Unstable Sympathies in the 19th-Century British Novel, 1814-1853

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the darker side of sympathy in three 19th-century British novels in order to illuminate the frustrations, anxieties, and displeasures of intimacy, both between people and between readers and texts. Examining just three of many possible ways in which interpersonal encounters can be deeply uncomfortable, I argue that Frances Burney's *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* (1814), Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) illustrate in characters and mobilize in readers self-other relations that are "difficult," revolting, and penetrating, respectively. These modalities of sympathy, which make reading a deeply uncomfortable experience, complicate Adam Smith's influential argument that sympathy generates benevolence and peace between individuals and social groups, challenging 19th-century politics that incorporate Smithian sympathy as a strategy for regulating gendered, lower-class, and racial others. Making sympathetic reading a discomfiting and disconcerting experience, the novels demonstrate that sympathy generates unstable affects that defy attempts to control people and their thoughts and feelings.

The Wanderer rewrites the conventions of the novel of manners to present sympathy as a mode of exclusion, aligning readers in "difficult," shifting sympathies with both the suffering heroine and the characters who persecute her. Further extending "difficult" sympathies from domestic to political life, *The Last Man* mobilizes intimacy that generates visceral revulsion and instigates social and

political uprisings that nearly decimate humankind. Finally, *Villette* revises narrative conventions for realist fiction in order to explore the sexual politics of sympathy, which Brontë portrays as an invasive mode of penetration that painfully binds self and other. Together, the novels show that 19th-century novelistic sympathy was fraught with disagreement and discontent that is obscured by the dominance of Smith's theory in contemporary politics and in modern studies of the 19th-century British novel. Examining unstable sympathies in *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* recovers the political valence of the novels' resistance to literary conventions of sympathy, which, the novels suggest, do not fully capture the volatility of interpersonal encounters.

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Unstable Sympathies in the 19th-Century British Novel, 1814-1853

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the darker side of sympathy in three early 19th-century British novels in order to illuminate the frustrations, anxieties, and displeasures of intimacy, both between people and between readers and texts. Examining just three of many possible ways in which interpersonal encounters can be deeply uncomfortable, I argue that Frances Burney's *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* (1814), Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) illustrate in characters and mobilize in readers self-other relations that are "difficult," revolting, and penetrating, respectively. These modalities of sympathy, which make reading a deeply uncomfortable experience, complicate Adam Smith's influential argument that sympathy generates good will and peaceful relations between individuals and social groups. In doing so, they challenge 19th-century politics that incorporate Smithian sympathy as a mode of regulation and nation-formation, especially those that used sympathy to confine women to marriage and domesticity, to ease the threat of the racial other raised by debates over the abolition of slavery, to quell revolts in the colonies, and to avoid lower-class uprisings at home. Making sympathetic reading a discomfiting and disconcerting experience, Burney, Shelley, and Brontë demonstrate that self-other relations do not generate consistently moral, mutually beneficial outcomes. Rather, they produce unstable affects that defy attempts to control or regulate people and their thoughts and feelings; sympathy comforts, confuses, and

disturbs, both binding people together and straining and distorting those relationships.

I began this project interested in the discomforts of reading three very different novels. I end it with a set of texts that recover an ongoing conversation about the operations and functions of sympathy in 19th-century Britain. The works of three novelists not often studied together, *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* represent a range of novelistic sub-genres across several traditional literary-historical periods, from the early 19th-century novel of manners to late-Romantic imaginative fiction to Victorian realism.[1] The novels' shared concerns about sympathy open an expanded view of the phenomenon as a controversial medium of interpersonal communication and an unresolved preoccupation of 19th-century British novelists. Despite their many differences, *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* each question the power and place of sympathy in literary, interpersonal, and political relationships. They each represent sympathy as affectively and morally unstable, occurring without or against participants' desires, reason, and judgment. They each complicate contemporary assumptions about sympathy's ability to "improve" people and societies. They each illuminate the politics of sympathy that underpin assumptions of "improvement," and they each to so by mobilizing unstable sympathies in readers, making present for readers the interpersonal discomforts represented in characters. I use the word "(re)present" throughout the dissertation to emphasize the instability of the sympathetic reading invited by the novels studied here. *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* (re)present unstable sympathies by both describing relations

between characters within the story (portraying, illustrating, representing sympathy at the thematic level) and reproducing those relations in readers (formalizing the unstable sympathies experienced by characters as part of the experience of reading).

Examining unstable sympathies in *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* recovers the political valence of the novels' resistance to literary conventions of sympathy, which, the novels suggest, do not fully capture the volatility of interpersonal encounters. *The Wanderer* rewrites the conventions of the traditional novel of manners to demonstrate that sympathy can operate as a mode of exclusion and persecution, aligning readers in unexpected and shifting sympathies with both the suffering heroine and the characters who exacerbate her "female difficulties." Further extending "difficult" sympathies from domestic to political life, *The Last Man* mobilizes intimacy that generates visceral revulsion and instigates social and political uprisings that nearly decimate humankind. Finally, *Villette* revises narrative conventions for realist fiction in order to explore the sexual politics of sympathy, which Brontë portrays as an invasive mode of penetration that painfully binds self and other.

Together, the novels suggest that sympathy throughout the British 19th-century was fraught with disagreement and discontent that is obscured by the dominance of Smith's theory in 19th-century politics and in modern studies of the 19th-century British novel. As I explain below, previous studies of sympathy's pitfalls have described the phenomenon and the reading experience it invites in Smith's terms as a mode of representation, imagination, and objective distance. I

argue that 19th-century novelistic sympathy also appears in terms other than Smith's as a medium for immediate, unpredictable, physiological response. Exploring *The Wanderer*'s, *The Last Man*'s, and *Villette*'s (re)presentations of sympathy in such terms allows us to see that the unstable, unexpected, and often unpleasant encounters they inspire undercut contemporary political and literary uses of Smithian sympathy to uphold a social hierarchy based on gender, class, and racial distinctions. Resisting literary conventions of sympathy in structure and narrative strategy as well as in plot and theme, the novels challenge the illusions of stability propagated by political appropriations of Smith's theory.

Although Smith published his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759, his conception of sympathy as an intentional act of imagination and a consistently moral exercise became embedded in 19th-century social, political, and literary projects of control and "improvement," as Chapter One explains in more detail. As 19th-century Britons sought to govern an increasingly diverse empire divided along lines of class, race, religion, and ideas about the role of women, Smith's account of sympathy as intentional, rational, and moral offered a way of bridging differences through the faculty of reason and under the auspices of mutually beneficial exchange. "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel," Smith writes in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, "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…[I]t is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations…By the imagination, we place ourselves in his situation" (15). For Smith, sympathy is a primarily mental

exercise – a matter of "imagination" and "representation" – rather than an involuntary physiological phenomenon, as David Hume had theorized it in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40).

Smith's insistence on the mediation of an "impartial spectator" ensures that "imagination" is a conscious, intentional activity. Imagining what another person feels in a given situation involves channeling the observations of a distanced, objective spectator to "examine" and "pass sentence upon" those feelings (*Theory of Moral Sentiments* 133, 135). If the impartial spectator approves those sentiments, sympathy ensues; if he disapproves them, it does not (22). The intervention of the impartial spectator enables Smithian sympathy to produce the unified and morally regulated communities that English people desired as they attempted to prevent working class riots, protests over the abolition of slavery, and political uprisings in their colonies during the first half of the 19th century. "All the members of human society stand in need of each others assistance," Smith writes, "Where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded…the society flourishes and is happy. All the different members of it are bound together by the agreeable bands of love and affection, and are, as it were, drawn to one common centre of mutual good offices" (103-104). Sympathy in Smith's account improves people, communities, and nations by binding them in "bands of love and affection" that are always "agreeable" and "good."

By making readers feel the interpersonal discomforts experienced by characters as part of the process of sympathizing with the text, *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* dispel contemporary illusions that sympathy works as

Smith describes it. *Unstable Sympathies* thus builds on David Marshall's insights into the fault lines within Smith's theory of sympathy, exploring those lines as they play out in "difficult," revolting, and penetrating ways. In *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy,* Marshall argues that sympathy for Smith is a fundamentally aesthetic or theatrical experience involving imagination, representation, and spectatorship. He asserts that "the act of viewing someone as a spectacle, and the situation of being turned into a spectacle, may have surprising and undesired effects" (49), such as affective distance rather than intimacy, pleasure in someone else's pain, and feelings of disgust when sympathy involves too much sameness and not enough difference.[2] For Marshall, Smithian sympathy produces effects that lead to its own "failure": "[i]n reading or beholding the characters of others, one risks not only being misled but also being placed in the position of distance, difference, and isolation that sympathy is supposed to deny" (181). Similarly, Susan Sontag observes that representations of others' pain most often do not produce the "proximity to…suffering" that we expect them to (102). More often such images generate feelings of horror, helplessness, and guilt that may even lead to "bore[dom]," "cynic[ism]," and "apath[y]": "Compassion," Sontag writes, "is an unstable emotion" (101).[3]

Marshall suggests that "distance, difference, and isolation" constitute "failures" of sympathy, and Sontag discusses sympathy as a self-interested exercise that we can choose to engage in or not. However, *The Wanderer, The Last Man,* and *Villette* (re)present the same negative affects as constitutive, unavoidable possibilities within self-other relations. They portray the affective

distance, "impotence," and "privilege" that Sontag associates with "imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others" (102); but they portray them as parts of sympathetic experience and not as external obstacles to it. If "compassion is an unstable emotion" for Sontag, then for Burney, Shelley, and Brontë, sympathy is an unstable experience, containing more than just compassion and the positive responses typically associated with identification. *The Wanderer*'s, *The Last Man's*, and *Villette*'s portrayals of self-other relations resonate more with Hume's account of sympathy as "contagious," "insinuating," and potentially negative (*Treatise* 386, 378) than with Smith's account of it as intentional, rational, and moral, a connection I explore in Chapters One and Two. Examining the negative affects produced as part of sympathy in these novels offers a more complex account of sympathy than the ones provided even by critics of sympathy such as Marshall and Sontag. Here, intimacy is fundamentally unstable, capable of spreading discomfiting and dangerous sentiments.

Noticing that Burney, Shelley, and Brontë represent negative affects and outcomes as possibilities of interpersonal encounters and that they invoke sympathy in terms other than Smith's allows us to observe that *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* engage quite explicitly in philosophical and political conversations about sympathy occurring in the first half of the 19th century. My analysis builds on Mary Fairclough's and Amit Rai's historicizations of sympathy before and during this period to argue that the unpredictable intimacies (re)presented in the novels work against the ameliorative function of Smithian sympathy in 19th-century social, political, and literary projects of governance and

"improvement." As Chapter One explains, 19th-century discourses about the abolition of slavery, working class protests, and colonial governance cite sympathy in Smith's terms as a mode of cultural unification and nation-formation in a time of social and political unrest. However, as Rai shows in *Rule of Sympathy*, such sympathy actually works under the auspices of "improvement" to control potentially unruly others, including women and the working class, slaves and ex-slaves, and colonial peoples.[4] The novels studied here remind readers of the negative potential of self-other relations by evoking sympathy more in Hume's terms than in Smith's, embedding unstable sympathies into their narrative strategies, subject matter, and plots. They thus echo the unpredictable sympathies that Fairclough describes as constitutive of the aesthetic and political literature of the French Revolutionary period, such as works by Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft. In this manner, the novels remind readers that sympathy can generate uncertainty and frustration as well as compassion; incite revulsion and revolt; and so blur the boundaries between self and other as to compromise individual power and agency. They suggest that sympathy is ill-suited to the projects of regulation and "improvement" that employed it to preserve the power of white British men in an era of social and political change.

Illuminating an ongoing conversation about the instability of self-other relations, *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* complicate not only the dominance of Smith's theory in their political milieu but also its dominance in modern literary criticism of the 19th-century British novel. In spite of Marshall's insights into the pitfalls of Smith's theory, and in spite of Fairclough's and Adela

Pinch's assertions that emotions circulate more in Hume's conception of sympathy than in Smith's in early 19th-century British literature, many scholars insist that the British novel across the 19th century represents sympathy as an intentional, rational, and moral activity that shapes subjectivity, individualism, and realism. For Pinch in *Strange Fits of Passion*, "feelings" in early 19th-century literature "spread about freely and fluidly; they do not know the boundaries of individuals…[T]he claims of individuals are subordinate to the feelings that visit them from without" (1). In Pinch's analysis, sympathy blurs the boundaries between self and other: "persons feel most the feelings they catch from others, as if by contagion" (44). Although Pinch concedes that the feelings "caught" through sympathy are usually speculations about what others feel and not their actual feelings, other critics describe "contagious" sympathy in early 19th-century literature as literally facilitating one's participation in others' experiences.[5] My analysis of unstable sympathies in *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* expands on the work of Pinch and Fairclough, tracing the particular ways in which "free…and fluid" sympathies play out not only at the turn of the 19th century but over the first half of the century: not only in *The Wanderer*, which Burney began late in the 1790s, but in the late-Romantic *Last Man* and in Victorian-period *Villette*. My extension of unstable sympathies further into the 19th century – and into novels in particular – complicates claims by Nancy Armstrong and others that 19th-century novelistic sympathy reinforces the individualism typically associated with the literature of this period and specifically with novels claiming to represent actual experience.

For Armstrong, sympathy conceived as intentional, rational, and moral is an essential component of a culture of individualism that emerges alongside the normatively realist genre of the novel. In this tradition, "feelings come from within the individual" and are shared between individuals "without compromising [each person's] individuality" (*How Novels Think* 12). By "plac[ing] ourselves in [the other's] situation" in a way that ensures that the experience "never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person" (Smith 15), sympathy as Smith describes it helps shape the modern subject, who defines him- or herself in terms of (but never as) others. Although Armstrong argues that individualism is a contested category that the realist novel "wins" in a "field of argumentation" about what defines the modern subject (*How Novels Think* 10), she aligns sympathy exclusively with "thinking that produces an individual" (11)[6] – a common critical assumption about sympathy in 19th-century British novels. In Armstrong's analysis, novelistic sympathy is defined in Smith's terms, and it reinforces a "British realism" that "celebrat[es] the individual" (22).

Other critical accounts of 19th-century novelistic sympathy echo Armstrong's assertion that encounters with others produce self-enclosed individuals. Rachel Ablow, for example, describes Victorian sympathy as a "psychic structure through which the subject is produced, consolidated, or redefined" (2). A Smithian "experience of entering imaginatively into another's thoughts or feelings" (8), sympathy for Ablow is "a mode of relating to others and of defining a self" (2). Here and elsewhere in the critical literature, self-other relations are distinctly Smithian. They are regulated by an "impartial spectator" or

by conscious acts of reflection. They are purged of "vehement passion" and thereby at least once removed from actual or direct feeling (Chandler 12) – or they occur "without feeling" at all, entirely mental activities (Greiner 3).[7] Even Audrey Jaffe, who describes Smithian sympathy as uncomfortable and self-effacing, argues that sympathetic novel reading recuperates the self that is destabilized in sympathy with real people. "The distinction between sympathy for fictional characters and sympathy for actual people," Jaffe writes, "may be reformulated as…the difference between the pleasurable sympathetic feelings fiction invites and the potential threat of an encounter with an actual person" (*Scenes of Sympathy* 7). In this account, sympathy between people produces existential discomfort, while "pleasurable" novelistic sympathy does not. Operating in Smith's terms, novelistic sympathy rebuilds individuals when they become unstable.

Contrary to such claims, the sympathies (re)presented in *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* induce confusion, discomfort, and pain in readers as well as in characters, suggesting that novelistic sympathy neither consistently regulates spontaneous or "vehement passion" nor always promotes individualism. The novels do not recuperate "the potential threat of an encounter with an actual person" but rather enhance it, making encounters with fictional people as uncomfortable as encounters with real ones. Studying 19th-century novelistic sympathy as an unstable ethical and aesthetic experience opens critical access to personal, literary, and political anxieties previously obscured by assumptions that sympathy occurs in Smith's terms.

For example, noticing that sympathy sometimes signals an unstable experience that disrupts the logic of individualism furthers Armstrong's argument that individualism is an "open-ended political debate" rather than a stable category in 19th-century political and literary thought (*How Novels Think* 22).[8] Unstable sympathies suggest that some of the novels Armstrong designates as "celebrating the individual" (and thus "realist") because they invoke sympathy may be more skeptical about individualism and social relations than the premises of her argument allow us to see – and for deeply political reasons. Moreover, they suggest that so-called "marginal" novels that do not "rationalize" unruly sentiments and "celebrate the individual" (22) better convey the full scope of self-other relations than the "mainstream" novels that offer illusions of (inter)personal, literary, and political stability. Unstable sympathies disrupt fantasies of the self-enclosed modern subject, complicating claims that novels invoking "sympathy" illustrate and produce such individuals. *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* imply that novelistic (re)presentations of 'real-life' sympathy must evoke self-other encounters that produce shifting and uncertain affects as well as stable and secure ones; they must propagate the confusing, the disgusting, and the painful alongside the comforting, compassionate, and kind.

Scholars such as Fairclough and Pinch have demonstrated that 19th-century sympathy is not always intentional, rational, and moral. However, 19th-century novel studies more often assume that it is, citing novels published in the second half of the century as exemplars of Smithian sympathy that they then attribute to novels across the century. By these standards, the novels studied here

have appeared to critics outdated, bad, or anti-social.[9] On the contrary, they are deeply engaged in a contemporary ethics and aesthetics of sympathy. But they question Smith's model and the individualism associated with it rather than celebrating or exemplifying it. Focusing on novels published in the first half of the 19th century, *Unstable Sympathies* reveals anxieties about sympathy's unpredictable operations and skepticism about its political and literary functions that are less noticed in studies of later novels. While 19th-century novelistic sympathy may sometimes function as a "psychic structure through which the subject is produced, consolidated, or redefined" (Ablow 2), *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* demonstrate that this is not always the case. Reconsidering the primacy of Smith's theory illuminates anxieties about interpersonal and literary relations that pervade the form, content, and invited reading experience of British novels in the first half of the 19th century and may illuminate them in novels in the second half as well.

In this study, I define "sympathy" as it appears in *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* as the sharing or communication of sentiments between two or more people, where sentiments can refer to thoughts or feelings (visceral or emotional), or both. As opposed to sympathy in Smith's theory, sympathy here occurs without or against the intervention of reason or rational reflection and produces affectively and morally unstable outcomes. Sympathy in Burney, Shelley, and Brontë involves multiple, conflicting responses to others, including negative and neutral responses such as boredom, confusion, frustration, disgust,

and pain. Contrary to Smith's insistence that sympathy is a consistently "moral sentiment," interpersonal encounters in the novels studied here are inconsistent and shifting, generating (for example) compassion in one moment and revulsion in the next. For this reason, I refer to such experiences as "sympathies" (plural) rather than "sympathy" (singular) because the latter implies only one kind of response.

As Chapter One demonstrates, the novels' (re)presentations of unstable sympathies more closely align with sympathy as described in 17th- and 18th-century occult, scientific, and philosophical accounts than it does with the Smithian account that appears in many early 19th-century political discourses. It resonates in particular with Hume's conception of sympathy as "contagious" and "insinuating." Building on the work of Fairclough and Rai, Chapter One suggests that unstable, visceral sympathies, such as those (re)presented in *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette*, complicate the dominant political discourse in order to expose the unequal power relations that drive its appropriation of Smithian sympathy, including relations between classes, between races, between cultures, and especially between men and women. In reviving a centuries-long conversation about sympathy's instability, the female-authored novels discussed here invoke the gendered discourse of sensibility, in which sympathy is a primarily feminine phenomenon that can lead to dangerous sentiments and "disorder" (Barker-Benfield). As Chapter One suggests, Burney, Shelley, and Brontë work within these assumptions in order to illuminate the ways in which

Smithian sympathy attempts to regulate women's minds and bodies by regulating the unstable sympathies historically attributed to them.

Several critics have noted that part of the problem in identifying what 19th-century novelists mean when they refer to "sympathy" has to do with the tremendous shifts in meaning that the term has undergone since the 19th century – and that it continues to undergo today, as scholars explore it in a wide range of fields, including not only the humanities and literature but also psychology and cognitive science.[10] Nancy Yousef observes that sympathy in 18th- and 19th-century ethics is "at once ubiquitous and conceptually unstable" (4). Dwelling on the radical instability of sympathy, especially as a mode of moral "mutuality" or "reciprocity," Yousef prefers the term "intimacy." Intimacy, "like sympathy, designates feeling for and with another," but it also "admits and discloses affective expectations and disappointments—from aversion to self-abasing admiration, from gratitude to resentment, from frustration to fascination—that involve neither mutuality nor reciprocity but that certainly…bind one to others" (2-3). Yousef and I share a common concern with the amoral, sometimes negative affects that arise in 19th-century interpersonal encounters but that fall outside of the usual ethical definitions of sympathy assigned to that period.[11]

But while Yousef offers the alternative term "intimacy" to get around sympathy's presumed ethical imperatives and its terminological and "conceptual…instability" over the past two centuries, I retain the word "sympathy" in order to recover its specific historical contexts and to explore more particularly the negative valences it carries in *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and

Villette. As these novels demonstrate in their uses of the word "sympathy" to denote a shifting and inconsistent phenomenon, 19th-century British sympathy existed not only as an ideal form of identification, "mutuality," or "reciprocity" but also as a medium for spreading thoughts and feelings that did not necessarily require participants to identify willingly, morally, or as equals with others. In the chapters that follow, I use the word "intimacy" interchangeably with "sympathy"; with "interpersonal relations, "encounters," or "experiences"; with "identification"; and with "self-other relations" to denote the affectively and morally unstable interactions, associations, and points of contact (re)presented in the novels explored here. These terms offer linguistic variety, but they all describe the phenomenon that Burney, Shelley, and Brontë explicitly call "sympathy."

Following Chapter One's situation of unstable sympathies in historical, theoretical, and political context, Chapter Two argues that Burney's final novel, *The Wanderer*, mobilizes sympathy in Hume's terms as a "contagious" medium for communicating positive and negative sentiments. *The Wanderer*'s extreme narrative reticence complicates the mode of Smithian sympathy conventional in novels of manners by aligning readers in sympathies that shift between compassion for the suffering heroine and curiosity, uncertainty, and frustration shared with characters who exclude her from their community. I suggest that *The Wanderer* uses the "contagious" mode of sympathy associated with the French Revolution to expose sympathy conceived as consistently moral as a misogynistic tool for enforcing a social code that confines women to limited, inflexible roles, such as wife and prostitute. Challenging the national politics and literary

conventions of the Smithian sympathy by which early 19th-century English people distinguished themselves from their French enemies, *The Wanderer*'s "difficult" sympathies (re)present domestic gender relations in England as a political as well as a literary problem.

Extending the mostly national concerns of *The Wanderer* to the international politics of *The Last Man*, Chapter Three demonstrates that in addition to spreading hostile feelings contagiously, sympathy can also incite violent unrest and personal and political devastation. In *The Last Man*, I argue, Shelley deploys revolting sympathies – sympathies that generate visceral discomfort, that diverge sharply from the directions intended for them, or that do both – to dispel the contemporary illusion that sympathy produces peaceful, benevolent relations between individuals and communities. Anticipating the revolting sympathies that "plague" mankind in this apocalyptic novel, Shelley frames the story of "last man" Lionel Verney with an unusual "Introduction" that unsettles readers' relation to the novel's first-person narrator. Activating revulsive responses alongside the compassion Lionel calls for throughout his narrative, *The Last Man* complicates the Smithian sympathy used in contemporary politics, by modern literary critics, and by the "last man" himself.

