assurance of” the essay’s “perfection.”

While Gerard argues that there are ways to encounter even familiar texts as though they were novelties—getting to understand different layers of complexity within an appropriate “object of taste” is *like* looking at new things within the thing that is no longer new—his approach makes it unclear whether all objects (or all readers) have the capacity to be re-newed in this way. However, especially in light of Gerard’s earlier descriptions of the pleasure that readers find in surmounting difficulty, *Tristram Shandy* seems like an ideal candidate for the “infinitely various” object of taste capable of overbalancing the decay of sensibility by repetition. Early in the essay, Gerard admits that “though great obscurity disgusts us, yet we are highly gratified by delicacy of sentiment, which always includes some degree of it [i.e. obscurity], occasions a suspense of thought, and leaves the full meaning to be guessed at, and comprehended only on attention.”⁴⁵ Gerard’s description could account either for the enjoyment to be had in parsing the extravagant leaps of Tristram’s digressive style, or for the “disgust” that Burke and Hume in particular found in attempting to do the same thing—depending on whether one finds *Tristram Shandy* to be a “great obscurity” or a minor one.

Tristram does not typically linger over the difficulties of his text. In fact, Jessica Matuoizzi has argued that the novel “projects an impression of textual redundancy and pointlessness” that “solicits a desultory and leisurely—perhaps even lazy—form of reading.”⁴⁶ In this view, Sterne requires relatively little from his readers, since Tristram’s heavy-handed narration explicitly encourages the lazy and reminds the distracted about facts they can’t afford

⁴⁵ Gerard, 4.

⁴⁶ Matuoizzi, 489, 490.

to miss. But while Matuozzi takes Tristram's proclamations about his book largely at face value, I see Sterne as more knowing than Tristram, more aware that his digressive style actually demands a great deal of effort on the part of the reader who wishes to keep pace with the story. As Natalie M. Phillips has recently argued, the profusion of interlocking stories produced by digression taxes the reader's ability to keep multiple overlapping storylines straight, ultimately producing a kind of cognitive overload.⁴⁷ The bored or uninterested critics whose responses I've just surveyed suggest that the repeated use of digression heightens the challenge: not only do readers struggle to keep Tristram's stories straight, they also struggle to remain invested in Sterne's digressions once novelty has worn away. Such a continued investment may only occur if these readers value the text for more than its surprising departure from their expectations. While the critics who valued *Tristram Shandy* solely on the grounds of its novelty found themselves bored by the novel's repetitions, a reader who appreciates the fact that true objects of taste are "infinitely various" may see repetition and obscurity as invitations to "discover beauties unobserved before," deepening her encounter with the novel by continually employing her taste.

Digression in crisis: familiarity and the straightest possible line

Up to this point, I have focused on the challenges that Tristram's digressions present Sterne's readers, considering what readerly resistance to (or pleasure in) digression can tell us about Sterne's larger project of familiarization. However, in later volumes of the novel, Tristram appears to undergo a change of heart in relation to his own expansive digressions. While the line diagrams that conclude the novel's sixth volume offer a retrospective account of the exuberantly

⁴⁷ Phillips, chap. 3, "Scattered Attention: Distraction and the Rhythm of Cognitive Overload," esp. 97-9, 122-4.

zany course that Tristram's previous volumes have run, Tristram follows them up by diagnosing their boisterous extravagance as a flaw, and instead proclaims his hope to continue his next volume along "a line drawn as straight as I could draw it, by a writing-master's ruler, (borrowed for that purpose) turning neither to the right hand or to the left" (VI.xl.426). While even Tristram's straight line leaves him some room to digress, the seventh and eighth volumes—published several years after the sixth volume, and comprising the novel's penultimate installment—reign in digression's characteristic extravagance in favor of telling some stories straight through. In the seventh volume, Tristram narrates his own travels through France at breakneck speed; while the pace of his travels slows down late in the volume, his narrative pace remains relatively brisk, a fact he attributes to his desire to finish telling the story of his travels and get on with his discussion of his uncle Toby's amours. The eighth volume traces Toby's narrative in as straightforward a manner as Tristram appears to have promised.

Such a change in the novel's approach to digression has long unsettled critics, who worry that Sterne has renounced what is most compelling about his style. However, if we take these critics' responses as demonstrations of just how effectively the novel has familiarized at least some of its readers to digression, we can understand why Sterne might downplay digression in the penultimate installment. As Lynch suggests, the habitual repetition of digression appears to have made the practice familiar rather than surprising by the end of the novel's sixth volume. This result is promising, as it suggests that Sterne can accustom his readers even to the strangest of literary techniques. But it also suggests that the strangeness of digression, its emphasis on what is foreign or unknown, may have been lost in the process. If *Tristram Shandy's* earlier installments work to familiarize the reader to digression as a way to demonstrate what such a project would look like, the later installments pull back from this project to critique the kind of

familiarity that might limit expansive fellow-feeling rather than encouraging it. We can only reconcile Sterne's intentions with Tristram's reduced digressions by acknowledging that Tristram fails to live up to the model of expansive sensibility that he has championed throughout the novel. Readers who can evaluate and judge this failure, however, might be better positioned to succeed in their own endeavors to develop sensibility.

By reducing the scope and frequency of digression, Sterne is able to approach the problems that follow upon *being* rather than *becoming* familiar. In particular, too strong a sense of familiarity makes it difficult to come to terms with an apparent change or a divergence from previous expectations. Such is certainly the case for critics who attempt to explain Tristram's change of heart regarding digression. Tristram's equation of his straight line with the straight and narrow way of Christian doctrine and Cicero's "emblem of moral rectitude" proves especially troubling. Taking Tristram at his word in this passage, J. Hillis Miller cannot quite come to terms with "the paradox of the narrative line," which "lies...in the incompatibility between moral rectitude and narrative interest. A wholly 'moral' story would be a straight line without features, altogether boring, like a journey in which nothing happens, while every distinguishing feature of a given story is at the same time a moral transgression."⁴⁸ If we agree with Miller's logic, Sterne's doctrine of the moral straight line requires him to choose between telling an immoral story and an uninteresting one. The problem with this reading is that it assumes that the doctrine of morality as a straight line is, in fact, Sterne's. Judith Hawley offers a corrective to this reading, noting that the passage "ventriloquizes proponents of rectilinearity" and distances

⁴⁸ J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative Middles: A Preliminary Outline," *Genre* 11 (1978): 381.

Tristram from them in the process.⁴⁹ Hawley reads Sterne's earlier digressiveness as "an implicit criticism" of the kind of "conventional morality" he has ventriloquized, and goes so far as to suggest that Tristram's vow to tell his story in a straight line going forward is no more than a "mock promise."⁵⁰ However, the straightforward storytelling of Tristram's journey through France in the novel's seventh volume demands that we consider this promise as more than *merely* mocking. Instead, it opens up a more intriguing paradox: in the chapter containing his line diagrams, Tristram simultaneously mocks certain ways of thinking about the "straight line" and makes an apparently sincere proclamation that he intends to follow one anyway.

The paradox of the straight line is heightened when considered alongside Sterne's sermon on the good Samaritan, included as Sermon III in *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (1760) and titled "Philanthropy Recommended."⁵¹ The sermon uses language incredibly similar to Tristram's straight line vow to describe the actions of the despicable priest who passes by a dying man without offering to lend assistance: "Take notice with what sanctity he goes to the end of his days, in the same selfish track in which he at first set out—turning neither to the right hand nor to the left—but plods on—pores all his life long upon the ground, as if afraid to look up, lest peradventure he should see aught which might turn him one moment out of that straight line

⁴⁹ Judith Hawley, "Digressive and Progressive Movements: Sympathy and Sexuality in Tristram Shandy; or, Plain Stories," in *Digressions in European Literature: From Cervantes to Sebald*, ed. Alexis Grohmann, Caragh Wells, and Ross Chambers (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 25.

⁵⁰ Hawley, 25. For another recent critical account that treats this passage as representing Sterne's ambivalence toward (if not outright critique of) morality, see Will McMorran, *The Inn and the Traveller: Digressive Topographies in the Early Modern European Novel* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), chapter 6, "Tristram Shandy: Narrative as Travelogue," esp. 184-6.

⁵¹ Laurence Sterne, *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (London: printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-Mall, 1760). As Hawley points out, the straight and narrow Christian path is itself not literally straight, and in his discussion of "the path-way for Christians to walk in" (VI.xl.426), "Parson Sterne probably has in mind the parable of the good Samaritan," who earns his esteem because of his willingness to abandon his own straight path in order to help another (Hawley, 25). However, she does not appear to be familiar with the sermon I discuss.

where interest is carrying him.”⁵² The priest’s straight line is explicitly selfish and self-interested; his plodding gait and downcast gaze recall Tristram’s early comparison between his own digressive writing and the muleteer who must get from Rome to Loretto, except in this comparison, the priest is not so much the muleteer as the blindered mule. The priest, and those like him, are “formed either of such impenetrable matter, or wrought up by habitual selfishness to such an utter insensibility of what becomes of the fortunes of their fellow-creatures” and thus incapable of expressing compassion.⁵³ In complement to the priest’s “habitual selfishness,” Sterne depicts the Levite (the second man to pass by the dying man) as guilty of “a deliberate act of insensibility proceeding from a hard heart.”⁵⁴ Tristram seems neither habitually selfish nor deliberately insensible—indeed, Sterne’s description of the Samaritan’s immediate offer of aid to a complete stranger seems more in line with Tristram’s actions throughout the novel—and yet in the context of this sermon, we can better understand that Tristram’s heart, though soft, may not be soft enough. Not perhaps a deliberately selfish man, he is nonetheless about to demonstrate a kind of narrative selfishness, or at least a limitation of the kind of expansive care for strangers that the Samaritan’s actions evoke.

If Tristram’s surprising straight line can tell us anything, then, it can tell us about how difficult it is to remain open to the strangers of the world once one has become so attached to one’s familiars. A careful reading of Tristram’s introduction to his line diagrams demonstrates that even Tristram’s straightest line contains room enough within it for one than one person’s life, but its scope is limited. While the loops and swerves away from the baseline clearly

⁵² Sterne, *Sermons*, I.iii.62-3.

⁵³ Sterne, *Sermons*, I.iii.60.

⁵⁴ Sterne, *Sermons*, I.iii.64.

represent digressions, the “straight line” itself is not singularly Tristram’s story: the chapter opens with Tristram’s prediction that “I shall be able to go on with my uncle *Toby*’s story, and my own, in a tolerable straight line” (VI.xl.425). The idea that these men’s stories are so intertwined with each other that they might *both* be encompassed by the same singular “straight line” emphasizes the continued proximity that I have elsewhere described as a precondition to deep familiarity. The novel thus makes room for significant contact with others, not only through the wider-ranging digressions that are marked by the larger leaps and bubbles, but also, as I have suggested, in the brief asides and background information that allow readers to reconstitute the lives and opinions of those closest to Tristram. Even the apparently “straight” segments of Tristram’s early diagrams must necessarily include the process of this familiarization to Toby, and perhaps to his father as well. However, as the increasing emphasis on Tristram’s own life and Toby’s story demonstrates, the scope of this focus is limited. Tristram’s straight line is not as insular as the priest’s in Sterne’s sermon, but neither does it evoke the Samaritan’s wandering path.

Although Tristram’s straight line contains room in which to digress from himself, there is no denying that Tristram’s desire for speed reduces the reach of his digressions. Tristram may be “hastening to the story of my uncle *Toby*’s amours” (VII.xliii.483) rather than hastening to tell a story of his own life, but especially toward the end of the novel, Tristram’s sense of his own mortality, and of a narrative destination that must be reached before his death, leads him to prefer some digressions over others. The reduction of digression is particularly apparent in the seventh volume, which narrates Tristram’s travels through France in a surprisingly linear fashion. The volume additionally represents the longest sustained narration about Tristram’s own life, and it is

in this manner that we might read the epigraph to this volume, which reads (in translation), “This is not an excursion but my main work.” As an ironic comment on readers’ priorities, the epigraph plays a joke much like the early injunction to take the digressions out of the novel. If we take the epigraph to be true, then the “main work” of *Tristram Shandy* comprises two volumes out of nine, and yet the fact that this one volume *is* the only one to focus so extensively on Tristram’s life provides grounds for labeling it as central—if one is willing to reassert the conventional definition of centrality that the novel has up until this point definitively rejected.⁵⁵

Whereas Tristram’s digressions might have been disruptive in the novel’s first volumes, by this point digression seems to have become the norm so thoroughly that telling a narrative straight through has become the unconventional option. This shift in Tristram’s narrative priorities does not simply provide readers with an impetus to realize the degree to which their expectations have been gradually transformed over the course of reading. Because this shift is marked by Tristram’s decision to speed through the narration of his recent encounters with strangers in France, in order to tell the story of his uncle Toby’s past, it has the potential to demonstrate the limits of familiarity as a paradigm for encountering others. Even as Sterne’s earlier volumes laud the process of gradual familiarization, the slow transformation from stranger to friend, the novel’s later volume can be read as his acknowledgement of a counterproductive tendency to invest more time, effort, and attention in a lengthy relationship, foreclosing the potential of new encounters to develop to the point of familiarity. In particular,

⁵⁵ Hawley, 27. Hawley only notes this as the epigraph to the seventh volume, but it also appears on the title page of the eight volume, suggesting that Toby’s story, as much as Tristram’s, is the novel’s “main work.” Thus, while Hawley claims the seventh volume represents “a digression from the main work in that Tristram leaves Toby’s story aside to pursue his own” (Hawley, 27), this interpretation ought to be somewhat complicated. The fact that a volume in which Tristram primarily relates his own stories can come to feel like a digression is a testament to the work already accomplished by earlier volumes—the work of habituating readers to digressive form—but it does not make the seventh volume itself into a digression.

the seventh volume suggests that this foreclosure of digression, the retreat from the strange into the familiar, may be a particularly strong response to crisis or threat. Faced with his own mortality, Tristram (and Sterne) becomes less interested in treading new ground, and although his literal travels take him through a foreign country, his narrative priorities remain relatively close to home.

A digression early in the novel's first volume introduces the reader to the midwife who lives near Shandy Hall, and who has "acquired...no small degree of reputation in the world;—by which word *world*, need I in this place inform your worship, that I would be understood to mean no more of it, than a small circle described upon the circle of the great world, of four *English* miles in diameter, or thereabouts, of which the cottage where the good old woman lived, is supposed to be the centre" (I.vii.12). The reduction of the midwife's "world" to such a small circle might seem targeted at increasing "your worship's" sense of self-importance. But the fact that the "great world" is itself just another circle—albeit a larger one—suggests that the circumscription of the midwife's world is akin to that of the gentleman's, differing only in size. In fact, when Tristram returns to the midwife after a lengthy digression, he clarifies that "her fame had spread to the very out-edge and circumference of that circle of importance, of which kind every soul living, whether he has a shirt to his back or no,——has one surrounding him" (I.xiii.33). This early image of a circumscribed and highly localized "world" makes it clear that the midwife is not alone in never leaving the confines of her own small circle: men with mobility greater than hers nonetheless may prove reluctant to venture beyond their own "circles of importance."

For someone who truly desires to leave himself behind—as Tristram claims he does—traveling beyond the circle's bounds might seem like a logical first step. And yet Tristram's

travels through France in the novel's seventh volume suggest that even when he does leave home, his domestic priorities travel along with him. Despite Tristram's recent promise to "leave, if possible, *myself*," the seventh volume does precisely the opposite, following Tristram's own travels in France as he attempts to recover his health (VI.xix.399). Thus, the seventh volume presents a paradox: while digressive style metaphorically travels far and wide in this novel, Tristram's actual travels aren't narrated in a highly digressive mode at all. Instead of following his signature rambling path, Tristram traces a relatively straight line from Dover to Toulouse. The novel itself offers a good reason for Tristram's narrative haste in this volume: he is running *away* from Death, and hastening *towards* the moment when he will—finally—narrate the promised tale of his uncle Toby's amours. But I want to suggest that we ought to seriously consider what the narrative leaves out in order to get where it's going. The pace of narration does slow noticeably about halfway through the volume, and when Tristram reaches the plains of Languedoc, he openly defies the conventions of travel narrative by proclaiming his intention to dawdle in the spaces between cities. And yet the encounters that enrich his experience of the plains are presented to the reader primarily in summary—at too brisk a pace for readers to benefit from Tristram's encounters. Tristram promises that he will produce an entire volume of "Plain Stories," but readers of this novel only find a single chapter—the last in a notoriously undigressive volume. Following on the heels of Tristram's surprising straight line, Sterne uses Tristram's travels to explore the difficulty of extending familiarity beyond one's family circle to include more distant strangers, especially when time is of the essence and one must prioritize some people's stories over others if any are ever to be told in full. Thus, Sterne's decisions about narrative pacing in the seventh volume reflect an important constraint on the expansive desires of

sensibility—it is much more challenging to stay sensitive and receptive to others when one is in a state of crisis—speaking to the difficulties of a stance it nonetheless upholds as an ideal.

Tristram's journeys in the south of France do provide a descriptive example of what it would look like, not to avoid or dismiss the presence of strangers in public spaces, but to instead embrace the possibility of contact with variety that the road provides the traveler. Initially traveling in a hired carriage, Tristram gives up "so precipitate and rattling a course" once he feels that death is no longer at his heels, in favor of the more leisurely mode of traveling by mule, "as slowly as foot could fall" (VII.xlii.482). The conjunction of the mule and of slowing down echoes in interesting ways Tristram's discussion of the digressive historiographer; whereas in volume I the historiographer is contrasted with the muleteer, who can avoid distractions, Tristram's travels through Languedoc on his mule's back at first seem to have more in common with the historiographer's digressive progress. The plains that are "pleasing to a traveller" are, he proclaims, "terrible to travel-writers...for after they have once told you that 'tis delicious! or delightful! (as the case happens)—that the soil was grateful, and that nature pours out all her abundance, &c....they have then a large plain upon their hands, which they know not what to do with—and which is of little or no use to them but to carry them to some town; and that town, perhaps of little more, but a new place to start from to the next plain——and so on" (VII.xlii.481-2). Here, Tristram makes an observation about the way in which the narrative tempo of travel writing conveys a sense of which geographical spaces are interesting or important: whereas towns and cities set the stage for descriptions that makes the course of the narrative slow to a standstill, the spaces that connect these towns and cities are relegated to summary, if not skipped over altogether. The traveler who followed in the travel writers'

footsteps would thus find himself hurrying from city to city, with little concern for what passes in between. Tristram heroically promises that he will “manage [his] plains better” (VII.xlii.482).

And yet, while Tristram’s travels slow down in this part of France, his narrative pace speeds up in this section of the novel, and his encounters with others recede into a list like the one that characterizes the digressive historiographer passage:

by stopping and talking to every soul I met who was not in a full trot—joining all parties before me—waiting for every soul behind—hailing all those who were coming through cross roads—arresting all kinds of beggars, pilgrims, fiddlers, fryars—not passing by a woman in a mulberry-tree without commending her legs, and tempting her into conversation with a pinch of snuff——In short, by seizing every handle, of what size or shape soever, which chance held out to me in this journey—I turned my *plain* into a *city*. (VII.xliii.483-4)

With the notable exception of the woman in the mulberry tree, Tristram’s fellow-travelers are largely faceless, and even this exceptional woman arises into a kind of evocative clarity only to vanish out of sight in a dash. Although Tristram’s promised collection of “Plain Stories” (VII.xliii.483) would presumably reverse the travel writers’ typical narrative tempo and take the time to express each of his encounters with travelers along the road in the form of an extended scene, such extended treatments do not appear in *Tristram Shandy*. Instead, the reader once again finds that the plains have become a space of summary—a different kind of summary than that of conventional travel writing, certainly, but still a space that narrative itself speeds through—and all because, as Tristram admits, “You will read the whole of it———not this year, for I am hastening to the story of my uncle Toby’s amours” (VII.xliii.483). Rather than truly reversing the conventions of travel writing, then, Tristram simply gestures at the possibility of doing so, before being pulled away by concerns that are literally closer to home.

Ultimately, it makes sense that haste would prove the enemy of sensibility, when prolonged proximity to others has been the enabling condition of Tristram's philanthropic education—and, as I have argued, of the reader's. After spending so much time with Tristram's digressions, the reader may have reached by the seventh volume a point at which she is comfortable critiquing them. I have attempted to argue that this critique, rather than standing at odds with Sterne's investment in sensibility, is actually in line with and necessitated by it. I see in *Tristram Shandy* not a prescription for how to acquire and practice sensibility, but a diagnostic attempt to run through the particular perils of learning how to feel with and for others. Sterne's novel does not offer definitive answers—but it probes the shape of the question, testing out an assortment of strategies for situating moments of intense feeling within the larger context of sustained investment in the lives of others that may be most likely to prompt it.

The seventh volume does provide one intense, but short-lived scene from Tristram's plain journeys, in which Tristram dances a roundelay with the French peasant Nanette, distracted all the while by the slit in her petticoat. Because it is the only scene from this portion of his journeys that gets described at length, it seems to be under a lot of pressure to do some kind of symbolic work, operating as a kind of generalizable encounter with a stereotypical attractive Frenchwoman—and indeed, Nanette is introduced in this register as “a sun-burnt daughter of Labour” (VII.xliii.485). But Sterne complicates this potential reading of the encounter. Before they can dance, Nanette asks Tristram to tie up a lock of her hair that has come unbound. In response to this gesture, Tristram writes, “It taught me to forget that I was a stranger... We had been seven years acquainted” (VII.xliii.485). In the peculiarity of this one moment, and this one gesture, something about foreignness breaks down: Tristram is still literally *un étranger*, both stranger and foreigner, but something about this moment encourages him to “forget” this fact,

and to feel for a moment's acquaintance what he might for someone who was actually his familiar. While Sterne's novel does not itself provide a mechanism for understanding how such a move from "stranger" to "familiar" might be achieved, it nonetheless holds out for the possibility of such an occurrence.