Finally, Chapter Four examines Brontë's use of direct address to expose and rewrite the sexual politics of penetrating sympathies. In *Villette*, I argue, sympathy crystallizes in painful, visceral ways the permeable boundaries between self and other, masculine and feminine, private and public, real life and performance – even as narrator Lucy Snowe insists on her privacy and

individuality. Distinguishing the pseudo-scientific "sympathetic faculty" from "rational benevolence" (a version of Smithian sympathy exemplified by Madame Beck), *Villette* suggests that encounters with others always involve the uncomfortable collapse of one's self, as one both penetrates and is penetrated by the perspectives and experiences of others. Such sympathies generate physical pain and ontological uncertainty, sometimes resembling sexual violation more than compassion or benevolence. Brontë suggests, however, that they also open access to alternative ways of being and living, positive as well as negative. Like *The Wanderer* and *The Last Man*, *Villette* suggests that novelistic representations of 'real-life' social relations involve (re)presenting the unstable, shifting sympathies at the heart of human intimacy. These sympathies paint a grim picture of personal, political, and literary relations. However, they resist in important and compelling ways the rigid binaries of good/bad, moral/immoral, same/other that underpin Smith's theory of sympathy as well as the social codes, political policies, and literary conventions that use it to enforce a hierarchy based on distinctions of gender, class, and race. The first chapter explores the historical, theoretical, and political contexts for 19th-century sympathies that will help advance these claims.

NOTES

[1] Although Burney published *The Wanderer* in 1814, its sentimental heroine and thematic concern with manners link it to the novelist's previous works, which helped establish the novel of manners sub-genre popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. I study *The Wanderer* as a 19th-century text, but many critics consider it (to use Claudia Johnson's word) a "belated" 18th-century novel (*Equivocal Beings* 167). I use the terms "Romantic" and "Victorian" loosely here to signify the accepted period designations of *The Last Man* and *Villette*. Although *The Last Man* occupies the traditional Romantic period (between 1789 and 1832) and *Villette* lands squarely in the Victorian period (1832-1900), my project dwells more on the novels' common preoccupation with 19th-century uses and representations of sympathy than with how they fit or do not fit within the accepted standards of "Romantic" and "Victorian" novels.

[2] Marshall calls this the "incestuous" aspect of sympathy, which depends on the self's resemblance to the other.

[3] For Sontag, sympathy is thus an undesirable response to others' suffering: "if we consider what emotions would be desirable, it seems too simple to elect sympathy. The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the far-away sufferers – seen close-up on the television screen – and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power. So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. To that extent, it can be (for all our good intentions) an impertinent – if not an inappropriate – response" (102).

[4] Lynn Festa traces this use of Smithian sympathy as a strategic mode of political representation to 18th-century colonial encounters. Preferring the term "sentimentality," Festa argues in *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* that sentimentality "as a rhetorical practice and as a literary form devises strategies to master the seemingly indiscriminate nature of sympathy. It allows the reader to control and assign provenance and proper cause to the ephemeral flow of emotions" (11). For Festa, sentimentality arose out of empire as Europeans "recast" the "confusion" of "messy, ill-assorted" encounters with colonial others as "scenes of benevolent reciprocity" (6). In this manner, "sentimental depictions of these moments of contact attempt to master a potentially vertiginous relation" (6). Festa's location of these strategic uses of self-other relations to preserve and maintain control supports my argument here in and Chapter One that the 18th and 19th centuries feature on ongoing conversation about the operation and function of sympathy in social life, politics, and literature.

[5] In *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy*, Orianne Smith describes the contemporary phenomenon of "enthusiasm" as similar to the unstable sympathies I discuss here. Although enthusiasm connotes a more religious or spiritual experience than sympathy, in Smith's analysis the enthusiast, like the sympathizer, is "transported" out of her body. Furthermore, enthusiasm, like sympathy as I describe it, is a fundamentally unpredictable, dynamic experience: "Romantic women writers, their readers, and their critics were keenly aware of the contemporary debate over enthusiasm: its ability to function either as a gift or a curse, to inspire poetry or a toxic blend of religious and political fervor, to nurture a sensitivity towards all living creatures, or to fan the flames of a passion that bordered on madness" (74).

[6] Arguing that "critics and cultural historians mistakenly collapse ['sensibility'] into 'sympathy' under the umbrella of sentimental literature" (*How Novels Think* 15), Armstrong distinguishes between "thinking that produces an individual" and "thinking that calls into question the individual's autonomy" (11) based in part on their respective associations with "sympathy" (in Smith's terms) and "sensibility." I am arguing that unstable sympathies, which derive from but are not the same as sensibility (as Chapter One explains), also question modern individualism.

[7] Such assumptions about 19th-century novelistic sympathy are not limited to criticism of Victorian literature, although accounts of "the 19th-century novel" typically focus on works published later in the century. Contrary to Pinch's and Fairclough's claims for late 18th-century and Romantic-period sympathy, Thomas McCarthy asserts that Romantic-period readers and writers "were developing a theory of reading, dependent on the reader responding actively to a text which is itself alive with feeling. This process entails…participating in the creative act through a process which emphasizes difference and individuality in order to then attain a genuinely sympathetic understanding" (44), where "sympathetic understanding" is understood to be fundamentally moral. Similarly, Debbie Lee describes the Romantic imagination as "essentially about empathy" (3), which she describes as synonymous with Smithian sympathy. In "empathy," "[o]ne expands the ego boundaries of the self in order to feel for the other" (35). In Lee's analysis, Romantic literature enters political discourses about religion, foreign exploration, and emancipation through its representation and facilitation of self-other relations described in Smith's terms. When interpersonal encounters produce negative affects such as boredom, frustration, and discomfort, they become "failures" of sympathy, implying that better outcomes follow when sympathy succeeds.

[8] Just as I argue that unstable sympathies and their political resonances are obscured by the critical dominance of Smith's theory of sympathy, Armstrong argues that the fragility of individualism is obscured by the "mainstream" "realist" novel's sublimation of all other ways of thinking about individuals and their autonomy.

[9] Chapters Two, Three, and Four dwell at length on how each novel's (re)presentation of unstable sympathies has led to suggestions that it is outdated, bad, or anti-social. For example, Claudia Johnson calls *The Wanderer* a "belated" novel about issues that "no one cared about" anymore and a "bewildering failure" in spite of "gigantic ambition" (*Equivocal Beings* 167, 165). For Lynn Wells, *The Last Man* is "puzzlingly unclear" about the "instruction" in sympathy it seems to provide. And Christopher Lane argues that *Villette* embeds misanthropy in its narrative strategies and its plot so that hatred and aggression are "inseparable from society" as Brontë portrays it (199).

[10] Perhaps one of the biggest challenges for modern scholars interested in 19th-century sympathy is the predominance of what we call "empathy" today. A term that emerged in 19th-century German aesthetic theory as a mode of engaging with works of art, "empathy" was translated into English from the German word *Einfühlung* in 1909 and has replaced "sympathy" in most popular discourses, as well as in some social-scientific, literary, and even political discourses. When it occurs in modern day conversations, empathy is almost always a positive experience with positive outcomes, such as mutual benevolence and altruistic actions. See, for example, Suzanne Keen's book *Empathy and the Novel* (2007). In more esoteric, discipline-specific conversations, "empathy" typically connotes a more unstable experience similar to the sympathetic one I am describing here (see, for example, studies by psychologists Nancy Eisenberg and Stephanie Preston and Frans de Waal). However, I prefer the word "sympathy" for its historical and political specificity for 19th-century novels. The word "empathy" did not exist in the 19th century, but the word "sympathy" described an almost identical experience.

[11] Yousef is interested in subverting "[t]he irresistible teleology associated with sympathy, which seems inevitably to lead to querulous demands for intersubjective symmetry—be it the perception of similarity, the impression of equality, or the expectation of reciprocity—[but that] inevitably passes over or discounts moments and modes of relational experience that fall short of the aim but are not, thereby, failures or breakdowns of relationship—or even, perhaps, ethical or epistemic failures" (3).

CHAPTER ONE

Other Sympathies: Complicating the "Impartial Spectator"

> "Sympathy is of so powerful and insinuating a nature that it enters into most of our sentiments and passions, and often takes place under the appearance of its contrary."
>
> – David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40)

In *Northanger Abbey* (1818), Jane Austen employs narrative strategies that "insinuate" readers' sympathy with heroine Catherine Morland in spite of the narrator's apparent ridicule of Catherine's Gothic novel reading. Poking fun at the heroine's absorption in her reading, the novel seems to share Henry Tilney's belief that a good reader is one who tempers the ideas and emotions aroused by fiction with the restraining power of reason and objective observation. That is, the narrator's critique of Catherine's reading (combined with Henry's criticism) implies that one should read with an internal or external mediator such as Smith's "impartial spectator," who objectively regulates sympathetic encounters, as my Introduction explains. "Consult your own understanding," Henry tells Catherine, "your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you" (186). However, the narrative sometimes involves readers in a distinctly unreasoned modality of sympathy in which readers reproduce Catherine's visceral responses. Exemplified by the Japan cabinet episode, the readerly sympathy invited by *Northanger Abbey* is unstable and shifting, sometimes affirming readers' "sense of the probable" and sometimes occurring in spite of it, opening

the way for responses that readers know to be irrational but that they experience anyway.

When the Japan cabinet episode begins, Catherine has been primed for sensation by Henry's teasing about "gloomy chamber[s]" and ominous furniture when she spots a "high, old-fashioned black cabinet" in her bedroom at the Abbey (150, 160). She tries unsuccessfully to unlock the cabinet but cannot give up: "To retire to bed, however, unsatisfied on such a point, would be vain, since sleep must be impossible with the consciousness of a cabinet so mysteriously closed in her immediate vicinity" (160):

> Again therefore [Catherine] applied herself to the key, and after moving it in every possible way for some instants with the determined celerity of hope's last effort, the door suddenly yielded to her hand: her heart leaped with exultation at such a victory, and having thrown open each folding door, the second being secured only by bolts of less wonderful construction than the lock, though in that her eye could not discern any thing unusual, a double range of small drawers appeared in view, with some larger drawers above and below them; and in the centre, a small door, closed also with a lock and key, secured in all probability a cavity of importance. (160)

A string of phrases like bursts of mental and physical movement, this passage runs as one very long sentence. Slipping into psychonarration of Catherine's perspective ("her heart leaped"), the scene is driven forward by Catherine's

anxious energy in unlocking the cabinet. Breathlessly navigating Catherine's breathless motions ("the second being secured…, though in that…; and in the centre"), the narrative picks up speed with Catherine's increasing excitement, manifest in her leaping heart and darting eyes. Having succeeded in opening the cabinet, Catherine now proceeds to probe its contents with a "heart [that] beat quick,…a cheek flushed by hope, and eye straining with curiosity" (160).

Continuing her strategy of piling phrase upon phrase, Austen's narrator draws readers along in a visceral experience that mirrors Catherine's. As Catherine frantically "seize[s] upon a second, a third, a fourth" drawer in the cabinet, readers are likely to fly through the prose with their own deeply felt "eagerness" to discover the secret of the mysterious cabinet (160), possibly with an equally accelerated heartbeat. All this occurs in spite of Catherine's and our own initial certainty that "there could really be nothing in it" (159). Our "sense of the probable" does not impede the anxiety we share with the irrationally excited heroine, and neither does our embarrassment in reproducing a reading experience represented (at least at first) as naïve and unsophisticated. Ultimately, Catherine and we along with her discover in the cabinet only a boring list of laundry bills. As Jane Spencer observes, free indirect discourse, including psychonarration of the kind we find in this episode, "can achieve a wide range of effects between the poles of satiric exposure and sympathetic involvement" (188). Even though Austen satirizes Gothic sensationalism at other moments in the novel, this scene lands decidedly on the "sympathetic involvement" end of the spectrum. Yet it is not the rational, reasoned version of sympathy that Henry endorses and that the

novel seems (at first) to recommend[1] – that is, sympathy mediated by the objective "observation," "judg[ment]," and approval of Smith's "impartial spectator." Rather, *Northanger Abbey* mobilizes sympathy (re)presented as deeply volatile and sometimes beyond control.

I offer this reading of the Japan cabinet episode as a well-known (though perhaps not recognized as such) example of the "other," non-Smithian accounts of sympathy I will examine in this chapter. Austen's strategies for involving the reader in characters' visceral experiences in such passages of *Northanger Abbey* are usually described as strategies of the Gothic novel.[2] Comparing the Japan cabinet episode with a similar scene in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (the Gothic novel Catherine is reading in Austen's novel), Spencer observes that Austen borrows Radcliffe's devices for reproducing the heroine's thoughts and emotions in readers. In this manner, Austen "not only parodies [Radcliffe's] writing, but takes it to greater sensational heights" (Spencer 192). However, such strategies for involving readers in characters' experiences are not only Gothic strategies. They are more broadly novelistic strategies for moving readers in unexpected, undesired, and often unpleasant ways. Like many of the versions of sympathy that circulated through late 18th- and early 19th-century social, political, and literary discourses, the affective experiences that Gothic novels induce in readers are, as James Carson notes, "visceral and physiological—a stimulation of the body" generated through narrative strategies that move "beyond conventional reading practices to create effects of terror [or anxiety or excitement or something else] in the very bodies of its audience" (31).[3] As I hope to suggest by the end of

this chapter, unstable modalities of sympathy in 19th-century novels unsettle readers' expectations by inducing their participation in ideas and emotions contrary to those that might be generated by rational reflection, inciting "visceral and physiological….stimulation" that occurs without or against the sanction of a reasonable, "impartial spectator."

As I explained in the Introduction, Adam Smith's theory of sympathy dominates critical discourses on the 19th-century British novel, as it dominated political discourses in early 19th-century Britain when Austen was publishing her novels. Conceiving of sympathy as intentional, rational, and moral – regulated by an objective "impartial spectator" – Smith's theory as laid out in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) has underpinned important scholarship on individualism and liberal humanism in the 19th-century novel. As I show in this chapter, however, Smith's theory of sympathy is one of many theories about sympathy circulating in social, political, and literary conversations in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Smith's emphasis on moral regulation and the objective mediation of what James Chandler calls the "vehement passions" has helped develop many important theories of the novel as a normatively realist genre that "celebrat[es] the individual" (Armstrong, *How Novels Think* 22). But the discursive dominance of Smith's theory has obscured the other ways in which novels and novelists employ sympathy as part of their ethical and aesthetic frameworks.

As this chapter suggests and as subsequent chapters develop, in *Northanger Abbey*, as in Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814), Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), alternative

conceptions of sympathy facilitate uncomfortable collapses of the boundaries between self and other. These unconventional, less stable sympathies generate in both characters and readers feelings at odds with the moral sentiments that sympathy produces for Smith, such as embarrassment in scenes like the Japan cabinet episode, but also even more uncomfortable and disturbing feelings, such as hostility in *The Wanderer*, disgust in *The Last Man*, and feelings of visceral penetration in *Villette*. By making sympathy uncomfortable, the novels activate in readers' responses both the discomfort of self-other relations and discomfort with contemporary assumptions about them, including the notions that sympathy helps develop moral individuals and that it functions consistently as a principle of positive social cohesion. Sympathy operates in these novels as a mode of antagonistic exclusion (in *The Wanderer*), as a force of disorganization (in *The Last Man*), and as a disturbing dissolver of distinctions between self and other, male and female, private and public, reality and performance (in *Villette*) – even as it sometimes generates the compassion, pity, and moral action typically associated with sympathy in Smith's conception.

Mobilizing ostensibly disparate affective states simultaneously, sympathy activates an experience similar to what Jillian Heydt-Stevenson calls "unbecoming conjunctions" in Austen's fiction. Initiating "odd, uncomfortable juxtapositions" (Heydt-Stevenson 181), moments of sympathy function like unbecoming conjunctions as they "allow for the simultaneous apprehension of paradoxical responses" (25), which "shake up conventions" and "destabilize any ready access to firm judgments and tidy truths" (25, 181). The novels' modalities

of sympathy thus complicate Smith's understanding of the phenomenon as an objective, moral force of social organization and action. More in line with Shaftesbury's and Hume's conceptions of sympathy as "contagious" and morally shifting, the novels suggest that sympathy is a necessary and inevitable part of human interaction but that it often communicates feelings that are unexpected, unwanted, and sometimes even dangerous. The novels demonstrate that, like unbecoming conjunctions, unstable sympathies can advance subtle yet scathing forms of cultural critique.

Currently, critics discuss novels that employ unstable modalities of sympathy as outdated (*The Wanderer*); bad, as if the novelists were unaware of the conventions of sympathy or novel-reading (*The Wanderer* and *The Last Man*); and misanthropic (*Villette*). Contrary to these conclusions, this dissertation explores less conventional approaches to sympathy not as failures of sympathy according to one theory but rather as engaged in an ongoing conversation about how sympathy functions in social, political, and literary relations in the first half of the 19th century. This chapter resituates sympathy in its several theoretical, historical, and political contexts in order to uncover the other accounts besides Smith's on which Burney, Shelley, and Brontë may have modeled their (re)presentations of sympathy, especially David Hume's conception of interpersonal relations as "insinuating" and "contagious" (*Treatise* 378, 386). In subsequent chapters, I suggest that in deploying unstable sympathies, the novelists studied here position themselves against the ameliorative function that sympathy acquired in early 19th-century British politics. As we will see, Smith's sympathy

formed the backbone of British attempts in the 19th century to secure a united, peaceful empire by regulating the emotions and actions of potentially unruly others, including women, the working class, slaves and former slaves, and colonial peoples. This chapter brings together theoretical, political, and literary conversations about sympathy in order to contextualize Burney's, Shelley's, and Brontë's (re)presentations of it in *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette*. By making readerly sympathy uncomfortable, the novelists illuminate the fundamental instabilities of human intimacy and the racial and sexual politics lurking behind sympathy conceived as ethically and aesthetically stable.

From the Occult to the Cult of Sensibility, from Hume to Smith (and Vice Versa): Sympathy in Theory/ies

Although Smith theorizes sympathy as a rational, moral exercise that relies on the evaluative function of the "impartial spectator," the earliest ideas about sympathy in British and European thought described it as an involuntary, unstable, and sometimes unexplainable phenomenon. Operating outside the parameters of human reason and control, sympathy could communicate good or bad sentiments and could unify or disrupt in any given occurrence. The primary definitions of sympathy in the *Oxford English Dictionary* attest to sympathy's mysterious unpredictability. In the first definition, sympathy is either (a) "A (real or supposed) affinity between certain things, by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence one another

(esp. in some occult way), or attract or tend towards each other," or (b) "A relation between two bodily organs or parts (or between two persons) such that disorder, or any condition of the one induces a corresponding condition in the other." Largely instinctual and otherwise inexplicable, or "occult,"[4] sympathy in both definitions occurs without the intention or even the desire of participants in the experience; it happens to the subject and is not wilfully initiated by the subject. In both meanings, sympathy is not necessarily moral: (a) specifies neither good "influence" nor bad, and (b) suggests that "disorder" dominates the bodily or interpersonal relation.

The *OED*'s second definition is equally non-committal about sympathy's rational or moral operations; here, sympathy is "[a]greement, accord, harmony, consonance, concord; agreement in qualities, likeness, conformity, correspondence." Definition (3a) is similar: "[c]onformity of feelings, inclination, and temperament, which makes persons agreeable to each other; community of feeling; harmony of disposition." States of "harmony," "consonance," and "concord" typically connote positive relations such as unity, inclusion, and peace. But neither definition names the possible "qualities" shared amongst persons or things in "agreement" with each other. As *The Wanderer* will demonstrate in Chapter Two, a "community" of people may "agree," "correspond," or sympathize with each other in shared feelings of confusion or hostility toward someone who is therefore excluded from the sympathetic group rather than included within it. That is, two or more people may exhibit sympathetic antipathy towards a person who they misjudge or mistreat. In this case, "harmony of

disposition" functions amorally or even immorally as an act of cruelty and exclusion.

Not until definitions (3b) and (3c) does the *OED* describe sympathy in language close to Smith's, and even here it belies the intentionality and reason in which Smith roots his theory. In (3b), sympathy is "[t]he quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling. Also, a feeling or frame of mind evoked by and responsive to some external influence." This description echoes Smith's sense of sympathy as a process of "entering" into and "sharing" someone else's feelings. But not until (3c) do we see sympathy described as moral, when it is "[t]he quality or state of being thus affected by the suffering or sorrow of another; a feeling of compassion or commiseration." In popular and critical discourses today, we typically think of sympathy in these positive terms, but from the 16th to the 19th centuries "sympathy" carried many possible meanings, as the *OED*'s quotations using the term demonstrate. In most of them, sympathy is neither a voluntary, intentional, or rational sentiment nor a moral one.

Sympathy also could be distinctly political, as in the *OED*'s definition (3d): "[a] favourable attitude of mind towards a party, cause, etc.; disposition to agree or approve." Unstable sympathies therefore could cause much anxiety, primarily during the revolutionary years of the late 18th and early 19th centuries but also during the social and political unrest of the early- and mid-19th century, as *The Last Man* and *Villette* demonstrate in Chapters Three and Four. If

sympathy occurs involuntarily and can communicate good or bad sentiments, and if sympathy can attract one to any given political "party" or opinion, then it can spread dangerous, potentially uncontrollable ideas of reform and revolution, inciting mobs and factions that might threaten England's social and political stability.[5] As we will see, such anxieties about sympathy drive both Smith's attempts in the mid-18th century to regulate the phenomenon with the "impartial spectator" and the increasing prevalence of Smithian sympathy in the first half of the 19th century, as Britain attempted to control working class protests, slave revolts and petitions for abolition, and the several colonies of its growing empire. Sympathy in Smith's terms (intentional, rational, moral) became 19th-century political policy, even though literary accounts of sympathy such as Burney's, Shelley's, and Brontë's depict interpersonal encounters as involuntary, visceral, and volatile – positive or negative. Although Smith's theory remains dominant in literary criticism of 19th-century novels, the history of sympathy in Western thought reveals an ongoing conversation about how sympathy functions – a conversation in which Smith's voice drowns out the voices of others, such as Hume, whose theory of "contagious" sympathy resonates with the self-other relations (re)presented by the novels studied here.

As the *OED* definitions and quotations suggest, the term "sympathy" emerged in the late 16th or early 17th century in the English, French, and German languages as a broad term describing the "affinity" between people and things in both medical and psychological contexts.[6] Medical definitions described sympathy much as the *OED*'s definition (2b), as a "relation between two bodily

organs or parts (or between two persons) such that disorder, or any condition, of the one induces a corresponding condition in the other." An "occult" process until scientists learned more about human anatomy and physiology, sympathy in 17th- and 18th-century medical contexts was said to operate through electricity, magnetism, the nerves, or the circulation of blood, employing current knowledge of natural science and the human body but also making guesses about processes beyond the scope of the known or understood.[7] As a psychological or interpersonal relation, sympathy worked in similarly mysterious ways, as participants "shar[ed] the feelings of another person or [were] affected by their suffering" (Jahoda 152). Sympathy's interpersonal function implies the operation of the rational faculties, including Smith's imaginative "representation" of what another person feels or thinks. But according to Gustav Jahoda and Mary Fairclough, in the 17th and 18th centuries this form of sympathy was often "occult" in the sense that it could happen inexplicably: unconsciously, without thought, and against one's will. Today the medical and psychological contexts for sympathy are considered separate, but back then they were related intimately.

In the 18th century, sympathy became embedded in popular discourse as an effect of sensibility and as an important process in the emerging field of moral philosophy. Ann Jessie Van Sant defines sensibility as an "organic sensitivity and responsiveness to feeling" and explains that 18th-century Britons considered sensibility the "physiological basis" of sympathy (1). "Dependent on brain and nerves," sensibility was the "underlying" process for "delicate moral and aesthetic perception;…acuteness of feeling, both emotional and physical;

and…susceptibility to delicate passionate arousal" (1). Fairclough corroborates this link between an individual's "organic sensitivity" and his or her capacity for sympathy. According to Fairclough, 18th-century medical and natural scientists described nerves as sympathetic transmitters within the body, capable of communicating order or disorder, as the case may be. Fairclough cites Robert Whytt, for example, who argued in 1768 (after the publication of Smith's *Theory*) that "all sympathy is owing to feeling, and consequently proceeds from the nerves" (35-36). Nerves could communicate either debilitating disease or wholesome fellow-feeling. The frontispiece for Van Sant's *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel* shows "Table XI from Alexander Monro's *Structure and Function of the Nervous System* (Edinburgh and London, 1783)," under which Monro singles out "the great sympathetic nerve" amidst "the structure of the surface of the spinal marrow" and "the dorsal nerves." In the 18th-century, as in the 16th and 17th centuries, psychology and medical science echo one another. Generated by sensibility, sympathy in this context is an experience of another that happens "organic[ally]," in or on the body, and at least as much by instinct or by involuntary physiological reaction as by reason or wilful intent. Today, scientists still refer to interactions within the body as sympathetic operations; the sympathetic nervous system, for example, is still said to transmit vital information to disparate parts of the body.

Important for this study of sympathy in three novels written by women, sympathy derived from sensibility was associated mostly with women, who were thought to have more sensitive nerves than men and thus more susceptibility to

feeling, especially to others' feelings. As G.J. Barker-Benfield documents, "[t]he view that women's nerves were more delicate than men's, making them naturally creatures of greater sensibility [and thus sympathy], became a prominent convention of the eighteenth century." But while sensibility was highly valued "as grounds for imaginative capacity," it was also thought to induce "greater suffering, delicacy, and susceptibility to disorder" (Barker-Benfield) – "disorder" being one possible outcome of sympathy in general, as we have seen. Stereotypically female traits, sensibility and sympathy were desirable but only to an extent, and they were notoriously difficult to control. As late 18th- and 19th-century writers invoked sympathy more and more in Smith's terms (as I explain in more detail later in this chapter), and as sympathy became associated more consistently with morality and benevolence, women also became stereotypically ethical creatures, concerned with the well-being of others.[8] As Amit Rai documents, 19th-century notions of female sympathy retain the potential for "disorder," even as writers theorize the experience as rational, controlled, and moral. Although women exemplified sympathy, men had to regulate female responses to others to keep them within acceptable and socially productive bounds. Nineteenth-century appropriations of Smithian sympathy thus mobilize a gendered paradox that empowers men and subordinates women, who need male guidance to express properly their own innate capabilities.

By invoking sympathy as visceral and volatile, Burney, Shelley, and Brontë rework 18th-century notions of the "disorder" sometimes caused by female sympathy and challenge 19th-century notions of sympathy as a regulated, rational

experience. Their (re)presentations of unstable self-other relations defy readers' assumptions about female novelists' approaches to intimacy through two surprising maneuvers. First, the novelists make sympathetic "disorder" a phenomenon that strikes not only women but also men, distinguishing between neither male and female characters, nor male and female readers in experiences of unstable sympathy. Although 19th-century Britons tended to discuss novels as texts that were by and for women (especially novels that were about or seemed to evoke sympathy), Burney, Shelley, and Brontë suggest that their novels and novels in general are aimed at wider audiences. For example, Burney's introductory dedication of *The Wanderer* to her father claims that as a child she read novels from her father's library. Shelley invokes in *The Last Man* topics traditionally associated with the more serious pursuits of men, including the Romantic poetry of Coleridge, P.B. Shelley, and Byron; contemporary politics; and classical history and literature. And in *Villette* Brontë explicitly blurs the boundaries of gender-specific sympathy in the character Vashti, who appears "neither…woman nor…man" (257) and with whom protagonist Lucy Snowe has her most penetrating moment of sympathy. In all three novels, sympathy circulates "disorder" not only in readers and characters who identify as female. Masculine women and effeminate men, as well as masculine men and feminine women, as well as people who identify with neither gender binary (such as Vashti, as Lucy sees her) may become implicated in unstable sympathies, which affect all humans with equal force.[9]

Second, the novelists defy readers' expectations for female novelists' approaches to sympathy by (re)presenting the phenomenon as a facilitator of discomfort and discord as well as personal, social, and national unity and peace – that is, by making negative affects and outcomes possibilities existing within intimacy with others. As Heydt-Stevenson asserts with respect to Austen, "aggression…is not solely a masculine characteristic"; women's reading and writing can "include…both the empathetic and the hostile" (3), as "empathy" does not preclude hostility. I argue in the chapters that follow that in showcasing sympathy's negative potential, Burney, Shelley, and Brontë illuminate the ways in which both conceptions of female sympathy as prone to "disorder" and political appropriations of sympathy as a mutually beneficial way of governing unruly others (including women) function as discriminatory devices for asserting power and control. They thus invoke unstable sympathies to illuminate, in large part, the sexual politics and gender double-standards reinforced by the dominant strain of sympathy in their cultural milieu. *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* do not merely revert back to apparently outdated modes of sympathy (such as Humean "contagion") or present failed sympathies, as critics privileging Smith's model have argued. Rather, the novels work within the many shifting conventions of a phenomenon historically associated with their gender to point out the serious problems with viewing it in limited terms.[10]

Amidst the 18th-century culture of sensibility that made sympathy a stereotypically female experience, contemporary moral philosophers began theorizing sympathy as an important "moral sense," even though it retained much

of the instability of earlier occult, medical, and psychological theories. In the writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper (the Third Earl of Shaftesbury) and Francis Hutcheson, for example, sympathy began to gain special prominence as a process driving interpersonal relations and influencing moral responses to others (Chandler 3-4). Although Enlightenment ideas about sympathy are most frequently discussed as precursors to Smith, who (it is thought) fully developed the idea, his predecessors exhibit a shared divergence from his theory of sympathy as a regulated, controllable exercise. In the writings of Shaftesbury and Hume, for example, sympathy communicates sentiments regardless of participants' intentions or desires, as if by "contagion," a term explicitly used by Hume and echoed by many scholars of moral philosophy to describe unstable sympathies. Unpredictable and shifting, sympathy in these theories is not a reliable facilitator of moral thought or action.

As James Chandler documents, Shaftesbury describes sympathy in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) not as a guarantee of benevolence and good will but as a potential producer of "moral deformity." For Shaftesbury moral deformity, moral "monstrosity," and immorality are products of contagious sympathies, in which impurities, corruption, or illness are circulated from (parts of) the body to the soul: "Nor need we wonder if the interior form, the soul and temper, partakes of this occasional deformity and sympathizes with its close partner," writes Shaftesbury, "[c]onsidering the strictness of relation, who can wonder, if from a body originally impure, corrupt, distorted, a like soul arises? Who is there can wonder either at the sickness of sense or the depravity of

minds enclosed in such frail bodies and dependent on such pervertible organs?" (qtd in Chandler 239). Anticipating conceptions of sympathy like Whytt's and Monro's, Shaftesbury suggests that "sickness" or "depravity" in one's organs can infect and corrupt the morality of one's soul. Furthermore, his language suggests that such a disease could spread from one contaminated body or soul to another. In Chandler's words, "Shaftesbury's notion of sympathy seems to be precisely a relation of sharing or contagion" (240), a relation that can spread illnesses of immorality and disorder.

In Hume's philosophy, the potential for "contagious" sympathy to spread undesired sentiments from one person to another is made explicit, even as Hume asserts that sympathy is an important agent of social cohesion and moral behavior. In his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), Hume defines sympathy as the passing of "affections" from one person to another and attributes it to the similarity between "the minds of all men…in their feelings and operations" (368). Innate similarity to others and innate sensitivity to others' thoughts and feelings enable people to experience the sentiments of others as their own:

> The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations; nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, susceptible. As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affects readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature. (368)

For Hume, sympathy defines humans as social creatures and facilitates their social existence, but it remains rooted in human physiology, functioning "organically" and not requiring the conscious initiation of sympathy upon which Smith's theory relies. "So close and intimate is the correspondence of human souls," asserts Hume, "that no sooner any person approaches me, than he diffuses on me all his opinions, and draws along my judgment in greater or lesser degree" (378): "[t]he passions are so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce correspondent movement in all human breasts" (386). Although Hume's examples of passions that "pass" contagiously are positive ones, such as love and friendship, his account of how they are communicated from one person to another does not preclude less desirable, negative sentiments from "passing" the same way. Hard-wired for interpersonal "correspondence," people sympathize without necessarily trying or even wanting to do so.

Published 19 years after Hume's *Treatise*, Adam Smith's conception of sympathy in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is a direct response to that of the earlier philosopher.[11] Like Hume, Smith conceives of sympathy as the foundation of social morality. However, sympathy for Smith operates through a conscious effort to imagine oneself in the situation of an other and not as a spontaneous and involuntary phenomenon. In the *Theory*, Smith revises Hume's ideas in two important ways. First, Smith disagrees with Hume about sympathy's independent, physiological power, arguing instead that we only feel what others feel by the conscious work of our imaginations: "[a]s 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…[I]t is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations" (15). According to Smith, sympathy does not happen on its own but rather is activated or willed by human cognition.

Smith's second revision to Hume's theory of sympathy, his addition of the "impartial spectator," ensures that "imagination" is a conscious, intentional activity. Smith tells us that imagining what another person feels in a given situation involves wilfully channeling the observations of a distanced, objective spectator to "examine" and "pass sentence upon" those feelings (133, 135). If the impartial spectator – also called "the examiner and judge" (135-136) and "the man within the breast" (344) – approves those sentiments, his approval amounts to sympathy. His disapproval amounts to "observ[ing] that we do not entirely sympathize with them" (22). As Fairclough observes, while Hume's version of sympathy is a physiological process, Smith's version is an evaluative activity. It transforms sympathy into a process in which only thoughts and emotions deemed morally appropriate or socially acceptable "pass" (not contagiously) from one person to another or between members of a group. Sympathy for Smith thus becomes an agreeable or enjoyable activity, not for the momentary pains it produces but for the lasting benevolence he thinks it will generate.[12]

Interpretations of Hume's and Smith's divergent accounts of sympathy have resulted in the belief that by revising Hume's theory Smith corrects or modernizes it – a belief predicated on a perception that the theorists diverge from

each other on the basis of spontaneous emotion versus rational reflection or thinking.[13] However, I want to suggest that Hume and Smith are more concerned with the possibility of controlling the process of sympathy than they are with establishing feeling or thinking as the catalyst for sympathetic response. After all, both theorists discuss feeling and thinking as interwoven processes that together constitute cognition. For Hume, "passion" and "reason" are "affections of the very same kind" (that is, "emotion[s] of the mind"). When he asserts that "[r]eason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (266), Hume does not relegate reason or thinking to the sidelines. He merely states that passions arise first and reason follows.[14] Smith reverses Hume's sequence of passion followed by reason so that we feel what another feels only after imaginatively putting ourselves in his situation.[15] Far from rejecting feeling and emotion, Smith makes them first principles, arguing that "[o]ur sensibility to the feelings of others, so far from being inconsistent with the manhood of self-command, is the very principle upon which that manhood is founded" (175). For Hume and Smith, feeling and thinking are equally important to sympathetic human relations.[16]

At stake, then, in Smith's revision of Hume is the problem of controlling those thoughts and feelings in the interests of propagating the "moral sentiments" of social productivity. Although Hume describes sympathy as capable of and, indeed, responsible for social cohesion via compassion and benevolence, sympathy's ability to communicate good or bad sentiments between one person and another makes it also capable of spreading disruptive, unwanted, or even

antipathetic sentiments. "Sympathy is of so powerful and insinuating a nature," Hume declares, "that it enters into most of our sentiments and passions, and often takes place under the appearance of its contrary" (378). Driven by "passions" described as "violent and sensible [produced by and experienced through the physical senses]," sympathy is a force that exceeds human control, even as it operates in and through the human body.[17] As in contagion, exposure to other people's sentiments leads to the unconscious reproduction of those same feelings and ideas, a phenomenon with dangerous consequences, as I discuss in more detail in Chapters Two and Three on *The Wanderer* and *The Last Man*. Hume celebrates sympathy as a positive binding force, but its unstable power of "insinuation" haunts his *Treatise*: "The sentiments of others can never affect us," Hume asserts, almost as a warning, "but by becoming, in some measure, our own; in which case they operate upon us, by opposing and increasing our passions in the very same manner, as if they had been originally deriv'd from our own temper and disposition" (378). As Nancy Yousef observes in her recent book *Romantic Intimacy*, "Hume's sympathy—the ease with which we 'enter into the sentiments of others,' the ready passage of 'affections…from one person to another'—is not necessarily a *moral* phenomenon" (76); it is "epistemically secure but ethically unstable…Affective (re)cognition of an other is only coincidentally bound up with a just response to that recognition" (80).[18]

Seen as a response to this "insinuating" aspect of Humean sympathy, Smith's theory looks like a cleaned-up version of interpersonal relations. Smith's insistence on regulating spontaneous "passion" through the intervention of the

impartial spectator and his assertion that sympathy occurs only when this spectator approves the other's sentiments allow him to posit sympathy as proof of humans' innate goodness and as productive of orderly communities. "All the members of human society stand in need of each others assistance," writes Smith, "Where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded…the society flourishes and is happy. All the different members of it are bound together by the agreeable bands of love and affection, and are, as it were, drawn to one common centre of mutual good offices" (103-104). In contrast to Hume's assertion of the facts of sympathy, good and bad, Smith's sympathy is an idealistic version predicated on humans' ability to exert self-control over a natural affinity for participating in others' innermost affections.[19]

Hume's response to Smith's *Theory* hints at this idealism about sympathy's operations and outcomes. "I wish you had more particularly and fully prov'd, that all kinds of Sympathy are necessarily Agreeable," writes Hume to Smith after reading the first edition of the *Theory*, "Now it woud appear that there is a disagreeable Sympathy, as well as an agreeable: And indeed, as the Sympathetic Passion is a reflex Image of the principal, it must partake of its Qualities, & be painful where that is so" (544). To explain himself, Hume offers the example of "[a]n ill-humord Fellow; a man tir'd & disgusted with every thing, always *ennuié*; sickly, complaining, embarrass'd," who "throws an evident Damp on Company, which I suppose wou'd be accounted for by Sympathy; and yet is disagreeable" (544). Against Smith's assertion that the moral outcome of sympathy makes the pain of the experience worthwhile and even "agreeable,"

Hume insists that sympathy can also generate amoral or even immoral sentiments, such as "*ennuié*," "ill-humor," and "disgust."

In the same letter, Hume goes on to suggest that "if all sympathy was agreeable," we would not encounter in sympathy the "difficult Problem [of] account[ing] for the Pleasure, receivd from the Tears & Grief & Sympathy of Tragedy" (544). Noting the pitfalls of Smith's argument that sympathy is consistently beneficial to "all the members of human society," Hume anticipates many of the "Problem[s]" with Smith's version of sympathy that modern scholars have elaborated at length, including the voyeurism implied by its necessary spectatorship, the sadism of the "Pleasure" derived from observing somebody else's "Tears & Grief," and the desensitizing effects of sympathy's operation via the spectacle of "Tragedy" (sympathy's problematic theatricality, as David Marshall explains it). Because sympathy operates beyond our control and sometimes against our will, as a "reflex," it can be a deeply uncomfortable and even violent experience that cannot always be recuperated for moral value or pleasure. Hume's letter confirms his implications in the *Treatise* that discomfort and disgust, including the discomforts of taking pleasure in somebody else's suffering, is a constitutive part of sympathetic experience. According to Nancy Armstrong, Smith does not want to "think that our apparent ability to share emotions is owing to the spontaneous spread of feeling from one individual to another" (*How Novels Think* 13). This does not mean, however, that sympathy doesn't function in that way.

In spite of Hume's and others' objections, Smith's definition of sympathy is the one most frequently invoked in literary criticism of 19th-century fiction today. However, the conversation about sympathy that the two philosophers exemplify persisted throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries as an ongoing debate in social, political, and literary writing about whether sympathetic encounters are "occult" in the sense that they are visceral, unstable, and potentially "disagreeable" or whether they are rational, controlled, and benevolent. In *The Wanderer*, Humean sympathy drives the mixture of curiosity, compassion, frustration, and hostility that travel from character to character (and even to the reader) in a sympathetic "contagion" that is overtly disagreeable or "difficult," as I call it. In *The Last Man*, when Lionel Verney "enters" into the suffering of a black man, his sympathy leads to his revulsion and rejection of the man and not the "necessary assistance" that Smith and Lionel himself describe as the outcome of sympathy. And in *Villette*, "rational benevolence" violates the object of sympathy as much as the more occult versions of sympathy evoked in Lucy Snowe's allusions to "electrical" sympathy and the pseudo-scientific "sympathetic faculty."

The next section situates these conflicting conceptions of sympathy as stable and unstable in late 18th- and early 19th-century political writings in order to show that earlier notions of sympathy as unstable spilled into later discourses. The political contexts for early 19th-century sympathies also suggest that Burney's, Shelley's, and Brontë's (re)presentations of sympathy as unstable are positioned against increasing assumptions in contemporary politics that sympathy is a

reliable force of social cohesion and benevolence. Nineteenth-century political writers and novelists increasingly employed sympathy in Smith's sense to tighten their control over interpersonal encounters and to deflect suspicions of revolutionary or radical intent. By contrast, Burney, Shelley, and Brontë invoke sympathy as unstable and volatile to illuminate the problem of control in such encounters and the exploitative power of sympathy used as a method of gendered, class-based, and racial subjugation disguised as "improvement."

From Revolution to Empire: The Politics of Sympathy

In spite of Smith's conception of sympathy as a facilitator of moral consensus and "agreeable bands of love and affection," the revolutionary decades following the publication of his *Theory* saw sympathy deployed in political and literary discourses in the occult or Humean sense of unpredictable, morally unstable "contagion." As Fairclough points out, the politically divergent works of Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft exemplify the ways in which sympathy was used in the French revolutionary period for opposing political purposes, as well as the ways in which the sentiments sympathy communicated could diverge from authors' intended purposes. Throughout the volatile 1790s, socio-political as well as literary writers demonstrated both interest in sympathy as a natural or instinctual force of positive social cohesion and ambivalence about employing sympathy successfully for particular ends, given its unpredictable ability to spread a wide variety of sentiments.

Fairclough's extensive study of Burke's and Wollstonecraft's ambivalence about sympathy illustrates the ways in which philosophical and theoretical conversations about the nature and function of sympathy continued well after the publication of Smith's ideas in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In fact, I suggest in what follows that we might view the decreasing prominence of unstable sympathies in the decades that followed the French Revolution as a result, in part, of its prominence in turn-of-the-century thinking. Revolution-era writers saw the liberal promise of the Revolution spiral into the Reign of Terror and the political unrest of the Napoleonic Wars, and their ambivalence about unstable sympathies shifted quickly to a fear of and aversion to a phenomenon capable of spreading such violence and destruction. As Burke's early work demonstrates, sympathy served writers as a powerful tool through which readers might reproduce feelings or ideas conveyed in a work of art. However, while both Burke's and Wollstonecraft's writings attempt to deploy sympathy to achieve particular social and political outcomes, both express deep concerns about controlling and containing sympathy's mysteriously "insinuating" power. As Fairclough explains in *The Romantic Crowd*, while Burke appropriated the ethics and rhetoric of sympathy to spread anti-revolutionary sentiment, Wollstonecraft appropriated them for her revolutionary project. In later chapters, I build on Fairclough's study of sympathy in revolutionary and early 19th-century theories by exploring in early 19th-century novels the "occult," non-Smithian (re)presentations of sympathy that she locates in philosophical and politically inflected writing.

Although his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) demonstrates much anxiety about non-rational, unstable sympathies, Burke's earlier *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756) highlight the young aesthetician-politician-philosopher's enthusiasm for sympathy as a force of moral action and union. For example, in the *Enquiry*, Burke follows Hume and anticipates Smith by naming sympathy as a first principle of human sociability, one of the "three principle links" in "the great chain of society" (40). An aesthetic response to outside stimuli, sympathy in the *Enquiry* appears in Hume's terms as a spontaneous, physiological phenomenon that occurs "antecedent to any reasoning, by an instinct that works us to its own purposes, without our concurrence" (43). Despite its spontaneity, sympathy in this early Burkean analysis maintains thoroughly positive potential: since "our Creator has designed we should be united by bonds of sympathy" (42), Burke writes, we "are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost any thing which men can do or suffer" (41). Whether experienced while viewing a work of art, while attending a play, while listening to music, while reading a novel, or while engaging with another human being (the most potent facilitator of sympathy for Burke[20]), sympathy in the *Enquiry* is an innate capacity that attests to humans' sociability and moral goodness. Indeed, it constitutes civilization, as humans' incapacity to be "indifferent" to one another ensures the wellbeing of individuals and society.

Even in the wake of the French Revolution, Burke's early optimism about sympathy carries through his later *Reflections*, but not without increased anxiety

about its instability as a physiological operation. In this more ambivalent text, sympathy operates via "the emotional ties generated in a domestic context" (Fairclough 66) – one typified by the domestic tradition of good old England, which Burke metaphorizes as an affectionate family.[21] Still employing the ethics and the rhetoric of sympathy as a physiological but moral medium, Burke contrasts English people's capacity for and long tradition of sympathy (portrayed as good sensibility) with the brutality of French revolutionaries who have kidnapped and terrorized the royal family (acting upon bad sensibility). Having described in gory detail the storming of the palace at Versailles (71-72), Burke asserts that such spectacles should deter English people from enabling such barbaric acts in their own country through the functioning of domestic-minded sympathy: "we are so made," writes Burke,

> as to be affected at such spectacles with the melancholy sentiments upon the unstable condition of mortal prosperity, and the tremendous uncertainty of human greatness; because in events like these our passions instruct our reason; because when kings are hurl'd from their thrones…, and become the objects of insult to the base, and of pity to the good, we behold such disasters in the moral, as we should behold a miracle in the physical order of things. We are alarmed into reflexion; our minds (as it has long since been observed) are purified by terror and pity; our weak unthinking pride is humbled, under the dispensations of a mysterious wisdom. (80)

Burke's language of "spectacles" and spectatorship reflects Smith's emphasis on sympathy as a rational process mediated by an impartial spectator, but the experience itself is led by the non-rational "mysterious wisdom" of "passions." Problematically reasoned and reflective, sympathy in Burke's ambivalent terms guides "us" (implicitly "the good") to moral behavior towards our fellow humans. French revolutionaries have forgotten that "we are so made" and have "perverted themselves, and in those that attend to them, all the well-placed sympathies of the human breast" (65). Attempting to keep sympathy linked to sensibility a positive experience, Burke employs it as a mode of conveying anti-revolutionary sentiment.

However, as one detects in Burke's description of the "fit of unguarded transport" in which the revolutionaries drag Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette from their beds, sympathy as described in *Reflections* may serve as a vehicle for uncivilized, destructive impulses as well as orderly conservative ones. Burke attempts to portray the natural English capacity for sympathy as wholesome and the irrational violence of French revolutionary sentiments as unnatural. But he describes the operations of revolutionary groups in language that recalls sympathy's instability in Hume's philosophy, which is rooted, we have seen, in the natural operations of the human body. For example, the mob that seizes the palace and its inhabitants in a "fit of unguarded transport" is a grotesque mass of unreflective movement in which sentiments are shared through a "burst of enthusiasm" beyond the limits of reason (Burke, *Reflections* 73): "amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies,

and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women" (72). This mob may be gendered and unthinking (indeed, gendered as unthinking), but its actions are directed by "[t]he Assembly, their organ," which "domineer[s] over them with a strange mixture of servile petulance and proud presumptuous authority" (69). Described as an "organically" functioning body, the revolutionary group spreads its dangerous fervor in sympathetic ways similar to those that operate on the familial English body. Fairclough articulates the implications of such descriptions, explaining that "Burke's dismissal of the behaviour of the revolutionary collective has obvious polemic rationale, but by aligning these actions with the principles of physiological sympathy, Burke suggests their resistance to regulation and control" (68). Sympathy can unite nations against unnatural violence, and Burke continues to attempt to control it for such ends, but uncontrolled, it can also spread and perpetuate those undesired dangerous sentiments.