Chapter 3

Ladies in Waiting: Dependence and Delay in Frances Burney's *Cecilia*

Frances Burney's father appears to have been the first critic to take her to task for the length of *Cecilia* (1782). "He will expect me to have just done," Burney wrote to her sister, "when I am so behind hand as not even to see Land!—yet I have written a great deal,—but the Work will be a long one, & I cannot without ruining it make it otherwise."¹ Burney's prediction is borne out in a novel almost twice the length of her first novel, *Evelina* (1778). But while she confidently defended *Cecilia*'s length as integral to its purpose, her readers were not as easily convinced. Reviewers of *Cecilia* and *Camilla* (1796) increasingly critiqued the distention of Burney's plots, and by the publication of her final novel, *The Wanderer* (1814), William Hazlitt could confidently assert that "*Evelina* is...her best novel, because it is the shortest."² In his review, Hazlitt goes on to explain that *Evelina*'s brevity allows Burney to exhibit "all the liveliness in the sketches of character, and exquisiteness of comic dialogue and repartee" for which she was regularly praised, while avoiding "the tediousness of the story, and endless affectation of the sentiments" that characterized her later works.³ Yet Burney's preemptive defense of *Cecilia*'s length offers the possibility that the tedium to which Hazlitt objects may have been part of Burney's strategy all along.

In this chapter, I suggest that a shorter version of *Cecilia* would "ruin" Burney's desired effect precisely because readers' capacity to sympathize with the heroine's frustrations depends

¹ Quoted in Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: the Life in the Works* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 99.

² William Hazlitt, "Standard Novels and Romances," *The Edinburgh Review*, 1815. ProQuest Literature Online (1999): 336.

³ Hazlitt, 336.

on the uncomfortable experience of the novel's duration. Expanding on Margaret Doody's proclamation that "the forms of [Burney's] novels are designed to express tension; each plot is an image of anxiety," I consider how Burney's large-scale formal techniques—such as oscillations in point of view enabled by omniscient narration, and the particular rhythms of narrative prose generated by alternation between scene and summary—provoke and sustain readers' ongoing experience of frustration.⁴ Such frustration leaves the reader in a much stronger position to sympathize with Cecilia, at least in theory. Of course, Hazlitt's response demonstrates the possibility that, in practice, the frustration Burney hopes to direct toward the structures of social control that hamper the lives of young women like Cecilia might redound instead upon the novelist. But even Hazlitt's callous dismissal of Burney's subject matter as "Female Difficulties...created out of nothing" reveals something important about Burney's understanding of the narrative conventions she works within and against.⁵ To write a narrative of female difficulties requires a different set of assumptions and expectations about pace and plot.

Cecilia details the coming-of-age, courtship, and eventual marriage of an orphan and heiress, whose youth and wealth paradoxically prevent her from having much say in the management of her own life. She is encumbered by legal restrictions specific to her own case (the dictates of her uncle's will, which prescribes her guardians as well as the conditions of her inheritance) which exacerbate the legal and social restrictions she bears in common with other young gentlewomen (legal transfer of property in marriage, as well as gendered expectations around public behavior). Thus, the trio of foolish male guardians who control Cecilia's money and try to dictate her marital prospects provide a concrete instantiation of the more nebulous

⁴ Doody, 3.

⁵ Hazlitt, 337.

forces of social convention that repeatedly prevent Cecilia from extricating herself from uncomfortable social situations, or making her own decisions about how to spend her time. As a result, she is “compelled to wait” while others act, sometimes nominally on her behalf, but always in an inept or self-interested manner, delaying her attempts to attain her own desires.⁶

While Cecilia’s incompetent guardians elicit her intense frustration, the reader experiences additional frustration thanks to the omniscient narrator’s revelation of important information Cecilia does not know. In the longest-running example of dramatic irony in the novel, readers discover at the very beginning of the novel what Cecilia does not realize until near the end: Mr. Monckton, the one parental figure Cecilia trusts (though not one of her three legal guardians), doesn’t actually have her best interests at heart. Instead of giving her responsible counsel about the suitors who descend upon her in droves when she arrives in London, he spends the novel scheming to keep her single until his elderly first wife—married for her fortune—will finally die and leave him free to acquire Cecilia as a second wife. Lest readers forget this fact, or that Cecilia doesn’t know it, brief shifts in focalization characterize most scenes in which Monckton plays a part, showing off his mercenary goals and Cecilia’s complete obliviousness to them. Thus, the narration ensures the reader’s powerlessness and impatience in the face of this information—producing feelings not unlike Cecilia’s own frustrations, despite the difference in cause.

Burney additionally works to align her readers’ emotional experience with her heroine’s by alternating between painfully extended scenes that dramatize Cecilia’s forced dependence on others and brief interludes of summary that suggest how short-lived any reprieve must be. The

⁶ Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*, Oxford World’s Classics, ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 471. Further citations of this edition will appear parenthetically in the text.

pacing and plot of the novel develop a strong juxtaposition between the sensation of calm self-control often linked to summary and the frustrated experience of distressing scenes that just keep going, no matter how hard Cecilia (or the reader) might try to stop them. In the process, Burney reveals how basic assumptions about narrative pacing and development (like those which lead Hazlitt to critique her work) are gendered. While common sense says that the reader of a novel is encouraged to plod through the tedium of habitual summary in search of the promised excitement that the next scene may offer, *Cecilia* challenges readers to understand that the dramatic confrontations that underpin the narrative grammar of the scene are experienced by women as threatening and anxiety-inducing. Interestingly, Hazlitt's allegations of "tediousness" and "endless affectation" must refer to just how long it takes for scenes in Burney's novels to effect any forward movement in the plot—not to summary, which does not actually take up appreciably more space in this novel than it does in others. Hazlitt is right to note that Burney's scenes are endless exercises in uncomfortable emotion that fail to come to a head, but rather than seeing this as a failure of Burney's art, I argue that it demonstrates at least partial success—the tedium and frustration that Hazlitt experiences arguably put him in a position more like that of Burney's heroines than he would otherwise have had the opportunity to personally experience. Burney's commitment to the frustrating tedium and terror of social life in *Cecilia* thus represents what it might look like to take "female difficulties" seriously, and to get readers to do the same.

The impersonal authority of omniscient narration

Critics working on narration in Burney's later novels—like most critics interested in omniscient narration in the eighteenth century—have focused on the development of free indirect discourse, a literary technique that both creates characters with legible interiorities and

demonstrates the way that such apparently private selves are shaped by broader social conventions.⁷ While the question of interior legibility matters to my argument as well, I am less interested in the moments when a character's thoughts color the narration with that character's language and patterns of speech, and more interested the way that focused attention to the inner life of *any* character can effectively foreground the superhuman powers of omniscient narration. This is especially the case when the narrator's easy access to a character's thoughts and feelings is explicitly contrasted with other characters' inability to know these same thoughts and feelings. Whenever Burney's omniscient narration reveals information to readers that is withheld from other characters, the act of revelation emphasizes both the narrator's great power and the reader's total dependence on the narrator.⁸ When, as is often the case, these revelations provide the reader with information that is completely unknown (and essentially unknowable) to Cecilia, the reader's frustrated dependence on the narrator is aligned with Cecilia's own disempowerment.

⁷ For intriguing work on Burney's narration in the context of free indirect discourse, see Julie Park, *The Self and It: Novel Objects in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), chap. 4, "Frances Burney's Mechanics of Coming Out"; and Julie Choi, "Feminine Authority? Common Sense and the Question of Voice in the Novel," *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 27, no. 4 (1996). On the role of free indirect discourse in both shaping interiority and troubling our assumptions about the private self as unique or individual, see Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), esp. chap. 4, "Agoraphobia and Interiority in Frances Burney's Fiction" and chap. 5, "Jane Austen and the Social Machine."

⁸ Jonathan Culler has criticized the use of "omniscience" as a label for this narrative mode, since it conflates four different elements of narration that often appear together, but are not necessarily connected to each other: "the conventional establishment of narrative authority, the imaginative or telepathic translation of inner thoughts, the playful and self-reflexive foregrounding of creative actions, and the production of wisdom through the multiplication of perspectives and the teasing out of intricacies in human affairs." The continued conflation of these different elements under the heading of "omniscience" has, in his view, "not only obscured the distinctiveness or salience of these practices but [has] repeatedly obfuscated them so that we fail to see what is going on." See Culler, "Omniscience," *Narrative* 12, no. 1 (2004): 32. While it's clear that these four elements of so-called "omniscient" narration are not necessarily linked, in the case of *Cecilia* and the eighteenth-century novel more generally, it seems apparent that Culler's first two categories—the establishment of authority and the narration of characters' thoughts and feelings—are essentially inseparable. The fact that they are not necessarily linked makes it all the more interesting and imperative to consider why they *are* linked so consistently.

Though reader and character suffer different kinds of dependence, Burney's novel aligns the two and thereby enables relatively-privileged readers to access Cecilia's own experience.

The aspect of narration that narratologists have labeled "focalization" is thus key to understanding the relationship between two primary characteristics of omniscient narration—the narrator's access to character's thoughts and feelings, and the air of authority that omniscient narration carries. Focalization describes the relationship between the perspective and knowledge position of the narrator and that of a given set of characters. Burney's *Cecilia* toggles between a nonfocalized perspective (pronouncements unassociated with any character in particular) and an internal focalization, primarily through Cecilia herself. Internal focalization through a character in *Cecilia* not only accounts for a narrator's access to a character's thoughts and feelings—it also proves a means by which the narrator asserts authority and a superiority of knowledge over the reader, when brief shifts in focalization allow readers sudden access to the thoughts and feelings of characters who are dangerously opaque to Cecilia.⁹ When this occurs, readers are forced to wait out the delay between their access to this knowledge and Cecilia's own discovery of it.¹⁰ In the process, the narrator's authority is linked to the ability to see through people who are opaque

⁹ I use these terms primarily in Gérard Genette's sense; see Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 185-98. My use of his concepts is occasionally inflected or supplemented by the work of Mieke Bal; see *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) 142-61.

¹⁰ Genette coins the term "paralepsis" to describe exactly such a shift in focalization that provides information beyond what the primary focal character can see or know (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 195). In the interests of avoiding excessive use of specialized vocabulary, I will prefer to describe these moments as "shifts in focalization." Bal additionally touches briefly on the different types of suspense generated by a knowledge disparity between character and reader: "When a question is raised...[i]t is also possible that the reader does know the answer, but the character does not. The tension, in this case, is different. The question is not what the answer will be but whether the character will discover it for itself in time. This is the suspense that lies at the root of a threat. A character makes a mistake. Will it realize this in time. There is someone standing behind it with an axe. Will it turn around in time?" (Bal, 161)

to Cecilia—and who, without the aid of the narrator, would implicitly be opaque to the reader as well.

As critics have demonstrated, the omniscient narrator's superhuman power to "see through" a character's visible surface to locate hidden depth is grounded in the structures of observation that frequently underpin eighteenth-century assumptions about sympathy. For example, Julie Choi argues that free indirect discourse specifically, as a feature of third person omniscient narration more generally, "can only emerge within a historically constructed arena of a *sensus communis* within which we can sympathetically read one another."¹¹ Choi's analogy between omniscient narrator and the sympathetic observer positions the culture of feeling as a major influence on novel's interest in—and methods for—relaying the thoughts and feelings of others, even as it suggests how those methods may work differently in the hands of female novelists invested in delineating the particular challenges sensibility posed for women.¹² John Bender's work on omniscient narration in light of eighteenth-century prison reform reminds us of the strange proximity of sympathetic and punitive power located within the act of looking.¹³ Bender and many who follow him in invoking Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) to discuss the novel emphasize how sympathetic interactions are meant to develop an "impartial spectator" or conscience that assists in making judgments about where to provide or withhold

¹¹ Choi, 655-6.

¹² For a compelling argument about the differences between men's and women's sentimental novels, see Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Oscillations of Sensibility," *New Literary History* 25, no. 3 (1994): 505-520.

¹³ First in *Imagining the Penitentiary* and later in essays on *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *Caleb Williams*, Bender correlates "contemporary ideas about the violence latent in the gaze with the eighteenth-century British school of benevolist moral thought—especially Adam Smith's—and with the narrative mode of free indirect discourse." Bender, *Ends of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012) 164. See also Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

sympathy. This portion of Smith's theory is also a powerful influence in discussions of omniscient narration, given the apparent similarity between the "third person...who judges with impartiality" and certain omniscient narrators.¹⁴ However, in what follows, I am just as interested in noting the characters within the novel who serve as Cecilia's *external* monitors, many of whom are less than ideally impartial.¹⁵ In fact, as I will go on to demonstrate, Cecilia is constantly under observation by those around her, in ways that demonstrate the dangers of being made an object of sentimental spectatorship. While the novel is primarily focalized through Cecilia herself, enabling readers to understand from within something of Cecilia's own feelings and struggles, the brief shifts in focalization typically present Cecilia from without, *not* from an "impartial" perspective, but as she appears to other characters who are engaged in keeping secrets from her.

This effect is nowhere clearer than in Burney's regular reminders that Mr. Monckton, who Cecilia considers an old friend and trustworthy ally, is secretly scheming to keep her single until his elderly first wife—married for her fortune—will finally die and leave him free to marry Cecilia, an outcome he considers to be a foregone conclusion. In the novel's opening pages, Burney introduces her readers to both Cecilia and Monckton in terms that underscore the dangerous knowledge disparity between them, and to enlist readers—somewhat to their discomfort—on the side of the knowing. Cecilia herself is depicted as essentially transparent,

¹⁴ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982), 135.

¹⁵ For another recent work that considers women's visibility as spectacles in *Cecilia* and *Camilla* in light of Smithian sympathy, see Heather King, "Pictures of Women in Frances Burney's *Cecilia* and *Camilla*: How Cecilia Looks and What Camilla Sees," in *Beyond Sense and Sensibility: Moral Formation and the Literary Imagination from Johnson to Wordsworth*, ed. Peggy Thompson (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2015). King pays attention to the way in which women's suffering bodies in *Cecilia* produce moral effects that dissipate with the disappearance of such suffering—something that Adam Smith's "impartial spectator" is not supposed to do.

legible through the codes of sensibility and not just as a result of omniscient narration: “her countenance announced the intelligence of her mind, her complexion varied with every emotion of her soul, and her eyes, the heralds of her speech, now beamed with understanding and now glittered with sensibility” (6). Monckton, on the other hand, is an experienced dissembler whom only the omniscient narrator knows well enough to suspect: “as he preserved to the world the same appearance of decency he supported to his wife, he was every where well received, and being but partially known, was extremely respected” (8). Cecilia’s partial knowledge of Monckton generates a serious power disparity, since Monckton believes he knows everything worth knowing about Cecilia—an easy task, because her sentimental naïveté leaves her essentially unguarded: “he had not more vigilantly inspected into her sentiments, than he had guarded his own from a similar scrutiny” (9). Lest readers forget this disparity, brief shifts in focalization characterize most scenes in which Monckton plays a part, showing off his mercenary goals and Cecilia’s complete obliviousness to them. These regular reminders create one of the novel’s most important background rhythms, generating suspense and frustration as readers worry for Cecilia even more than she knows she ought to be worrying for herself.

Keeping time with the feelings of others

In addition to shifts in focalization and the long-term waiting that they create and keep in motion, the emotional charge of certain patterns of narrative tempo in *Cecilia* also assists in developing readers’ impatience and constructing a parallel between their emotional experience and Cecilia’s. Throughout *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith uses the metaphor of “keeping time,” in a musical sense, to disparage observers’ ability to feel as strongly as those who suffer: “how far are the languid emotions of our hearts from keeping time to the

transports of theirs?”¹⁶ And yet precisely by forcing her readers to keep within Cecilia’s experience of time—the long delays and impatient waiting, the endless repetitions of social gatherings—Burney makes them “keep time” with her emotional experience of dependence. Thus, description of Cecilia’s frustration works alongside the recreation of an analogous state in Burney’s readers, so that the resulting sympathetic response may be no longer “weaker in degree,” and even readers who have never experienced such dependence firsthand may come to understand it well enough to sympathize strongly with Cecilia.¹⁷

It has become a critical commonplace to locate tension and anxiety as dominant emotional states generated by *Cecilia* specifically and in Burney’s work in general; however, most critics tend not to distinguish between the tension and anxiety supposed to be felt by Cecilia and that which readers feel for her in response.¹⁸ Julia Epstein, for example, writes of an “intense narrative tension present in *Cecilia*” that “comes not from suspense—we can anticipate more or less what will happen, if not next, then eventually—but from an ambiance of continual threat.”¹⁹ Though this tension is presumably felt by “we” who read, the threat that is supposed to cause it is only immediately real to the character. In most cases, it is implied that these feelings are shared by Cecilia and the reader as the result of a basic sympathetic impulse, readers responding

¹⁶ Smith, 47.

¹⁷ Smith, 9.

¹⁸ In addition to those critics named below, an incredibly partial list of critics who discuss this characteristic anxiety would include Margaret Doody (“The forms of her novels are designed to express tension; each plot is an image of anxiety” (3)), Terry Castle (“the Burney heroine’s typical mixture of expectation and unease” (259)), Julie Park (“abjection” (128)), Emily Anderson (“involuntary emotional breakdown” (46)), and Kristina Straub (“the anxiety of fending off ruin and exhaustion” (121)). Catherine Gallagher also locates anxiety as a driving force in *Cecilia*’s plot, though differs with some critics as to its cause: “We do not often fear for Cecilia, but we are kept in a state of perpetual anxiety about the fate of her money” (238).

¹⁹ Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women’s Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) 166.

emotionally to the situation of a suffering character. But while critics such as Catherine Gallagher and Deidre Lynch have demonstrated that eighteenth-century novels play a key role in developing practices of reading that rely on emotional engagement with fictional characters, the eighteenth-century theories of sympathy upon which this mechanism tends to be built do not provide particularly stable foundations. Samuel Johnson's famous *Rambler* essay and novels like Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote* (1752) foreground the perils of over-identification; however, as I have already suggested in my previous chapter, theoretical writings on sympathy in the period tended to focus instead on the likelihood of *under*-identification, and the subsequent impossibility of feeling anything at all for the pains of an other perceived to be insufficiently like oneself. Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is no exception. Sympathy, for Smith, is a mechanism that depends on what he calls the judgment of propriety: before one can sympathize with another's emotions, one must determine them to be appropriate to their cause. Hazlitt's dismissal of Burney's "female difficulties" demonstrates how easily the judgment of propriety might foreclose rather than enable sympathy; in Hazlitt's view, Burney's heroines experience emotions far in excess of what he deems "appropriate" to their circumstances. But even if Hazlitt were to see the propriety of Cecilia's frustration, for example, Smith's mechanism of sympathy still could not guarantee that he would experience anything like the same strength of frustration in turn. Even before Smith enters into a catalogue of the many ways in which sympathy can fail, he is quick to point out that even the ideal sympathetic response cannot produce an emotion as strong as the one that elicited it:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other

way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.²⁰

In other words, the problem with the model of sensibility that Smith nonetheless champions is that, even as it invokes the “imagination,” it begins with an act of sensory perception, and “our senses...never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person.” Sympathy still accomplishes a great deal, but its limits are constantly foregrounded, even in Smith’s early description of it, where phrases like “as it were,” “in some measure,” “some,” and “weaker in degree” remind us that fully entering into another’s body is fundamentally impossible.

Seen in this light, Burney’s manipulation of the reader of *Cecilia* appears to be an attempt, not merely to encourage the imagination of a situation of dependence, but to actually recreate it. Readers feel dependence for different reasons than Cecilia does, but according to Smith, it is more likely that a personal experience of an emotion will produce it powerfully within a reader than any observation of another person experiencing that emotion, however focused such observation may be. Burney bolsters up a potentially failing sympathetic paradigm by attempting to make readers feel what Cecilia herself feels, albeit through different means. One way in which Burney achieves this is by ensuring that that readers’ experience of time parallels Cecilia’s. As I have already mentioned, Smith uses the metaphor of “keeping time” throughout *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* to describe being in concord with another’s emotions. In fact, it is part of his early description of how judgments of propriety get made: “The man whose

²⁰ Smith, 9.

sympathy keeps time to my grief, cannot but admit the reasonableness of my sorrow.”²¹ But his investment in the time and timings of sympathetic feeling goes beyond the metaphorical in the miniature narratives that provide his examples and test cases.

It is often convenient to operate as though sympathetic response were instantaneous, and indeed, Smith often represents the initial pangs of sympathy as sudden and automatic. But the truth is that sympathy, far from instantaneous, is an ongoing process. Smith emphasizes the time it takes to develop sympathetic reactions in an early anecdote that highlights the possibility that sympathy may fail to be felt, even towards those whose expressions of suffering we deem appropriate. In this anecdote, a stranger passes by in the street, expressing deep grief, and we are told that he has just learned about the death of his father; while we must agree that his grief is appropriate, this agreement does not necessarily provoke a sympathetic emotional response. Smith’s explanation for why “we” do not respond with sympathy, despite judging the situation worthy of it, rests on the issue of how much time it takes to identify with others:

Both he and his father, perhaps, are entirely unknown to us, or we happen to be employed about other things, and do not take time to picture out in our imagination the different circumstances of distress which must occur to him. We have learned, however, from experience, that such a misfortune naturally excites such a degree of sorrow, and we know that if we took time to consider his situation, fully and in all its parts, we should, without doubt, most sincerely sympathize with him. It is upon the consciousness of this conditional sympathy, that our approbation of his sorrow is founded, even in those cases in which that sympathy does not actually take place; and the general rules derived from our preceding experience of what our sentiments would commonly correspond with, correct upon this, as upon many other occasions, the impropriety of our present emotions.²²

When “we...do not take time,” Smith suggests, we are capable of only a “conditional sympathy,” devoid of the strong emotional component that only time spent imagining ourselves into the

²¹ Smith, 16.

²² Smith, 17-18.

position of the stranger could produce. “Conditional sympathy” solves a problem for Smith’s theory—it explains how we can approve another’s pain *without* immediately feeling it for ourselves—but it poses a problem for authors hoping to use sympathy to galvanize an emotional response, especially on behalf of a character whose social, gendered, or racial identity places her as a “stranger” to the majority of readers. If one can move straight from observation to sympathy without any painful side effects, then one never needs to enter into the pain of an alien “other.” But the amount of time readers spend with novels seems poised to overcome this reluctance to sympathy, perhaps even against a reader’s will. The previous chapter has suggested that one way novels can perform this familiarization is by encouraging readers through prolonged habitual contact with a challenging style, like Tristram’s digressiveness. Like Sterne, Burney approaches this problem by attending to the way in which different rhythms of prose affect the reader; but while I have argued that Sterne equates the difficulties of digressive style with the difficulties of sensibility, in Burney, the experience of difficulty and the frustration it might generate is linked less to style and more insistently to questions of narrative pacing and plot.

Narrative tempo and habitual summary

In *Cecilia*, Burney attempts the feat of forcing readers to “keep time” with her heroine by linking certain narrative tempos with different types of emotional experience. In this way, she is able to connect the reader’s emotional experience of the duration of reading—and the alternating narrative tempos that inflect that duration—to Cecilia’s emotional experience of the corresponding periods of narrative time. In a chapter of *Narrative Discourse* entitled “Duration,” Gérard Genette describes “four basic forms of narrative movement” which he characterizes as

“the canonical forms of novel *tempo*”: ellipsis, scene, summary, and descriptive pause.²³ Though Genette freely admits that there is no real way to measure the duration of a written passage, he nonetheless defines these narrative movements in terms of the relationship between “story time” and “the pseudo-time, or conventional time, of the narrative,” explaining that “*scene*, most often in dialogue...realizes conventionally the equality of time between narrative and story” while summary designates a quicker tempo in which story time is shorter than narrative time.²⁴ The total elision of an event from the story through ellipsis and the detailed focus of descriptive pause form opposite ends of the spectrum of narrative tempo, and thus are often easiest to identify, yet the novel’s “fundamental rhythm is defined by the alternation of summary and scene.”²⁵

From the beginning of the novel, Burney draws upon the established associations of scene, summary, and their alternation to develop emotional associations with these narrative tempos that are unique to *Cecilia* and which underscore the sense that the action which enables the novel’s plot is almost always perceived by Cecilia as threat. Genette, speaking of the typical uses of scene and summary, writes:

the contrast of tempo between detailed scene and summary almost always reflect[s] a contrast of content between dramatic and nondramatic, the strong periods of action coinciding with the most intense moments of narrative while the weak periods [are] summed up with large strokes and as if from a great distance... The real rhythm of the novelistic canon...is thus the alternation of nondramatic summaries, functioning as waiting room and liaison, with dramatic scenes whose role in the action is decisive.²⁶

²³ Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 94. In *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Genette admits that this four-part system does not usefully account for moments in the narrative when the action is paused, not for description to occur, but for the narrator to provide a kind of monologue or address to the reader; in light of this omission, Genette concludes that “in a study of tempo, it would perhaps be better to make a place for that fifth type of movement, the reflexive digression.” See *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 37.

²⁴ Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 94.

²⁵ Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 97.

²⁶ Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 109-10.

While it's certainly true that Burney presents the "dramatic," "strong," and "intense" elements of her narrative in scenes, some of the novel's most dramatic scenes might nonetheless aptly be described as "waiting rooms," contrasting minimal or frustrated external action with active internal preoccupation. In contrast, Cecilia's most decisive actions—in which she makes decisions for herself, rather than having them made for her—frequently occur within the realm of habitual summary, which offers relief from the relentless drama of social life. In what follows, I want to briefly sketch the primary uses of narrative tempo that will be of interest to me in this chapter, and to offer some explanations for how they generate a reading experience that oscillates between ongoing frustration and short-lived relief.

I will begin by discussing summary, which is especially interesting as a feature in *Cecilia* because of its ability to take on apparently contradictory emotional overtones: Burney initially uses summary to relate Cecilia's boredom and frustration with the routines of Mrs. Harrel's busy social calendar, but when Cecilia breaks away from her friend's schedule to develop her own, more solitary habits, the narrative summary of these actions is calming and consoling rather than harried. While both of these uses of summary draw on conventional assumptions about what summary can do (depicting habitual or repetitive action, subordinating individual events to general routines, determining that which lies at the narrative's threshold level of notice), Burney must actually work to develop these associations in the early part of the novel so that she can create a kind of emotional shorthand to draw upon later. While these different potential uses of summary are initially set up in opposition to each other, Patricia Meyer Spacks' observation that Burney's society "understands conventional female occupations as ways of filling dead time" may help to account for the fact that *both* Mrs. Harrel's socializing and Cecilia's private reading

and charity are best presented in summary.²⁷ Cecilia hopes to escape from the busy socializing of her London life and control her time on her own terms, and yet this option ultimately proves just as unsatisfying and just as impossible to sustain as the endless rounds of social events she dislikes—offering the frightening possibility that it is just one more way of killing time, rather than productively filling it.

Burney makes pointed use of summary in Cecilia's initial introduction to London as a way to suggest the empty repetitions of life lived in high society. This mode of summary also tends to remind both Cecilia and the novel's readers of Cecilia's dependence on the Harrels, since they are the ones who set the pace for Cecilia's dizzying early days being toted around as an eligible heiress in London society. Cecilia is particularly at the mercy of Mrs. Harrel's jam-packed social calendar: her "catalogue," as she calls it, "contain[s] a list of engagements for more than three weeks," with new ones apparently being added as soon as old ones are erased. While such a schedule is second nature to Mrs. Harrel, Cecilia quickly begins "to grow weary of eternally running the same round, and to sicken at the irksome repetition of unremitting yet uninteresting dissipation" (53). Burney conveys the emptiness of these repeated activities formally by summing them up in a single sentence: "Several days passed on nearly in the same manner; the mornings were all spent in gossiping, shopping and dressing, and the evenings were regularly appropriated to public places, or large parties of company" (52). This is the language of habitual repetition with minimal variation, and Burney's sentence itself repeats its basic structure across three parallel clauses built around passive constructions ("days passed," "mornings were...spent," "evenings were...appropriated"); the elision of subjects creates the

²⁷ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 61.

impression that these actions perform themselves in a rote manner only questionably tied to personal agency. The listing of multiple activities (“gossiping, shopping, and dressing,” “public places, or large parties”) creates a feeling both of fullness—there are so many options—and emptiness—their interchangeability making each one less meaningful on its own.

The choice to summarize a great deal of Cecilia’s early time in London effectively suggests the weightlessness or unimportance of any individual gathering; it is only in their total accumulation that they signify anything at all, not just within the novel but within the social world in which Mrs. Harrel hopes to be seen as a key player. Her socialite’s calendar may allow her to plan “more than three weeks” in advance, but Burney is not forthcoming as to how *much* more, and given Mrs. Harrel’s total lack of forethought in monetary matters, it seems entirely possible that her social planning is equally shortsighted. After all, the next three weeks will likely look quite the same as the last, and the continual fullness of her schedule is more important than the fact that this schedule is filled up primarily by repeatable events. This is emphasized by the prevalence in this stretch of the novel of chapters titled after social events: “An Assembly” (35), “A Breakfast” (46), “An Opera Rehearsal” (60). The use of the indefinite article, a feature of all chapter titles in this novel, here adds to the sense that no single event is definitive—each is simply one instance among many.

But while the summary presentation of Cecilia’s “endless round” of London activities conveys her distaste with her inability to independently order her day-to-day schedule, and her boredom with socially mandated outings that do nothing to address her deeper emotional needs, it soon becomes clear that it is not repetitiveness in and of itself to which Cecilia rejects. Instead, the real problem is Cecilia’s dependence on Mrs. Harrel, whose fundamental principles are at odds with her own. After a particularly lengthy stretch of unproductive gatherings in which

Cecilia finds no enjoyment, she comes to the conclusion that she has no choice but to “become mistress of her own time” at once (55). The schedule she assembles for herself is no less repetitious in nature than Mrs. Harrel’s, but Cecilia’s chosen pastimes are presented as renovating rather than exhausting. Freed from the fatiguing compulsion to socialize indiscriminately, she finds herself in possession of “all the leisure she could desire for the pursuit of her favorite studies, music and reading” (55). In the chapters that follow this decision, Burney still summarizes a great deal of Cecilia’s activities rather than representing them as scenes, but this summary takes on a less harried quality. Instead of representing distaste or boredom, summary of Cecilia’s quiet time spent by herself suggests a kind of settled contentment, visible especially in a sentence which closes a chapter by summing up Cecilia’s new way of managing her time: “And thus, in the exercise of charity, the search of knowledge, and the enjoyment of quiet, serenely in innocent philosophy passed the hours of Cecilia” (103). While earlier summary statements have tended to measure out time in terms of days or weeks, the reference here to “hours” subtly suggests the added fullness of value placed on individual days passed under this less hectic regime. Thus, relatively early in the novel, Burney has attempted to detach summary from the “endless round” of social engagements Cecilia dreads, and to instead align this narrative mode with the potentially soothing habits of study and charity, which Cecilia does not necessarily depend on anyone else to complete.

Distended scenes and the rhythms of dependence

However much Cecilia may enjoy her hours of “innocent philosophy,” they do not arise to the level of scenic representation. The same, of course, cannot be said for the social events which the narration sometimes relegates to summary but which Cecilia cannot wholly succeed in

avoiding. Thus, the rhythmic alternation between scene and summary, which forms the fundamental pattern of narrative tempo in the novel, gains specific contours for Burney's readers. The juxtaposition between scene as dramatic and summary as nondramatic gains an emotional charge: the heightened action of scenes is increasingly anticipated as a threat, where summary at least holds the possibility of calm recovery.²⁸ Scenes are made to feel undesirable, not only through their stark contrast to the fleeting summaries that represent Cecilia at peace, but also through Burney's frequent technique of extending lengthy scenes by inserting brief sentences of summary which paradoxically prevent these scenes from coming to a close. This practice generates a halting, stop-and-go rhythm that mimics Cecilia's experiences of delay and dependence, drawing out events long past the point when we might expect them to conclude and denying the reader as well as Cecilia any real relief from the action. While such sequences are not completely related in the narrative tempo properly called "scene," I refer to such extended sequences as "distended scenes" in order to emphasize both their eventfulness and their prolongation. These distended scenes play a key role in Burney's attempt to make readers "keep time" with Cecilia's frustrated experience of dependence.

One way to define a distended scene is to note that it takes up a disproportionately large amount of narrative time. Events such as the masquerade ball at the Harrels' house, Mr. Harrel's public suicide at Vauxhall, and Cecilia's last-minute journey to London to head off her agreement to a clandestine marriage with Mortimer Delvile, are not especially lengthy by the novel's internal clock—none of them requires more than forty-eight hours of diegetic time. And yet they are narrated in such detail, with such regular alteration between scenic presentation of

²⁸ This is in keeping with Spacks's assertion that "in many female novels—novels by and about women—the represented lives of young women oscillate between boredom and far more dramatic forms of anguish," and suggests that this oscillation is embedded in Burney's novel at the level of narration itself (Spacks, *Boredom* 62).

dialogue or action and summaries of Cecilia's paralyzed reactions, that they take up more pages and chapters than other events of similar diegetic duration. If moments within these scenes shade into summary, other moments are much closer to Genette's category of the descriptive pause, which halts action in order to describe a scene—and yet the descriptions that pause and prolong the narration in distended scenes are less invested in Cecilia's physical surroundings than they are in Cecilia's thoughts and feelings. The feeling of distension is produced not merely by the fact that these sequences take time to read; it is also the case that they operate under conditions of heightened suspense, caused both by Cecilia's lack of knowledge (sometimes, though not always, shared with the reader), and by the insistently social nature of these events. Distended scenes tend to occur in masquerade ballrooms, fashionable pleasure gardens, crowded carriages or coaching inns, or even in the city streets. There are always observers, and their gazes both constrain Cecilia's actions and ensure that the stakes of any blunder are magnified—all of which makes the distended scenes' length even harder to bear. Furthermore, distended scenes typically center on Cecilia's struggles to *do* something or to *know* something, and yet everything from her physical mobility to her ability to gather the necessary information is dictated by others who have disproportionate power over her. Ultimately, such distended scenes present action itself as something stressful and undecided; to be in the midst of one is to be in the midst of threat and uncertainty, and to long for the uneventfulness of summary.

The link between omniscient narration, incomplete knowledge, and dependence is dramatized at length in Burney's representation of the Harrels' masquerade, which occurs shortly after Cecilia has implemented her plans to manage her own social calendar separately from Mrs. Harrel. Terry Castle has influentially argued that the masquerade scene allows Burney to articulate a female will to power that is increasingly rendered impossible by later events in the

novel. And yet, while Castle's work on masquerade and the carnivalesque tends to suggest that *any* subversion of the normative order provides women with real power to subvert the patriarchy, I see the narrative rhythms of this scene as demonstrating how the masquerade paradoxically exacerbates Cecilia's dependence on patriarchal structures, rather than allowing a space of freedom from them. Castle may be correct to claim that masquerades in general represented the only social spaces in eighteenth-century England where "a woman was free to circulate—not as a commodity placed in circulation by men, but according to her own pleasure," but this freedom of movement is only conditionally available to Cecilia.²⁹ Instead, the masquerade becomes an exaggerated demonstration of Cecilia's dependence on men she barely knows. Tormented throughout the evening by a masked devil who forces her into a corner and does his utmost to prevent others from approaching, Cecilia's circulation is only intermittently and conditionally restored by other men who confront her devilish antagonist but can only momentarily rescue her from his clutches—and who, in some cases, expect more from her in return than simple gratitude. The narrative tempo of this scene largely reflects Cecilia's oscillation between confinement by the devil or other male figures—which transforms her into a spectacle—and the freedom to become the spectator instead and thus enjoy the masquerade. Burney's prose dilates on moments of Cecilia's captivity, generating a slow-motion effect that parallels Cecilia's mortified experience of being at the center of attention; it is only when Cecilia is free of her captor that the narrative moves at a comfortable and easy pace, as does Cecilia herself in the ballroom.

²⁹ Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986) 22.

Previous critics' descriptions of Burney's characteristic tension and anxiety frequently cluster around the masquerade scene.³⁰ It is certainly possible that some of the anxiety ascribed to this scene could derive from personal identification with the events that befall Cecilia—the experience of being cornered in a bar by an aggressive stranger is not too far from the harassment Cecilia experiences here, and all too familiar to a majority of Burney's present-day readers. But I am interested in the way that discomfort and frustration may be caused, not merely by the content of the scene, but by the manner in which it is narrated. In addition to the halting narrative rhythms of the distended scene, this lengthy sequence is also organized around an extended sequence of predictions about the devil's identity, all of which are ultimately proven wrong. The devil, readers eventually discover, is none other than Mr. Monckton—hoping to prevent other men from wooing Cecilia, since he cannot—but this information is only available to readers thanks to a brief shift in focalization late in the scene, and Cecilia herself never discovers the devil's real identity. This revelation represents the culmination of a lengthy process of discernment in which Cecilia and the reader are both involved. At the beginning of this process, readers know only what Cecilia knows, and it is not until late in the scene—when she has made several guesses about the devil's identity and then been proved wrong—that the narrator reveals Monckton's plot. The moment perhaps ought to prove comforting, since it releases the reader from the claustrophobic experience of Cecilia's interior life, but is more likely to read as upsetting since it confirms Cecilia's inability to distinguish friend from foe and suggests the ways in which this may continue to cause problems as her narrative progresses.

Cecilia's position at the masquerade reinforces the perception of her sentimental transparency, demonstrating how such visibility can be a problem for women. Castle's account

³⁰ Both Castle and Epstein's references to anxiety, quoted above, refer to this scene specifically.

of the liberating force of the masquerade begins with anonymity: divorced from the father's or husband's name, costumed behind a mask and encouraged to speak in disguised tones, a woman could theoretically escape the markers of her dependence on others and act independently without incurring the typical consequences for such behavior.³¹ But the disguising acts upon which this liberation is predicated simply do not take place in Burney's novel because Cecilia decides not to attend the masquerade in costume.³² She assumes that this decision will keep her from attracting attention, but her rather naïve strategy backfires and the tasteful simplicity of her normal dress sets her apart from the crowd, although she is initially unaware of this fact, since "in her curiosity to watch others, she ceased to observe how much she was watched herself" (106). Caught up in the spectacle offered by others, Cecilia doesn't spare a thought for who may be watching her. This moment closely mirrors the one, almost at the start of the novel, when Cecilia cannot recognize how closely she is being watched by Monckton. Both of these occasions additionally flaunt the narrator's ability to distance herself from Cecilia's thoughts: only someone with a better perspective on Cecilia could see what it is that Cecilia has "ceased to observe."

Monckton's harassment of Cecilia throughout the masquerade makes her the center of attention, too much the subject of others' gazes to be able to gaze back on her own terms. Monckton initially circumscribes Cecilia's movements by using his body in tandem with the codes of polite socialization that forbid women from engaging in violent physical behavior to

³¹ Castle, 254-5.

³² Castle reads the vulnerability caused by Cecilia's lack of costume as representative of an unconscious narcissistic fantasy: "One wonders...whether Cecilia's conspicuousness is so unpleasant on a deeper level, and whether Burney has not engineered this moment of exposure for her heroine" (Castle 271). But this reading rings false to the text in a number of ways, especially as Monckton's behavior subjects Cecilia more and more intensely to the unwelcome attention of others.

ensure her dependence on him. After backing her into a corner, “the black gentleman seemed now to have all authority in his own hands, and his wand was brandished with more ferocity than ever, no one again venturing to invade the domain he thought fit to appropriate for his own” (108). The authority literally resides in the devil’s “hands” and the wand that represents an extension of them. Cecilia cannot pass him by without engaging in unwanted (and unwomanly) physical contact; he literally creates his own “domain” by force of his embodied action, to which Cecilia is necessarily subject. Furthermore, he has drawn unwanted attention to Cecilia while preventing her from effectively observing or even communicating with others: “Cecilia now became seriously uneasy, for she was made an object of general attention, yet could neither speak nor be spoken to” (111). When she is eventually released, she “hurrie[s] into a corner, where she hope[s] to breathe and look on in quiet” (112). Cecilia’s main goal is to achieve the calm of an uninterrupted vantage point where she can “look on” without having to be looked at—much like the position that the omniscient narrator incontestably holds throughout the novel. Cecilia’s desire to become the observer, rather than the observed, reinforces the sense that Cecilia is perpetually at the mercy of others’ vision.

Monckton, in his role as the devil, has not merely used brute force to keep Cecilia in her place, practically caged by his frantic movements. He has also placed her in a position where she cannot depend on herself for a release from this harassment, and must call upon other men to save her from this predicament. This creates problems of its own: her would-be saviors are only minimally effective at their tasks, and even as their actions may be heroic, their motives are revealed to be no different from Monckton’s. In different ways, the conduct of Belfield, costumed as Don Quixote, and of Mortimer Delvile, costumed in a white domino and unknown to Cecilia until after the masquerade, reveals their participation in a system of competition over

women that is rendered respectable under the rubric of “chivalry” but ultimately perpetuates women’s dependence on others.³³ Belfield as Quixote unsurprisingly represents this chivalry as energetic but toothless, and true to the character he portrays, he fails to rescue the damsel. Delvile is slightly more effective than Belfield. But though he succeeds in removing Cecilia for a time from Monckton’s unwanted advances, he uses the opportunity to make advances of his own, invoking tropes of courtly love alongside tropes of sentimental legibility to reframe Cecilia’s captivity as her own fault: “‘O, depend upon it,’ cried he, ‘there are many who would be happy to confine you in the same manner; neither have you much cause for complaint; you have, doubtless, been the aggressor, and played this game yourself without mercy, for I read in your face the captivity of thousands: have you, then, any right to be offended at the spirit of retaliation which one, out of such numbers, has courage to exert in return?’” (112). Despite the reader’s own intimate knowledge of Cecilia’s discomfort throughout the scene—knowledge that has been heightened by the distended structure of the scene itself—Delvile contends that this discomfort is entirely her own fault. His equation of Monckton’s domineering behavior with a justified, and even admirable, “spirit of retaliation” rings false because of the looming power disparity between Monckton and Cecilia; it is instead Cecilia who possesses the right to rebel against her violent captor. In response to Delvile’s comments, Cecilia rebukes him in a manner that conflates his pleasantries with Monckton’s physical aggression: “I took you for my defender! Whence is it you are become my accuser?” (112). But Delvile continues to speak to her in a courtly language of captivating looks that ignores the threat and distress of real captivity. In Cecilia’s resistance to

³³ Straub usefully compares the devil’s behavior to that of the courtly lover: “most oppressively and obsequiously hovers about her—in the manner of a submissive, courtly lover—while aggressively keeping at bay everyone else who might wish to speak to her” (Straub 119-23). Delvile and Belfield may appear to have nobler intentions, but they work within the same system as Monckton, even if they use less physically violent means to achieve their ends.

Delville, we may hear Burney's own judgment on the subtle ways in which even those who seek to liberate women from some aspects of their dependence may unthinkingly perpetuate others.

Cecilia's physical captivity and frustration is overlaid by the slow development of her assumptions about the devil's true identity. Rather than merely withhold information about the devil's identity, Burney allows Cecilia to come to her own conclusion which she believes firmly to be true, only to unsettle the only logical explanation and put readers and Cecilia back in the same boat. Because the scene is primarily tightly focalized through Cecilia, readers are inclined to agree with her reasonable prediction that the devil is Sir Robert Floyer, a nobleman smitten with Cecilia's fortune who has been forcing his attentions upon her for most of the time she has spent in London. The prediction gains the ring of truth through repetition when Cecilia shares her suspicions with the white domino. Only later in the evening does Cecilia recognize Sir Robert Floyer in a different costume, thus plunging her back into uncertainty as to the identity of the devil. Thus Burney's strategic withholding of this knowledge creates suspense, but this suspense is really only worsened when readers finally do learn the devil's identity, precisely because this information is still unknown to Cecilia.³⁴

The momentary shift in focalization that alerts readers to Monckton's scheme thus comes as a shock, only heightening the feeling of frustration that has pervaded the scene as a whole. Burney's narrative focalization shifts back and forth quickly within the span of a single paragraph, presenting the same situation from Cecilia's perspective, a nonfocalized perspective, and Monckton's perspective, each of which offers slightly different information:

her perplexity to conjecture who he could be, or what were his motives for this persecution, became the more urgent as they seemed the less likely to be satisfied. But the fiend, who was no other than Mr. Monckton, had every instant less and less

³⁴ For Cecilia's comment to the white domino (later revealed to be Mortimer Delville), see p. 112. For her realization that Floyer cannot be the devil, see p. 117.

encouragement to make himself known: his plan had in nothing succeeded, and his provocation at its failure had caused him the bitterest disappointment; he had intended, in the character of a tormentor, not only to pursue and hover around her himself, but he had also hoped, in the same character, to have kept at a distance all other admirers: but the violence with which he had over-acted his part, by raising her disgust and the indignation of the company, rendered his views wholly abortive: while the consciousness of an extravagance for which, if discovered, he could assign no reason not liable to excite suspicions of his secret motives, reduced him to guarding a painful and most irksome silence the whole evening. And Cecilia, to whose unsuspecting mind the idea of Mr. Monckton had never occurred, added continually to the cruelty of his situation, by an undisguised abhorrence of his assiduity, as well as by a manifest preference to the attendance of the white domino. (123-4)

The first sentence situates us firmly within Cecilia's "perplexity," even if this mental state is approached in the narrator's more measured syntax. The first clause of the sentence that follows gives no notice of a shift, but the clause that follows identifies "the fiend" as Mr. Monckton in a matter-of-fact tone that proves a distinct contrast to Cecilia's uncertainty. The passage continues to outline Monckton's intentions with regard to the scheme, retreading for readers the events that they previously lacked a method for interpreting, but this new perspective is not allowed to Cecilia, "to whose unsuspecting mind the idea of Mr. Monckton had never occurred." This brief nonfocalized clause reinforces exactly how little Cecilia knows and suggests that she is unlikely to find out very much on her own, her "unsuspecting" nature a poor defense against a hypocritical world. Burney's narrator judges Monckton's scheme quite harshly—"such is deservedly the frequent fate of cunning, which while it plots surprise and detection of others, commonly overshoots its mark, and ends in its own disgrace" (126)—and yet while Monckton may not detect anything promising about Cecilia, neither is he detected by her. His "cunning" is clearly not a positive trait, but the reader is left wishing that Cecilia might develop some for herself, to detect the plots of others if not to perpetrate plots of her own.