A similarly ambivalent hopefulness about sympathy's potential for social and political action characterizes Wollstonecraft's revolutionary writings in the 1790s. While for Burke sympathy can (ideally) guard against the terrifying outbreak of revolution at home, for Wollstonecraft sympathy with revolutionary fervor can initiate positive changes for the domestically oppressed, as long as it functions within reason. As Fairclough observes, Wollstonecraft remains somewhat skeptical of sympathy because its unreasoned, instinctive qualities could undermine her rationalist goals, but she values sympathy as "a medium of revolutionary principles" by "mak[ing] it the medium of enlightenment

principles" and not the effusive emotions of an unthinking crowd (87). In one of Fairclough's examples from *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794), Wollstonecraft describes the storming of the Bastille in terms of a carefully reasoned sympathy and not an instinctive or emotional one:

> There was, in fact, an inconceivable solemnity in the quick step of a torrent of men, all directing their exertions to one point, which distinguished this rising of the citizens from what is commonly termed a riot. – Equality, indeed, was then first established by an universal sympathy; and men of all ranks joining in the throng, those of the first could not be discriminated by any peculiar decency of demeanour, such public spirited dignity pervaded the whole mass. (*Historical and Moral View* 88)

Explicitly "avoiding every kind of violence" (88), this "mass" comes together through "universal sympathy" in the rational principle of "Equality," driven by a "dignified" political goal rather than the contagious, mindless feelings that instigate a "riot."

For Wollstonecraft, the French Revolution is a vital example of how through rational sympathetic communion gendered and class-based norms might be overthrown in favor of more egalitarian "intellectual improvement, gradually proceeding to perfection in the advancement of communities, from a state of barbarism to that of polished society" (*Historical and Moral View* 7). In this respect, the sympathy she observes in the Revolution has Smithian potential.[22] However, the Revolution as Wollstonecraft describes it also exemplifies violence

and destruction proceeding from sympathy operating without the intervention of reason. Like Burke and, as we will see in the next chapter, like the English-born, French-raised heroine of Burney's *The Wanderer*, Wollstonecraft faces the problem of how to contain the unstable nature of sympathy in order to make it function as a productive agent of social and national inclusivity.[23]

Although she insists on sympathy within the bounds of reason and separate from instinct or unreflective emotion, Wollstonecraft continually reverts to descriptions of sympathy that rely on physiological understandings of its unstable nature. Later in the *Historical and Moral View*, she celebrates revolutionary sympathy in which "[s]o rapid was the spirit, so general the momentum, that in the course of a week upwards of three millions of men in arms were formed into companies by a common interest resembling an electrical sympathy" (128). Recalling the 17th- and 18th-century occult and medical definitions as well as Hume's sense of sympathy as "contagious," Wollstonecraft suggests that sympathy has the power to bring people together around issues of equality, education, and women's rights. But she also implies that "electrical sympathy" might "insinuate" sentiments contrary to her social and political goals. And, indeed, for those who thought differently about equality, education, women's rights, and the other "improvements" Wollstonecraft championed, her representation of sympathy as "insinuating" made her ideas (however rationalist) even more threatening for their implied potential to infect the conservative English status quo.

As the French Revolution deteriorated into the fear and horror of the Terror, political and literary writers began shying away from the unstable, physiological models employed by Burke, Wollstonecraft, and others. In the years during and after the Terror, sympathy took a more rational, moral bent in political and literary discourses concerned with the rights and roles of women and the poor, the slave trade and emancipation of slaves, imperialism and colonial governance, and the general "improvement" of individuals, communities, and the nation. As Amit Rai observes at length in *Rule of Sympathy*, in these early 19th-century contexts debaters on both sides of the issues deployed sympathy in Smith's terms as a mode of rational ("impartial") benevolence and as a means of peacefully uniting an increasingly diverse empire. In many ways a response to the upheaval of the French Revolution and sympathy's role in activating and spreading it, sympathy in early 19th-century politics seeks to avoid the dangerous contamination of unwanted sentiments that facilitated late 18th-century revolts and revolutions – and that might escalate the class riots and slave revolts that were breaking out across the British empire. As Rai describes it, Smithian sympathy in early 19th-century politics aims to prevent revolution and maintain British hierarchies of power. I argue in subsequent chapters that by employing unstable sympathies, Burney, Shelley, and Brontë position themselves against this dominant use of sympathy in contemporary politics, illuminating the ways in which its illusion of stability obscures the power structures that it keeps in place. Understanding sympathy's role in early 19th-century social and political thought helps contextualize the novelists' (re)presentation of intimacy's darker side.

In the 1790s and into the early decades of the 1800s, rising fears about sympathy's potential to spread revolutionary fervor and unrest to England coincided with several uprisings in England and the European colonies. In 1791, slaves in the French colony of St. Domingue had revolted in what looked like an event directly influenced by the French Revolution. Not surprisingly, subsequent uprisings and revolts in England were worrisome, especially to those currently in power. From English food riots in the very cold winter of 1794-1795 well into the 1830s and beyond, the British empire faced the threat of revolution on several fronts, both domestic and colonial. In England itself, for example, textile artisans in Charlotte Brontë's region of Yorkshire rioted in the early 1810s against labor-saving machinery that threatened their livelihood (Brontë fictionalizes these Luddite Protests in her second published novel, *Shirley*). A plotted rebellion of weavers (called the Pentridge Rebellion) was foiled in 1817, and in 1830 agricultural laborers rebelled against new machinery in the Captain Swing Riots. In the British colonies, slave revolts threatened colonial rule in Barbados in 1816, Demerara in 1823, and Jamaica between 1831 and 1832. In 1807, Britain had abolished the slave trade, but slavery itself was not dissolved until 1833, and the 1820s saw much debate and demonstration about the justice and legality of enslaving human beings.[24] Political unrest continued into the 1840s and 1850s with the Chartist movements, which sought to expand voting and property rights for the working class.

From the 1790s through the 1850s, then, England was engaged in a battle not only to defeat Napoleon in France (an event that occurred finally in 1815) but

also to quell the threat of revolution within its own empire and to unify its increasingly diverse population. Thus it is not surprising that contemporary political discourses addressing the problems of industrialization and poor issues, slavery, and colonial governance increasingly invoked sympathy as intentional, rational, and moral rather than as occult, physiological, and morally unstable. As Rai documents at length, by the end of the 18th century, the ethical and aesthetic principle of sympathy began to expand from moral philosophy to become "integrated into mobile strategies of governmentality, such as charities, social improvement, class-based education, the cult of domesticity, national integration, and other utilitarian and evangelical reforms" (Rai, *Rule of Sympathy* 104). By the early 19th century, sympathy in Smith's terms served politicians and reformers as an effective policy for binding people together in a British imperial population increasingly marked by differences in race, religion, class, and ideas about gender roles.[25]

Paradoxically linked to both instinct and cultivation – not only "affections" but also "tastes, habits, and customs" – sympathy facilitated projects of identity-, community-, and nation-formation. In such projects, groups promising humanitarian aid, such as evangelical and other missionary organizations, educated enslaved or formerly enslaved, colonial, and poor populations in practices designed to help them help themselves (for example, by teaching them trade skills, hygiene, work ethic, basic reading and writing, and related knowledge) – but also to make them more useful, more productive, more obedient British subjects.[26] In Rai's analysis, sympathy thus was appropriated for

hegemonic projects, "fus[ing] with the apparatuses of 'police'" used to establish, regulate, and maintain structures that were inevitably unequal.[27] In *Villette*, Brontë describes this form of sympathy as "rational benevolence," an exercise practiced by characters with greedy and religious interests in controlling others, including colonial others: the discreet surveillant Madame Beck, the Catholic priest Père Silas, and his rich parishioner Madame Walravens, who owns property in Guadeloupe. I explore *Villette*'s particular resistance to the ameliorative function of sympathy outlined by Rai in Chapter Four. Chapters Two and Three explore other forms of resistance to contemporary social and political uses of sympathy to shore up a hierarchy of power that preserved the superior agency of white British men.

Rai's study of rational, stable sympathy in early 19th-century political literature, combined with Fairclough's examination of "contagious" sympathies in the philosophical and politically inflected literature of the revolutionary period and my own analysis of 18th-century theories of sympathy, demonstrates the ongoing conversation about sympathy's function that occurred before and after the publication of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759. While Revolution-era writers found the more occult, physiological model more compelling vehicles for their political goals, early 19th-century writers found the more objective, consistently moral model more useful for their projects of unification and control. In both cases, theorists and practitioners of sympathy shaped its definition and function to fit the outcomes they desired or intended for fellow-feeling. In neither case did they establish a unanimously accepted

definition that replaced all others. Rather than assuming that 19th-century sympathy is necessarily rational and moral, then, as scholars of 19th-century novels tend to do, we are better served examining the specific situations in which sympathy appears and how specific works evoke it in readers.

As this chapter has argued, and as the next three chapters will demonstrate in detail, (re)presentations of interpersonal encounters as visceral, unstable, and potentially "disagreeable" (as opposed to rational, controlled, and consistently moral) do not illustrate failures of sympathy but rather other, historically and theoretically valid ways of viewing a complicated and controversial phenomenon. In fact, when mobilized within a political climate in which viewing sympathy as "impartial," rational, and benevolent is more common than viewing it as volatile and "contagious," the "difficult," revolting, and penetrating sympathies we find in *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* provide important points of access into the novels' complex politics, ethics, and aesthetics. Shedding the assumption that sympathy in 19th-century novels must always be defined in Smith's terms, the next three chapters explore the complications of Smith's model illuminated by the alternative modalities of sympathy employed by Burney, Shelley, and Brontë. Specifically, the novels examined here challenge the idealistic view that dissolving differences into a common British identity creates a community of peaceful individuals and a stable social structure. In a period in which rational, Smithian sympathy existed as a "technology of power" keeping certain groups, including women, in unequal relations to others, the evocations of sympathy in the novels of Burney, Shelley, and Brontë may be seen not only as challenges to

those power structures but as reminders of the revolts, revulsion, and revolutions that sympathy can also generate.

In *Northanger Abbey*, the reader's sympathy with Catherine Morland and her reading practices is surprising and embarrassing. But it is not "difficult" and disturbing, as are the reader's shifting sympathies between protagonist and antagonists in *The Wanderer*, or revolting, as is sympathy with the "last man" alive, or viscerally painful, as is penetrating sympathy with Lucy Snowe in *Villette*. In *The Wanderer*, to which I turn in the next chapter, Burney deploys what I call "difficult" sympathies that powerfully reorient readers' perspective on self-other relations in the early 19th century – especially relations between men and women. In *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*, which is set during the French Revolution but aimed at an early 19th-century audience, sympathy operates as a mode of exclusion in which unstable affects, including not only compassion but also curiosity, frustration, and hostility, spread "contagiously" to unite minor characters and readers in irritated uncertainty about the heroine, perpetuating her "difficulties" rather than alleviating them. Condemning English prejudices towards the French as well as social codes that bar women from self-dependence, Burney's final novel complicates the Smithian regime of sympathy upon which early 19th-century Britons theorize their difference from the French and through which contemporary novels of manners shore up exclusionary social rules, including the cultural imperative of women to marry. By activating readers' sympathies with the novel's antagonists as well as its protagonist, Burney employs a modality of sympathy that illuminates both the prejudices pervading

English society and the ways in which traditional novels of manners perpetuate them.

NOTES

[1] I repeat these disclaimers of "at first" and "initially" because, as critics have long observed, Austen's critique of Gothic novel-reading in *Northanger Abbey* is complex and incomplete. Rather than a parody of the genre and the reading habits it encourages, Austen folds elements and strategies of the Gothic into her representation of "reality." For more on the complexity of Austen's genre-mixing and "realism," see (among others) George Levine, "Translating the Monstrous: *Northanger Abbey*"; Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*; Joseph Litvak, *Strange Gourmets: Sophistication, Theory, and the Novel*; Nancy Armstrong, "The Gothic Austen"; Sonia Hofkosh, "The Illusionist: *Northanger Abbey* and Austen's Uses of Enchantment"; and Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History*.

[2] As George Haggerty observes, Gothic novels evoke visceral effects in readers through a "process of suspension" used to "astonish readers and move them out of themselves" and, implicitly, into the experiences of the characters about whom they are reading (275). About Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novels, in particular, Peter Garrett notes that "the plight of the persecuted, often confined, heroine becomes the basis for a sensationalism that exercises the imagination [and the physiological responses] of both protagonists and readers, who dread unnamed terrors and thrill in response to apparently supernatural effects" (470). See also James Carson (below).

[3] The stakes of Gothic novels' "visceral and physiological…stimulation" of readers' bodies underscores what I am arguing is at stake in 19th-century novels' (re)presentations of sympathy as non-rational and unstable. According to Carson, such strategies and effects demonstrate that in the world and modality of the Gothic (as, I would add, in the experience and modality of unstable sympathies), "individuality is unstable and autonomous subjectivity untenable" (43). Similarly, the sympathies (re)presented by Austen, Burney, Shelley, and Brontë dissolve the boundaries between self and other that remain intact in Smith's version of the phenomenon and in the political discourses that employ it.

[4] By "occult" here and elsewhere, I mean unexplainable, mysterious, and not completely understood – not necessarily supernatural and magical, as the word sometimes connotes. Although sympathy sometimes appears to occur by supernatural means (as in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, as I suggest in Chapter Four), in most cases explored in this dissertation, sympathy occurs through means that are simply not understood within current knowledge of human physiology and psychology. In occurring contrary to expectations or intentions, the operations of sympathy are inexplicable and mysterious and "occult" in this sense.

[5] For studies of sympathy and crowd behavior in the first half of the 19th century, see Fairclough and Carson. In *How Novels Think*, Nancy Armstrong discusses sympathy as a way of controlling 18th-century "factionalism."

[6] James Chandler locates the origin of sympathy in the 17th century, while Amit Rai traces it, in a similar definition as an anatomical and interpersonal relationship of "affinity," as far back as the 15th century. I date sympathy to the "late 16th or early 17th century" in accordance with the dates from which the *OED* quotes uses of "sympathy." In any case, early dating matters less to my argument than the definitions that circulated in earlier discourses and how those definitions become integrated into late 18th- and early 19th-century formulations of the phenomenon.

[7] For early definitions in science and medicine, see Jahoda and Mary Fairclough. Both scholars cite Digby (1669) and Whytt (1765) as contemporary sources. Seth Lobis's forthcoming book *The Virtue of Sympathy: Magic, Philosophy, and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England* (December 2014) promises to expand on the connection between early, magical or "occult" definitions of sympathy between internal organs or external objects and sympathy conceived as an interpersonal phenomenon.

[8] In *Scenes of Sympathy*, Audrey Jaffe argues that "in Victorian discussions and, frequently, in contemporary critical analyses, sympathy tends to appear explicitly as a women's issue. According to Ruskin, for example, women's position within the family renders them better at feeling than men. As the centers of Victorian domestic life, women were expected to defer their own desires and work toward the fulfillment of others', and the name given that generalized identification was frequently sympathy…In a discussion of nationalism, Samuel Smiles links sympathy learned in childhood [from one's mother] to the adult exercises of charity and philanthropy" (17). Jaffe goes on to assert that "sympathy is not uniquely a women's issue" and that "Victorian representations offer competing and complimentary structures variously associated with sympathy" (18). While Jaffe defines Victorian sympathy in Smith's terms, I suggest that exploring 19th-century sympathy in other terms reveals the ways in which novelists work against Smith's logic as it gets deployed in contemporary political projects, including projects for regulating women's potentially "disordered" sympathies and their position in the family and domestic life.

[9] Hume's account of sympathy may be especially useful for projects seeking to rewrite assumptions about women and sympathy, since, as Adela Pinch suggests in *Strange Fits of Passion*, "In Hume's *Treatise*…women have no special place as either objects or subjects of sympathy" (25).

[10] As I suggest here, gender is bound up intimately with notions of sympathy in 18th- and 19th-century philosophical, political, and literary thinking. The chapters that follow explore gender issues illuminated by Burney's, Shelley's, and Brontë's mobilization of unstable sympathies, but the many implications for gender of these modalities of sympathy need further exploration that is beyond the scope of the current study. My aim in this project is to illuminate readerly discomfort as a facet of sympathy understood as unstable and visceral rather than as a failure of sympathy understood as intentional, rational, and moral.

[11] See David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton's editorial notes to the Oxford edition of Hume's *Treatise*, cited in this chapter.

[12] According to Orianne Smith, "[Adam] Smith's idea of sympathy is more contrived than Hume's and less optimistic as well: sympathy, for Smith, is a moral duty and not necessarily a spontaneous sentiment" (160). While I agree with Smith that Adam Smith's sympathy is "contrived," in that the addition of the impartial spectator makes it "not as natural and effortless as Hume and Hutcheson suggest" (160), I disagree that Smith is "less optimistic" about sympathy. To me, the impartial spectator suggests an attempt to control the "natural" operations of sympathy in order to make it a positive experience and something to be "optimistic" about. Although Hume's pessimism remains evident in language that questions sympathy's ethical stability, Smith attempts to mitigate his own concerns with sympathy's dangerous potential by adding a set of controls that allow him to view it as a consistently beneficial phenomenon.

[13] In such analyses, Hume stands for a sympathy of unrestrained feeling (both emotional and visceral), while Smith stands for a sympathy of conscious, intentional cognition. Rae Greiner, for example, distinguishes between Hume and Smith in terms of the relative importance each finds in feeling and thinking: "Smith's sympathizer abstracts feeling, routing it through cognition, while Hume allows for sensation to be transmitted both directly and unconsciously from one person to the next" (5). In this analysis, Smith's theory updates Hume's because it privileges the faculty of rational thought. On the other hand, Smith's theory obscures the capacity for spontaneous interpersonal response – humans' tendency towards "contagious" mutual affection – that Hume, along with the novelists studied in this dissertation, cannot ignore. In another vein, Michael Frazer frames the sensation-vs.-cognition debate in Hume and Smith studies as a difference in the importance to each philosopher of the active individual in the sympathetic process. In *The Enlightenment of Sympathy: Justice and the Moral Sentiments in the Eighteenth Century and Today* (2012), Frazer argues that where Hume takes a "protoutilitarian" position that puts the

greatest happiness of the whole above the happiness of the individual, Smith's position values individual difference and individual action.

[14] As Pinch notes, in Hume's analysis "[a]ll perceptions are divided into two categories, impressions and ideas; impressions are those perceptions that enter the mind with the 'most force and violence,' while all ideas are, without exception, the fainter copies of the impressions." An experiencing subject "progress[es] from a lively impression…to the less lively *idea* of something" (33).

[15] For Smith, "[b]y the imagination we place ourselves in his situation" and "when ['his agonies'] are thus brought home to ourselves when we have thus adopted and made them our own [i.e. consciously], [they] begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels" (*Theory of Moral Sentiments* 15).

[16] Hume's *Treatise* may suggest that "passions" (or "impressions") are more important that "reason" (or "ideas"). However, as Pinch observes, sympathy in Hume's analysis "can reverse the seemingly unidirectional flow of force. Sympathy works precisely by converting ideas into their corresponding impressions" (*Strange Fits* 34), turning thoughts back into feelings. This reversal within Hume's own philosophy suggests that interpersonal encounters are complex, unstable phenomena in which "ideas" and "impressions," thoughts and feelings, are intertwined with and inseparable from each other.

[17] In contrast to "passion," human "reason" (also an "affection," or "emotion of the mind," and a faculty of cognition) "operate[s] more calmly, and cause[s] no disorder in the temper." However, this "tranquility" of reason makes us forget that reason derives first from passion: reason "leads us into a mistake concerning them [reasonable affections], causes us to regard them as conclusions only of our intellectual faculties" (Hume 280).

[18] Yousef's main concerns in *Romantic Intimacy* are the 18th-century moral philosophers' faulty "insistence on the immediate self-evidence of sympathy" (8), the negative interpersonal encounters that such conceptions of sympathy displace, and the related problem of sympathy generating "just response[s]" to others. However, her insights into the ethical instability of sympathy in Hume's philosophy (as well as in Shaftesbury's) speaks to my concern with the problem of controlling for literary or political purposes a phenomenon theorized as socially productive yet inherently unstable.

[19] It is telling that in 1756, only three years before Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Dr. Johnson defines sympathy as the earlier theorists do, as "the quality of being affected by the affection of another." Johnson's passive verb tense suggests, like Hume did, and like the *OED* still does, that sympathy is something that happens to a person and not necessarily something that he or she actively initiates or participates in by will.

[20] In one famous passage that speaks to problems of spectatorship and desensitization discussed by Marshall in great detail, Burke argues that people will pour out of a theater to witness and be moved by the live execution of a real human being.

[21] The metaphor of the family to describe the nation runs through *Reflections*. In one example, Burke compares the government of England to a familial inheritance passed on through the generations: "Whatever advantages are obtained by a state proceeding on these maxims, are locked fast as in a sort of family settlement; grasped as in a kind of mortmain for ever. By a constitutional policy, working after the pattern of nature, we receive, we hold, we transmit our government and our privileges, in the same manner in which we enjoy and transmit our property and our lives" (33). The "natural" connection experienced between members of a family both makes revolution (the violation of inheritance) reviling and, through shared loyalties and affections, "preserves an unity in so great a diversity of its parts" (33).

[22] As Fairclough notes, "sympathy [in Wollstonecraft's conception] is stripped of all emotional associations, which is an extremely unusual use of the term even amongst reformist thinkers" (88). Importantly, however, Wollstonecraft's version of rational sympathy also differs from the model theorized by Smith. Fairclough explains that Wollstonecraft "reject[ed]…Adam Smith's regulated sympathetic exchange…assert[ing] in the *Vindication of the Rights of Women* that 'the world cannot be seen by an unmoved spectator: we must mix in the throng, and feel as men feel, before we can judge of their feelings.' For Wollstonecraft, sympathy is not a 'cool' evaluative principle, but a social one" (Fairclough 84). If sympathy for Wollstonecraft is a rational exercise, its commitment to sharing embodied feeling involves a less rigid "mix[ing]" of sentiments than it does for Smith.

[23] In *The Wanderer* Burney seems torn between Burke's conservatism and Wollstonecraft's proto-feminism. Burney was a longtime acquaintance and admirer of Burke (though she sometimes differed with him politically, for example on the subject of Warren Hastings). However, *The Wanderer* features a Wollstonecraftian character, Elinor Joddrel, whose beliefs about the rights and independence of women are mocked less than the means by which she attempts to realize them.

[24] See *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age* (1999), edited by Iain McCalman, an invaluable source of social and political context for philosophy and literature in the period.

[25] Exploring Smithian sympathy as a regulating force in 18th-century politics, Armstrong argues that Smith's intentional, rational, and moral sympathy – along with the individualism it promoted – "offered a symbolic resolution to the problem posed by factionalism" in the 18th century (*How Novels Think* 20). For Armstrong, "factionalism" denotes both "spontaneous and collective emotional responses…that, during the first half of the eighteenth century, served as a code word for the Hobbesian body politic composed of warring religious sects and combative political groups controlled by a powerful monarch" and the "unruly mobs of displaced agrarian laborers and a growing number of urban poor [who] assumed the role of chief antagonist to civil society" in the second half of the 18th century (20). From regulating the "unruly" sentiments of religious, political, and lower-class others in the 18th century, sympathy in Smith's terms gathers even more powers of governance after the French Revolution and the ensuing Terror, becoming the privileged mode of sympathy in the 19th century.

[26] Rai documents how such discourses, often couched in the language of Christian religion and the mediating influence of God, both call for fellow-feeling in cross-class and cross-racial encounters but also describe sympathy (regulated by sympathizers' "impartial" reasoning and rational control) as a way of establishing and maintaining order, privileging its controlling function over its capacity to build mutual feeling and understanding. Sympathy in Smith's terms is especially useful, for example, in the "Protestant Dissenters' Petition for Promulgating the Christian Religion in India," in which the petitioners argue that communicating the "light and blessings of Christianity" sympathetically in India provides the British colony with "additional strength and stability" as it creates a shared moral foundation (qtd in Rai, *Rule of Sympathy* 144).

Similar strategies cropped up in abolitionist debates, where instructing the enslaved or formerly enslaved in the tastes and affections of their benevolent sympathizers aimed to keep them orderly and obedient throughout the radical changes and unrest occurring at home and abroad. In fact, Smithian sympathy was used on both sides of the debate: by abolitionists as well as anti-abolitionists, both of whom deployed sympathy as means of improving the lots of enslaved people. As Rai documents, on the one hand, abolitionists portrayed racial others as fellow humans through their innate capacities for feeling, suffering, and sympathizing, imploring more privileged Britons to take pity on them. On the other hand, anti-abolitionists appealed to their constituents to sympathize with and take pity on lesser peoples who could not take care of themselves and thus required the structure and patronage of slavery. Agents of humanitarian assistance and patronage alike thus used Smith's rhetoric of shared feeling and "agreeable bands of love and affection" to reaffirm differences they upheld as fundamental, ensuring that white British masculinity remained at the top of the power structure.