Ultimately, this scene delivers a great deal of tension and anxiety because it begins with one unknown (the devil), adds in another (the white domino), briefly removes one (when Cecilia

assumes the devil is Sir Robert Floyer) and then adds it back again (when she recognizes Floyer in a different costume), only ultimately revealing the devil's identity to readers and leaving the white domino's identity a mystery to Cecilia and to readers alike. This parallel between Monckton-as-devil and Delvile-as-white-domino is reinforced by the summary sentence which concludes the chapter: "A great variety of conjecture upon all that had passed, now, and till the moment that she sunk to rest, occupied her mind; the extraordinary persecution of the fiend excited at once her curiosity and amazement, while the knowledge of her affairs shewn by the white domino, surprised her not less, and interested her more" (128). Curiosity, amazement, and surprise are alike the properties of both men. From the vantage point of the novel's conclusion, the apparent parallel between Monckton and Mortimer Delvile may seem misguided. After all, though Cecilia still doesn't know who he is, he ends the novel as her husband, a man for whom she more or less willingly sacrifices the fortune she would never give up to Monckton. Yet the line that separates these men is very fine indeed. Shades of similarity can be seen as early as Delvile's introduction in the masquerade, where, like Monckton, Delvile accosts Cecilia with uncomfortable gallantries. Ultimately, both present threats to Cecilia's independence, and though Cecilia may ultimately choose to marry Delvile anyway, their initial similarity seems to pave the way for the novel's notoriously resigned conclusion.

The frustrating eventfulness of summary

Distended scenes, which reach a high emotional pitch, are often followed by lengthy stretches of summary that serve as a space for calm reflection and recovery. And yet, while these summary passages allow Cecilia and readers alike to reflect on the hectic action of the scenes which have preceded them, they come to represent increasingly fruitless attempts to regain and

maintain equilibrium in the midst of an ongoing plot. A pointed instance of this can be seen in the transition between the aftermath of Mr. Harrel's public suicide and Cecilia's removal from London to Delville Castle. As many critics have noted, Harrel's suicide provides a convenient break between the two "halves" of the novel.³⁵ The events at Vauxhall that lead up to and follow after Harrel's death represent another distended scene, in which nothing happens quite when it should and everything takes more time than anyone expected. But perhaps more interesting, and less discussed, is the way in which the chapter that follows this scene provides its counterpart in terms of narrative tempo, detailing the events of a month in less space than the previous chapters have devoted to the events of a single night. Initially, this distinction creates a sense of calm and of greater security after the frightening events that have been drawn out across the previous chapters. And yet, the chapter also links summary, distanced point of view, and authorial judgment to suggest that even in habitual or repetitive action, there can be no real rest. The same distanced omniscience that enables Burney's narration to gloss over a month's worth of events in a chapter puts the narrator in a position to reveal further information about the complicated family dynamics of the Delvilles. This information, in turn, spells potential danger for Cecilia.

This stretch of summary suggests a link between Burney's more distanced omniscient narration and the increased pace with which the narrative moves through time. Both of these moves are visible in the transition across a chapter break that marks Cecilia's departure from London with the Delvilles and her arrival at their country estate. Book VI Chapter II ends with a one-sentence paragraph in immediate rather than habitual past tense—"They slept one night upon the road, and arrived the next day at Delville Castle" (457)—but even this paragraph is

³⁵ See, for example, Doody: "The public death of Harrel in the exact center of the novel supplies a mock 'ending'—Harrel thought of it as the ending—and prepares us for break-down, the collapse of smooth appearances and convenient pretenses" (Doody 134).

devoid of the level of detailed immersion provided by the heightened description and emotionally-engaged tone of the preceding scene. By contrast, the arrival at Delvile Castle in Chapter III promises a change of pace, quite literally: the insistent forward motion of scene that has characterized the lead-up to Harrel's suicide and the attempts to manage the aftermath dissolves into a temporally unspecific summary, where the past tense marks consistent scenic traits and habitual actions rather than the immediacy of an event just occurred: "Delvile Castle was situated in a large and woody park, and surrounded by a moat. A draw-bridge which fronted the entrance was every night, by order of Mr. Delvile, with the same care as if still necessary for the preservation of the family, regularly drawn up" (457). The descriptive pause of the first sentence could conceivably represent Cecilia's first introduction to the place "the next day," and it would not be unreasonable to assume that the chapter could continue in scene rather than summary. But the second sentence dispels this notion with words such as "every night" and "regularly" indicating that we have moved beyond a specific day's occurrences and into the realm of general summary. This represents a palpable change of pace—while the previous chapter covered no more than twelve hours, by the end of this chapter Cecilia has "now been three weeks at the castle," though nothing of great importance has occurred to mark this time (462). The same descriptive sentences that mark this change of pace suggest the distancing of the narration from Cecilia; while she remains the primary focal character, the sentences quoted above come from a nonfocalized perspective, not associated with any character in particular.

The chapter is given over primarily to contemplation, and thus most of the narration consists of a summary depiction of Cecilia's mental and emotional state, but even this summary is delivered from a somewhat increased distance and also tends to foreground the tensions that might move the novel back into another sequence of frantic activity. By this point Cecilia has

recognized her own strong attraction for Delvile, but has also come to know his family well enough to realize that the conditions of her uncle's will—which require her future husband to take her surname in order to ensure her inheritance—would prove an insurmountable obstacle to any match between them. Much to Cecilia's surprise, Delvile appears to be avoiding her as much as she has proposed to avoid him, and as the narrator relates that “though neither of them knew the motives or the intentions of the other, the best concerted agreement could not more effectually have separated them” (460). Delvile continues to be inscrutable to Cecilia, and to the reader as well, though the narrator's distanced delivery of this statement at least informs the reader, if not Cecilia, that her motives and intentions are equally unknown to Delvile. Only after a prolonged description of the developments affecting Cecilia's inner life does Burney introduce the external actions that have been occupying Cecilia's time. These provide a seeming complement rather than any contrast to the halting and circular movements of Cecilia's emotional struggles: “She amused herself with walking and reading, she commissioned Mr. Monckton to send her a Piano Forte of Merlin's, she was fond of fine work, and she found in the conversation of Mrs. Delvile a never-failing resource against languor and sadness” (460). In something like an echo of Mrs. Harrel's London rounds, the parallel clauses in this sentence contribute to a sense that Cecilia has both so much to do and so little that will actually take her mind off her problem. The shock of Harrel's suicide dissipated, Cecilia is left with feelings of “languor and sadness” that may prove equally uncomfortable, and far more lasting.

The distanced perspective afforded by summary furthermore appears to enable the moment when the narration is—unprecedentedly—focalized through Mrs. Delvile: “Such was the love which already she felt for Cecilia; her countenance had struck, her manners had charmed her, her understanding was displayed by the quick intelligence of her eyes, and every action and

every notion spoke her mind the seat of elegance. In secret she sometimes regretted that she was not higher born, but that regret always vanished when she saw and conversed with her” (461). The confusion of “she” and “her” in this short paragraph is the culmination of a pattern that begun in the preceding paragraphs, creating a strangely smooth transition from Cecilia’s thoughts and feelings into Mrs. Delvile’s thoughts about Cecilia. The trope of sentimental legibility that first introduced readers to Cecilia is here confirmed by Mrs. Delvile—her understanding is “displayed” in her eyes, her actions “speak” of her mind—but once again, this trope is couched in circumstances that prove it to be far from true of everyone. Readers are in on Mrs. Delvile’s “secret” regret, but it is invisible to Cecilia herself. This division between Cecilia’s knowledge and the novel’s readers’ is exacerbated by the following paragraphs, which describe in some detail the circumstances that led Mrs. Delvile into a loveless marriage to a cold husband, and the resulting intense affection for her son. This unexpected backstory is in some respects analogous to the information about Monckton provided in the novel’s opening chapter—it provides readers with insights about a secondary character that are not available to Cecilia. But unlike the case of Monckton, where Cecilia’s lack of knowledge is perceived by readers as threatening, the additional information about Mrs. Delvile evokes a more complicated response. It certainly provides a deeper understanding of her character, but unlike in Monckton’s case, it’s unclear how Cecilia might benefit from sharing that understanding with the reader—unless it might serve as a warning about the results of marrying to preserve one’s family name (as Mrs. Delvile has done, and as Cecilia’s uncle’s will aims to force her to do).

I suspect this moment can best be understood as broadening the scope of an original problem. What began as Cecilia’s own private drama—her inability to read Delvile, to which readers may add her inability to read Monckton—is shown to be one small part of a larger issue.

The inability of the Delvilles to communicate intelligibly with each other rests in a fundamental difference of character that seems both insurmountable and totally invisible to the Delvilles themselves: “[t]heir minds, indeed, were totally dissimilar” (462). The narrator certainly perceives and represents this dissimilarity in striking terms, but the characters themselves are too close to the problem to understand it quite so clearly. Thus the problem of incomplete knowledge is far from being limited to the naive Cecilia. Especially when it comes to understanding “the motives or the intentions of the other,” the Delvilles are in just as deep as she is. It bears restating that only the disembodied omniscient narrator can provide this kind of information, and thus her authoritative pronouncements about the inner worlds of others underscores just how little these individuals know about each other and themselves.

Ultimately, then, while this chapter proceeds almost entirely in summary, and does foreground habitual actions, it still manages to be far from uneventful. In fact, I want to suggest that Burney creates the feeling of time passing, not through extensive scenes, but through the provision of new information through summary. The three weeks covered in this chapter are given weight not only by the repetitive actions that fill them, but by the amount of new information made available to the reader. We might see this as a more modest interpretation of Tristram’s claim to being “digressive and progressive simultaneously”—instead of scenes, readers are treated to information, but narrative time nonetheless moves onward while this information is provided, even as external action grinds to a halt. As with her time spent by herself in London, Cecilia’s habitual actions at Delvile Castle seem preferable to the alternative of indiscriminate socializing which the Harrels’ behavior has represented. But although this chapter marks Cecilia’s total freedom from the Harrels, it simultaneously develops new challenges that the unknowing Cecilia will have to face next.

The rhythms of courtship

Throughout *Cecilia*, the stakes of narrative pacing are highest in the scenes that surround the heroine's growing relationship with Mortimer Delvile. Burney's marriage plot demonstrates how the potential pleasure to be found in distention and delay is systematically withheld from female characters (or, perhaps sympathetic readers) when these delays are out of their control. Psychoanalytic narrative theories have tended to eroticize the halting delays that produce the stuff of plot, transforming these roadblocks into the source of readerly pleasure. However, from the perspective of female characters like Cecilia, for whom plot's eventful delays signal threat and disempowerment, such a vision of narrative desire is all but unthinkable.³⁶ Thus, though the courtship novel in particular might seem primed to underwrite an "erotics" of plot, in which diffuse and wide-ranging narrative desire is channeled toward the eventual authorization of heterosexual desire within marriage, Burney instead offers a far bleaker vision of the marriage plot, in which courtship is experienced less as pleasurable foreplay, more as a threatening or painful gauntlet that must be run. Early in the novel, Cecilia's desire to wait is framed as a prudent measure which enables Cecilia to maintain some control over her future by ensuring marriage to a man whose character she will know she can rely on. However, once her affections for Delvile are betrayed—against her will—Cecilia finds her own desire to delay their match, or even avoid it entirely, overruled by Delvile's desire for immediate action in the form of a clandestine marriage. When Cecilia's reluctant agreement to this plan is jeopardized and

³⁶ For a popular account of plot's erotics, see Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), esp. chap. 4, "Freud's Masterplot: A Model for Narrative," 90-112. For a strong rebuttal of the universality of the pleasure such plots could produce, see Susan Winnett, "Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 105, no. 3 (1990): 505-18.

eventually thwarted by delays she cannot control, Burney makes it clear that the potential pleasure of narrative delay depends entirely on who is in control of the slowed-down pace. Keeping time with Cecilia may require readers to reevaluate the pleasure to be gained by the conclusion of the marriage plot.

While the rest of the novel tends to represent delay as a frustrating hardship that prevents Cecilia and young women like her from doing as they wish, the early stages of Cecilia's acquaintance with Delvile suggest that the exercise of patience may offer women a kind of power. Since marriage is often little better than a legally binding state of female disempowerment, a woman must take care to choose a husband she trusts not to abuse his legal and social power over her. Because real women lack the power of omniscience that Burney grants her narrator, caution must be the watchword of courtship; women should wait patiently, insofar as it's possible, for a suitor's real character to unfold before making a decision about marriage. The importance of such patience seems exacerbated in *Cecilia*, where even men who aren't actively scheming (like Monckton) are still inscrutable. Mortimer Delvile is initially just as difficult to read as Monckton, simply the "white domino"—both white knight and distressing blank. In the face of this inscrutability, Cecilia schools herself not to betray her growing regard: "Her purpose, therefore, was quietly to wait an explanation, which she rather wished retarded than forwarded, that her leisure and opportunity might be more for investigating his character, and saving herself from repentance" (253). And a few pages later: "All, therefore, that now employed her care, was to keep off any indissoluble engagement till each should be better known to the other" (311). This patient emotional discipline, vigilant against outside spectators if not against growing personal preferences, may initially make the prolongation of courtship an important if not quite enjoyable strategy. Cecilia decides to wait, and her decision initially

appears validated by the information she discovers about Delvile's family situation and which leads her to decide against a match that would so enrage Delvile's parents.

However, the plot's total disregard for Cecilia's decision to hide her feelings suggests Burney's awareness of how easily young women's decisions about the pace of their lives might be taken out of their hands. Delvile discovers the affections Cecilia had chosen not to reveal: at a point in the novel when he is thought to be convalescing in a completely different part of the country, perhaps even touring Europe, Delvile arrives unexpectedly at Cecilia's lodgings and overhears her talking to a pet dog about how much she misses Delvile. While this seems like a typically trite plot device for galvanizing this particular subplot into action, the impossible coincidence of this overheard confession is suggestive of the larger social world in which Cecilia moves. Even in a moment when she thinks she is completely alone, the world intervenes in the form of the last person she could have wanted to overhear her. The unintended confession transfers power without Cecilia's desire or consent—at the end of the encounter, Cecilia reflects that "Delvile...was now become acquainted with his power, and knew himself the master of her destiny; he had quitted her avowedly to decide what it should be" (551). This provides a rather stark picture of why delay could offer a savvy strategy for navigating courtship—ideally, it lets women make informed decisions about who should become the master of their destiny. But Delvile's unwanted discovery ensures that Cecilia's strategies are all for naught, and suggests Burney's larger sense that no amount of delay will enable a woman to be the master of her own destiny for very long.

The pacing of the events that follow Delvile's unwanted discovery provides another example of how the form of the novel exacerbates the reader's frustration in order to align the reader with Cecilia. As the narrative tracks the rapid oscillations in Cecilia's response to

Delvile's proposal of a clandestine marriage, a kind of stop-and-go rhythm begins to build. She loves him, but she knows that marrying him will have negative consequences, possibly for both of them; she believes the objections of his parents are wrong, but she deeply respects his mother as a friend and feels bound to support her wishes even if she doesn't agree with them; she finally agrees to go through with the plan, but almost as soon as Delvile has left for London, she decides she's made the wrong choice; and while she doesn't believe she should travel to London for a wedding she no longer plans to go through with, she realizes that in Delvile's haste, he has neglected to provide any information about how to contact him between his departure and the morning of the wedding. Knowing no other way to communicate her change in sentiments without just leaving Delvile alone at the altar, Cecilia decides that she will travel to London to tell him in person that she can't go through with this plan. And this decision marks the *beginning* of yet another stop-and-go, back-and-forth, will-she-or-won't-she sequence, as Cecilia's journey to London is itself interrupted by acquaintances she meets on the road, who get into all kinds of trouble and imperiously demand her assistance. In a sentence that seems to get at the heart of the connection between pacing and emotion in this sequence, Burney writes, "These repeated impediments almost robbed Cecilia of all patience; yet her total inability of resistance obliged her to go, stop, or turn, according to their own motions" (608). Cecilia's "fear of raising suspicion, from a consciousness how much there was to suspect, forced her to curb her impatience," but readers privy to the desperation of her inner monologue know exactly how taxing it is to keep up this appearance (595). To let on that she has something to be impatient about would be to invite the discovery of the very scandalous act she has set out to prevent. Burney's tight focalization of this sequence through Cecilia's perspective cements the overlap between Cecilia's impatience and the reader's—as the only ones "in on" Cecilia's secret, readers

participate in her frustrated impatience and likewise powerless to *do something* about it. Like Cecilia, we are robbed of all patience by impediments of plot and pacing, yet obliged to go, stop, or turn according to the behest of the narrative. Ultimately, Cecilia is only able to prevent the marriage from taking place when she finds herself at the altar, and an unknown woman's objection from the pews halts the marriage ceremony long enough for Cecilia to stand firm in her own desire not to go through with it.

D. A. Miller, considering the relation of narratability to the marriage plot in Jane Austen, writes of "the counteracting pressures of retardation and dispersion" offered by the "narrative of social circumstance"—the events and occurrences that occupy a larger scale than the marriage plot, out of which such a plot must nonetheless be formed. In Austen's case, Miller suggests, "the edge on the heroine's desire (as well as the readers' comes from the interaction of a direct objectal desire (Anne wants Wentworth) and a theoretically unending obstacle course."³⁷ But in *Cecilia*, the plot proceeds more from the heroine's desire to end the obstacle course than from her desire acquire a specific husband. Anne clearly wants Wentworth—but although Cecilia does seem to want Mortimer Delville, what she wants even more is a chance to rest.

Opting out

In the wake of so much chaos, it is understandable that Cecilia might desire to regain control over her own life by cutting the social ties that have caused her so much trouble. And yet it poses a problem that the only way for Cecilia to regain this control is to retreat, not only from the social world, but from the eventful activity that would generate narrative. The novel is

³⁷ D. A. Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 43.

nearing its end—a reader of the printed volume can see how the pages before her are dwindling—but it is not yet over, though Cecilia seems to convince herself that it could be. As with most of the stretches of summary that I have surveyed thus far, Cecilia’s retreat to the country after her failure to marry Mortimer Delvile holds out the promise of a settled and orderly pace of life even as it gives Burney room to develop the issues which will return to disturb such a precarious peace.

This becomes particularly clear during the chapter entitled “A Calm,” which begins shortly after the failed marriage ceremony with Cecilia’s move to a temporary accommodation near her own soon-to-be-finished estate. The bare facts of her move are followed up by a single-sentence paragraph: “Here Cecilia continued a full month: which time had no other employment than what she voluntarily gave to herself by active deeds of benevolence” (789). This summary—passing over a month in a single sentence—covers more time in fewer words than perhaps any other in the novel, and offers an antidote to the overly distended scenes of heightened emotional distress that have proceeded it. In contrast to the lengthy sentences packed full of parallel clauses that announced the repetitious nature of social events in London, this sentence names a single employment for Cecilia’s time, and emphasizes it as one that she “voluntarily gave to herself.” Clearly, Cecilia’s removal from society finally allows her to organize her own time so that repetitions are calming rather than harrowing, and benevolent rather than self-absorbed.

But this scheme also entails a retreat from narrative. In a summary passage that echoes Cecilia’s much earlier decision to manage her own time in London, Cecilia resolves that upon moving to her own permanent residence she will begin a new plan of living:

...she determined, as much as was in her power, in quitting her desultory dwellings, to empty her mind of the transactions which had passed in them, and upon entering a house

where she was permanently to reside, to make the expulsion of her past sorrows, the basis upon which to establish her future serenity...

A plan by which so great a revolution was to be wrought in her mind, was not to be effected by any sudden effort of magnanimity, but by a regular and even tenour of courage mingled with prudence. Nothing, therefore, appeared to her so indispensable as constant employment... (790)

Cecilia's own injunction against suddenness and in favor of regularity might be read narratively as an injunction against scene in favor of habitual summary, and indeed the entirety of "A Calm" is written in the latter mode. This chapter foregrounds the potential problems, both narratively and personally speaking, of proceeding entirely in summary. On the one hand, "calm" is a thoroughly desirable state in the wake of so much painful and fruitless exertion. But just as a becalmed ship, while not endangered by storms, cannot move forward on its journey, the "even tenour" of Cecilia's new life threatens the purposeful movement of Burney's narrative. And on the side of personal costs, Cecilia's new independence is a relatively lonely one. Without suggesting that Burney prefers her heroine's disempowerment so long as it enables plot, I think we can read Cecilia's self-imposed "calm" as a judgment, not merely on the threat that narrative poses to female independence, but also on the silent costs of independent self-control—which becomes thinkable only in total solitude.³⁸

The core impulses of Cecilia the character and *Cecilia* the novel may seem, at this moment in the novel's plot, to be at odds. For Cecilia, independence is only conceivable in a state *beyond* narrative—a state practically nonnarratable, in which an entire month can pass by in the span of a single sentence. Miller has argued that such a nonnarratable state represents the end goal of many nineteenth-century novels, an equilibrium achieved by the culmination of narrative that "is, paradoxically, what reduces [the narrative's] own movements to a largely gratuitous, or

³⁸ Straub suggests that Cecilia's early attempts to withdraw from social events in London are flawed precisely because the cost of self-control appears to be loneliness; see Straub 122-3.

inessential, middle.”³⁹ And yet I would not suggest that Cecilia’s calm is actually “nonnarratable.” While it may initially appear that Cecilia has found that “great good place where movement (unless already known and reduced to an iterative mode) is impossible,” it quickly becomes apparent that Cecilia’s withdrawal from society cannot actually remove her from its web of interdependences. A period of calm may enable Cecilia’s sense of self-control, but it is not conducive to the demands of narrative—or, Burney suggests, to the ultimately inescapable demands of other people. While Cecilia hopes to achieve a kind of peace by stepping beyond the social world, her fundamental dependence on others (and others’ dependence on her) continues to draw her into conflict, producing a plot that moves, however haltingly, towards climax and conclusion.

Cecilia’s frustration with her own dependent position throughout the novel demonstrates Burney’s critique of the hierarchies of gender, age, and rank which have enforced this dependence; and yet, in Cecilia’s moment of proclaimed independence, Burney seems intent on reminding readers that even Cecilia’s empowerment relies on making dependents of others. Part of her plan for a perfect independence includes “solacing herself with the society of the wise, good, and intelligent,” yet Cecilia soon realizes that “[f]ew answered this description, and those few were with difficulty attainable” (793). Incapable of finding the kind of friendship she desires, Cecilia finds herself surrounded instead by dependents, including Mrs. Harrel and Henrietta Belfield as well the mass of unspecified recipients of her general charity. Cecilia has escaped from a dependent position, but she has not escaped from the system that distributes dependence unevenly, not just between men and women, but between different social classes.

³⁹ Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents* 8.

She has merely changed her place, so that rather than depending on others, she now has the power to make others depend on her.⁴⁰

Burney is particularly suspicious of claims for total self-reliance, which typically attempt to ignore or conceal one's ties to others rather than actually breaking them. This tension manifests in the novel's subplot concerning Mr. Belfield, a tradesman's son with an education and ambitions above his station. Over the course of the novel Belfield tires of job after job, leaving his mother and sister to comparable poverty as he pursues his own whims. Late in the novel, he turns away from his well-supported position as a companion to a noble gentleman, refusing the "servility of dependence" and "resolv[ing] to give up patronage for ever" (663, 661).⁴¹ Instead, around the same time as Cecilia's retreat to the country, Belfield sets out on his own plan of "Labour with Independence," which seems to primarily involve his working as a day laborer in the country near Cecilia's estate and living alone on the proceeds of this work (659). Belfield explains his system in attractively high-minded terms that seem to parallel Cecilia's own plan: for example, he proclaims himself to be "done with visits and society" (660). Yet as much as Belfield and Cecilia may chafe against their dependent situations, Burney's treatment of Belfield's scheme, and of his subplot generally, suggests that belief in radical independence is not only naïve, but also irresponsible: ignoring the fact that you depend on others, and that others depend on you in turn, doesn't make that dependence go away. At best, it makes it someone

⁴⁰ Gallagher, in a vein of argument complementary to my own, reads Cecilia's impulses to charity as a "dream of leaving her own story behind and becoming a *deus ex machina* in myriad other stories" (Gallagher 234).

⁴¹ Ironically he does not seem to judge his sister, Henrietta, for her analogous position as a companion to Cecilia, allowing Burney to establish the way that questions of gender complicate questions of dependence: women are both necessarily more dependent under patriarchy and yet expected to be less frustrated by this fact since that's just the way things are. A number of critics have noted the ways in which Belfield is a foil for Cecilia (and, in his later career as an author, for Burney herself), yet it is worth bearing in mind that in many ways his gender makes his problems with dependence quite different from Cecilia's—they are problems not because dependence is a problem, but because dependence is gendered feminine and thus more shameful for a man to have to submit to.

else's problem: Belfield's scheme only makes him what he needs to support himself, but this is because Cecilia has taken on his sister as a companion and supports her when Belfield cannot. Monckton responds to Belfield's starry-eyed scheme by declaring that radical independence is functionally impossible: "one part of a community must inevitably hang upon another, and 'tis a farce to call either independent, when to break the chain by which they are linked would prove destruction to both" (734). In this view, independence isn't so much impossible as it is absurd: how could one even begin to embark on a complete independence from others, and at what cost? Despite Monckton's general untrustworthiness as a character, his basic assessment here seems uncomfortably in line with the events of the novel so far. But his language nonetheless implies the potential for violence that Burney sees implicit in all systems of dependence. Even if independence is a mere illusion, some alternative is needed to the kind of restrictive, even punitive experience of dependence as a "chain." Furthermore, it's clear that some dependents would *benefit* from breaking the chains that leave them in a position of perpetual subservience, rather than being destroyed.

Compared against Monckton's vision of individuals bound by painful yet necessary chains, Cecilia's charity suggests a possible antidote, a positive model of dependence in which it is a duty to support those who cannot support themselves. In fact, this impulse to charity is deeply embedded within the systems of sensibility: the most appropriate sentimental response to the suffering of another is to feel pity, and then to follow up on this pity by offering assistance, often financially.⁴² But while Cecilia prizes her charitable endeavors throughout the novel, and makes them central to her retreat from society both in London and later in her country "calm,"

⁴² For a significant account of the interrelationship of sympathy and economics in the period, see Gillian Skinner, *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel, 1740-1800: the Price of a Tear* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

Burney does not ultimately see them as anything like a solution to the problem. One of the most unsettling things about Belfield's project of "Labour with Independence" is the way that it derails Cecilia's sentimental desire to come to his aid: "[Cecilia's] curiosity to hear him had sprung wholly from her desire to assist him, and she had expected from his story to gather some hint upon which her services might be offered. But none had occurred; he professed himself fully satisfied with his situation; and though reason and probability contradicted the profession, she could not venture to dispute it with any delicacy or prudence" (664). Belfield deliberately removes himself from the sentimental economy by refusing to ask for more than what he can acquire for himself.

Belfield's independence is ultimately not sustainable, but neither, it turns out, is Cecilia's overwhelming benevolence. When Cecilia and Delvile are at last married, and Delvile does not take the Beverly name in keeping with the terms of Cecilia's inheritance, Cecilia forfeits that inheritance and is forced to leave her estate. The scenes that lead up to her departure show just how much the surrounding neighborhood has depended on her presence, either in the form of direct employment, monetary presents, or lenience with late rent payments. It seems unlikely that the distant relative who assumes Cecilia's place will be anything like as forthcoming with his money as she was when it was hers, and her servants and tenants will clearly suffer from her departure. Cecilia blames herself—seeing it as a "capital error" that she never thought to save up her money to ensure her charities could continue in case of an emergency (873)—we might be tempted to blame instead the structures that place power over many in the hands of a few.

Going mad

Taken within the context of this larger debate, Cecilia's madness reads like a nightmare allegory of dependence—at once the most extreme extrapolation of her typical position and the most logical outcome in a society where she and women like her are not expected to take personal control over their bodies or their minds. Burney's depiction of this madness pushes the narrative techniques of distended scene and threatening shifts in focalization to their extremes in order to demonstrate how Cecilia's lack of control over the events in her life, and her regular positioning as a sentimental spectacle observed by others, culminate in her total disempowerment. While earlier shifts in focalization have been relatively brief, Burney's narration of Cecilia's madness shuts readers out entirely from Cecilia's thoughts and feelings, relegating readers to an external vantage point which they must share with the novel's other characters. And yet, unlike these characters, readers have the lengthy experiences of the novel up to this point, filtered through Cecilia's perspective, to guide their sympathy with her in this state of crisis, and to see it not as a break from the novel's other events but as their logical culmination. Thus, when other characters fail to sympathize with Cecilia in her madness, or lose their sympathetic stance once she returns to her senses, readers do not necessarily have to participate in these sympathetic failures, and may instead have gained the emotional experience necessary to critique or overcome them.

Critics have regularly commented on the strangely unsympathetic or detached narration of Cecilia's madness. Julia Epstein, for example, notes that "the narrator neither judges nor sympathizes" with Cecilia, and Julie Park characterizes the narrator's tone as "hyperexpository and balanced."⁴³ This strangeness, I would suggest, logically results from the extrapolation of the novel's typical knowledge disparity between Cecilia and the reader. Throughout the novel,

⁴³ Epstein, 170; Park, 136.

Cecilia has known less than the reader does about other characters' secrets—not only Monckton's, but also Mrs. Delvile's and even Mortimer Delvile's. Her madness, in which Cecilia "appear[s] unconscious even of her existence," sketches the outward limit of this disparity between character and reader (911). Any reader is automatically in a position of vastly superior knowledge when compared to an unconscious figure who may not be able to know anything at all. The stakes of this disparity are heightened because, unlike in previous instances, the reader's excess knowledge no longer falls into the realm of what is secret or hidden: instead, it is obvious information about the world around her that readers possess but Cecilia disastrously lacks. Just as earlier moments of knowledge disparity were signaled by shifts in focalization away from Cecilia, her madness is also represented from vantage points primarily outside of her disordered mind; portions of the scene are focalized instead through Mortimer Delvile, other portions through Dr. Lyster, who comes to help Cecilia, but a great deal is relayed in an even more detached style.

This shift to a largely external representation of Cecilia coincides with Cecilia's ultimate disempowerment via her transformation into a sympathetic object. By the time of *Cecilia's* publication, the madwoman as object of sympathy had already enjoyed great popularity in the literature of sensibility.⁴⁴ Whether encountered as part of a typical tourist visit to Bedlam or outside the confines of the asylum, the madwoman is typically approached from the outside by male figures in whom she provokes sympathy, but in whose story she plays a transient role. An early moment in Cecilia's madness suggests Burney's frustration with this trope. The narration

⁴⁴ Even limiting the pool to the texts already discussed in previous chapters, examples include Clarissa's madness after being raped, and Maria of Moulins (in *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*). Burney further explores the image in *Camilla*, where Mr. Tyrold shows Eugenia a beautiful madwoman as an object lesson in not regretting her physical deformities since she still possesses a sound mind. One of Adam Smith's early arguments against sympathy as a simple replication of another's feeling relies on the example of sympathy for a mentally disordered "wretch" who may feel happiness but for whom spectators nonetheless feel sympathy: see Smith, 12.

inhabits, to darkly comic effect, the perspective of the woman who runs the pawn shop where Cecilia ultimately collapses: “All she could think of by way of indulgence to [Cecilia], was to bring her a quantity of straw, having heard that mad people were fond of it; and putting it in a heap in one corner of the room, she expected to see her eagerly fly to it” (900). The pawnbroker’s offering of straw at once mimics and mocks the charitable reactions that sympathy with another’s distress is expected to produce; Burney’s narration casts the straw as a perverse form of care that suggests just how useless such care may prove when offered by someone with no insight into “what has befallen” the sufferer in question.⁴⁵ The pawnbroker’s relative coolness is contrasted by the terrible anguish of Mortimer Delvile, when he finally discovers what has become of Cecilia, but however great his grief (and however greater his understanding of what has caused Cecilia’s insensibility), it does not lead him to judge—as it might lead the reader to judge—his own complicity in bringing Cecilia to this point.

Burney’s final and strongest critique of the sympathetic gaze occurs when Delvile’s hard-hearted father, who despises Cecilia for marrying Delvile, is surprised into a confrontation with Cecilia’s “wholly insensible” form: “the changed and livid face of Cecilia caught his eye, and, struck with sudden consternation, he involuntarily wept” (912). Far from signaling a wholesale reformation, however, even the man’s pity is couched in paternalistic rhetoric that offers no path out of Cecilia’s dependence. Delvile Senior chastises himself for failing to properly provide for Cecilia when she came to him looking for shelter; her powerlessness makes him wish he had acted as her “protector” in this specific incident, but it does nothing to make him aware of the ways in which his own behavior has enforced the structures of dependence from which Cecilia

⁴⁵ The phrase is Smith’s; the first question that a spectator ought to ask upon observing one who suffers is, “What has befallen you? Till this be answered...our fellow-feeling is not very considerable” (Smith 11-12).

may truly need to be protected (912). His “involuntary” sympathy operates only when it is no longer of any real use to Cecilia, and fails to produce any sustained change of character.⁴⁶ Both Park’s discussion of “abjection” and Emily Hodgson Anderson’s discussion of “staged insensibility” in Burney’s works portray this moment of madness and collapse as a paradoxically deliberate rejection of control—a necessary transformation from subject to object that represents the only way of operating under the conflicting expectations that social life places on young women.⁴⁷ But I am skeptical of the suggestion that succumbing so spectacularly to dependence and to external objectification could have any power to “loosen the constraints of ideal femininity,” as Park puts it—particularly because, as Margaret Doody suggests, the silent and sickly female body present in scenes such as this one “seems a hostile parody of what men want women to be (deaf, mute, anorexic, motionless).”⁴⁸ As with the charity that Cecilia has doled out to others throughout the novel, the sympathy which other characters show to her can only *appear* to soften systems of dependence, while simultaneously reinforcing them.

Conclusion

While *Cecilia* gained relatively favorable reviews, nearly all of the recorded responses register a complaint about the novel’s ending. While Cecilia and Delvile are married, this state is not perfect. Cecilia gives up her fortune to take Delvile’s name, and while a series of moderately

⁴⁶ For a discussion of Cecilia’s madness and its failure to create a lasting impression on either Mortimer Delvile or his father, see King, 52-4. King contrasts the external representation of madness in *Cecilia* with the representation of madness through the eyes of the heroine who experiences it in Burney’s third novel, *Camilla*.

⁴⁷ See Park, chap. 4, “Frances Burney’s Mechanics of Coming Out,” esp. 128-37; Anderson, chap. 3, “Forgetting the Self: Frances Burney and Staged Insensibility.”

⁴⁸ Park, 124; Doody, in *Cecilia*, xxii.

fortunate reversals do occur (Delvile's father dies, and a distant relative of the Delvilles leaves Cecilia some money in her will), the novel ends, quite literally, on a note of resignation:

The upright mind of Cecilia, her purity, her virtue, and the moderation of her wishes, gave to her in the warm affection of Lady Delvile, and the unremitting fondness of Mortimer, all the happiness human life seems capable of receiving:—yet human it was, and as such imperfect! she knew that, at times, the whole family must murmur at her loss of fortune, and at times she murmured herself to be thus portionless, tho' an HEIRESS. Rationally, however, she surveyed the world at large, and finding that of the few who had any happiness, there were none without some misery, she checked the rising sigh of repining mortality, and, grateful with general felicity, bore partial evil with chearfullest resignation. (941)

Burney's sentences tack back and forth between happiness and imperfection, general felicity and partial evil, cheerfulness and resignation. The rhythms of this final passage suggest that the oscillation between contentedness and frustration which has plagued Cecilia as an heiress will still continue to structure her married life, even if those oscillations will prove less severe.

Burney's willingness to acknowledge that the desired outcome of marriage might still present imperfections frustrated many of her readers. In her journals, Burney describes an encounter with Edmund Burke, who wished *Cecilia's* conclusion "either more happy or more miserable; 'for in a work of imagination,' said he, 'there is no medium.'"⁴⁹ While Burney was "not easy enough to answer him" aloud, in her writing she has "much...to say in defence of following life and nature as much in the conclusion as in the progress of a tale; and when is life and nature completely happy or miserable?"⁵⁰ Attempting to truly capture the life and nature of a young woman like Cecilia requires a narrative "progress" that develops haltingly, impatiently, anxiously toward a resigned conclusion whose greatest consolation may be found in the fact that it is over. Marrying Mortimer Delvile cannot rid Cecilia of the structural dependencies that have plagued her

⁴⁹ Edmund Burke, in Doody 145.

⁵⁰ Frances Burney, in Doody 145.

throughout the course of the novel, but it can ensure that she is in a middle state, neither “completely happy or miserable,” which promises that future frustrations are likely to exist on a smaller scale.

Burke’s chiding, like Hazlitt’s later dismissal of Burney’s novels, suggests that many readers responded to the frustration of reading this novel in a way that simply did not lead them to sympathize. Burke makes his claim for a happier conclusion in the name of art, which does not have to represent life in its exactness; Hazlitt, too, is frustrated with the way that Burney’s novels seem to upend expectations of pacing and plot: “The reader is led every moment to expect a denouement, and is as constantly disappointed on some trifling pretext. The whole artifice of her fable consists in coming to no conclusion. Her ladies stand so upon the order of their going, that they do not go at all.”⁵¹ But what Hazlitt does not grasp is how Burney’s female characters “do not go at all,” not as a result of a poorly-constructed plot, but as a result of the real social constraints under which these women labor—and for which Hazlitt ultimately feels neither frustration nor sympathy.

Faced with sympathetic paradigms that privilege vision of suffering but acknowledge the ultimate impossibility of that visual encounter to recreate the same experience of suffering that produced it, Burney attempts to do one better. I have argued that her focus on distended and delayed temporal processes—foregrounding the time between knowledge and action, between initiation and completion, between desire and attainment—produces for her readers an experience of powerless waiting similar to that of Cecilia herself. This may not always prove a successful strategy for gaining readers’ sympathy and support, because readers are free to retaliate against their dependence on a novelist they perceive as abusing her authority. Yet as this

⁵¹ Hazlitt, 337.

formulation of the undesired outcome may suggest, even the backlash against *Cecilia* ultimately proves Burney's point: no one is comfortable with arbitrary dependence on an invisible power, whether that power of the result of societal or authorial construction.

Chapter 4

Learning to Live with Hope in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

Given the voluminous length of the novels I have considered in previous chapters, Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1817) may seem an odd text with which to conclude. Anything *but* lengthy—not just in comparison with the novels that have been the focus of my previous chapters, but even in comparison with the rest of Austen's published works—*Persuasion* is regularly likened to the Romantic lyric, emphasizing the novel's relative brevity, inward focus, and intense evocation of momentary feelings.¹ Critics pay close attention to Anne Elliot's "abnormally intense experience" and to the sensitivity of Austen's free indirect discourse, which registers this intensity with striking precision to provide "a transcript of Anne's inner consciousness."² Such an emphasis on intense feeling coupled with brevity would seem to reinforce the paradigm of fleeting feelings, and the focus on momentary rather than gradual or lasting emotional experience—were it not for the fact that Anne's intense agitation in the present stems from her continued affection for Captain Wentworth, and her persistent belief that she ought to have acted differently in the past. Thus, *Persuasion* complicates any simple opposition between fleeting and lasting feelings. Instead, the novel situates moments of emotional intensity in the present against the background of feelings which began in the past. Sometimes, these

¹ For example, Adela Pinch suggests that "the concept of the 'lyric' can usefully describe certain aspects of the novel—its emphasis on loss, its emphasis on temporality and repetition instead of plot, and its interest in voice and in noise." See Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 145. Deidre Lynch also situates *Persuasion* as "a novel that deemphasizes plot": see *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 213.

² Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 277-8; Lynch, *Economy of Character*, 213. Butler additionally notes that "the intimacy with which Jane Austen approaches Anne's consciousness appears to be something extraordinary" (277-8). More recently, D. A. Miller has noted Anne's "unique absorption of Austen's narration," though he reads this as a sign that *Persuasion* marks "the great false step of Austen Style," contrary to the critics I have previously quoted, who laud such absorption. See Miller, *Jane Austen, or, the Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 68-9.

lasting feelings operate at a threshold level of awareness, and it is the shocks of the present which allow characters to realize that feelings long since dismissed as gone have been lingering, unremarked. The history of Anne and Wentworth's previous courtship, and their struggles to recover from their broken engagement, suggest that the sudden shocks of feeling which attend their reunion ought to be contextualized as elements of a larger process.

In this chapter, I read *Persuasion* for its emphasis on the emotional experience of hope which enables the lengthy process of recovery—from love lost, from wounds sustained, from the aftereffects of choices one wishes one could remake. Such recovery situates hope as both necessary and challenging, particularly in the face of a future which is, at best, uncertain. The novel is full of events and actions which rupture expectations, sudden blows which leave lasting scars. Anne's decision to break her engagement with Wentworth marks one such rupture, which leaves its "lasting effect" on Anne in her "early loss of bloom and spirits."³ Captain Benwick's fiancée dies while he is away at sea; Louisa Musgrove falls from the Cobb, "too precipitate by half a second," and sustains a serious head injury which not only endangers her life but affects her personality (109). In cases like these, the sense of rupture and discontinuity comes not only from the pain of grief or physical injury, but from these events' unpredictability. Benwick is the one fighting a war at sea, but his fiancée dies while safe at home; Louisa's fall depends on a minuscule mistiming. In these moments, an unexpected event suddenly cuts short a promised future, and the loss of this future makes visible just how much is at stake in characters' expectations.

³ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) 28. Further citations of this edition will appear parenthetically in the text.

Under these conditions, nothing is quite so hard to maintain as “cheerful confidence in futurity” (30)—and yet, I argue, Austen posits such hopefulness as the best chance at recovery, and at something like happiness. Many of the characters in *Persuasion* think and act as though their futures were hopeless, preserving a state of melancholy, regret, or denial in relation to the futures they once might have had, but can have no longer. Captain Benwick recites melancholy poetry to express but also to preserve his grief; Sir Walter reads and rereads his copy of the *Baronetage*, even though its pages present him with the same sad facts about the death of his wife and his only son; and Wentworth, hurt by Anne’s rejection, denies both his own feelings for Anne and Anne’s worthiness of them. But *Persuasion* also contains characters who think and act hopefully: by this, I mean that their thoughts and actions entertain, even actively work toward, the possibility of a future more in line with their desires, no matter how unlikely success may seem. The outside world poses real dangers in *Persuasion*: everything from the looming threat of war to the surprising prevalence of illness, injury, and death among those who have not gone to sea generates an atmosphere in which hope is a challenge, and resignation seems far more realistic. However, I argue that the novel ultimately encourages an attitude of hope toward an uncertain future, even at times suggesting that hopefulness might keep feelings alive long enough to give them a second chance at fulfillment. Anne’s “retentive feelings” (60) may cause her pain, and yet by the novel’s conclusion, this pain has given way to joy; the hope that Anne has barely dared to hope has enabled, against all odds, the arrival of the desired outcome.

In order to give readers a similar experience of hoping against the odds, Austen structures *Persuasion* to perpetuate readerly doubt and uncertainty. Because the opening chapters in particular fail to confirm readers’ expectations about pacing and plot—delaying the arrival of a clear main character, focusing on courtship scenarios that have gone awry in the past rather than

suggesting any that might prove hope for the future—readers may begin to doubt whether their previous knowledge, either of novels or of life, has provided them with the information they need to predict this novel’s outcome. Thus, Austen begins by demonstrating how hard it can be to hope when the future appears not only uncertain, but also fundamentally beyond one’s ability to predict or control. Even when subsequent events encourage the hope that Anne and Wentworth could warm to each other again, this hope rests uncomfortably alongside the sense that people’s characters may be fundamentally unchanging. Thus, the challenge of hopefulness which confronts *Persuasion*’s first-time readers derives in part from the way in which narratives of hopeful recovery and narratives of hopeless stagnation develop in parallel throughout the majority of the novel, and in the process of a first reading, they may be indistinguishable. Instead, the difference between these narratives, and the real value of hope, is only discovered belatedly.