[27] Rai uses the vocabulary of Foucault ("governmentality," "police"), indicating not the specific groups that we, today, identify as "the government" or "the police" but rather all institutions of "surveillance, normalization, and subject production (identity formation)" (*Rule of Sympathy* xix), from political policies to religious missions to abolitionist activism. However, it is worth noting that the increased use of Smithian sympathy – with its regulation, mediation, and spectatorship – in 19th-century British politics coincides with the gradual emergence of the literal police in England. As David Philips notes in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, small paid police forces emerged in 1792, horse and foot patrols in London in 1805, and the first professional, full-time, uniformed police force (the Metropolitan Force for Greater London) in 1819. After the County and Borough Police Act of 1856, police forces were everywhere in England.

CHAPTER TWO

"Difficult" Sympathies in *The Wanderer*

Frances Burney's *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* (1814) markets itself as a novel about specifically gendered problems. Its eponymous heroine enters the story as an English refugee of the French Revolution, but she encounters more "difficulties" arising from assumptions about what women can do and how one should treat them than from the Terror in France. Even though she lacks friends and money, the Wanderer resists accepting financial assistance from men to avoid the appearance of illicit affairs. Her attempts to make money by honest means, including music instruction, sewing, and shop-keeping, subject her to misconceptions about the moral integrity of working women and one libertine's attempt to abduct and probably rape her. And on the rare occasions she is not presumed immoral, the Wanderer must fend off would-be suitors fascinated by her mysterious silence and good looks. According to the social codes of this fictional world, a woman must be either a seductress or a wife. "Female difficulties," indeed!

In addition to these, however, *The Wanderer* stirs up other "difficulties" that cloud its proto-feminist illumination of the heroine's troubles. Compared to Burney's previous novels, *The Wanderer* is notoriously "difficult" to read. Even a partial plot summary makes it sound melodramatic and outdated, as it extends and combines themes of 1790s political novels, late 18th- and turn-of-the-century novels of manners, and earlier romance literature.[1] But the sheer number and

magnitude of the difficulties recorded in *The Wanderer* make reading about them a strikingly uncomfortable, unfamiliar experience. The novel is both disturbing in the candid grittiness of its details and embarrassing in its excesses, evoking in the reader a discomfiting mixture of compassion and irritation. As the heroine encounters painful difficulty after painful difficulty for the bulk of nearly 900 pages, doing little to alter her "difficult" situation, reading in sympathy with her becomes an increasingly tenuous experience.

Unlike Burney's first three novels, which train readers to sympathize with the heroine of a novel of manners, *The Wanderer* problematizes readers' sympathetic relationship with its protagonist. While the earlier novels evoke readers' sympathy with their heroines by making their histories and inner thoughts transparent, *The Wanderer* delays revealing information about its protagonist for a very long time, even as it records her immediate "difficulties." Lady Juliet Granville is the first, legitimate daughter of an English nobleman but neither characters nor readers know this until nearly halfway through the novel. We don't discover her name until page 387, when a character (not the narrator) discloses it in conversation. Not until 250 pages after that do we learn her family history, when the same character tells the story to someone else. It takes another 100 pages to find out why Juliet has fled from France and refuses to disclose her identity. And not until Juliet's corrupt French husband appears in England does the narrator finally tell Juliet's story. As Julia Epstein observes, "Burney keeps even the reader of *The Wanderer* and virtually all of the characters in the dark"

(176), aligning readers not only with the virtuous protagonist but also with the antagonists who perpetuate her "female difficulties."[2]

The Wanderer is "difficult" to read, then, not only because reading about pain is uncomfortable, or because it is such a long novel, or because it insists on a frustrating dearth of information. It is "difficult" because of the ways in which it undermines the kind of sympathy readers of Burney expect, both by distancing them from the heroine and by aligning them with other characters' perspectives. Margaret Anne Doody articulates this difficulty as she wonders how "[w]e sympathize with the nameless heroine, even while she antagonizes us with her mystery" ("Introduction" xvi). Expecting the detailed personal histories provided in *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla*, readers become disoriented, incredulous, and even angry when *The Wanderer* "seems rather to bar readers from sharing in the inner life of the heroine than to invite them to exercise any privileged form of knowledge" (Park 127).

Nineteenth-century readers' dislike of *The Wanderer* is well documented. Walter Scott, who had found *Evelina* and *Cecilia* "uncommonly fine compositions," decided that with *The Wanderer*, Burney "has certainly made a miss" (Letter to Matthew Weld Hartstonge). John Wilson Croker declared it to be "inferior to its sister-works," arguing famously that "The Wanderer has the identical features of Evelina—but of Evelina grown old" (124, 125).[3] While many 20th-century critics agreed with their 19th-century predecessors,[4] more recent critics have been increasingly impressed with what Leanne Maunu calls "the richest and most complex of any text in the Burney canon" (189). Influential

scholars, including Doody, Epstein, and Kristina Straub, as well as many 21st-century critics have vindicated *The Wanderer* by demonstrating how its complex themes contribute to a biting critique of early 19th-century social and gender norms.[5] But while recent critics have written prolifically on themes of "female difficulties" in *The Wanderer*, few have attended at length to the novel's striking narrative oddities, and almost none have examined closely the sustained, visceral "difficulties" of the experience of reading it.

The Wanderer's thematic interest in sympathy has not gone unnoticed in the critical literature. In her literary biography of Burney, Doody argues that "[o]ne of the moral themes" of the novel is a "need for wider sympathies," especially between the English and French (*Frances Burney* 331). In a similar vein, Claudia Johnson suggests that the novel focuses to a large extent on Juliet's "yearning" for "feminine sympathy" in the face of sexual threats from men (*Equivocal Beings* 178). And several critics have pointed out how that "need" and "yearning" are disappointed as the Wanderer repeatedly comes up against nationalistic prejudice and the almost uniform animosity of the English women she encounters.[6] Few critics, however, have examined the ways in which the disappointment of expected or desired sympathy gets formalized in the novel's narrative strategies for moving its readers. For while readers of *The Wanderer* have come to appreciate it for its proto-feminist politics, they often remain puzzled about and irritated with its unusual narrative antics, including the narrator's extreme reticence about the heroine and its sympathetic alignment of readers and characters who remain frustratingly "in the dark."[7]

In this chapter, I explore the "difficulty" of reading *The Wanderer*, suggesting that the novel formalizes in its extreme narrative reticence the problems of sympathy that play out in its plot. *The Wanderer* not only disappoints the heroine's desire for "wider" "feminine sympathy" within the novel; it systematically undermines readers' expectations for sympathy with the heroine, generating frustration in readers as part of its narrative project. In the discourse of sympathy typically associated with novels of manners – Adam Smith's conception of sympathy as an "impartial" mode of benevolence and social cohesion – discomfort and irritation appear to constitute failures of sympathy. I suggest, however, that these negative reactions demonstrate sympathy operating in a different way: not as Smith envisioned it but rather as David Hume theorized it, as an unstable, potentially dangerous "contagion" of either positive or negative sentiments. Noticing the ways in which negative feelings circulate sympathetically in *The Wanderer* allows us to see that Burney's final novel is less a bad novel of manners than a novel of bad manners – an insightful illumination of the good- *and* ill-will at work in contemporary social codes and political policies as well as the literary conventions that uphold them.

Examining more closely the ways in which *The Wanderer* complicates the sympathy readers expect reveals an even more thorough unveiling of early 19th-century sociality than critics have noted previously. By making the most compelling "difficulty" readers encounter in the novel the difficulty of finding their sympathies enlisted on behalf of characters with compromised morals and bad manners, *The Wanderer* demonstrates Burney's distrust of sympathy as a

principle of benevolent social inclusivity, especially as English people used this principle to distinguish themselves from their French enemies. In the world of *The Wanderer* and in the experience of reading it, sympathy unites people around self-oriented projects of exclusion in which suffering outsiders such as the mysterious heroine do not evoke unmixed compassion and moral behavior but rather unstable, shifting responses, including compassion but also uncertainty, speculation, suspicion, and frustration. Increasing suspense and intensifying characters' and readers' desire to know more, these unexpectedly shifting sympathies keep minor characters interested in Juliet and readers reading a long and slow-moving novel. But they often slip participants into shared intolerance and animosity, demonstrating sympathy's ability to embitter and exclude as well as compassionate and cohere, not only in revolutionary France but also in early 19th-century England. *The Wanderer*'s modality of contagious, "difficult" sympathies presents the domestic gender relations upheld by traditional novels of manners as a political, social, and literary problem.

Sympathy and the Novel of Manners

Before disappointing readers with *The Wanderer*, Burney published three wildly successful novels that helped shape the popular novel of manners sub-genre. Facilitating readers' sympathy primarily with their eponymous heroines, these earlier novels follow their protagonists as they founder within and eventually learn to navigate a complex system of social codes. As Patricia Meyer

Spacks explains, novels of manners detail the rules of social behavior, but they also point to the injustices and double standards that underlie them. For example, Burney's first novel, *Evelina, or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778),

> supplies a full spectrum of manners defined along axes of form and content. Understood as social forms, manners are simply conventions, often arbitrary. Understood as moral content, manners express awareness of the needs and desires of others. The novel's mannerly ideal [the hero, Lord Orville, and ultimately Evelina] combines moral awareness with conventional compliance. (*Novel Beginnings* 162)

By pointing out where manners operate as "form" only, the novel instructs readers in how to recognize performances of manners that lack moral substance. By demonstrating the value and the domestic rewards of conveying moral content through one's social forms, the novel defines ways of working within social codes without eschewing them altogether. According to Spacks, although Burney's novels don't "overturn existing conventions" (168), they do "investigate the ways that young women may use manners to their own purposes" (169). Evelina gets her man by following the rules, even though she doesn't always agree with them. Critiquing without disrupting, novels of manners seek to inculcate readers in a similar compliance with a combination of propriety and awareness of propriety's shortcomings.

In addition to demonstrating the subject matter of novels of manners, Burney's early novels also exemplify the way the sub-genre typically utilizes sympathy as part of its moral framework. In novels of manners, readers encounter complex social worlds from the heroine's perspective, sharing her suffering as she learns to navigate its conventions and acquiring her insights into its arbitrary forms and ideal content. The novels suggest that by adopting the heroine's behavior, readers can share her rewards for conforming to social expectations: a happy ending in marriage to a suitable husband. Novels of manners thus employ sympathy to bind readers to the values of marriage and domesticity that the heroine ultimately embodies. Although they "urge us to assess the ways in which, the degree to which, [social codes] impinge…on lives occurring within [them]," Burney's novels of manners ultimately suggest that women have no acceptable choice but to comply (Spacks, *Novel Beginnings* 168, 172).

Evelina, Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress (1782), and *Camilla, or A Picture of Youth* (1796) exemplify the mode of sympathy paradigmatic to the novel of manners in their specific narrative strategies for facilitating readers' sympathy with their heroines, either to the exclusion of or to a much greater degree than sympathy with other characters. All three novels allow readers almost complete access to the heroines' thoughts and feelings and provide extensive background information about them, including details about their family histories, dispositions, and physical appearances. Because the novels meditate on the relationship between a woman's behavior and her moral character, such details are crucial for readers to justify going along with protagonists whose actions don't

always appear to indicate proper morality and who frequently make mistakes that are misinterpreted by other characters. For example, knowing that Evelina comes from a sheltered life in the country and is just now "entering the world" makes her social blunders comic instead of scandalous, contemptuous, or immoral, as when she laughs unwittingly at Mr. Lovel's affected manners. In *Evelina*, Burney makes sure that readers share privileged knowledge about Evelina's history and upbringing, even though her guardian, Mr. Villars, keeps it from almost every character in the novel. Openly acknowledging Evelina's innocence and good intentions, the novel assures readers that sympathy with its heroine is a morally appropriate and socially sanctioned response. *Cecilia* and *Camilla* work similarly to keep readers in the loop of privileged information.

As sympathy gained political valence in the 1780s and 1790s, directing readers' sympathies into socially acceptable routes became increasingly important for conservative novelists like Burney. As I explained in Chapter One, in response to the French Revolution, both conservative critics and radical reformers, including Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft, employed sympathy to demonstrate the veracity of their claims and to spread their ideas. Both a feminine ideal connected to 18th-century notions about sensibility and a liability because of its instinctive and unstable nature, sympathy played an especially powerful role in novels of the revolutionary period. Jacobin and anti-Jacobin novelists alike deployed sympathy as a coercive medium for uniting female readers around their respective beliefs about women's rights and duties. As the liberal promise of the French Revolution spiraled into the chaos and atrocities of the Terror, however,

sympathy became an increasingly suspect literary strategy, especially when writers characterized it as uncontrollable by reason and used it for overtly political purposes.[8]

Arising amidst the burgeoning political debates incited by the American and French Revolutions, including debates about social equality and women's rights, conventional novels of manners deploy a much more controlled version of sympathy to align readers with their domestic agendas. With their separate modes of narration, Burney's first three novels, which span this politically volatile period, experiment with ways of monitoring the direction and degree of readers' sympathies. In the epistolary discourse of *Evelina*, the heroine speaks intimately in the first person to an addressee-reader. This strategy gives novel readers the illusion of direct access to the virtuous heroine's private sentiments but risks exposing readers to any inappropriate ideas that might be lurking there. In *Cecilia*, Burney attempts a different way of sympathetically aligning reader and heroine. In this novel, a third-person omniscient narrator occasionally enters the heroine's perspective through free indirect discourse, a strategy that allows readers insight into the heroine's psyche but with the guidance of an impartial, authoritative narrator who can mediate any moral indiscretions. *Camilla* extends this technique for directing socially acceptable sympathies by using free indirect discourse to enter other characters' perspectives as well as the heroine's. While *Camilla* primarily facilitates readers' sympathy with its protagonist, it also justifies her acquaintances' misinterpretations by illuminating the logical conclusions to which her behavior leads. Remaining focused on the heroine, *Camilla*'s diversion into

other characters' misconceptions guides readers' resolve to avoid habits that incite such assumptions.[9]

Burney's experimentation with different narrative styles in her novels of manners bears out Nicola Watson's observation that late 18th- and early 19th-century novels increasingly employ third-person, rather than first-person, narrators to regulate readers' sympathies. In Watson's analysis, evaluative third-person narrators, who impose distance between readers and sentimental heroines, control the potentially dangerous, indiscriminate nature of sympathy by "enforc[ing] public circulation" and social "consensus, as opposed to the private circulation of the solipsistic language of feeling" (70). Like the "impartial spectator" in Smith's theory of sympathy, which I discussed in Chapter One, third-person narrators, as authoritative evaluators and interpreters of characters' inner lives, prevent readers from sharing the wrong sentiments with the wrong people by regulating the direction of their sympathies.[10] Through such narrative strategies for guiding reader response, many novels of manners published around the turn of the 19th century take an increasingly conservative tack with respect to the ethics and aesthetics of sympathy, representing and activating sympathy in the service of social, familial, and national harmony. Exemplified by the works of Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen as well as those of Burney, such novels shore up domestic values through a Smithian version of sympathy.

At first glance, *The Wanderer* appears to continue both the trend Watson observes and Burney's previous experimentation with directing readers' sympathies into socially and morally acceptable routes. Its third-person narrator's

extreme reticence imposes the most authoritative distance between heroine and reader of any of Burney's narrators. However, *The Wanderer*'s narrator is so reticent that she impedes the novel of manners' paradigm for sympathetic reading: she blocks readers from the intimate details about the heroine that, in *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla*, justify their sympathy with protagonists. While a narrator withholding information is nothing unusual in general (it does, after all, build suspense), it is unusual in Burney's oeuvre. Unlike the earlier narrators' transparency with respect to their heroines, *The Wanderer*'s narrator both withholds information about the heroine and calls attention to the fact that she is doing so. For example, when Miss Bydel mistakenly hears the initials "L.S." as "Ellis" and believes that the Wanderer's name is "Miss Ellis," the narrator takes up this moniker for her own use, telling readers that the "appellation" "Ellis, therefore,…now, will be substituted for that of the Incognita" (*Wanderer* 91). When Gabriella inadvertently reveals that "Miss Ellis" is actually "Juliet," the narrator again updates her narrative lexicon with the new name, "for the borrowed name of Ellis will now be dropt" (389). "Borrowed" but not unknown, Juliet's names in these two instances foreground the narrator's deliberate withholding of privileged information as she uses only the "appellation" currently available to characters when she refers to her mysterious protagonist. Expecting to encounter "female difficulties" from Juliet's perspective, readers participate instead in other characters' "difficulties" determining who she is and what her unusual manners mean.

Although *The Wanderer* features a sentimental heroine similar to those of Burney's previous novels, and although it makes social manners a dominant theme of its discourse, its divergent narrative strategies suggest that it is not meant to be read like them.[11] Working within the thematic and structural framework of the traditional novel of manners, *The Wanderer* disrupts readers' expectations about the experience of novel-reading: it activates readers' sympathies not only with the heroine and her good manners but also with characters whose manners turn out to be bad ones. While good manners involve consistently "pleasing" others (Spacks, *Novel Beginnings* 161), *The Wanderer* is unapologetically not pleasing, generating in readers a disconcerting combination of compassion, curiosity, and frustration in place of unmixed satisfaction in the heroine's eventual marriage. Diverging sharply from the paradigmatic mode of Smithian sympathy for the novel's heroine, these complex responses suggest that sympathy in *The Wanderer* operates in a more volatile way, destabilizing both minor characters' relation to the Wanderer and readers' relation to the novel.

A "contagion of curiosity": Sympathy in *The Wanderer*

In some ways, *The Wanderer* shares its predecessors' idealism about Smithian sympathy, rehearsing ideas about sympathy as a process that generates mutual benevolence. Recalling relationships of sensibility from 18th-century novels, the sentimental bond between Juliet and Lady Aurora Granville exemplifies this innate capacity for sympathetic good-will. When they meet for

the first time, before Juliet's history and identity are known, these women of feeling share a sympathetic connection defined by their physiological susceptibility to feeling and the physical manifestation of its effects. When Aurora's chaperone, Mrs. Howel, summons her young charge to return home, Aurora begs her to "conceive a little fellow feeling, how difficult it is to tear oneself away from Miss Ellis" (101). This heartfelt speech prompts "Miss Ellis" to cry

> "What honour Your Ladyship does me!"…her eyes glistening: "and Oh!—how happy you have made me!" –
>
> "How kind you are to say so!" returned Lady Aurora, taking her hand.
>
> She felt a tear drop upon her own from the bent-down eyes of Ellis.
>
> Startled and astonished, she hoped that Miss Ellis was not again indisposed?
>
> Smilingly, yet in a voice that denoted extreme agitation, "Lady Aurora alone," she answered, "can be surprised that so much goodness—so unlooked for—so unexpected—should be touching!"

In this quintessentially sentimental moment, physiological markers of Juliet's feeling physically touch Aurora, and a reciprocated feeling of "goodness" and admiration passes "unexpected[ly]" between them. Affected by Aurora's

unfailing attendance amidst others' unkind treatment, Juliet's gratitude speaks itself in her "glistening" eyes.

In scenes like this one, Juliet and Aurora look like models of sympathy that the novel encourages readers to replicate. *The Wanderer*'s third-person narrator seems to approve Juliet and Aurora's sympathetic exchange, which brings them together in partial relief of Juliet's "difficulties." However, sympathetic exchanges in other parts of the novel also communicate feelings of self-interest and greed that bring characters together through shared meanness and exclusion instead of through mutual good-will. In *The Wanderer*, the circulation of feelings occurs not in the Smithian language of a rational, impartial spectator but rather in a Humean language of physiological contagion. As I explained in Chapter One, while Smith theorizes sympathy as inherently moral, Hume describes it as a medium for communicating either good or bad sentiments: an "insinuating" force spreading emotions and ideas regardless of their moral content or the participants' consent. For Hume, sympathy is "of so powerful and insinuating a nature that it enters into most of our sentiments and passions, and often takes place under the appearance of its contrary" (378). By linking sympathy's unstable, "insinuating" potential to the atrocities of the Terror in France, *The Wanderer* (re)presents the gendered, class-based hierarchies of power upheld by traditional novels of manners and their Smithian strategies of sympathy as political problems as threatening as the French Revolution. In this novel of bad manners, sympathy is neither a force of "impartiality" nor an assurance of moral "consensus." Rather, volatile, shifting sympathies expose the cultural norms,

partialities, and prejudices that trap the heroine in a marriage plot that turns out to be her most lasting "difficulty."

The opening scene establishes the novel's conceptual approach to sympathy when would-be hero Albert Harleigh draws on the language of sympathy as "contagion" to describe the political climate in France. Reflecting both political usages of sympathy during the revolutionary period and Hume's conception of sympathy as unstable and "insinuating," Harleigh conflates bodily disease and infectious ideology as he asks Juliet (still unnamed and in disguise) if she has "escaped the general contagion" in Robespierre's France (*Wanderer* 16). A polite civility on the one hand and a pointed inquiry on the other, Harleigh's question allows him (and readers) to discern that Juliet does not pose a political threat: she replies "cheerfully" that she "ha[s] escaped every evil!" (16). Harleigh's language, combined with the scene's setting "during the dire reign of the terrific Robespierre," suggests, first, that "the general contagion" is one of revolutionary ideas and, second, that its sympathetic circulation threatens to infect English visitors. Harleigh reaffirms this conceptual link between revolution, sympathy, and dangerous sentiments when he argues, in the same scene, that Elinor's new interest in revolutionary ideas took root when she "quaffed, of the revolutionary beverage…in defiance of its noxious qualities" (18). Actively drinking "in defiance" of English principles, Elinor becomes "inebriated" with revolutionary ideas that develop internally and prove difficult to reverse (18): ultimately, Elinor's dangerous sympathies lead to her obsessive romantic pursuit

of Harleigh, to her ostracism from the community, and to her multiple attempts at suicide.[12]

If Juliet and Aurora seem to exemplify sympathy in Adam Smith's sense, as sympathetic benevolence derived from sensibility, then Elinor appears to demonstrate the effects of sympathy in Hume's sense, as unpredictable and potentially adverse. While theorists even earlier than Hume worried about sympathy's potential to communicate negative affects, the French Revolution and its aftermath made these anxieties more urgent. Repeatedly identified with Jacobin ideas and melodramatic techniques for moving readers to sympathy, Elinor recalls revolution-era fears about the kinds of feelings novels could generate if readers' sympathies were not kept in check, as novels of manners and their "impartial" narrators sought to do.[13] In contrast to Juliet and Aurora's innate capacity for fellow-feeling and kindness, Elinor's sympathy threatens to spread sentiments "noxious" to social conventions and national traditions.

Juliet and Aurora's sentimental moment, combined with Elinor's Wollstonecraftian performance, have suggested to some critics that *The Wanderer*'s themes and strategies are "belated" or outdated for 1814. I want to propose, however, that by foregrounding women of feeling and Jacobin characters, Burney is not merely rehearsing ideas that "no one cared about" anymore (Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 167). From well-known associations of the French Revolution and physiological sympathy, Burney draws out anxieties about sympathy's unpredictability that 19th-century English readers would also encounter in contemporary social and gender relations. As Maunu observes, "the

novel is not so much about the Revolution and the Terror as it is about some of Burney's own concerns regarding gender and the nation. 'Female difficulties,' the subtitle of the novel, is where Burney's interests really lie" (193).[14] Besides Elinor's revolutionary fervor, *The Wanderer* uses the Humean language of sympathetic contagion to describe the English community that Juliet enters, suggesting that anxiety about the "insinuating" spread of non-benevolent sentiments runs deeper than concern about French revolutionary ideas. In this novel, contagions of curiosity, suspicion, and greed bear out sympathy's negative potential at least as much as French revolutionary passion. In fact, the novel presents these spreading, unstable sentiments as sources of some of Juliet's most tangible "female difficulties," linking domestic concerns about marriage and gender relations to national politics through its conceptual approach to sympathy.

In the surprisingly antipathetic England that Juliet encounters, self-interest, suspicion, and greed spread from person to person in the same language of sympathetic contagion as Elinor's "quaffed" revolutionary fervor. A "contagion of curiosity" breaks out soon after Juliet enters the boat in the opening scene and plagues her throughout the novel (*Wanderer* 25). Elinor, for whom the stranger "affords…the vivifying food of conjecture" (12-13), first displays symptoms of the curiosity infection, but none of her playful guesses about Juliet's identity suggest a necessary correspondence with French revolutionary ideas or emotions. Juliet may have come from France and may speak in French, and Elinor may have imbibed French revolutionary passions, but in the curiosity contagion, Juliet may equally be a "dulcinea," or a "tawny Hottentot," or a "fair Circassian,"

or a "nun" (12-13). What connects these half-serious hypotheses is not a fascination with or fear of revolutionary France but rather Elinor's unquenchable desire to continue guessing at the Wanderer's identity – to use the suffering heroine as a source of personal amusement rather than attend to her as a person in need.[15]

Knowing who Juliet is will determine whether Elinor and the other passengers treat her with compassion or suspicion – a quite serious concern, given their precarious situation in Robespierre's France. However, the many possibilities for Juliet's identity evoke a play between compassion and suspicion and between pleasure and frustration that proves far more compelling than the security of knowing her background and circumstances. Not yet fed up with the Wanderer's deferrals, Elinor admits that she is "glad…that 'tis dark, for discovery is almost always disappointment" (13). Unsure of how to respond to the mysterious heroine, Elinor and the other English passengers bond not through mutual compassion but rather through collective uncertainty about how to treat Juliet – and the uncomfortable yet thrilling tensions their shifting sympathies produce. As we will see, Elinor and the English passengers continue to make assumptions about Juliet's character and history in order to differentiate her from themselves by class allegiance, family ties, and national origin. But their fluctuating responses to suspense (both enjoyment and impatience), as well as their fluctuating sympathies for an unidentifiable woman (both compassion and frustration, both pity and suspicion), suggest that not knowing Juliet's identity is far more compelling than knowing it, even if it produces intense discomfort.

From Elinor, the "contagion of curiosity" spreads to the other passengers, erupting in small but powerful bursts throughout the scenes in the boat and at Dover. Soon after Harleigh questions Juliet about her avoidance of the "general contagion" in France, Riley expresses a sudden frustration that he "cannot for my life make out who she is, nor what she wants. Why won't you tell us, demoiselle? I should like to know your history" (16). Riley's curiosity catches even in Mrs. Maple, who "contemptuously" admits that

> "I have really some curiosity myself, to be informed what could put into such a body's mind as that, to want to come over to England."
>
> "The desire of learning the language, I hope!" cried Harleigh, "for I should be sorry that she knew it already!"
>
> "I wish, at least, she would tell us," said the young lady [Elinor], "how she happened to find out our vessel just at the moment we were sailing."
>
> "And I should be glad to discover," cried Riley, "why she understands English on and off at her pleasure, now so ready, and now answering one never a word." (16)

Increasingly compelled to speculate about the stranger, the passengers feed off each other's persistent desire for details, demanding more and more information. Subsequent outbreaks of curiosity are most clearly marked in the text by the frequency of the words "name" and "names," as characters fixate on their desire to know what Juliet is called and who her alleged English friends are.

Immediately following the exchange above, and again at Dover, Burney marks the eruption of curiosity contagion with the visual effect of words on the page. "'And pray, good woman,' demand[s] Mrs. Maple," when Juliet admits to knowing English already,

> "how came you to learn English? Have you lived in an English family? If you have, I should be glad to know their names."
>
> "Ay, their names! their names!" was echoed from Mrs. Maple by her niece. (17)

Spreading as an "echo" from Mrs. Maple to Elinor, the demand to know "names" registers the potent infectiousness of the passengers' curiosity. In a similar outbreak at Dover, the word "name" repeats at least seven times within one page (not to mention variations of "name," such as "appellation"). The brevity of the sentences in which the word "name" appears underscores the force of its noxious power:

> "Well, that's settled," said Elinor; "but now the landlord wants your name, for taking your place."…
>
> "…What name am I to tell him?"…
>
> "…if you do not give me your name…"…
>
> "Well, but what is your name?"…
>
> … "I cannot tell my name."
>
> …"…a Wanderer,—without even a name!"… (32-33)

Spreading through the dialogue like curiosity spreads through the group, the word "name" emphasizes both the increasing intensity of the passengers' inquiries and

the force of the pressure this mounts on Juliet, whose safety depends on remaining obscure.

When she seeks refuge in the English boat, Juliet seeks sympathy that produces charitable bonds: sympathy of the sort she eventually finds with Aurora and of the sort readers expect to find when they open a novel of manners. However, what Juliet finds in the English passengers' sympathetic curiosity does not consistently "unite" her to her country-people, or ensure that fellow creatures cannot be "indifferent spectators" to her suffering, as Burke had theorized sympathy (*Enquiry* 42, 41). Nor does Juliet find that "dignified," reflecting crowd seeking or upholding justice through "universal sympathy," as Wollstonecraft had idealized it (*Historical and Moral View* 88). Fundamentally unstable, sympathy in *The Wanderer* both "unite[s]" and divides, depending on one's point of view and the affective responses most prominent in any given moment of sympathy. For minor characters, shared suspicions unite the community against potentially dangerous (however fascinating) outsiders, such as Juliet, even while their shared pity sometimes results in acts of good will, such as Elinor's invitation of the Wanderer into her aunt's home (and her aunt's agreement to have Juliet as a guest). Such sympathetic exclusion preserves English norms and traditions – traditions that Juliet's English acquaintances cannot be sure she shares until they know more about her. In some instances, even sympathetic contagions of suspicion and hostility are thus preservative, as they shore up a social and political hierarchy in which the English upper and upper-middle class remains on top and

in power, while apparently foreign, lower class, and racial others remain subordinate and subservient.

In other instances and for other people, however, the same sympathies are destructive. For Juliet, the English passengers' sympathetic curiosity and suspicion belie the benevolence she seeks to forge in all of her interpersonal encounters. Throughout the novel, such sympathies thwart Juliet's attempts to support herself until she can safely announce her identity. When her harp students find out about her mysterious arrival in England, one student's contemptuous decision to quit leads other students to quit in turn. When one student decides that she needn't pay for lessons already received, almost every other student also decides not to pay. At social events, when one person snubs Juliet, all others follow suit. These sympathetic acts of exclusion incur very real distress for Juliet, as they prevent her not only from supporting herself financially but also from paying bills and debts to others and from bolstering strong business relationships. "Difficulties" in one line of work and in one group of people follow Juliet into others.

Not confined to upper and upper-middle class society, sympathetic contagion spreads among lower class English people as well. While the first half of the novel details Juliet's "difficulties" in locating benevolent friends within fashionable society, the second half finds her encountering similar "female difficulties" among poor farmers in the New Forest. Although she expects to find more compassion in the poor than in the rich, Juliet discovers instead a similar uncertainty about her actions that quickly infects everyone around her.

Attempting to travel anonymously, Juliet finds herself "advertised in a news-paper!" (*Wanderer* 663) and, like Godwin's Caleb Williams, runs disguised from shelter to shelter to avoid "detection" (665). Mistaken for others, Juliet is "pursued as a runaway, and stigmatized as a swindler" (673) and even treated like the promiscuous woman whose bonnet she borrows: "assailed with coarse compliments upon her pretty face; now by jocose propositions to join company; and now by free solicitations for a salute" (669). In the New Forest, as in Brighthelmstone, prejudices and misconstructions also spread like "contagion," demonstrating that sympathy does not generate only the benevolence that Juliet seeks. Rather, sympathies constantly shifting between compassion and suspicion compromise Juliet's financial and personal well-being and pigeonhole her into one of the few roles for women defined by the rigid social codes prescribed by novels of manners. In the world of the novel, if Juliet does not act like a conventional, marriageable woman, then she must be a seductress or a prostitute. Navigating between one's compelling uncertainties about which she is constitutes half the fun of interacting with or reading about her.

A final example of unstable sympathies demonstrates the dangerous course the "contagion of curiosity" takes when Juliet fails to satisfy social expectations for female behavior. Although the "contagion" begins with a relatively innocuous interest in discovering Juliet's identity, it gathers force during the heroine's ongoing persecution, ultimately inspiring Sir Lyell Sycamore's attempt to abduct and rape her. When Juliet engages Sir Jaspar Herrington to help her keep the rakish Sir Lyell from Flora Pierson, Sir Jaspar's

lack of information and ensuing curiosity about Juliet's predicament lead him to assume the worst about her character. Juliet asks Sir Jaspar to "receive a visitor" so that she doesn't have to see him herself, and the elderly, doting Sir Jaspar agrees, "his eyes…bright with intelligence" (*Wanderer* 441). When he discovers that his fair acquaintance has asked him to attend Sir Lyell, however, Sir Jaspar's expression undergoes a speedy revolution:

> Disappointment and chagrin soon took place of sportive playfulness in his countenance; and, muttering between his teeth, 'O ho! Sir Lyell Sycamore!' – he fixed his keen eyes sharply upon Juliet; with a look in which she could not but read the ill construction to which her seeming knowledge of that man's motions, and her apparent interest in them, made her liable; and how much his light opinion of Sir Lyell's character, affected his partial, though still fluctuating one of her own. (441)

Here, the narrator takes up the Wanderer's point of view, conveying her "reading" of Sir Jaspar's misreading of the situation. Since Sir Jaspar lacks information to the contrary (or, indeed, any information at all about the Wanderer), he immediately assumes an illicit relationship.

The conjectures that curiosity breeds become dangerous when Sir Jaspar's misconstruction of Juliet inadvertently feeds Sir Lyell's curiosity and his appetite for mischief, initiating the threat of an actual illicit relationship. After Juliet leaves the two baronets together, their respective speculations perpetuate their false surmises about the heroine. Sir Jaspar refers Sir Lyell to what he (incorrectly) sees

as “the interest [Juliet] takes in you,” which Sir Lyell receives with great surprise and “transport” (443), thinking that Juliet has expressed romantic feelings for him. Upon discovering from Sir Lyell’s reaction that he has fed the young man false information (“put…good notions into [Sir Lyell’s] head”), Sir Jaspar finds “new doubts now destroying his recent suspicions” (443). But even this mistake fails to check his insatiable curiosity about the Wanderer’s identity. Sir Jaspar next asks Sir Lyell “whether Sir Lyell could tell in what name [Juliet] had been upon the stage; and why she had quitted it” (444) – another erroneous speculation that Sir Lyell interprets as new, factual knowledge.

Although Sir Jaspar again sees his error and “[seeks] to draw back his information” (445), he cannot reverse his provocation of Sir Lyell’s lust for sexual conquest. Upon “discovering” that she really was “upon the stage,” Sir Lyell “[swears] that he would not so lightly be put aside from a view of success, now once it was fairly opened; and…[vows] that he should begin a siege in form, and persevere to surrender” (445). The curiosity contagion gathers strength, raging between two characters and breeding false speculations about Juliet’s status as a professional performer. This untrue conclusion about her public persona compromises her social and moral standing and leads Sir Lyell to believe that she is susceptible to seduction. Soon after, he tries to use this to his advantage when he attempts to abduct her in a post-chaise (458), like Lovelace in Richardson’s *Clarissa* and like Sir Clement Willoughby in Burney’s *Evelina*.

As Spacks explains, such scenes of abduction in novels of manners point to the double standard of society’s social codes: since the upper class’s “code of

manners" are "concerned with 'pleasing' only those securely located at their own social level," it "allows predatory behavior to unprotected females" (*Novel Beginnings* 164). Implicitly linked to the injustices of conventional rules of conduct, Juliet's "female difficulties" are not alleviated by conforming to social rules, as Evelina, Cecilia, and Camilla learn to do. Rather, Juliet's "difficulties" are perpetuated by them, as the gendered, class-based code of manners authorizes the harmful, antagonistic treatment she receives from Sir Lyell, as well as from her harp students and the socialites of Brighthelmstone. Since, as Spacks notes, the social code ensures polite relations between upper class people only, it puts women who appear lower class in serious danger, as it seems to justify Sir Lyell's "predatory," antipathetic behavior towards social inferiors.

Juliet's entrapment within a system of manners that she has no choice but to follow reflects the plight of other heroines in other novels of manners. In *The Wanderer*, however, the heroine's "difficulties" are exacerbated by the mode of (moral) communication that usually points to a way of overcoming them. In *The Wanderer*, sympathy spreads both negative and positive sentiments. Juliet and Aurora's sentimental relationship evokes the compassion and affection that typically overcome "difficulties" encountered in public life and make marriage a desirable reward for the heroine's perseverance in traditional novels of manners. However, sympathy in this novel also circulates suspicion, prejudice, and contempt – qualities at odds with domestic felicity. As the narrator observes, anytime Juliet seems to "kindle" "warm compassion" in others, "the emotion, though good, took a direction that made it useless; it merely played about in

exclamations of pity; then blazed into curiosity, vented itself in questions,—and evaporated" (*Wanderer* 405). Before it "evaporate[s]," however, sympathetic curiosity poses very real dangers to Juliet as it escalates into a full-blown epidemic of self-interest and disregard of others. (Re)presenting sympathy as "insinuating" and unstable, *The Wanderer* unsettles the assumptions about sympathy's essentially positive, "impartial" character encoded in British social and political thought and in turn-of-the-century literary conventions.

Catching the "contagion": Reading *The Wanderer* Sympathetically

What makes *The Wanderer* particularly "difficult" to read, however, is that its representation of unstable sympathies does not stop with curious characters but infects the experience of reading as well. While *The Wanderer* shares with Burney's other novels of manners their condemnation of meanness and vulgarity, unlike the others, it does not position readers on the moral side of the divide, with the protagonist and her exemplary behavior. Instead, *The Wanderer* aligns readers with other characters' uncertain, fluctuating responses by equally barring them from the personal information that would explain her unusual and suspicious actions. Through this innovative narrative strategy, *The Wanderer* formalizes its representation of sympathy as an unpredictable "contagion of curiosity," surprising and discomfiting readers expecting to sympathize solely with the heroine.

Many 19th-century readers, including John Wilson Croker and William Hazlitt, express sympathy not with the novel's heroine but with its "dramatis personae," who become as impatient with the "interminable plot" as readers do (Croker 127). Like Croker, these characters

> are kept in distorted attitudes, improbable situations and monstrous inconvenience…till it pleases Madame D'Arblay, at the end of the fifth volume, to find out the Wanderer to be a lord's daughter, which seasonable discovery relieves the whole assembly from the troublesome intricacies in which they had been so long, without any visible cause, involved and perplexed, like the persons of the fairy tale. (127)

Literary critics often cite both Croker's and Hazlitt's reviews as examples of readers' dislike of Burney's apparent French sympathies in *The Wanderer*,[16] but they pay less attention to their objections to the novel's structural and narrative strategies. Like Croker, Hazlitt finds fault with the novel's delay tactics and lack of explanations, declaring that Burney makes it the project of the novel "to postpone [all answers] to the end of five volumes, without the smallest reason for…doing so, and with every reason to the contrary. The reader is led every moment to expect a denouement, and is constantly disappointed on some trifling pretext. The whole artifice of her fable consists in coming to no conclusion" (337). For Hazlitt, the novel's unnecessary length –arduous reading because of the narrator's extreme reticence – is "disappointing," uninteresting, and deeply frustrating. Put in the same difficult position as characters "groping in the dark"

for information about Juliet, many readers catch characters' "contagious" curiosity, along with their subsequent frustration, antipathy, and unquenchable desire to know her story. As I documented in the introduction of this chapter, several modern critics, including Julia Epstein, Margaret Anne Doody, and Suzie Asha Park, suggest that the novel continues to infect 21st-century readers with characters' unstable responses to its unusual heroine and her mysterious behavior.

The narrator's slow revelation of Juliet's physical appearance and personal accomplishments demonstrates the affinity between readers' experience of the heroine and that of her fictional acquaintances within the novel. The opening scene introduces Juliet as a sentimental, sympathetic figure: she cries out pathetically in "agony" and distress, she blushes (even through the blackface of her disguise) at the other passengers' persistent questions, and she expresses her gratitude with great feeling. However, she also appears as "terrific" as the revolutionary atmosphere around her: initially only a pathetic voice, Juliet is bodiless, helpless, and utterly unknown. While Burney's earlier novels immediately acquaint readers with the persons, histories, and innocence of their heroines, in *The Wanderer* readers gain information only through the observations and speculation of other characters, as if they were just another bystander to the mystery of Juliet. Elinor's hypotheses about Juliet's identity may appear farfetched at first, but it takes the course of the novel for the narrator to disprove them. Until then, readers are left to eschew or embrace Elinor's guesses as they choose.

In the opening scene, enveloped in the literal darkness of night as well as the metaphorical darkness of mystery, minor characters and readers discover Juliet's physical appearance only near arrival in England and, even then, only in part. Soon before the vessel reaches Dover, "the stranger…tak[es] off her gloves…exhibit[ing] hands and arms of so dark a colour, that they might rather be styled black than brown" (*Wanderer* 19). Finding their suspicions confirmed in the appearance of Juliet's blackness, characters exchange "look[s] of triumph," but the slow unveiling of the Wanderer is not yet complete. Soon after, "the wind just then blowing back the prominent borders of a French night-cap, which had almost concealed all her features, displayed a large black patch, that covered half her left cheek, and a broad black ribbon, which bounded a bandage of cloth over the right side of her forehead" (20). Without any information except that revealed by the passengers, readers are left not only to draw their own conclusions but to crave more of the revelations that spark characters' "triumph" over a woman apparently inferior because of her race, class, and nationality.

By marking her heroine as different in appearance from the upper middle-class English people she encounters, Burney signals contemporary social and political anxieties about the place of poor and racial others in English society. As Chapter One explained, early 19th-century anxieties include uncertainty about the slave trade and slavery, the place of black people in England, charity to the poor, and colonial governance – all discourses in which activists appealed to readers' sympathies from both sides of the issue.[17] The English passengers' subsequent exclusion of the Wanderer on the basis of difference suggests that their

participation in others' suffering involves a perpetuation rather than an alleviation of "difficulties." Indeed, most of these characters fail to invoke in their treatment of Juliet even the most self-interested appropriations of sympathy (for example, the argument that sympathy is the duty of social and moral superiors to their helpless inferiors). Once on shore, Mrs. Maple wonders "[w]hy can't that body as well stay in the kitchen?" (*Wanderer* 24), and Mr. Ireton asks, "What, is that black insect buzzing about us still? …Why what the deuce can one make of such a grim thing?" (27). Mutually excluding Juliet on the basis of race, class, and nationality (they still think she is French), *The Wanderer*'s minor characters engage in sympathy almost entirely with each other, uniting to exclude rather than include the heroine.

While such scenes illustrate minor characters as especially insensitive, *The Wanderer* does not interpellate readers as moral opposites of these bad examples – as sympathizing accepters of the heroine in her difference. Even after Juliet's disguise disintegrates and she emerges as a beautiful, accomplished Englishwoman, the narrator's extreme reticence continues to align readers, in part, with antagonists in their lack of information and misinterpretation. This occurs even though readers sometimes occupy Juliet's point of view, as in the encounter with Sirs Jaspar and Lyell and in the concert scene, in which Juliet thinks she is being followed by a Frenchman who turns out to be Elinor in disguise. In such moments of free indirect discourse, readers share Juliet's anxiety as she struggles to navigate a confusing social world like the heroines in conventional novels of manners.

In other moments, however, readers remain limited to minor characters' impressions of Juliet, their sympathies pulled in unexpected, often undesirable directions. Although Burney's previous novels have prepared readers to identify almost entirely with the heroine of a novel of manners, *The Wanderer* shifts readers' sympathies in multiple, conflicting directions, making sympathy itself a "difficult" experience. As the mystery of the Wanderer's identity continues to unfold throughout the novel, and as characters' treatment of Juliet continues to change based on what they know or think they know about her, many readers echo characters' speculations, distrust, and frustration, as Croker and Hazlitt do.[18] Despite characters' assumptions and surmises, neither they nor we "[can] gain further intelligence" about Juliet, who "continue[s] to resist…enquiry, elud[e] insinuation, and baffl[e] conjecture" (*Wanderer* 41).

The Wanderer's reticent narrator reinforces this experience of uncertainty by continually shifting between different characters' perspectives rather than simply divulging information, a delay tactic that heightens both curiosity and frustration.[19] We see Juliet's physical "metamorphosis" from poor black woman to accomplished English woman, for example, through the eyes of Mrs. Ireton, who has taken the Wanderer into domestic service:

> It was some days before Mrs. Ireton thought that she might venture to travel, without appearing too robust. And, in this period, one only circumstance called forth, with any acrimony, the ill humour of her disposition. This was a manifest alteration in the complexion of her attendant, which, from a regular and equally dark hue,

> appeared, on the second morning, to be smeared and streaked; and, on the third, to be of a dusky white. This failed not to produce sundry inquisitive comments; but they never succeeded in obtaining any explanatory replies. When, however, on the fourth day, the shutters of the chamber, which, to give it a more sickly character, had hitherto been closed, were suffered to admit the sunbeams of a cheerful winter's morning, Mrs. Ireton was directed, by their rays, to a full and marvelous view, of a skin changed from a tint nearly black, to the brightest, whitest, and most dazzling fairness. The band upon the forehead, and the patch upon the cheek, were all that remained of the original appearance. (42-43)

Since Juliet remains inexplicably silent during this scene, and since the narrator does not enter her consciousness at this time, we experience the unveiling through Mrs. Ireton's "mockery and anger" (43), seeing Juliet almost exclusively as Mrs. Ireton misrepresents her. Irked by Juliet's persistent silence, Mrs. Ireton encounters her magnificent transformation with "mockery and derision," suggesting that she is a dangerous "adventurer" whose ability to metamorphose constitutes "the secret of [her] trade" (46). The narrator pokes fun at Mrs. Ireton's exaggerated conclusions, but without any more information about Juliet, readers cannot come to any other definitive conclusions. Is Juliet a trustworthy gentlewoman or a conniving thief? Is she an accomplished private lady or a promiscuous public performer? Do her quick tears and profuse blushes attest to her gentility, or does she act good breeding as well as she acts the ethnic other?

Straddling uncertainly the divide between these binary positions – between gentlewoman and thief, private lady and public performer, genteel and lower class – Juliet's ambiguous social standing raises uncomfortable questions for characters and for readers about the binaries upon which their social codes are built. Indeed, the tenuous, blurred categories suggest their own inadequacy, as Juliet is both private and public, both genteel and performing. At the mercy of the novel's extreme narratorial reticence and without the guidance of an impartial spectator or access to the heroine's insights, readers must guess uncomfortably alongside characters, participating both in Juliet's "difficulties" as she is (mis)judged and in characters' "difficulties" making those (mis)judgments. While Mrs. Ireton's exaggerations suggest that her conclusions are incorrect, readers' only other recourse is to remain unsure what to think about a heroine and a novel so resistant to cultural and literary norms.

Nineteenth-century reviews of *The Wanderer* suggest that the mystery of Juliet's identity and the suspenseful, "vivifying food of conjecture" it offers is both compelling and maddening. Juliet's silence keeps characters flocking to her for more information, just as the narrator's reticence keeps readers turning the pages to find out the heroine's secret. But their continual deferrals and delays of discovery also aggravate and irritate, involving characters and readers in unstable, shifting emotions. For reviewers such as "H.", the narrator's reticence is fundamental to the novel's compelling suspense. "H." suggests that "the only interest which the story is calculated to excite, depends on our ignorance of the motives by which [Juliet] was obliged to conceal her name and her family." "H."

is one of the only reviewers who refrains from spoiling the ending with detailed plot summaries that reveal too much information, lest they "destroy the pleasure of our readers" (235). This excitedly curious response mirrors characters' attraction to Juliet as an object of mystery, as well as their unquenchable, self-interested desire to discover more about her. In the novel, Elinor suggests that "it is Juliet's secrecy, her aura of unattainability, her masterly suspense-heightening game-playing, and her refusal to speak openly" that make her irresistible to Harleigh (*Wanderer* qtd in Austin 259).