Ultimately, the kind of hope that I see Austen foregrounding in *Persuasion* is active, rather than passive: not a giving up of agency but an agential willing of a future different from (better than) the present, *even if* the willing is the most active thing that one could possibly do to bring it into being, and even when that willing is not explicitly called “hope.” Like the labor of attention I have discussed in Richardson’s *Clarissa*, the hope I locate in *Persuasion* does not need to issue in external action in order for it to be of value, though as a result, both attention and hope are often challenging to distinguish from passivity based on external effects alone. Likewise, both attention and hope emphasize provisional thinking and mental flexibility in the face of distress. But a primary difference lies in the relationship between hope and judgment: while Richardson’s suspense encourages readers to pay attention and to judge as best as they can based on the information they have been given, hopefulness does not seem to rely to the same

degree on calculations of what is proper or likely. Hope can seem like the least warranted response to an uncontrollable future which might change in an instant. The hopeful future one projects or desires is far from guaranteed to come to pass; and indeed, the course of one's future can change in an instant. But after that shock, Austen suggests, one must not simply give up on the future, but rather learn how to adjust one's hopes to one's new circumstances—to recover and thrive in the present with what one has been given.

Hoping in hindsight

Hope possesses a complex relationship to temporality: it is primarily future-oriented (we hope for things that have not yet happened), but as the conditional and counterfactual conjectures which litter *Persuasion* suggest, the futures we hope for may be the futures of pasts that did not happen, but could have. My understanding of this temporal complexity is informed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's observations about the relationship between hope and reparative reading. I have already discussed this relationship in my first chapter, where I explored Lady Elizabeth Echlin's rewriting of the third installment of *Clarissa* as an example of reparative reading. In the context of *Persuasion*, Sedgwick's most significant observations about hope have to do with the ethical possibilities enabled by its layered temporality. Hope and paranoia both look to the past as well as to the future, but for distinct ends. Sedgwick offers a way to understand how the surprising accidents and sudden reversals of *Persuasion*'s plot at once challenge and demand the practice of hope. Comparing paranoid and reparative reading, Sedgwick explains that the reparative practice of hope, while frequently "traumatic," at least preserves the possibility for change in the future:

To recognize in paranoia a distinctively rigid relation to temporality, at once anticipatory and retroactive, averse above all to surprise, is also to glimpse the lineaments of other

possibilities. [...] to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious, paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did.⁴

In other words, the paranoid desire to prevent anything in the future from coming as a surprise is precisely what prevents the future from looking any different from the present or the past. The only way to be secure against surprises is to persist in feeling what one has always felt, to prefer familiar over unfamiliar pain. The “fracturing” and “traumatic” experience of hope which Sedgwick opposes to paranoia is certainly not painless, but it is still to be preferred for offering a new perspective on the past and the future that makes change possible. For Sedgwick, hope—along with the reparative process which simultaneously fosters it and relies on it—is not to be preferred on the basis of its truthfulness, or its usefulness as a way of predicting the future.⁵ Instead, hope is valuable because it provides the reader with “room to realize that the future may be different from the present”—which then offers the subsequent, “profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities” that the past “could have happened differently from the way it actually did.”

In *Persuasion*, the complex temporality of hope makes hope especially challenging to name in the present. It is often only when the thing Anne has hoped for comes to pass (or seems

⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 146

⁵ See Sedgwick: “the main reasons for questioning paranoid practices are other than the possibility that their suspicions can be delusional or simply wrong” (Sedgwick 130).

very likely to come to pass) that she is willing or even able to acknowledge that hope is the thing which she has been experiencing. This time lag between feeling something and naming that feeling, or even being conscious that one was feeling, organizes *Persuasion*'s account of feelings other than hope; as I will demonstrate, many of the scenes critics single out for their expression of emotional intensity paradoxically portray that intensity as unnamable in the moment. But hope is characterized to an even greater degree by this delay between feeling and knowing what one feels. Thus, while Anne models certain hopeful behaviors from the novel's beginning, she does not label them as such for herself, even going so far as to suggest that she has persisted in her affections although "hope is gone" (235).

The fact that hope is hard to name in the present fundamentally shapes the way Austen's readers encounter the events of *Persuasion*. When characters are unwilling, or unable, to name their feelings in the present, readers struggle with the same difficulty: as a result, Anne's hopeful actions are only obviously hopeful when they are looked back on from some distance. This act of looking backward to a previous moment is frequently framed as a kind of rereading. Rereading does at times occur in a mode of hopelessness, in Sir Walter's rereading of the Baronetage and Captain Benwick's recitation of poetry; in these cases, rereading allows one to repeat or even revive a past feeling, preventing development or change and instead demonstrating the essential similarity between the past and the present. But hope fulfilled allows for a rereading of the past that deviates from verbatim repetition: because it is visible in retrospect, a rereading undertaken in the mode of hope can show how hope was already there, even if it was only faintly visible—looking forward to and making possible this present, from which it would be possible to name it for the hope which it was.

This retrospective framework results in a slight deviation from the approach I have taken

in earlier chapters, in which I have tended to proceed from the assumption that the issues of pacing and structure which I examine are at least potentially visible to a first-time reader of the novel. I have primarily worked through each novel's significant events in order, discussing how the novel gradually develops the emotional experience of suspense, familiarity, or frustration over time. In *Persuasion*, this task is made more difficult by the fact that first-time readers, like characters, may not actually be able to see the role of hopefulness and its significance to the experience of reading until late in the novel, perhaps not even until after the novel is over. This is not to suggest that the novel's form is not a dynamic process; what has changed, in *Persuasion*, is how much more difficult it is for one to know what kind of process it is while one is in the midst of it. Looking back on the events of *Persuasion* from the novel's conclusion, the reader is able to see patterns which may have been experienced in the moment, but often so insensibly that they may simply not have registered until they are looked back on. James Noggle has noted that the idea of things happening "insensibly" offers a distinct point between sensibility and insensibility: use of the adverb "depicts not a state of affective lack but a positive process in which affects are added to, built up, or altered without itself being felt, often because of its extreme gradualness."⁶ This "extreme gradualness" helps to account for the way that *Persuasion* seems to demand consideration in retrospect in order to confirm or organize what one has nonetheless already experienced. This is particularly the case with hope, which is a challenging sensation to name when one is still unsure whether it will amount to anything.

For these reasons, the emotional experience of learning how to hope as a reader of

⁶ James Noggle, "Unfelt Affect," in *Beyond Sense and Sensibility: Moral Formation and the Literary Imagination from Johnson to Wordsworth*, ed. Peggy Thompson (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2015) 125. While Noggle's essay focuses on the work performed by unfelt affect in Edward Gibbon's writing, particularly the *Decline and Fall*, he highlights uses of the term by Richardson, Burney, and Adam Smith which suggest the centrality of this issue to the questions of process at stake in my own project.

Persuasion is best understood in hindsight: while there are signs of hope early in the novel, they are rarely directly labeled as such, and it is only from the standpoint of the novel's conclusion that practices from its opening chapters might reliably be classified as hopeful or hopeless. For the purposes of discerning how these patterns operate, I want to begin with an overview of how I distinguish between hopefulness and hopelessness throughout the novel. This overview necessarily draws its examples from throughout the novel, focusing on two opposing images of the mind: first, the hard-shelled hazelnut held up by Wentworth as an example of "firmness" (88), and second, Anne's observation of her old school friend Mrs. Smith's "elasticity of mind" (154).

The paradigm of hopelessness assumes that one's hopes are completely contingent either on the events of the outside world or the dictates of one's "nature," and finds its earliest articulation in Wentworth's comparison of an unpersuadable mind to a firmly-shelled hazelnut. In a significant conversation between Wentworth and Louisa Musgrove, which Anne accidentally overhears, Wentworth praises "firmness of mind" and denigrates changeable characters. When Louisa discusses how easily she has persuaded her sister to reconcile with an estranged suitor, Wentworth offers his approval of Louisa's consistency and scorn for her sister's persuadability; using a hazelnut to offer an impromptu object lesson, he proclaims, "let those who would be happy be firm" (88). However, this happiness comes at the cost of imagining one's character as fixed. This fixity affects both the firm character, who appears unchanging, and the "yielding and indecisive character," who *appears* to change rapidly as she is influenced by outside forces, but whose persuadability remains constant even when her opinions do not (88). In this model, there is no room for someone to be fixed in some ways, and yet change in others; nor is there room for either character to change from within. Imagining people as hazelnuts, subject

to all the vicissitudes of the outside world, significantly negates the possibility of inward dissent from outward circumstances which I have suggested forms the most basic prerequisite of hope.

Wentworth's analogy of the hazelnut implies that whatever one's fundamental character might be, that character is maintained perpetually. And yet, the events of *Persuasion* ultimately suggest that a better model would be to assume that everyone possesses, in some degree, the "elasticity of mind" which Anne discovers partway through the novel's second volume in the person of her former schoolmate Mrs. Smith (154). Anne is surprised to find that her friend has gone from being a wealthy wife to a poor and disabled widow, and even more surprised to find that, despite these changes, Mrs. Smith "had moments only of languor and depression, to hours of occupation and enjoyment" (154). Anne pays close attention to how this has come to pass, and determines that Mrs. Smith's relative cheerfulness in the face of hardship "was not a case of fortitude or of resignation only.—A submissive spirit might be patient, a strong understanding would supply resolution, but here was something more," which Anne labels "elasticity" (154). Neither strong and resolute like Wentworth's firm character, nor submissive and resigned, like Wentworth's yielding character, Mrs. Smith unsettles Anne's (and the novel's) models for understanding how people respond "under reverses" (247). Anne insists that Mrs. Smith's "elasticity of mind" is not something the woman has developed for herself, but rather "from Nature alone," "the choicest gift of Heaven" bestowed upon Mrs. Smith by "merciful appointment" from above (154). In other words, echoing Wentworth, Anne insists that even Mrs. Smith's flexibility comes from without, rather than within. Nonetheless, acknowledging such plasticity as a positive option—envisioning the ability to change one's mood or one's mind, not as a bad form of persuadability, but as a good form of adaptability to life's unpredictable circumstances—marks a major turning point in Anne's own narrative of slow recovery.

Thinking in terms of the mind's elasticity highlights the capacity for change which brings with it the capacity for hope. This competing model is only elucidated relatively late in the novel, and even then, Anne is more prepared to see Mrs. Smith as an anomaly than a model to be followed. But the belated arrival of a name for the kind of attitude which enables recovery is much like the belated ability to name hope itself, and suggests that the absence of a name for this paradigm does not simply equate to the absence of the thing itself. The elastic qualities of an individual mind do not need to be immediately apparent in order for us to believe that they might be there. In hindsight, the idea of a malleable mind helps to explain even those characters whose lives appear to remain static, by contextualizing that stasis not as inevitable but as a result of willed behavior intended to preserve it. Certain characters actively prolong their own suffering, either by exacerbating their wounds (like Captain Benwick or Anne herself seeking out melancholy poetry) or by refusing to admit that they have made mistakes that need to be corrected (like Wentworth casting all the blame on Anne for their broken engagement, or like Lady Russell feeling bound to encourage the breaking of that engagement in the first place). But there is also still some hope that even these characters may simply be at such an early moment in the process that their progress is almost indistinguishable from stasis. After all, the eight years of Anne's own backstory suggest that such things take time to emerge. Because they take time, there is room to hope that even those who seem to have been overset for good may yet improve.

The novel's unnatural beginning

In *Persuasion*'s opening chapters, the slow pace of habitual summary combines with the focus on past failures or foreclosed opportunities to call into question the relationship between the plot of this novel and the plot of Austen's earlier novels. The first three chapters (like the

members of the Elliot family on whom they focus) largely neglect the woman who is nonetheless to become the novel's heroine. Even when Anne does rise into indisputable prominence through the fourth chapter, which relates the "little history of sorrowful interest" that is her past engagement to Wentworth, it is under circumstances that highlight the disparity between the plots which her current situation might plausibly produce and those which have structured Austen's other novels (28). James Phelan, writing about Austen's refusal of comic expectations in the first half of the novel, argues that "if you conclude, upon reading the end of chapter III, that 'he' will be Anne's future husband, you are relying less on the progression of the first three chapters and more on your sense of what Austen's other novels have done, and, thus, what her other novels are supposed to do."⁷ *Persuasion*'s opening forces readers to acknowledge the gap between hopeful expectations they may have developed based Austen's previous novels, and the minimal encouragement for those expectations offered by this particular novel. And it generates this doubt even though Wentworth *will* be Anne's future husband.

The feeling that takes its time to develop in *Persuasion* is significantly *not* love. This marks a change in focus from Austen's previous novels, which emphasize the gradual process, not just of falling in love, but of realizing that this is what has been happening all along: thus when Elizabeth presses Darcy "to account for his having ever fallen in love with her," he replies, "I was in the middle before I knew I had begun."⁸ In *Persuasion*, however, such a sentiment is more likely to be expressed about hope than about love. Falling in love seems to take almost no time at all—and at least narratively, that particular emotional process seems rather beside the

⁷ James Phelan, "The Beginning and Early Middle of *Persuasion*; or, Form and Ideology in Austen's Experiment with Narrative Comedy," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 1, no. 1 (2003): 75-6.

⁸ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966) 380.

point. For example, Austen relates Anne and Wentworth's initial courtship in a lightly ironized summary which suggests how many other men and women have traced out the same basic pattern: "Half the sum of attraction, on either side, might have been enough, for he had nothing to do, and she had hardly any body to love... They were gradually acquainted, and when acquainted, rapidly and deeply in love" (26). In a different novel, such rapidity might be cause for alarm: in *Cecilia*, for example, it is just what Cecilia hopes to avoid; in other Austen novels, it would at the very least be suspect. And yet the happiest married couple in *Persuasion*, Admiral and Mrs. Croft, jest before Anne about their own shockingly brief courtship, with the Admiral asking his wife to measure its length in "days," and Mrs. Croft admitting that "if Miss Elliot were to hear how soon we came to an understanding, she would never be persuaded that we could be happy together" (92). The brevity with which Anne's previous courtship is treated by the narrative thus does not serve to condemn her initial attachment to Wentworth as shallow or unfounded. Instead, it emphasizes the outsized impact of such a brief period on Anne's future life and happiness: "A few months had seen the beginning and end of their acquaintance; but, not with a few months ended Anne's share of suffering from it" (28). Austen's shift in focus away from the development of love to love's aftermath results in a novel that begins by throwing into doubt any readerly expectations about the kind of story the novel will tell.

Such uncertainty is only exacerbated by the way in which the novel's opening seems content to leave Anne as a minor character in her story. While the first three chapters of *Persuasion* slowly drift toward a focus on Anne, the narrator's attention in the opening chapter is devoted almost entirely to Sir Walter Elliot and Elizabeth Elliot, both of whom seem to be living hopelessly in a present whose major events and emotions have already been determined by the past. These predetermined feelings greet the reader in the novel's opening sentence, which

details Sir Walter Elliot's habit of reading about himself in the Baronetage; this habit provides "occupation in an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one," and ensures that "any unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs changed naturally into pity and contempt" (3). The sense of Sir Walter as a character stuck in his past is reinforced by the repetition between the opening words of *Persuasion* ("Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire") and the opening words of Sir Walter's entry in the Baronetage ("ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH-HALL") which begin the novel's second paragraph (3). Reading the Baronetage, Sir Walter participates in a well-developed emotional practice for ensuring that his present distresses or "unwelcome sensations" are redirected, not only towards his own past, but towards "the history and rise of the ancient and respectable family" whose name he bears (3-4). Although the passage that Sir Walter reads and re-reads has itself changed slightly over time—Sir Walter adds information about his daughter Mary's marriage, the precise date of his wife's death, and the identity of the current heir presumptive—these emendations to the text do not seem to disrupt the iterative mode in which the novel begins. Rather, Austen suggests that Sir Walter's habitual re-reading of the same passage relegates all of its contents into the realm of an essentially homogenous past. The details of Sir Walter's personal past, offered up in the portion of the entry that is quoted in the text, seem an unlikely place to find "consolation": his only son is stillborn, his wife is dead, his eldest daughters are still unmarried. The only potential consolation appears to lie in the fact that no further changes have occurred in almost five years. In this way, Sir Walter's rereading recalls Sedgwick's description of the "knowing, anxious, paranoid determination" that "there must be no bad surprises."⁹ Sir Walter attempts to inoculate himself against the surprise of grief or of loss by making it part of his repeated experience.

⁹ Sedgwick 146, 130.

Elizabeth Elliot relates less comfortably to the past events which have determined her present feelings and habits.. Yet Austen's introduction of Elizabeth suggests that she, no less than Sir Walter, sees the events of the past as continued marks upon her present. In particular, the death of her mother thirteen years prior to the novel's beginning has determined a great deal of Elizabeth's life since. While the eight-year period that marks the distance between Anne and Wentworth's first engagement and their second chance develops a talismanic status over the course of *Persuasion*, in the first chapter, this thirteen-year period of Elizabeth's life seems likely to mark the interval of the past that matters the most. Austen achieves this effect largely by experimenting with techniques for giving temporal weight to a lengthy period of time described in a relatively brief summary. While at first it does not seem such a hardship that Elizabeth is "handsomer at twenty-nine than she was ten years before...still the same handsome Miss Elliot that she had begun to be thirteen years ago" (6), Austen's tolling repetition of "thirteen" throughout her depiction of Elizabeth's past begins to solidify the tedium of such an unchanging existence:

Thirteen years had seen her mistress of Kellynch Hall, presiding and directing with a self-possession and decision which could never have given the idea of her being younger than she was. For thirteen years had she been doing the honours, and laying down the domestic law at home, and leading the way to the chaise and four, and walking immediately after Lady Russell out of all the drawing-rooms and dining-rooms in the country. Thirteen winters' revolving frosts had seen her opening every ball of credit which a scanty neighborhood afforded; and thirteen springs shewn their blossoms, as she travelled up to London with her father, for a few weeks annual enjoyment of the great world. (6-7)

The shift from "thirteen years" to "thirteen winters" to "thirteen springs" highlights the paradox through which the slight variations within this repetition enhance the sense of monotony rather than eliminating it, even as the grammatical parallelism within sentences and between sentences reinforces the sensation of changelessness as stagnation. Though the passage continues by

reaffirming Elizabeth's certainty that she is "still quite as handsome as ever," it also betrays Elizabeth's growing concern for the way in which her "still"-ness increasingly marks her as ineligible to ever leave the single state; indeed she "would have rejoiced to be certain of being properly solicited by baronet-blood within the next twelvemonth or two. Then she might take up the book of books with as much enjoyment as in her early youth; but now she liked it not" (7). Nothing but Elizabeth's relationship to the Baronetage has fundamentally changed since her youth, and this change has been one of increasing denial rather than one which enables the possibility of hope.

The cumulative effect of the first chapter is to blur the boundaries between the habitual actions and iterative tenses of the past and the definitive beginning of action in the present. At several points, the narrative appears as though it will stop detailing characters' backstory and kick off the novel's plot, but nearly every attempt to move the story towards the present is followed by some degree of backsliding into the past. For one example, the paragraph discussed above moves from the "then" of Elizabeth's childhood pleasure in the Baronetage to the "now" of her dislike, in a way that suggests we may finally have surmounted the thirteen years of her past and finally arrived at the present—only to have the following paragraph begin by introducing an element of her backstory left out of the repetitive catalogue of habitual action. This is the story of her failed attempt to court the prospective heir to her father's baronetcy, Mr. William Elliot, who "several years" ago married "a rich woman of inferior birth" despite what Elizabeth and Sir Walter view as the greater attractions of marrying Elizabeth (8). "This very awkward history of Mr. Elliot," as the narrator calls it, "was still, after an interval of several years, felt with anger by Elizabeth," and this unchanging anger becomes yet another potential bridge between past and present: "so miserably had he conducted himself, that though she was at

this present time, (the summer of 1814,) wearing black ribbons for his wife, she could not admit him to be worth thinking of again” (8). But rather than situating the present as a time when the monotony of the past is shattered, instead it represents a time when changing conditions do not lead to changing emotions—and in fact this single changed condition, the death of Mr. Elliot’s wife, does not largely undermine the continuing monotony of Elizabeth’s existence. In the absence of “habits of utility,” Elizabeth is left in the same cycles of repetition in which we found her, with no guarantee that “the sameness and the elegance, the prosperity and the nothingness, of her scene of life” will ever vary (9).

Rereading the past

At first glance, the story of Anne’s past which cements her place as the heroine of *Persuasion* seems to offer no more promising a relationship between past losses and present feelings than those experienced by her father and elder sister. And yet, although little about Anne’s outward circumstances has changed since her refusal of Wentworth nearly eight years prior to the novel’s beginning, Anne’s inner life has been thoroughly restructured at some point since this refusal by a deliberate change in her own opinions. Unlike Sir Walter or Elizabeth, who have effectively remained in emotional holding patterns, Anne is willing to rethink her past decisions, even though she cannot remake them. Anne’s reevaluation of her past is made clear to readers through a set of counterfactual or conditional statements about the kinds of pasts (or presents, or futures) she could have had and did not. Austen deepens and complicates our understanding of the past as it actually happened by economically evoking a number of different pasts that could have occurred in its place. When Anne imagines what she would have done, or how Wentworth might have acted, she constructs alternative timelines which could rewrite her

own sad story. These returns to the past yield difference, rather than sameness, even before that difference could issue in external action.¹⁰ Aligning these alternative pasts with the difficult work of sustaining hope—even in circumstances where it appears that all hope is gone—I want to continue to draw on the idea that hope is itself a mode of conditional thinking that ignores despairing probabilities, not because they are inherently untrue, but because doing so provides a more ethically productive outlook on one's own future. In fact, Sedgwick frames the ethical power of hopefulness as it plays out in the act of reparative reading as something that stems less from probabilities than from possibilities: "Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did."¹¹ This sequence may apply to the reader of *Persuasion*, whose initial belief that the novel will end happily may challenge her to grapple with the possibility that it need not, necessarily, end happily at all. For Anne, however, the process seems reversed: it is because Anne entertains the idea that her own past could have happened differently from the way it did that she is able to realize a future different from the present.

Even though Anne does not seem to truly believe that she will have a second chance at happiness, this fact has not prevented her from making a decision to reject her previous choice and to consider how she might have made it differently. Such an act may seem hopeless, this

¹⁰ My understanding of the relationship between difference and repetition in *Persuasion* is indebted to Lorri G. Nandrea's article on this topic. Nandrea clearly depicts how the counterfactual conjectures that Anne proposes mimic the larger structure of the novel itself, in which, "Rather than pursuing the effects of Anne's first decision all the way to the end, Austen returns to these roads not taken, the virtual choices that lost out to the actual, and plays these out too. The novel thus sketches an unusual picture of a sequence that results from unfolding, in time, multiple possible outcomes of a single moment in history—making the past that has never been present become the future." See Nandrea, "Difference and Repetition in Austen's *Persuasion*," *Studies in the Novel* 39, no. 1 (2007): 49.