As Croker's and Hazlitt's responses indicate, however, "suspense-heightening" reticence is also extremely frustrating for readers, whose responses often mirror those of Juliet's fictional acquaintances. Strikingly, both critics' irritation with *The Wanderer*'s long-deferred "discovery," "troublesome intricacies," and "postpone[ment]" echo characters' complaints later in the novel about Juliet's "endless delays" and "eternal procrastinations" (*Wanderer* 588). Speaking for everyone, Elinor tells Juliet that "[w]e are all round sick of this loathsome procrastination" (585). Even Harleigh, who seems capable of the disinterested sympathetic benevolence that Juliet desires, begs her to end "the tortures of the most deadly suspense" (577): "O put a period to this unequalled, unexampled mystery!" (578), he pleads, "[o]pen to me your situation" (579). Both frustrated and fascinated, Croker and Hazlitt share characters' growing dislike of the heroine – a most unusual result for a novel of manners. The heroine enters the novel as "a voice of keen distress…imploring…pity and admission" (11), but Croker describes her as "this nuisance, this cause of perpetual disagreement and

perplexity" (127). Echoing Elinor's assertions that Juliet is a "chimera," "a compound of cold caution, and selfish prudence," and an exemplar of "double dealing, false appearances, and lurking disguise! Without a family…without a story…without a name!" (*Wanderer* 18, 181), Croker condemns her for being "without any tie of relationship, without any feeling of charity, without an [sic] personal liking, nay with a personal dislike" (127). Yet like Elinor, Croker, Hazlitt, and "H." evince a strange attraction to Juliet and the novel, in spite of the frustration and antipathy they induce. Sometimes pitying her plight, sometimes fascinated by her mystery, and sometimes aggravated by her (and the novel's) persistent silence and incessant delays, readers and characters unite sympathetically in their shifting responses to the heroine, the instability of which prevents them from fully including her within their normative English communities.

Readers from Croker and Hazlitt to Claudia Johnson have suggested that *The Wanderer*'s inability to evoke readers' consistently positive sympathy for its heroine points to bad writing or "bewildering failure" in spite of "gigantic ambition" (Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 165). However, *The Wanderer* is a "failure" only if one assumes that it aims to make readers feel only with the heroine and experience "difficulties" only from her perspective. The novel's thematic and formal deployment of sympathy as "contagion" interrupts this conventional, heroine-centric operation of sympathy, also enlisting readers' sympathies on behalf of characters with bad manners. Self-consciously "loathsome" in this regard, *The Wanderer* makes the process of reading itself

"difficult" in order to confront readers with the instability of self-other relationships and to dispel the illusion that sympathy consistently produces unity and peace. *The Wanderer* suggests that by maintaining an illusory binary between good and bad, pure and impure, traditional novels of manners uphold a social code that endangers women by forcing them to occupy inflexible domestic roles that do not adequately reflect or respect the many different roles and relationships of early 19th-century women – a variety demonstrated both by Juliet's work experience in the novel and the shifting sympathies I have been describing.

Like Burney's earlier novels of manners, *The Wanderer* concludes by rewarding "good" characters and punishing "bad" ones. However, this unconventional novel of manners presents the rewards as absurd and the punishments as undue, suggesting that such ends do not dissolve the heroine's "female difficulties." Rather, they ensure that "difficulties" remain by trapping her within one of the social and literary conventions that the novel's shifting sympathies have continually resisted: resolution in marriage. Although *The Wanderer* rewards the persevering heroine with the traditional happy ending, when we view Juliet's marriage in light of the "contagion of curiosity" in which we have participated, such a conclusion begins to feel less satisfying and, indeed, less possible. The "difficult" sympathies with which we contend for the bulk of the novel prepare us to question the domestic sympathies purported by the apparently conventional conclusion, including Juliet's union with Harleigh and the value placed on such conclusions by contemporary standards of Englishness. By making sympathetic reading "difficult," *The Wanderer* (re)presents for readers

an early 19th-century world in which social and political life are complicated and imperfect, in which encountering others is both uncomfortable and reassuring, both disconcerting and unifying, and in which not even heroines live happily-ever-after.

(Un)resolving "Difficulties"

Although sympathy in marriage purportedly alleviates all "female difficulties" by the novel's end, the rapidity of its arrival casts a dark shadow of skepticism on its resolution of the deep-seated problems the novel has been tracing. In a sudden shift from its sustained portrayal of shifting sympathies in England, *The Wanderer* concludes by attributing the end of Juliet's "difficulties" to the death of her corrupt French husband and the safety of her friend the Bishop. In the convoluted logic of this ending, Juliet can marry Harleigh and live happily ever after now that her first husband is dead. Now indulging in verbose explanations, the narrator thus settles all the good characters happily into marriage and "exclude[s]" all the bad characters "from the happy [Harleigh] Hall" (*Wanderer* 872). However, both the abrupt shift in narrative style from extreme reticence to conventional transparency and the content of the narrative revelation suggest that this is only a performance of conclusion designed to mask lingering domestic "difficulties." Who, after all, are all those consistently good, sympathetic characters – those exemplars of moral content combined with respectable manners?

As a reward for her suffering, Juliet gets Harleigh as a husband, even though he has pursued her with more unabated, unapologetic, and explicitly unasked-for curiosity than any other character. Begging her repeatedly to tell him who she is, Harleigh has ignored Juliet's polite requests that he leave her alone and attracted harmful suspicions about their relationship. Harleigh appears to demonstrate the sensibility that might lead to benevolence, and not only because of his name.[20] He has blushed, cried, and vibrated with feeling at least as much as Juliet and Aurora. However, Harleigh is also driven by the contagious curiosity that infects other characters and readers. As Park observes, Harleigh "represents the Romantic audience par excellence. Throughout the novel, he evinces an overwhelming desire to know or, rather, to confirm what he already knows [or thinks he knows]…about the wanderer" (141). Harleigh's ulterior motives for treating Juliet with kindness – desire for a wife, desire for discovery, pleasure in the chase – illuminate the illusoriness of the disinterested sympathy that Juliet seeks as well as Harleigh's inability to value a woman for her independence and autonomy. Harleigh discovers in Juliet what he has been looking for all along: a pliable object of sympathy to mold into a properly domestic wife. Like Park, Andrea Henderson associates Harleigh's pursuit of Juliet with readers' engagement with the novel. For Henderson, Harleigh "enjoys not only the ultimate pleasure of obtaining Juliet but also the suspenseful intermediate pleasures [and, I would add, the compelling frustrations] of contemplating her, idealizing her, desiring her" (117). Harleigh has perpetuated many of the

Wanderer's difficulties so far, and marrying him, Burney suggests, does not promise to end them.

Innovative mastery of ironic indirection is typically attributed to Austen. However, Burney's own experimentation with irony in conclusion is worth noting, especially as it relates to her narrative experiments in engaging readers in "difficult" sympathies. Along with the increasing distance they impose between heroine and reader, Burney's early novels of manners exhibit increasing pessimism in their otherwise conventional conclusions. Although each heroine ends in marriage to the man of her choice, a darker and darker shadow lingers over the anticipated happiness of each. While Evelina's marriage is rendered comic by a monkey's attack on the ridiculous Lovel, Cecilia's marriage depends upon her giving up her fortune along with her name. Still more ominous in its implications for the heroine's future, Camilla's marriage requires her full conformity to the strict social codes that have caused all of her painful miscommunications with the hero. In *The Wanderer*, Burney's experimentation with both narrative facilitation of readers' sympathies and manipulation of the conventional happy ending culminates in a marriage that only pretends to alleviate "female difficulties."[21]

About *The Wanderer*'s ironic conclusion, Margaret Doody observes that "Burney gives us the 'happy ending' of course, but not until after she has made sure it is just a formality and by no means a solution" ("Introduction" xxxiv). Similarly, Catherine Frank argues that the too-tidy ending contradicts the novel's ostensible resolution: "following upon [a] lengthy narrative…of discontent,

the…speedy ending contain[s] within [it] elements that challenge the promised peace" (429). Burney's hasty, absurdly set proposal scene calls attention to the marriage's implausible resolution of the heroine's problems. Set in the ridiculous location of a "bathing machine," the proposal, "however momentous, was neither long nor difficult to arrange" (*Wanderer* 864), despite the many pages it has taken to get there. In contrast to the narrator's earlier, reserved style, this scene proceeds with transparency and haste:

> Harleigh…was speedily summoned into the machine; his proposals applauded rather than approved; and, All descending to the beach, the Bishop took one hand; and the Admiral another, of the blushing Juliet, to present, with tenderest blessings, to the happy, indescribably happy Harleigh. (864-865)

The rapidity and exaggerated inclusivity of the proposal and its aftermath present any "indescribably happy" ending as absurd and improbable: sandwiched between the farcically paired French Catholic Bishop and English Admiral, Juliet "descend[s] to the beach" with an unlikely united "All." Instead of persuasively resolving the heroine's and readers' "difficulties," this conclusion of a long-drawn-out and hopelessly problematized marriage plot functions like the "machine" on which the narrator unexpectedly focuses our attention. As the conclusion to a novel of manners, the ending follows the conventional formula: heroine gets hero, good get rewarded. But the violent "contagion" of curiosity and exclusion that has preceded it belies its force as a desired, truly "happy" ending, making us question our investment in such resolutions.

The ostentatious, celebratory Englishness of Admiral Powel, Juliet's long-lost maternal uncle, further undermines the "promised peace" of this domestic conclusion. Not only does the Admiral's high praise of "our plain old English fashion" (*Wanderer* 859) fail to ring true as a summary of Juliet's painful mortification in all English social classes. He actually voices sympathy for Juliet's deceased first husband, the unworthy French officer: "though he might be but a rogue," the Admiral observes, "a husband's a husband" (856). Furthermore, the Admiral tries to unravel Juliet's engagement to Harleigh, even though it has just occurred. "If he had but had an insight into her being in such a hurry for a husband," he tells her, "he should have made free to speak a good word for a young sea-captain of his acquaintance" (865). Pointing out yet again the striking rapidity of Juliet's marriage and even attempting to rewrite it, the Admiral presents a disturbing picture of how domestic ties are formed in good "old England" (858) – that is, in the interests of one party at the expense of another. The nationalistic, patriarchal rhetoric of this scene calls attention to the source of Juliet's continuing "difficulties" in the novel: not the revolutionary corruption of France but the problematic politics of sympathy in England, the horrors of which Burney equates with the terrors of the French Revolution.

After all, "female difficulties" do not really disappear in *The Wanderer*, even when we reach the end of the novel. Instead, they haunt Juliet's future as words on the page while the narrator wraps up her story:

> Here, and thus felicitously, ended with the acknowledgement of her name, and her family, the DIFFICULTIES of the WANDERER…
>
> How mighty…are the DIFFICULTIES with which a FEMALE has to struggle! Her honor always in danger of being assailed, her delicacy of being offended, her strength of being exhausted, and her virtue of being calumniated!
>
> Yet even DIFFICULTIES such as these are not insurmountable, where mental courage, operating through patience, prudence, and principle, supply physical force, combat disappointment, and keep the untamed spirits superiour to failure, and even alive to hope. (873)

Although the narrator claims to dissolve "DIFFICULTIES" with certainty and confidence, the conspicuously capitalized word literally piles up on the final page, appearing three times in three short paragraphs. Marriage, the novel suggests, does not dissolve "female difficulties." Rather, it is an imperative but arbitrary conclusion to a story that upholds and recirculates conventions that severely limit women's independence, autonomy, and privacy.

Anything but "pleasing," *The Wanderer* suggests that "female difficulties" are not "surmountable" within the conventions of the traditional novel of manners, their narrative strategies for regulating readers' sympathy, and the social and political codes they uphold. As the novel's conclusion implies, forcing heroines (and real-life women) into marriages that elide the discomforts,

frustrations, and uncertainties of social life raises more "female difficulties" than it solves, and it misrepresents a social world in which encounters with others spread as much uneasiness and animosity as compassion and good will. If *The Wanderer* is a "revolutionary" novel, it subverts cultural norms by mobilizing a contagion of "difficult" sympathies and by demonstrating that domestic gender relations are a problem perpetuated by conventions of sympathy embedded as much in literature as in social attitudes and political policies.

In this chapter, I have argued that *The Wanderer* (re)presents sympathy as a phenomenon in which negative sentiments fluctuate with positive ones and as mode of exclusion as well as inclusion. For Burney, self-other relations involve experiences at odds with Smith's account of sympathy as consistently moral and benevolent. While readers of the novel expect to sympathize with the heroine as they do in Burney's other novels, *The Wanderer*'s unstable sympathies engage readers in literary intimacies driven by their sustained uncertainties about how they relate to fictional others – uncertainties that result in an uncomfortable mixture of compassion and impatience, fascination and frustration. I continue to explore this compelling tension in Chapter Four, where I examine Charlotte Brontë's use of penetrating sympathies in *Villette*, a novel that makes sympathy's uncomfortable collapse of boundaries between self and other, private and public, pleasure and pain, the basis of its representation of 19th-century sociality. First, however, I would like to explore in more detail the underside of sympathy that I have begun to outline above. The next chapter examines what I call revolting sympathies in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, which literalizes anxieties about

sympathy's "contagious" negative potential by portraying sympathy as a disease spreading suffering, grief, and devastation. As we will see, *The Last Man* explores the operations of sympathy in national and international politics, illuminating both sympathy's potential to exclude others and its revolting volatility.

NOTES

[1] *The Wanderer*'s revolutionary setting, which includes discourses on controversial topics such as the rights of women and the rationality of religious belief, extends the themes of 1790s political novels. Fashionable society's misinterpretation of the protagonist follows other heroines' plights in late 18th- and early 19th-century novels of manners. And the novel's basic premise (a mistreated woman fleeing from a bad man to a more chivalric one) recalls the plots of even earlier romance literature.

[2] Juliet McMaster also notes the similarity between readers' and characters' positions with respect to Juliet, observing that readers are left to "guess at [the heroine's] feeling" based on "external signs such as blushing" ("Silent Angel" 247), just as characters do. See also Katharine Rogers.

[3] Contemporary readers' disappointment with *The Wanderer* is evident in both its commercial failure and in the enmity traceable in nearly all written responses to it. In addition to Scott's and Croker's contempt, Maria Josepha, Lady Stanley, found it "absurdity in plenty" (Letter to Louisa Clinton). Even Byron, who had looked forward to it eagerly, classed it with the other "feminine trash of the last four months," including Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage* and Lady Morgan's *O'Donnel* (Letter to John Murray II, 24 July 1814). Public opinion and published reviews were so dismal that, even though 800 orders had been placed after the first edition sold out, 500 were revoked before the second edition finished printing, and they remained unsold. Burney had negotiated payment with her publishers through a sixth edition.

[4] Eugene White, for example, suggests that *The Wanderer*'s unconventional style of narration is an unintentional mistake rather than a conscious decision, arguing that "it is not to be assumed that Fanny Burney had thought seriously about the problem of point of view, or about any of the problems of technique for that matter" (qtd in Daughterty 7). In a similar vein, Lillian Bloom and Edward Bloom propose that *The Wanderer*, which they describe as "afflicted by [narrative] stasis," exemplifies a decline in Burney's literary talent after the success of *Cecilia* (234).

[5] See also Juliet McMaster, Katharine Rogers, Andrea Austin, Deidre Lynch, Deborah Kennedy, Catherine Frank, Maria Jerinic, Suzie Asha Park, and Andrea Henderson.

[6] See, for example, Jerinic and Maunu.

[7] Though not directly related to the novel's unusual mode of narration, Claudia Johnson's suggestion that *The Wanderer* is "belated" – about "controversies no one cared about" any more (*Equivocal Beings* 167) – is the most contemptuous comment I have found in relatively recent critical literature. Although Johnson has contributed greatly to Burney's improved reputation since the 1980s, her comments about *The Wanderer* reveal a degree of frustration and even dislike of the novel that is worth examining in the context of its unusual approach to sympathy.

[8] Both sympathy and novel-reading have complex, intertwined histories in British literature, culture, and politics, particularly in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods. As Chapter One explains, sympathy emerged from an 18th-century culture of sensibility that viewed human beings and especially women as susceptible to involuntary participation in the emotional experiences of others. On the relationship between sympathy and sensibility, see Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel* (1993) and G.J. Barker-Benfield, "Sensibility" in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age* (1999). For a more comprehensive analysis of women's novels during the revolutionary period (including Edmund Burke's influence on women's novels), see Claudia Johnson's book *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988).

[9] While *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla* do not explicitly invoke political events, their publication dates speak volumes about their strategies for moving readers. *Evelina* (1778) was published just

after the American Revolution but before the revolution in France. *Cecilia* (1782) arose in the years just before the French Revolution, which broke out in 1789. *Camilla* (1796) emerged during the politically volatile 1790s, though without mentioning contemporary politics. I am suggesting that we can read these novels' relationship with late 18th-century social, political, and literary ideas about sympathy in Burney's experimentation with narrative style from 1778 to 1814.

[10] As Chapter One explains, in Smith's version of sympathy, an imagined, internal "impartial spectator" – also called, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, "reason, principle, conscience, the inhabiter of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct" – oversees sympathetic communication, but at a distance and without taking part in it. Performing an evaluative function, the sympathizer "approve[s] the passions of another" (Fairclough 28) rather than reproducing those passions.

[11] Indeed, the novelist's correspondence around the time of *The Wanderer*'s publication, as well as her intended revisions of the novel after publication, suggest that Burney had very particular strategic intentions. In a letter to her brothers James and Charles, Burney insisted that their reading of *The Wanderer* should be suspenseful: they should "[l]ock up [the other] 4 Vols. & read fairly—& let no one peep" ahead in the story (Letter to James and Charles Burney). According to her half-sister, Sarah Harriet Burney, Burney kept family and friends in suspense of all details about the novel, denying them even the novel's title until it was published and insisting that "half the bloom of novelty is taken off an expected work, by mentioning its name, extent, or any thing relating to it before it is published" (Letter to Elizabeth Carick). The evident intention to keep readers in suspense is confirmed by Robert Mack's discovery that Burney would have increased narratorial reticence in revision, in spite of reviewers' dislike of the novel's tightlipped narrator. While it is impossible to determine authorial intention without more specific authoritative commentary, the above evidence seems enough to disprove Claire Harman's suggestion that Burney composed *The Wanderer* for personal "entertainment" only (304).

[12] In her revolutionary passion and attempts at suicide, Elinor recalls Mary Wollstonecraft, whose sexual as well as political exploits were public knowledge by 1814, thanks to William Godwin's very revealing *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798).

[13] Elinor's embodiment of revolutionary philosophy and her status as a Wollstonecraftian figure within *The Wanderer* have long defined critics' interpretations of the novel. Such critics link Elinor to ideas, and even to characters, in late 18th-century Jacobin novels by pro-Revolution female novelists. According to Deborah Kennedy, Elinor "embodies the initial optimism [of the French Revolution] and the hope for a change that would emancipate not just the French [and women] but all humankind" (13). For Patricia Meyer Spacks, this "enthusias[m] for the principles of the French Revolution" translates to a "belie[f] in openness" ("Privacy" 524) and honesty in interpersonal relationships. Elinor's forwardness with Harleigh, a product of this revolutionary philosophy of female empowerment, echoes the forwardness of heroines in other late 18th- and early 19th-century progressive novels, such as Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796). Elinor's preferred style of writing – less remarked upon by Burney critics – further identifies her with Jacobin novelists and techniques. Elinor's letters to Harleigh, in particular, mimic the strategies of transparent "openness" employed by Wollstonecraft and Hays. Elinor's style imitates Jacobin novelists' strategies for activating the sympathetic communication of revolutionary, democratic, and pro-feminist ideas in the 1790s.

[14] While I agree with Maunu that *The Wanderer* is more about "female difficulties" than it is about the "overtly political events" of the Terror in France, I disagree with her argument that "by claiming her novel is about the Revolution, Burney tosses her audience a red herring" (193). Burney neither claims the novel is "about" the French Revolution (in fact, her introductory Dedication claims that the novel is not political at all) nor completely dissociates Revolution-era issues from her more immediate, Napoleonic-era concerns about British social life.

[15] As Maria Jerinic observes, *The Wanderer* is as much about debunking a contemporary "sense of English national superiority" than it is about rehearsing post-Napoleonic prejudices towards French people (65). Showing that her heroine "is no better off in England than she was in France" (65), Burney focuses on English social values, assumptions, and prejudices as the center of her critique. Building on Jerinic's argument, I suggest that *The Wanderer*'s French Revolutionary setting draws surprising connections for readers between the issues of the 1790s and early 19th-century concerns about women's liberty and safety in society. On Burney's ambivalent treatment of French and British values and social codes, see also Leanne Maunu's book *Women Writing the Nation: National Identity, Female Community, and the British-French Connection, 1770-1820* (2007).

[16] Burney, also known by 1814 as Madame d'Arblay, composed *The Wanderer* mostly in France, where she lived with her French husband, Alexandre d'Arblay, and their son from 1802 to 1812. In the introductory Dedication of the novel, she famously asserts that she passed her time in France "unannoyed…perfectly a stranger to all personal disturbance" (*Wanderer* 6). Perhaps more alienating for anti-French, British readers, however, is her suggestion of a partial allegiance to France. Burney claims that *The Wanderer* "leave[s] all discussions of national rights, and modes, or acts of government to those whose wishes have no opposing calls; whose duties are undivided; and whose opinions are unbiasssed by individual bosom feelings" (5).

[17] On sympathy in early 19th-century colonial, racial, and humanitarian politics (including religious missions), see Amit Rai's book *Rule of Sympathy: Sentiment, Race, and Power, 1750-1850*.

[18] One might consider the novel a painstaking revelation of the Wanderer's history, in contrast to the easy, accessible revelations provided by Burney's earlier novels. As Deidre Lynch has suggested, Burney "rewrites the knowledge of character as a [narrative] process or as a story" (189). My analysis dwells on the challenges this rather difficult, unpleasant narrative "process" poses to readers' ability to sympathize in ways they expected to do so.

[19] This shifting between perspectives, which occurs most often through free indirect discourse, is reminiscent of the perspective-shifting in *Camilla*. However, *The Wanderer* takes this strategy further by not always providing readers with Juliet's side of the story. While in *Camilla*, readers can identify where characters are misreading or mis-communicating with each other because they have insight into both perspectives, in *The Wanderer*, readers often see only other characters' impressions of Juliet, without any privileged information about what motivates her actions.

[20] Notably, Albert Harleigh's name signals his status as the novel's modern "man of feeling." Albert Harleigh follows a line of sentimental heroes who bear the same name, including Henry Mackenzie's Harley in *The Man of Feeling* (1771) and Mary Hays's Augustus Harleigh in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796). The fact that *The Wanderer*'s Harleigh shares the same spelling of his name as Hays's character, who proves morally unworthy of the heroine's affections, suggests that Albert is closer to a modern critique of the sentimental sympathetic hero than to Mackenzie's earlier, non-satiric model.

[21] *The Wanderer* engages in an uncertain line of descent from Austen. Burney is generally thought to be one of Austen's primary novelistic influences. However, *The Wanderer* follows *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and is contemporaneous with *Mansfield Park* (1814), which, it is worth noting, also features a heroine who tests readers' patience. (In "Jane Austen's Dangerous Charm: Feeling as One Ought about Fanny Price," Nina Auerbach famously refers to the heroine of *Mansfield Park* as a kind of Romantic "monster"). *The Wanderer* thus may owe much of its innovation to Austen's insights, especially since its conclusion is Burney's most Austen-esque ending.