¹¹ Sedgwick, 146.

return to the past in order to rethink the future possesses the time signature of hopefulness. At first, Anne envisions her rejection of her past decision, not in terms of her own poor choice to follow Lady Russell's advice, but in terms of Lady Russell's poor choice to give that advice in the first place. While Anne insists that she blames neither Lady Russell for giving her advice nor her younger self for following it, she nonetheless "felt that were any young person, in similar circumstances, to apply to her for counsel, they would never receive any of such certain immediate wretchedness, such uncertain future good" (29). Imagining her future self as an older woman being asked to give advice to someone in a situation like her own, Anne determines that she would pass along the wisdom she has gained in hindsight. While this conditional future paints Anne as a minor character in the story of someone else's courtship, suggesting that Anne's own moment for benefiting from this knowledge is over, she still conceives of her experience as possessing value that might be of use in the future. This knowledge is itself based on a process of self-persuasion, in which Anne's acute awareness of unrealized possibilities allows her to change her mind from within—something Wentworth's hazelnut model of fixed character does not even begin to consider:

She was persuaded that under every disadvantage of disapprobation at home, and every anxiety attending his profession, all their probable fears, delays, and disappointments, she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement, than she had been in the sacrifice of it; and this, she fully believed, had even more than a usual share of all such solitudes and suspense been theirs, without reference to the actual results of their case, which, as it happened, would have bestowed earlier prosperity than could be reasonably calculated on. (29)

Anne's persuasion from without by Lady Russell is juxtaposed to the process by which Anne has "persuaded" herself over time. This self-persuasion introduces two different counterfactual possibilities. Anne considers first what would have happened if she had maintained the engagement, and next what would have happened had she been made to suffer the financial and

emotional hardships of being a sailor's wife that Lady Russell so grimly predicted. It is not until Anne determines that she would have been happier married to an impoverished and endangered Frederick Wentworth that the reader is informed that this would not have been the case, since Wentworth's naval career has been far more lucrative than anyone could have expected. The complex interplay of former expectations and present reconstructions lets readers, like Anne, dwell not just on the facts but on the narrative possibilities latent in the eight years that have passed since her last encounter with Wentworth.

While such an action may seem to transform the past into a place heavy with opportunities that have been apparently foreclosed in the present, it also demonstrates a key difference between Anne's temperament and Lady Russell's. It is not only that Anne has changed her mind over time, and that Lady Russell has not, but that Lady Russell has a static view of what has passed that leaves her powerless to imagine futures worth inhabiting. When Lady Russell hears of Anne's refusal of Charles Musgrove (who marries Anne's younger sister Mary instead), we are told that although she "never wished the past undone, she began now to have the anxiety which borders on hopelessness" that Anne may never marry (29). Never wishing the past undone—never grappling seriously with its challenges and remaking its conclusions—lands Lady Russell in a place of anxiety and hopelessness which Anne may be better suited to escape. In contrast, the narrator positions Anne's own capacity for change and growth not only in the indefinite past moment when she decided that she was wrong to be persuaded, but also suggests that it opens up into the present: "She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older—the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (30). While both Anne's forced prudence and learned romance are referred to in the past tense, the switch from a complex to a simple past ("she learned romance" instead of "she

had learned romance”) evokes, in the world of standard past-tense novelistic narration, a shift that encompasses the present and suggests that the process of “learning romance” may be as ongoing as the process of growing older. Thus, even before Wentworth’s reentry into her life, Anne’s ability to continue elaborating the multiple, unrealized possibilities of her past demonstrates the kind of active effort that cannot change how things have already happened, but may provide the necessary condition to envision real change in how things may yet come to pass. Or, to put it quite simply: because Anne knows, by the time the novel begins, that she would have chosen differently in the past, she is in a strong position to actually choose differently in the future when marriage to Wentworth becomes, once again, a viable option. Perhaps it is in this light that we ought to read her claim “of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone” (235). For all that Anne seems to believe that all hope is gone, her willingness to envision alternatives—to reread her past and find the possibility of a different present there—carries hope’s shape if not (yet) its name.

Dwelling with hopelessness: “falling into a quotation”

Anne’s counterfactual thinking models one version, early in the novel, of what hope might look like—and yet the challenge of hoping in *Persuasion* is exacerbated by the fact that Anne often seems caught between hopeful and hopeless behaviors. In the same way that Sir Walter’s rereading of the Baronetage seems paradoxically to reduce the discomfort caused by his wife’s death and his lack of a direct male heir, characters like Anne and Benwick appear to console themselves against the grief of lost love by turning to poetry. In all three of these cases, the experience of rereading or reciting is not intended to discover something new: instead, these characters repeat something they already know in the hopes it will produce the same feeling it

has always produced. As Deidre Lynch has noted, while literary critics are used to positioning rereading as the action which allows the critic greater access to the hidden or obscure elements of a text, in the early history of the novel, rereading was not necessarily thought to produce difference, but rather sought out as a preserve of comforting sameness. Generalizing about the “constant readers” of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, who return again and again to favorite novelists for consolation, Lynch depicts their rereadings as “odd compounds of diligence and in-a-rut indolence” which “prompt thoughts of holding patterns and inertia rather than development and mobility.”¹² Lynch ultimately links such readings, where “the persistence and habituation of feeling are overriding concerns,” to a growing understanding of domestic life and marital constancy—topics certainly at stake in *Persuasion*. But in the novel’s first volume, at least, the feelings which persist and are habituated through rereading seem to have more to do with the avoidance or loss of domestic concerns. Sir Walter turns to the Baronetage so that he will not have to curb his financial outlay or the misplaced family pride which encourages it. Anne and Benwick recite and discuss poetry in order to maintain their grief over having lost their chances at the kind of constant domesticity that a kind of shared repetition would ideally promise. Anne’s counterfactual thinking offers a version of rereading which rejects such constancy in favor of change and hope, but it is challenging to see this pattern since it is interleaved with Anne’s less hopeful recourse to poetic repetition.

The melancholy musings with which Anne occupies herself on a walk to Winthrop offer an example of repetition as stagnation, one which parallels her father and sister’s introductions in the novel’s opening chapters. In a striking passage, Austen’s free indirect discourse reveals Anne

¹² Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 156. Worth noting, too, is Lynch’s parenthetical note that “protagonists of this period’s anecdotes of faithful reading are, as far as I can tell, almost always male” (*Loving Literature*, 156).

“repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn” (84) in language that reflects, in its word choice and patterns of speech, not so much Anne as the “poetical descriptions” themselves. Anne has clearly summoned such poetic language as a kind of insulation against overhearing the painful conversation between Wentworth and Louisa taking place within earshot, but Austen’s narration avails itself of affected, “poetical” syntax and diction in order to point out the ironic fact that Anne schools herself against one kind of pain by indulging in another:

Her *pleasure* in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn, that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness, that season which has drawn from every poet, worthy of being read, some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling. She occupied her mind as much as possible in such like musings and quotations... The sweet scenes of autumn were for a while put by—unless some tender sonnet, fraught with the apt analogy of the declining year, with declining happiness, and the images of youth and hope, and spring, all gone together, blessed her memory. (84-5)

Although Austen represents the patterns of Anne’s thoughts, the language belongs neither to the narrator nor to the character whose thoughts are being narrated; words like “poetical” and “extant” belong to the heightened register of diction more common to poetry, and the strange ordering of words in the phrase “poetical descriptions extant of autumn” suggests the kind of inverted syntax more common in poetry than prose.¹³ The conventional “poetical” phrases filter into the narration even before the mention of poetry, in a way that may initially shock the reader—for example, “[t]he last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves” is a startling phrase, belonging to neither Anne’s nor the narrator’s typical mode of speech, so it stands out even

¹³ It is worth noting that neither of these words appears anywhere else in Austen’s published novels. “Poetical” appears twice within the span of a page—both “poetical descriptions extant of autumn” and “sweets of poetical despondence.”

before the reader is informed that it functions as a kind of quotation. And yet the passage does not actually include literal quotations, nor does it provide the names of poems or poets. Instead, the “poetical” seems to represent a category comprised of fragments, where units as short as a single word can stand in for a whole series of poems and poets. Endlessly repeatable because they have already been endlessly repeated, the poetical descriptions of autumn comfort Anne by allowing her to substitute an expression of feeling with which she is already familiar in place of a startling or painful experience of the outside world for which she is unprepared. Yet Austen appears suspicious of this mode of poetic consolation. She ironizes Anne’s comfort in the melancholy “sweets of poetical despondence,” and her sense of being “blessed” by her memory of these quotations, questioning whether it is worth preventing the pain others might cause by way of inflicting a more familiar pain upon oneself (85).

Austen seems equally wary of Captain Benwick’s habit of resorting to poetic language to represent the depth of his grief over the death of his fiancée, even though here the repetition of poetry provides a socially-sanctioned avenue for sharing emotion with others. In a conversation with Anne about “the richness of the present age of poetry,” Benwick mobilizes the language of contemporary poets as a way of talking about his pain:

he shewed himself so intimately acquainted with all the tenderest songs of [Scott], and all the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony of [Byron]; he repeated, with such tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness, and looked so entirely as if he meant to be understood, that [Anne] ventured to hope he did not always read only poetry; and to say, that she thought it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly. (100-1)

That Benwick can only express “such tremulous feeling” by repeating the words of others is, to some extent, a fact of social circumstances. His repetition of poetry allows him to express his sorrow without actually having to own it—perhaps the only valid way of communicating deep

emotion in a casual conversation. But the fact remains that the intimate acquaintance this passage discusses is an acquaintance with feelings expressed by others, not himself. In fact, Anne's wariness of "complete" enjoyment of poetry suggests an image of Benwick taken over by the poetry that he recites in an effort to be "understood"—and if this is the case, the problem is Benwick's commitment to a total repetition of the poetry he reads. Benwick responds to Anne's recommendation of books intended to encourage patience rather than indulge sorrow "with a shake of the head, and sighs which declared his little faith in the efficacy of any books on grief like his" (86). Benwick's lack of faith is clearly also a lack of hope: he sees "a grief like his" as hopeless. Anne, too, has used poetry to reinforce her sense of hopelessness, but in this moment she is nonetheless able to notice and work against this attitude in Benwick. Anne's slightly distanced language of aesthetic appraisal offers a model for thinking about and naming feelings in a mode that does not simply repeat them "completely." Thus, the sentence which begins by describing Benwick's reading using an emotionally-charged vocabulary drawn from the poetry in question (intimate, tender, impassioned, hopeless, tremulous, destroyed, wretched) shifts, after Anne's suggestion, to a more measured vocabulary of aesthetic appreciation (enjoy, estimate, taste). Distancing the emotions experienced by people in poetry from the responses that such poetry ought to motivate in its readers, Anne shows that there are multiple ways to relate to melancholy feelings, even if she also recognizes that "she had been eloquent on a point in which her own conduct would ill bear examination" (101). Indeed, Anne's own poetic recitations are not proof against the shocks of the outside world—on the walk to Winthrop, she finds her musings interrupted by an uncomfortable conversation, and although she tries, she "could not immediately fall into a quotation again" (85).

Moments of shock and processes of recovery

Persuasion's first volume is organized around repeated scenes of intense feeling which follow a predictable pattern, both in terms of content and in terms of their narrative pacing. In these scenes, Anne is surprised by Wentworth's presence, and experiences strong feelings of agitation; the initial encounter and the feelings it generates are often described quite briefly, and such descriptions are better at suggesting *that* Anne feels strongly than they are at naming *what*, precisely, she feels. Once Wentworth leaves Anne's vicinity, she struggles to replay what has just occurred, to interpret and understand both Wentworth's actions and her own. Anne's reflections on these moments are often narrated at far greater length than the moments themselves receive; an encounter which barely lasts a sentence can spawn paragraphs of recollection. As in Burney's *Cecilia*, the periods of summary after scenes of intense action are welcomed by Austen's heroine as well as the novel's readers as an opportunity to regain composure. However, where Burney's distended scenes begin from a point of tension which they then keep running at a high pitch almost indefinitely, the moments of shock which characterize *Persuasion* tend to arise unpredictably out of otherwise unremarkable scenes, often ushering in a dramatic change of tone: Anne is having breakfast when Charles Musgrove arrives to announce that, in just minutes more, Wentworth will unexpectedly come to call; all of Anne's attention is absorbed in attempting to remove her young nephew from clinging to her back, when Wentworth comes to her aid. Louisa's sudden and unexpected fall from the Cobb provides the most extreme case of such shock; one minute, the party is walking comfortably by the sea, the next minute, Louisa jumps, and the world changes mid-sentence: "too precipitate by half a second, she fell on the pavement of the Lower Cobb, and was taken up lifeless!" (109) But rather than standing out as anomaly, this moment solidifies the pattern which underwrites most of the first volume, in

which Anne's entire existence seems to consist of unwelcome shocks which she cannot securely guard herself against.

The accidental or unexpected nature of the encounters which generate the strongest emotional reaction reinforces the sense of an uncertain, uncontrollable outer world which makes hope a challenge. However, rather than confirming Wentworth's hazelnut model of character—the way to be happy is to be perpetually hardened against the possibility of attack—Anne's responses to these unexpected encounters begin to suggest the possibility, at least on a very small scale, of something like recovery. In Anne's earliest encounters with Wentworth, Austen begins to map out in miniature a pattern of shock and recovery which readers will come to see characterizes many characters' responses to sudden blows. Recalling Deidre Lynch's argument about the familiarizing quality of repeated defamiliarization in *Tristram Shandy*, we might read these repeated shocks as a way of familiarizing readers to the iterability of this process which begins with a shock but continues with recovery.¹⁴ By far the majority of characters in *Persuasion* find themselves hopeless in the face of shock, unable to respond to the rupture between what they assumed would occur and what has actually come to pass. But other characters are more capable of hopefulness: when upset by events they were not expecting, they gradually assimilate and learn to manage the shock. Thus, at Lyme, Anne is the least upset by Louisa's fall and able to direct the others in her party about how to seek help. This process is often described in terms of "hardening"—so Anne does eventually find herself "hardened to being in Captain Wentworth's company" (99)—but unlike Wentworth's hazelnut which is either firm or not, Anne finds that her own "hardness" changes over time. More importantly, it changes at least partly due to her own conscious efforts: thus, even before the Crofts' possession of

¹⁴ See Lynch, "The Shandean Lifetime Reading Plan," and my discussion in Chapter 2 above.

Kellynch-hall, Anne deliberately “harden[s] her nerves sufficiently to feel the continual discussion of the Crofts and their business no evil” (30). The mind, it seems, is not a nut, but can harden and soften at will. In the moment, it is challenging to see these narratives as hopeful, but they nonetheless play out the temporal pattern I have ascribed to hope, tracing the delay between feeling something and being able to understand and name that feeling on a scale much smaller than the novel as a whole, and thus, perhaps, a scale more easily visible to the first-time reader. Even in moments when Anne appears hopelessly shaken by Wentworth’s presence, the small-scale pattern of feeling, and reflecting on feeling—of being shocked, and beginning to recover—offers an early glimpse of the temporal pattern of hope.

The sentence-level techniques Austen uses to relate Anne’s earliest responses to Wentworth tend to displace the actual experience of feeling into the future or the past, in the process strangely emptying out what we might assume to be feeling’s sharpest temporal ground, the present. By representing Anne’s present feelings as essentially ineffable in the present, Austen shifts attention away from the momentary shock of strong feeling and toward the process of understanding that feeling which necessarily follows. For example, Anne’s first encounter with Wentworth occurs so suddenly, and is over so quickly, that the narration might best be described as summary or even stream-of-consciousness, lacking the sharpness of external detail we might expect from a scene. The entire event takes place in less than a paragraph:

a thousand feelings rushed on Anne, of which this was the most consoling, that it would soon be over. And it was soon over. In two minutes after Charles’s preparation, the others appeared; they were in the drawing-room. Her eye half met Captain Wentworth’s; a bow, a curtesy passed; she heard his voice—he talked to Mary; said all that was right; said something to the Miss Musgroves, enough to mark an easy footing: the room seemed full—full of persons and voices—but a few minutes ended it. (59)

The tempo moves too quickly here for Wentworth’s words to be quoted—Anne hears his “voice” but while he talks to all present, the narration refuses to pin down what precisely has been said,

lingering instead on the tone of his social niceties, the “easy footing” which Wentworth has no trouble achieving but which Anne, as the narration reflects, is far from maintaining. The elongated final sentence—with its choppy, paratactic syntax, focus on actions rather than subjects, and stuttering repetitions of words and grammatical structures—is often singled out as characteristic of Austen’s newly intimate dealings with her heroine’s overwhelmed mental processes. But I am even more interested in the way this apparently intimate experience of Anne’s anxious consciousness is introduced by the assertion that the experience it narrates is already in the past.

Anne feels “a thousand feelings” in this moment, but Austen’s narration only makes us explicitly privy to one, “the most consoling, that it would soon be over. *And it was soon over*” (emphasis added). The sentences that follow in fact describes a moment that seems to occur temporally between these two sentences. By moving directly from Anne’s anticipation of a near future event (“it *would soon be over*”) to the moment immediately following that event’s completion (“it *was soon over*”), Austen creates a kind of temporal buffer that separates Anne and the reader ever so slightly from the anxious experience she goes on to narrate. However, the repetition of “over”—and repetition in general in this passage, both of individual words and grammatical structures—suggests the real futility of such a desire. Far from providing a sense that things are “over,” the stuttering assertion undermines its own credibility with each repetition: “‘It is over! it is over!’ she repeated to herself again, and again, in nervous gratitude. ‘The worst is over!’” (60) While the “few minutes” of their first encounter may be over, the Anne’s feelings about that encounter are anything but.

Indeed, repetition of key words and phrases seems to organize both Anne’s initial shock and her slow, determined recovery. When she decides to “reason with herself, and try to be

feeling less,” the repetition of “eight years” (four times in the span of a page, and two of those in the same sentence) suggests just how little those eight years have really done to compose her feelings about her past. For all that she sees her reaction as “absurd,” and insists that “oblivion of the past” is the “natural” and “certain” result of so much time, she concludes her reasonings with the discovery “that to retentive feelings eight years may be little more than nothing” (60). While such “retentive feelings” might initially seem to place Anne in company with her sister and father, unable to move past feelings retained from the past, a key distinction lies in Anne’s ability to be surprised by the interaction between her feelings retained from the past and the events of the present. Rather than relying on past feelings as a refuge or habit that prevents the development of new feelings, Anne’s continued affection for Wentworth, and her painful awareness of their past courtship and her past mistake, encourages a very different relationship to him in the present. The fact of this change over time is underscored by another phrase that finds itself repeated throughout Anne’s period of recovery: Captain Wentworth’s assertion, relayed to Anne by her sister Mary, that he finds Anne “so altered he should not have known [her] again” (60). The repetition of “altered” throughout the pages that follow organizes Anne’s attempts (and failures) to distance herself from the scene that has so overpowered her; a variation on Wentworth’s phrase appears as quoted speech at the start of two subsequent paragraphs of Anne’s disordered thoughts, underscoring her own sense that “these were words which could not but dwell with her” (61). Anne’s “mortification” at Wentworth’s appraisal is heightened by the fact that “he was not altered...she had seen the same Frederick Wentworth” (61). But while Anne submits to the “sobering tendency” of these words (“they allayed agitation; they composed, and consequently must make her happier” (61)), a hopefully minded reader may note that the capacity to alter can be a positive thing, however negatively it is here intended. Likewise,

Wentworth's apparent "sameness" can be seen as a negative, as a sign that he has failed to adapt or to grow over the course of eight years—a stagnation that seems ultimately worse than Anne's loss of bloom. Thus, particular words and phrases ("over," "eight years," "altered") gain layers of meaning and nuance as they are repeated in different contexts, often reading quite differently than they did on their first use, and modeling on a small scale the way that repetition might gradually produce a different outcome than expected.

A similar pattern organizes the scene in which Wentworth approaches Anne without her knowledge to remove a clinging child from her back.¹⁵ Evidence of this passage's effectiveness at generating feeling goes as far back as the response of Maria Edgeworth: "don't you see Captain Wentworth, or rather don't you in her place feel him taking the boistrous child off her back as she kneels by the sick boy on the sofa?"¹⁶ Edgeworth's contention that the experience provided by *Persuasion* is somehow deeper and more primal than vision—that it can provide the experience of *feeling in place of* another—offers a paradox, since the scene itself essentially focuses on Anne's difficulty in describing what she feels, or even what has actually happened to her. Finding herself alone with Wentworth, Charles Hayter, and two small children in the drawing room, Anne deliberately turns her attention away from the source of her anxiety to focus on the Musgrove children instead. One of the children, Charles, is recovering from an injury, but while Anne leans down to tend to Charles, his younger brother begins to climb on her back in such a way that she can neither stand up nor dislodge him—until suddenly, in the midst of her discomfort, "she found herself in the state of being released from him; some one was taking him

¹⁵ I am particularly indebted to Pinch's discussion of this scene; see Pinch, 153.

¹⁶ Quoted. in B. C. Southam, ed., *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1968), 117.

from her, though he had bent down her head so much, that his little sturdy hands were unfastened from around her neck, and he was resolutely borne away, before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it” (80). Here, the sentence elongates a relatively sudden action in order to distinguish the different stages in Anne’s apprehension of that act. At first she is not even aware that an outside agent is responsible for her release; the subsequent clause extends her knowledge (and the reader’s) by labeling “some one” other than the child as the cause, but that person has already borne the child away “before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it.” Anne’s knowledge lags behind the action because in this moment she is object rather than agent—and by tracking the small shifts in Anne’s own comprehension, Austen’s narration provides the sensation of being with Anne in the moment of her final discovery. It manages this despite the fact that those sensations are themselves challenging to name: “Her sensations on the discovery made her perfectly speechless” and “produced such a confusion of varying, but very painful agitation, as she could not recover from” (80). To feel with Anne in this moment is to feel in essentially general terms: “sensation,” “feelings,” “confusion,” and “agitation.” And yet Anne’s claim that she cannot recover has shifted by the end of this paragraph: “it required a long application of solitude and reflection to recover her,” but this at least situates recovery as possible (81).

Thus, Anne’s first encounters with Wentworth highlight the fact that, even if the past is over, Anne’s feelings about it are not—and perhaps may never be. In the moment of reading, Anne’s feelings are overwhelming. But just as these scenes give Anne the space to recollect and compose herself, they also suggest reasons to hope. After all, something not being over is a condition for something to come out differently than one expected that it would. Something not being over in the present means that it may still be open to change in the future. Indeed, the same

pattern of shock and recovery ultimately organizes her much more hopeful response to Wentworth's letter, in which he declares his continued reflection: the narration begins by admitting that "such a letter was not soon to be recovered from," and that "every moment...brought fresh agitation," but this agitation, rather than pain or confusion, is one which Anne can finally name as "an overpowering happiness" (191).

Temporal distention in the second volume: "the natural sequel"

The two-volume structure of *Persuasion* represents a departure from Austen's earlier novels, all of which were published in three volumes.¹⁷ But this structure allows for a certain symmetry between the novel's two halves which draws attention to the novel's interest in doubling and repetition with a difference. The novel's two volumes each possess twelve chapters, and each volume can be neatly divided into six-chapter units based on the presence or absence of Wentworth from Anne's life. Their first meeting after years apart, which I have discussed at some length above, occurs in Volume I Chapter 7. After Louisa's disastrous fall from the Cobb in the last chapter of Volume I, the first chapter of Volume II begins with Anne's removal to Bath, which simultaneously removes her from Wentworth's company; she (and Austen's readers) will have to wait another six chapters to be in his presence again in Volume II Chapter 7.¹⁸ Seen in retrospect, these patterns suggest on the small scale something that Anne might learn to hope for on the larger scale. After years without Wentworth, he returns; after

¹⁷ Claudia Johnson suggests that the first courtship between Anne and Wentworth, detailed only minimally and in retrospect, serves as a kind of stand-in for the expected third volume: *Persuasion* "is constantly calling attention to a temporal gap, to the time unwritten, but everywhere felt, to the missing third volume, as it were." See Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 147.

¹⁸ For a compelling articulation of this division of the novel into quarters, see K. R. Ireland, "Future Recollections of Immortality: Temporal Articulation in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 13, no. 2 (1980): 209-10.

months without Wentworth, he returns again; and as the wife of a sailor in wartime, perhaps this rhythm of parting and return will organize Anne's future as well. But all of this is only visible in hindsight, once the novel has been completed: in the moment, for first-time readers of the novel and for Anne as a character within it, Wentworth's departure from the text at the start of Volume II is not calculated to produce strong hopes of reunion. And in fact, the striking rise to prominence of the character of Mr. Elliot in the opening chapters of the second volume places him as a strong alternate candidate for Anne's affections: even if this alternative is almost immediately dismissed by Anne, Austen's plot makes space for its sinister possibility, and even for the possibility that Anne will again be "persuaded" by Lady Russell into a poor choice about her future.

Despite Anne's professed lack of interest in Mr. Elliot, the opening of *Persuasion's* second volume continues to throw him in Anne's way; even if readers do not actually entertain the possibility that Anne could marry Mr. Elliot instead of Wentworth, it is as though the novel itself entertains this possibility quite seriously. Lady Russell certainly sees Mr. Elliot as a potential match for Anne, primarily because he would help to complete a narrative of Anne's future that would have her replicate her mother's past. Even Anne finds herself tempted, if not by Mr. Elliot, then by the idea of re-embodying her mother: "For a few moments her imagination and her heart were bewitched. The idea of becoming what her mother had been; of having the precious name of 'Lady Elliot' first revived in herself; of being restored to Kellynch, calling it her home again, her home forever, was a charm which she could not immediately resist" (160). Mr. Elliot's hint towards a future proposal is offered in similar terms, in his praise of Anne's name and his "wishes that the name might never change" (188). These moments clearly suggest that a match to Mr. Elliot would represent a bad version of returning to the past, one that could

only generate stagnation, and yet throughout the second volume, such a match is a much-discussed possibility.

Wentworth's reappearance dispels any remaining fear of a match to Mr. Elliot, but more importantly, his agitation in Anne's presence replays the kind of agitation Anne herself has experienced throughout the novel's first volume, offering proof of the way that recovery occurs at different speeds. When Anne encounters Wentworth unexpectedly in Bath, the strength of her initial reaction is in keeping with how she has responded earlier in the novel to his first arrival in Kellynch: "she saw nothing before her. It was all confusion. She was lost" (175). However, in the encounter that ensues, Anne's overpowering emotions are easier for her to handle, and it is Wentworth who appears visibly overset:

He was more obviously struck and confused by the sight of her, than she had ever observed before; he looked quite red. For the first time, since their renewed acquaintance, she felt that she was betraying the least sensibility of the two. She had the advantage of him, in the preparation of the last few moments. All the overpowering, blinding, bewildering, first effects of strong surprise were over with her. Still, however, she had enough to feel! It was agitation, pain, pleasure, a something between delight and misery. (175)

The frantic stream of adjectives in which Anne asserts that "the overpowering, blinding, bewildering, first effects of strong surprise were over with her" might lead us to question whether this is another instance of her overinsistence on things being "over." And yet the fact that Wentworth is the one "struck and confused," comparatively "unprepared," suggests the way in which he is working through similar steps to Anne, but at a delay. Later, in Wentworth's solicitude for Anne's recovery from the events at Lyme—"I am afraid you must have suffered from the shock, and the more from its not overpowering you at the time" (181)—we may hear a man who is perhaps only just learning for himself what it is like to suffer from a shock, and to feel that suffering more intensely for its being delayed in time.

While the doubling and repetition I have outlined between the two volumes of *Persuasion* suggests a kind of symmetry between the two halves of the novel, in fact, the second volume covers much less diegetic time than the first; the narrative pace slows to capture in painstaking detail the final events that will lead to the novel's conclusion. Although the happy ending seems increasingly certain from the moment of Wentworth's reappearance, the novel takes its time in providing it, allowing readers the experience of waiting through a period of time intensely charged with hopefulness on the cusp of being confirmed. K. R. Ireland has mapped out in detail the "remarkable deceleration of pace in the closing chapters of *Persuasion*" and the relative distention of narrative time in *Persuasion* as a whole: while it contains the fewest chapters of Austen's published novels, and very nearly the fewest pages, it covers eight months of diegetic time, the average for Austen's other novels.¹⁹ The result is that "the average ratio of pages per chapter is the highest of the six novels, while its two longest chapters"—Volume II Chapter 9 and Volume II Chapter 11—"extend to twice that average and are the longest in all Austen."²⁰ Ireland suggests that the final "quarter" of the novel is "temporally the most densely compact sequence in Austen, to match its narrative status as the most emotionally charged resolution in her work," but this claim sits uneasily with his further assumption that "later revisions would have abbreviated" Mrs. Smith's revelations about Mr. Elliot in Volume II Chapter 9 "and retained the more dramatic, climactic II/11 as longest."²¹ In other words, if we consent to Ireland's notion that length and deceleration of pace mark out those segments of the novel to which we ought to pay greatest attention or ascribe the highest emotional intensity, then

¹⁹ Ireland, 209.

²⁰ Ireland, 209.

²¹ Ireland, 210.

we ought to see Mr. Elliot's backstory as a mistake. The only other option, which Ireland dismisses out of hand, would be to situate Mr. Elliot's backstory as equal in importance to Anne's discussion of constancy with Captain Harville, or Wentworth's penning of the letter that leads to their reconciliation. While it is true that the information Mrs. Smith provides is negligible, I want to suggest that its effect on the pace of the novel's final events is significant. I see the intervention of this unwanted, unneeded backstory in the last chapters of *Persuasion* as one more way in which Austen delays—and thus, perhaps, calls into doubt—the novel's long-hoped-for conclusion.

The problem of Mr. Elliot's backstory is related to Mrs. Smith's apparent superfluity to the plot of *Persuasion*. Ireland, for example, insists that "the new final paragraph of the novel hints at the writer's own uneasiness about Mrs. Smith's role."²² It should be clear by now that my own reading of *Persuasion* places Mrs. Smith as central, if not for reasons of plot, then because she offers the clearest example of a hopeful "elasticity of mind" that the novel has to offer. Mrs. Smith enters the novel belatedly, it is true, and apparently from out of nowhere: Anne does not know what has become of her former schoolmate until she learns from her former governess that the woman she last heard of as married to "a man of fortune" is now "a widow, and poor" (152). But Mrs. Smith's belated arrival may be related to the belated ability to name hope: only in the novel's second volume is Anne or the reader prepared for the example she offers.

Situated the morning after the concert in the Octagon Room where Wentworth has spoken suggestively with Anne about his own feelings and Anne has felt her own hopes almost completely confirmed, Mrs. Smith's lengthy discussion of Mr. Elliot puts a drag on the forward

²² Ireland, 210.

movement of a much more compelling strand of the plot. Mrs. Smith's candid appraisal of Mr. Elliot's past does fill in several gaps in understanding, but the same could have been accomplished more rapidly in summary—the mode of Austen's delivery here is as surprising as the information itself.²³ Even Anne experiences this information as largely unnecessary, since it does not change her mind about Mr. Elliot, but merely serves to confirm it. The frustration felt by generations of critics about the chapter's apparent superfluity is not unlike that felt by Anne herself, who would rather, at this moment, reflect on the previous night's encounter with Wentworth, but who, like the reader, is made to wait. Rather than attempting to deny the superfluity of the information this chapter offers, or to explain it as a thread left hanging in the wake of Austen's rewriting, I suggest that this frustrating sense of purposelessness is precisely what Mrs. Smith's discussion of Mr. Elliot has to offer the novel.²⁴

Only the eclipse of the Wentworth plot by Mr. Elliot in this moment can demonstrate the degree to which the alternate possibility of Anne's match to Mr. Elliot has dwindled out of sight—and allow Anne to reflect, in hindsight, on how plausible that poor decision might have been. On her way to Mrs. Smith's, Anne truly believes that it is not even worth thinking about how she might have felt about Mr. Elliot “had there been no Captain Wentworth in the case,” because “there was a Captain Wentworth: and be the conclusion of the present suspense good or

²³ In fact, dissatisfaction with the delivery of Mr. Elliot's backstory is something of a critical commonplace. Marilyn Butler, for example, writes that “Mrs. Smith's history of [Mr. Elliott's] past, that outworn cliché of the eighteenth-century novel, is a device which Jane Austen otherwise allows herself only in *Sense and Sensibility*” (Butler 280). Johnson also highlights “the conventionalized villainy of William Elliot and the conspicuously artificial means of disclosing it” as a throwback to *Sense and Sensibility*, though she is more concerned with using this to counter readings of *Persuasion* that emphasize the novel's “autumnal” qualities (Johnson 144).

²⁴ Susan Morgan makes a similar claim that “the inappropriateness of Mrs. Smith's revelation is itself appropriate. The irrelevance of her information to the plot or to Anne's happiness is exactly the point.” See Morgan, *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 178.

bad, her affection would be his forever” (192). And yet, by the end of her conversation with Mrs. Smith, “Anne could just acknowledge within herself such a possibility of having been induced to marry [Mr. Elliot], as made her shudder at the idea of the misery which must have followed. It was just possible that she might have been persuaded by Lady Russell!” (211). “Anne could *just* acknowledge,” “it was *just* possible”: however minimal the chances of this particular scenario, Anne’s willingness to acknowledge it demonstrates the real dangers which hope and elasticity of mind may be up against. It is also worth noting that

Austen’s self-consciousness about suspense in the final chapters of *Persuasion* seems to support my claim that the real utility of Volume II, Chapter 9 lies in its capacity to delay the final reunion, and in delaying it, provide the time necessary for Anne and for the novel’s readers to understand just how tenuous or fragile that reunion actually is—how likely it is to have happened otherwise. Anne’s own reference to “the conclusion of the present suspense” regarding Wentworth reads like one way Austen winks at her readers, and her heroine, about the prolongation of this process. A similarly playful passage opens Volume II, Chapter 11, gesturing both to the slowing down of narrative time and the real superfluity of the Mr. Elliot plot by the novel’s penultimate chapter. The chapter opens with a curious comparison to the *Arabian Nights*: “One day only had passed since Anne’s conversation with Mrs. Smith; but a keener interest had succeeded, and she was now so little touched by Mr. Elliot’s conduct..., that it became a matter of course the next morning, still to defer her explanatory visit... Mr. Elliot’s character, like the Sultanness Scheherazade’s head, must live another day” (229). Scheherazade seems a fitting reminder that sometimes, a story’s failure to conclude is what keeps hope alive, and furthermore, that keeping a story going for long enough might be the necessary prerequisite to a happy ending: Scheherazade’s ongoing storytelling not only prevents the Sultan from killing her, but

ultimately leads to his falling in love and dispensing with his murderous serial monogamy which has threatened all of the women in his kingdom.²⁵ If used to describe the relationship between Anne and Wentworth, the comparison might have held greater weight—but as it is, this moment teases readers with its tonal mismatch between the seriousness of the suspense engendered by the life-or-death storytelling of Scheherazade, and the comparatively unimportant question of Mr. Elliot's character. Such a playful tonal mismatch reads to me as Austen's way of acknowledging the tension she has created by delaying the rapprochement between Anne and Wentworth for so long. Ultimately, then, the elongation of time in these chapters does important work to make us simultaneously doubt and hope that we will see a reconciliation at the end of them. It provides a final period of necessary waiting before the charged sequence that will end with Anne's reading of Wentworth's letter and their final reunion.

Returning together to the past

Anne and Wentworth's reunion and shared discussion of their past offers a retrospective accounting of the novel's events as they have been experienced by *both* partners; it enables them to agree on a shared narrative of the novel they have just lived—and we have just read. In this way, even before the novel is done, we become rereaders of it. Anne and Wentworth's retrospective detangling of the multiple narrative possibilities afforded by the novel, their work of filling in the blanks and ordering past potentials so that they produce the present moment, is not altogether unlike the work of a reader who, having read the whole story through, sits down to

²⁵ For more on the connections between *Persuasion* and *Arabian Nights*, see Ros Ballaster, "Playing the Second String: The Role of Dinarzade in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction," in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West*, edited by Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 93-6.

describe the plot in hindsight. This act of rereading is distinct from Sir Walter's return to the Baronetage or Anne's repetition of poetical descriptions of autumn, because it looks back on the past from a present in which feelings and circumstances alike have *changed*, enabling new information about the past to come to light. "Constancy" becomes a key term in *Persuasion*'s penultimate chapter, one to which Anne, Harville, and Wentworth all ascribe value—and yet, Anne and Wentworth's work to rewrite their past together into a different present requires things to have happened differently, even if we are to believe that these changes in situation have allowed characters' *feelings* to remain essentially the same. The final chapters, then, preserve the fiction of "constancy" in order to assert after the fact some kind of continuity within a story that could, instead, be read as one of total rupture and unlikely (or even incomplete) repair.

While scenes in which couples confer together about the events that have just taken place are something of a hallmark in Austen's novels, in *Persuasion*, this sequence helps to underscore the complex temporality of hope in the moment when we know that such hopes are no longer in vain.²⁶ This complexity is visible in the fluid movement between past, present, and future moments that characterizes the tense patterns of this sequence. Anne and Wentworth find their way to a less-traveled street where they can talk freely, because "the power of conversation would make the present hour a blessing indeed; and prepare for it all the immortality which the happiest recollections of their own future lives could bestow" (240). In the logic of this phrase, the present "prepare[s]" the happiness of the future even as the imagined future "bestow[s]" happiness on the future's past, which is the present. The kind of conjectural thinking which proved instrumental to Anne's own process of "learning romance" returns in the idea that she

²⁶ On the significance of these social scenes of remembering, see Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 77.

and Wentworth are “more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their re-union, than when it had been first projected” (240). While “perhaps” may inject a degree of uncertainty, it is very nearly overwhelmed by the remainder of the sentence and its echoing repetition of “more”: not only “more exquisitely happy,” Anne and Wentworth are also “more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other’s character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting” (240-1). To cement this sense of added fullness, the characters, like the reader, “[return] again into the past” with the goal of tracing out of chaos and contingency a shape that will produce this moment as its future (240).

In this light, it is appropriate that the reader (like Anne) learns only in retrospect the degree to which the first half of the second volume has grated on Wentworth—and how waiting without something to do has enabled him to gather the resolve needed to return to Bath with “some degree of hope” (243). Given the claims I have made about the retrospective nature of hope, it is unsurprising to discover that Wentworth has only realized the persistence of his own affections for Anne belatedly, when Louisa’s fall from the Cobb simultaneously demonstrates Anne’s levelheadedness under pressure and convinces Wentworth of the dangers of a temper like Louisa’s (and like his own) which stubbornly persists in getting its own way no matter the context. Despite this belated realization, Wentworth defends his claim to constancy of feeling, but “thus much indeed he was obliged to acknowledge—that he had been constant unconsciously, nay unintentionally; that he had meant to forget her, and believed it to be done” (241). The idea that one could be “constant unconsciously, nay unintentionally” ultimately troubles the usefulness of “constancy” as a paradigm. Of course, Anne and Captain Harville’s discussion of constancy provokes Wentworth’s letter to Anne and the novel’s happy conclusion; it also suggests Austen’s investment in a question at the center of this project: how long, and

under what conditions, do feelings tend to last? But to these questions, Austen's exploration of "elasticity of mind" and the hopefulness it enables adds a further challenge: how can we think about the persistence of feeling as more than just stubbornness or stagnation?

Seen in this light, Anne and Harville's discussion of constancy appears eerily similar to Wentworth's praise for the firmness of the hazelnut. Spurred by Captain Benwick's apparent inconstancy (as demonstrated by his engagement to Louisa so soon after the death of his first fiancée), Anne suggests that men's feeling may be shorter-lived than women's; Harville dismisses Benwick as an anomaly and defends his sex, claiming that men's feelings are strongest "in a true analogy between our bodily frames and our mental" (233). But there is something halfhearted about their rerun of this battle of the sexes, especially since Benwick seems to have already proved Harville wrong, and Wentworth will soon disprove Anne's claim as well. More important than their disagreement over men's and women's capacities for lasting feeling is their shared assumptions about what might cause someone's feelings to change in the first place. Both Anne and Harville talk as though constancy is either a fact of "man's nature" (or woman's) or the result of "outward circumstances"—neglecting the third option which would situate the persistence of feelings as something over which an individual might exercise some personal control (233). This is not to say that outside circumstances play no significant role in this question. When Anne tells Harville that women "live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us," she clearly speaks from personal experience (232). But the equation Anne suggests between being confined at home and being at the mercy of one's feelings cannot tell the whole story. Benwick, for example, has access to the kind of "profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other" which Anne identifies as the opposite of women's confinement, and yet prior to his engagement to Louisa, it seems safe to say that his feelings preyed upon him. In contrast,

the widowed Mrs. Smith lives alone, quiet, and doubly constrained by her gender and by physical disability, but her feelings do not seem to prey on her at all. Even without the ability to move in the wider world, this novel offers examples of what it might look like to control one's feelings, rather than be controlled by them. Ultimately, Anne and Harville are just as wrong about the gendering of constancy as Wentworth has been about the value of firmness, both for Louisa and for himself. Seen in this light, a positive model for lasting feelings might have to acknowledge the fact that one can work to change what one feels—even if that change is simply a growth or addition of “more.”

Concluding in uncertainties

When Austen opens the novel's final chapter with the question, “Who can be in doubt of what followed?”, the answer is both no one and, in some senses, everyone (248). The point of the novel has been to make it so that the simple situation Austen sketches in final chapter's opening paragraph—two young people deciding to marry and doing so despite familial disapproval—seems anything but inevitable. As a result, we value more highly the events which have unexpectedly come to pass. If *Persuasion* has been a testing ground in readerly hope, developed by Austen's constant willingness to undermine or challenge the assurances of union which make the courtship plot tick, then the novel's final chapter offers an explanation for why such a version of hope might be necessary. The uncertainty in which Anne and Wentworth find themselves suggests that learning how to be hopeful is not merely a condition of securing the right partner in marriage: it is also, increasingly, a valuable skill for surviving the tensions and uncertainties of life itself, whether married, widowed, or single. *Persuasion*'s final paragraph famously opens out from the past tense into the present, and the present in which the novel ends is, in real ways,

uncertain. In the early spring of 1815, when the novel ends, Anne's "dread of a future war" is well-founded: Napoleon is about to escape from Elba, as Austen, writing in the summer of 1816, knew well; there is no chance that Anne will be preventing from having to "pay the tax of quick alarm" (252). The world of the novel, which has been full from the beginning with accidents and missteps that one cannot foresee or control, will not simply settle itself out of sight once the marriage takes place. But if the world is always going to be capricious and uncertain, then it is one's own feelings which one must work to change—developing the elasticity of mind that earns Mrs. Smith a place in the novel's final paragraph alongside Anne and Wentworth.

Anne and Wentworth's marriage offers the possibility of hope anew to other characters as well—in particular to Lady Russell, whose difficulty in adjusting to the situation she advised against eight years ago suggests just how hard it can be to maintain a hopeful outlook when things turn out exactly the opposite to what you expected. Austen depicts this process of struggling in a paragraph that begins with Anne's concerns for her old friend, but shifts into a tone of firm correction perhaps closer to the narrator's own:

Anne knew that Lady Russell must be suffering some pain in understanding and relinquishing Mr. Elliot, and be making some struggles to become truly acquainted with, and do justice to Captain Wentworth. This however was what Lady Russell had now to do. She must learn to feel that she had been mistaken with regard to both... There was nothing less for Lady Russell to do, than to admit that she had been pretty completely wrong, and to take up a new set of opinions and hopes. (249)

Lady Russell's process of admitting she had been pretty completely wrong, and of taking up a new set of opinions and hopes, has only just begun with the novel's conclusion. Lady Russell's belated education in hopefulness makes it clear that the challenge of hope has to do in part with how long it might take between an initial shock and the reworking of that past shock into future hope for recovery. For Anne, the process of "learning romance" has already begun before the novel opens; for Wentworth, as we discover in the penultimate chapter, it is only the events of

the novel (and mostly the anxious waiting of the second volume) which teach him to hope; and it is not until the novel's final chapter that Lady Russell must slowly, painfully, learn how to reorient her own hopes for Anne's future. All three characters are recovering from the same event—Anne's broken engagement eight years ago. But recovery looks different for each of them; it takes a different amount of time, and its onset can be almost distressingly late. And yet, the fact that recovery from a sudden blow can begin later than one expects means that there is literally no reason to stop hoping. It also means that what counts as "constancy" depends a great deal on one's narrative framing of the situation, on how large a view one is willing to take, and on how one ties the threads of one's past self back into the present.

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