CHAPTER THREE

Revolting Sympathies in *The Last Man*

In *The Wanderer*, sympathy generates a mixture of feelings, including compassion, curiosity, frustration, and dislike, illuminating the instability of interpersonal relations as well as sympathy's potential to operate as a mode of exclusion and as cultural critique. In Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), interpersonal encounters not only include antipathy and disgust but have national and international consequences, including widespread conflict and suffering. Expressing large-scale fears about the interpersonal, social, and national bonds that sympathy can facilitate, *The Last Man* follows Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), *Mathilda* (1819), and *Valperga* (1823) in their preoccupations with what this chapter calls revolting sympathies: sympathies that generate visceral discomfort or revulsion, that diverge sharply or revolt from intended outcomes, or that do both. Adapted from "last man" Lionel Verney's own description of foreign refugees as a "revulsive stream" flowing into England (*Last Man* 236), the term "revolting" captures the sometimes ugly implications of interpersonal relations in social and political contexts. It signifies sympathy's potential to incite not only revulsion but also revolt. In *The Wanderer*, revolution remains in the background, as the novel's French revolutionary setting provides an aura of instability by which Burney explores mostly domestic "difficulties." In *The Last Man*, the entire world is in tumult as revolting sympathies plague mankind, revealing the far-reaching global implications of a dangerously underestimated phenomenon.

Shelley first voices sympathy's ability to generate both personal disgust and political unrest in *Frankenstein*, when the titular scientist stops to "consider the effect" of what he is doing in creating a female companion for his "monster." Just before completing his task, Frankenstein cites revolting sympathies as the result he fears most:

> I was now about to form another being, of whose disposition I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness…They might even hate each other; the creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man…Even if they were to leave Europe, and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. (*Frankenstein* 138)

Surprisingly "moved" by the plight of his creature (120), Frankenstein's sympathy with an eight-foot-tall murderer has led him to this perilous point, and the monsterly sympathies that his fellow-feeling enables appear equally dangerous, as they could lead unpredictably to either love or hate. If hate, the creatures' mutual "abhorrence" will wreak havoc on humans, whom they will

continue to blame for their deformity and loneliness. If love, the creatures' sexual "sympathies" will produce a "race of devils" that take over the earth, "at the price perhaps of the existence of the whole human race" (138). Facilitated by his own surprising sympathy with his creature, Frankenstein's fear of sympathy between male and female creatures turns him into a murderous monster himself: he destroys the female as her future mate looks on. In *Frankenstein*, sympathy precipitates death, threatening to decimate "the whole human race."

In *The Last Man*, it nearly does kill off "the whole human race": crystallizing sympathy's dangerous potential, an unstoppable plague and other unavoidable disasters infect and kill everybody except for first-person narrator Lionel Verney. Shelley's third prose publication,[1] *The Last Man* follows Frankenstein's fears about sympathy to fruition, framing the extinction of mankind as an ancient prophecy of the future – and thus as an urgent warning for readers of the 19th-century present. I argue in this chapter that the plague plays out Shelley's concern with the personal, social, and political devastation that sympathy often involves: that the inevitable and unstable interpersonal encounters at the heart of social life are both the forces that bind people and nations in intimate relations and the forces that strain and contort those relationships. Indeed, nearly all of the named characters who die in the novel do so from complications of sympathy, suggesting that the illness that is "plaguing" mankind is revolting sympathies.

In the past few decades, several critics have suggested that in *The Last Man*, Shelley advocates for sympathy as a force of moral action and a solution to

the interpersonal and international problems foregrounded in the novel. Building on Anne Mellor's assertion that the novel locates hope in the "unwilling but powerful embrace of the racial other" (Mellor, "Introduction"),[2] Fuson Wang, for example, argues that in *The Last Man* sympathetic social inclusivity constitutes "immunity" to the plague. In a similar vein, Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor suggests that *The Last Man* opposes a "feminizing insistence on sentiment, sympathy, and sociality" to "a masculine narrative of the sublime" (771). Extending thematic representations of sympathy to the novel's structural design, Wagner-Lawlor argues that the novel's "Introduction," which is written by a fictional author-editor, "insist[s] that this tale of a dead-end history be opened back up to reader responsiveness, back to that most important of human feelings, sympathy. The value of the story now becomes the animation of the reader's sympathetic identification with Verney's losses of utopian government and of domestic sociality" (769). In this account, the novel activates the reader's sympathy through its frame structure, thereby aiming to "re-civilize the world with compassionate beholders" (772). Contrary to claims that Shelley invests in sympathy as compassion, I argue that *The Last Man* and its disorienting "Introduction" (re)present the inevitability of loss and revulsion, which they portray as parts of identification with others.

Indeed, while readers may "identif[y]" with certain aspects of Lionel's world (for example, with his accounts of warfare and party politics), readers' "responsiveness" to Lionel has been much more complex than accounts of sympathy as "sentimental" and "inclusiv[e]" suggest. Lionel's language begs for

pity and compassion as he tells his "long drawn and tortuous" tale – his "journal of death…leading to the ocean of countless tears" – at an unnerving height of anxiety, urgency, and grief (*Last Man* 267). However, his narrative produces few tears of compassion or sentimentality in readers, who more frequently report feeling bored and disgusted, as they find Lionel's tale just as he describes it: "long drawn and tortuous." One 19th-century reviewer calls it a "sickening repetition of horrors" and a "struggle after the display of morbid feelings" ("The Last Man" 103). Another claims that the story is "disfigure[d]" by its narrator's "morbid affectation" and "bombast" ("Book Review," *The Monthly* 335). Yet another celebrates that the conclusion "did come at last!" (Barrett). Far from "insist[ing]" on sympathy as a "sentimental" or "inclusive" activity, *The Last Man* problematizes readers' identification with its characters and situations, opening up questions about what sympathy is and how we respond to the agony and grief of others.[3] Rather than pitying Lionel, 19th-century readers report being disoriented and frustrated by his tale, citing both aspects of the novel's form, such as Lionel's "bombastic" style and the novel's fantastical "Introduction," and thematic details of the plague as the underlying causes of their unsentimental responses. In the 21st century, readers continue to have trouble feeling Lionel's pain. In Lynn Wells' words, the novel "openly solicits our sympathy and understanding yet remains puzzlingly unclear about the exact message of its 'instruction'" (212). While Lionel begs readers for compassion, *The Last Man* does not elicit "sentimental" responses.

For all of the destruction and death it records, one of the most disturbing features of *The Last Man* is the revolting sympathies it produces in readers. Lionel's pleas for compassion fall on deaf ears for a number of reasons, including his verbosity and overblown rhetoric; in this chapter I focus in particular on the unusual "Introduction" that frames Lionel's narrative to examine sympathy's function and dysfunction in Shelley's work. According to the author of the "Introduction," who is identified only partially as the biographical Mary Shelley, Lionel's story describes events of the future that were prophesied in ancient times by the Cumaean Sibyl. To form Lionel's narrative, which is set at the end of the 21st century, the 19th-century author of the "Introduction" has "adapt[ed]" and "translat[ed]" the fragmented "Sibylline leaves" discovered strewn about a cave in Naples (5, 7). Temporally disorienting and practically impossible, the "Introduction" unsettles readers' relation to the first-person narrator even before they first encounter him. And yet it becomes still more disturbing as Lionel's futuristic world proves surprisingly similar to contemporary readers' own (and, I suggest, surprisingly similar to that of 21st-century readers). Introducing the impossible history of a familiar world, the novel's "Introduction" activates its own set of revolting sympathies, generating claims that the novel itself is revulsive (a "sickening repetition of horrors").

Readers' negative responses to *The Last Man* look like failures of sympathy within the framework of the dominant political and literary discourses in both Shelley's time and our own. As I described in the Introduction and in Chapter One, the prevailing discourses in the 19th and 21st centuries follow Adam

Smith in assuming that sympathy will alleviate suffering and unite disparate peoples in benevolence, altruism, and peace. In *The Last Man*, however, Shelley portrays revulsion as a constitutive possibility within sympathy and not as an external obstacle to it. Continuing a pattern begun in *Frankenstein* and sustained in many of Shelley's subsequent novels, *The Last Man* mobilizes revolting sympathies to disrupt the fantasy that sympathy necessarily leads to improved, peacefully united individuals and social groups – as well as comfortable, cohesive reading experiences. As we will see, Lionel and Adrian Windsor institute as political policy a Smithian conception of sympathy, but their idealistic theory breaks down in practice, as Lionel's most direct encounter with the plague through the only explicitly black man in the novel demonstrates. The novel's revisionary portrayal of the way sympathy mobilizes revulsion pervades both structure and plot, implicating readers in the self-other encounters that pain and endanger humankind in the novel. Extending interpersonal relations to reader-text relations, the "Introduction" motivates readers' revulsion as part of the process of sympathizing with its characters. Against contemporary discourses that deploy sympathy as a force of altruism in political debates over slavery, imperialism, and how to maintain a peaceful British empire, *The Last Man* projects 19th-century anxieties about sympathy's disruptive potential onto an imagined apocalyptic future.

Mary Shelley and the Horror of "mutual affection"

Shelley's early novels are rife with revolting sympathies, but such moments of revulsion and rejection have often been discussed as failures of sympathy and not as parts of its very operation. Years before *The Last Man*, Shelley's works demonstrate anxiety about the radical unpredictability of human intimacy, in which disgust and revulsion occur alongside compassion and benevolence. As Shelley's Mathilda explains, sympathy is a "sweet and mutual affection" shared by two or more people "knit" together in a common bond, but it occurs "unsought and unaware." The desire for sympathy makes one "more human" (*Mathilda* IX),[4] but sympathy itself can be caused by and result in monstrous intimacies and affiliations.[5] *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, demonstrates this troubling paradox in the doubling of its ambitious scientist and his "monster." As David Marshall and others have argued, the fatal problem in this novel appears to be that sympathy is lacking. According to Marshall, *Frankenstein* is a "philosophical investigation of the failure of sympathy," a novel about "the causes and effects of sympathy's failure" (181).[6] In this view, Victor Frankenstein's withdrawal from his friends and family fuels his unnatural ambition (and vice versa), leading him to create the being whom he then rejects. Similarly, the creature's inability to forge sympathetic bonds causes him to revenge himself on humankind and especially on his creator. If everyone had engaged sympathetically with others, the novel seems to suggest, nothing bad would have happened.

However, the problem in *Frankenstein* is not really that sympathy has failed; it is that sympathy does not operate the way characters or readers expect.

While Frankenstein fails to mark the affinities between his creature and himself, readers note the resemblances. When the scientist thinks about the "monster" he has created, he describes himself in the same language of ferocious monstrosity that the creature uses later with respect to himself: "When I thought of him," Frankenstein recalls, "I gnashed my teeth, my eyes became inflamed, and I ardently wished to extinguish that life which I had so thoughtlessly bestowed. When I reflected on his crimes and malice, my hatred and revenge burst all bounds of moderation" (*Frankenstein* 71). Later, the creature describes himself in remarkably similar language: "The feelings of kindness and gentleness, which I had entertained but a few moments before, gave place to hellish rage and gnashing of teeth. Inflamed by pain, I vowed eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind" (116).[7] "Knit" together whether they want to be or not – not only by language but also by the manners and dispositions one might expect a child to inherit from his parent – Frankenstein and his creature share "mutual affection[s]" of anger and vengeance. At this point in the novel, the scientist does not recognize his own participation in his creature's monstrous sentiments, but that does not mean that their bond is not one of sympathy. Exacerbated by Frankenstein's refusal to consider that he and the creature are parent and child, their sympathy occurs "unsought and unaware," producing "horror and hatred" (121) rather than "sweet[ness]" and benevolence.

Frankenstein himself confirms this unsolicited connection and its revolting tendencies upon recognizing that he shares the creature's sentiments. When the creature asks for one "of another sex, but as hideous as myself," whose

"sympathy" he can "excite" (*Frankenstein* 120), Frankenstein's surprising sympathy with his creation leads him to the point of creating and abandoning another "monster." "I was moved," recalls Frankenstein, "I shuddered when I thought of the possible consequences of my consent, but I felt that there was some justice in his argument. His tale, and the feelings he now expressed, proved him to be a creature of fine sensations; and did I not as his maker, owe him all the portion of happiness that it was in my power to bestow?" (120). Here, Frankenstein knowingly sympathizes with a being who appears to share human characteristics, such as the "fine sensations" that enable him to "compassionate" the creature. However, this sympathy ultimately leads the scientist to even greater revulsion: "His [the creature's] words had a strange effect upon me," Frankenstein admits, "I compassionated him, and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred" (121). While the creature's appearance is itself revolting, the scientist's ability to identify with this "filthy mass" is a deeper source of "horror and hatred," causing him to revolt from his earlier compassion. As Debbie Lee observes, "Frankenstein identifies intensely with his creature at the same time he repeatedly refers to the creature as a 'monster,' a 'demon,' and a 'fiend'" (177). But while Lee argues that Frankenstein's reaction constitutes "alterity's failure" – the failure of sympathy as an ethical ideal – I am suggesting that Shelley represents "intense identification" as essentially amoral, inclusive of the involuntary disgust that can and sometimes does arise from identification with an other. Unexpected and deeply disturbing,

Frankenstein's sympathy includes revulsion, "horror and hatred" simultaneously with recognition, compassion, and the desire to "console." Although Frankenstein reports that his "feelings…altered" from compassion to revulsion, the monstrosity of his compassion drives his feeling of revulsion and cannot be separated from it.

Sympathy proves yet more horrifying, however, when Frankenstein contemplates other possible results of his feeling with the creature, namely the consequences of creating a mate "as hideous as [he is]." Just as Frankenstein finds the creature even more repulsive for his similarities, so might the creature revolt from seeing his own monstrosity in a female version, as I suggested earlier. Not only might the female creature "refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation" (*Frankenstein* 138) – that is, with the creature's agreement to "go to the vast wilds of South America" and live "cut off from all the world" (120). The two creatures "might even hate each other" (138). Their sympathy in both "deformity" and "abhorrence" may lead to revulsion and rejection instead of what the creature "so ardently desire[s]" in asking for a sympathetic mate: a life "not happy, but…harmless, and free from the misery I now feel" (120). Imagining the consequences of constructing a second creature, Frankenstein realizes that sympathy in all instances is detrimental to mankind. If sympathy causes creaturely revulsion, it will make the creature(s) more rather than less miserable and consequently endanger the humans on whom both creatures would take revenge. And if mutual monstrosity causes the creatures to be "more attached to one another," as the original creature hopes (120), sexual manifestations of sympathy

will result in "a race of devils…propagated on the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror" (138).

Frankenstein appears to deplore the inhumane loss of sympathy in its characters; but their cruel and monstrous actions are actually driven by an abundance of sympathies presented not as consistently compassionate but as fundamentally revolting. Capturing particularly well the threatening sexual implications of "mutual affection" (and somewhat undermining his own ideas about sympathy's "failure"), Marshall observes that "sympathy itself seems to result in monstrous forms of reproduction" (213).[8] Revolting sympathies unite participants not in mutual good-will and peace but in their shared capacity for revulsion and violence – and for the "reproduction" of those sentiments and behaviors. While Marshall and others have argued that such unpredictable, negative, and "monstrous" affects derail sympathy in *Frankenstein*, causing it to fail, I am suggesting that the novel portrays bad causes and effects as constitutive parts of sympathy, not as obstruction or failure. Noticing that Shelley's early fiction ponders revolting sympathies' paradoxical potential to (re)produce destruction – to proliferate hatred and aggression within the structures of intimacy and affiliation – suggests that *The Last Man* and its prophecy of extinction carry Frankenstein's fears about sympathy to their logical conclusion.

Following *Frankenstein, Mathilda* meditates on filial bonds so intimate that they appear "unlawful and monstrous": a "guilty love more unnatural than hate" (*Mathilda* VII). Sympathy's revulsive potential is put into play when the close relationship between Mathilda and her father seems to veer into sexual

passion, generating "horror and misery" that stem from mutual feeling, from the impossibility of naming father-daughter intimacy in language other than "incest," and from recognition of the "crim[inal]" nature of incestuous feelings (*Mathilda* VII).[9] Focusing on the paradoxes and unpredictability of an ostensibly positive relationship, *Mathilda* explores the undesired and repulsive directions that sympathy can take. Not only does sympathy arrive "unsought and unaware"; it thrives in familial or near-familial proximity. "Seldom found except when two amiable creatures are knit from early youth, or when bound by mutual suffering and pursuits," sympathy is paradoxically most pure when most revolting and most morally "unlawful": when it occurs between close family members, such as brother and sister or father and daughter.

As Alan Richardson explains, Shelley's and other Romantic writers' preoccupation with incest has much to do with contemporary ideas about sympathy: "Since (according to sympathy theory, an outgrowth of associationist psychology) sympathy relies on a prior sense of identification [such as biological relation], those who share early experiences and perceive one another as 'like' have the best foundation for a loving relationship" (*Neural Sublime* 101). Yet as Richardson notes, a dangerous ambiguity arises when "the sexual element of affectionate feelings predicated on likeness [is] intensified by a history of mutual love, and heightened by the tensions and desires set into play by sexual difference" (101). The "prior…identification" of genetic "likeness" augments sympathy and makes for the most "loving" relationships, but these relationships become suspect when "love" contains a "sexual element." While most Romantic

literature explores this ambiguity in sibling and near-sibling relationships (98), such as Victor Frankenstein's relationship with his "more than sister" Elizabeth Lavenza, in *Mathilda* Shelley heightens the monstrosity of such sympathy by making the potentially incestuous relation a filial one. Both constitutively human and perversely "unnatural," sympathy between Mathilda and her father leads one to commit suicide and the other to waste away in loneliness and seclusion, horrified by the alienation and loss that come along with intimacy.[10]

Like *Frankenstein* and *Mathilda*, Shelley's *Valperga; or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* also explores revolting, unpredictable sympathies. Examining unstable relationships as a historical problem, *Valperga* embellishes the actual adventures of a historical figure in 14th-century Italy. Despite Castruccio's development into an inhumane despot, Euthanasia's early sympathy with him continues, even after he threatens to invade her city and seduces and abandons another woman. Like *Frankenstein* and *Mathilda*, *Valperga* closely aligns sympathy with (sexual) love, and in Shelley's examination of it such love can and often does lead to pain and suffering. Not until *The Last Man*, however, does Shelley carry out in her fiction the most catastrophic possibility of the revolting sympathies imagined in her previous novels: the extinction of the entire human race. Like Shelley's earlier novels, *The Last Man* deploys sympathy with great ambivalence. Sympathy binds characters in mutual love and respect, promising to ease or even end suffering induced by various causes, including poverty, war, and physical illness. But it turns out to be a highly volatile phenomenon that can also strain and distort relationships with others.

In *The Last Man*, Shelley transfers the problem of revolting sympathies from the mythical (*Frankenstein*), personal (*Mathilda*), and historical (*Valperga*) to the contemporary, political, and global. Using the plague to transmit disease the way sympathy can and sometimes does transmit disorder, *The Last Man* dispels the fantasy of sympathy as mutually beneficial sharing and suggests that interpersonal encounters can have serious (inter)national consequences, including widespread suffering and political turmoil. The plague crystallizes this revolting outcome: an almost universally fatal experience, it becomes more and more widely shared until Lionel becomes the "last man" alive. Indeed, almost all of the novel's named characters suffer from sympathetic relations with others, which hasten their untimely and tragic deaths. Ultimately, the novel locates pain, disorder, and devastation in humans' engagement in revolting sympathies with others. In the world of *The Last Man*, this fact of human nature lies behind imperial drives and the wars they inspire as well as romantic, familial, and literary relationships, which break down and run amuck even as they produce compassion, love, and intimacy. Framing Lionel's story as an ancient prophecy of future catastrophe, the novel's unusual "Introduction" anticipates this unsettling representation of sympathy by presenting literary endeavors as sympathetic encounters in which disjunction, dislocation, and disorientation are embedded in the structures of reading and writing.

Introducing Revolting Sympathies

As Julie Carlson explains in *England's First Family of Writers*, Mary Shelley considered reading as interactive an activity as face-to-face encounters with others. Like many of her other novels, *The Last Man* investigates the "performative qualities of writing" and the transformative effects that words can have on readers (Carlson 17). According to Carlson, for Shelley literature provoked dynamic responses, moving the novelist to be "at once animated and terrified." Like people, books could "awaken and terminate love, utter and prognosticate events, plant seeds for the future, vivify and stupefy minds" (17). In Shelley's fictional worlds, as in her biographical experience, language has great power to create, improve, and destroy, but it functions irrespective of readers' (or even writers') desires and motivations; words themselves can "spellbind, intoxicate," and even "make you other" (17). That is, for Shelley texts exist in a sympathetic relation with their readers, imparting feelings and ideas by contagion, magnetism, or electricity – by seemingly "black-magical" arts that operate without the consent or reasoning of the participants (17).[11] The short "Introduction" to *The Last Man* prepares readers for a revolting response to Lionel's narrative by establishing reading and writing as comforting, transformative, world-altering events but also as deeply disjunctive experiences of contradiction and repulsion. In the "Introduction," reading and writing are sympathetic encounters that can comfort and terrify – animate, repair, and destroy.

An embellishment of events in Shelley's life, the "Introduction" dates the inception of the novel to a visit to Naples in 1818 and describes the creative

process as the "translation and adaptation" of "unintelligible" fragments (*Last Man* 7). While exploring a cave, the first-person author of the "Introduction" and this author's "companion" discover "the gloomy cavern of the Cumaean Sibyl" and in it "piles of leaves, fragments of bark" that "were traced with written characters" (3, 5). They notice "that these writings were expressed in various languages," some known and some unknown, some "old as the Pyramids" and others "in modern dialects." Upon closer examination, "they seemed to contain prophecies" (5). Working first with a companion and later alone, the author collects, selects, deciphers, translates, and adapts the "fragments" to shape Lionel's story, which is a heavily edited prophecy of future extinction.

Partially autobiographical but unmistakably fantastic, the "Introduction" leaves *Last Man* scholars divided on the status of these first seven pages with respect to Lionel's long-winded narrative. Some critics argue that the "Introduction" is integral to Lionel's story, defending it as an essential "part of the fiction" (O'Dea, "Prophetic History" 301). Lynn Wells, for example, argues that despite its slimness, the "Introduction" "suffuses the main narrative, disrupting its illusion of representational stability. Although placed before the text, the introduction penetrates the story to its end" (215).[12] Other critics contend that the "Introduction" remains in a disjunctive relation to the main text. Presenting the mythical as reality and fantasy as possibility, the "Introduction" constitutes for Lee Sterrenburg "an elaborate hoax" (342). Others avoid discussing it at all, focusing on Lionel's narrative as the primary concern of Shelley's text. I suggest that the "Introduction" is both integral and disjunctive, mobilizing in reader

responses the dynamic movements between multiple, sometimes conflicting affects that characterize reading and writing in Shelley's experience and sympathy in Lionel's narrative. The "Introduction" thus presents reading as a sympathetic encounter that can generate responses as unexpected and viscerally discomfiting – as "revolting" – as the sympathies described between characters in the novel. It activates readerly sympathies that shift between ostensibly opposite responses, such as identification and differentiation, location and dislocation, attraction and repulsion. In this manner, disjunction, disorientation, and dysfunction form part of *The Last Man*'s aesthetic of sympathy. Lionel's story may constitute the bulk of the novel, but the "Introduction" enacts as a condition of reading the revulsion that exists within self-other relations.

The "Introduction" invites revolting sympathies by blurring the boundaries between novelist, fictional author, narrator, and reader and by presenting historical and literary unity as a collection of constantly moving parts, (re)presenting identification with a person, situation, or text as an experience of simultaneous integration and disjunction. Like Lionel's narrative, the "Introduction" contains a first-person narrator, but this narrator remains shadowy, both distinct from Lionel and from the biographical Mary Shelley and a version or inflection of them. While the temporality of the "Introduction" precludes Lionel from writing it, its fictional author has much in common with the "last man" alive, including his mourning and his attempt to use writing to mitigate the pain and anxiety of becoming "last"; the author, too, has lost a "companion." Just as Lionel eases his loneliness by recollecting his friends in writing, the author of the

"Introduction" finds that writing "softened my real sorrows and endless regrets, by clothing these fictitious ones in that ideality, which takes the mortal sting from pain" (*Last Man* 7). As Carlson and others have noted, Lionel and the fictional author-editor share both qualities with Shelley, whose composition of *The Last Man* overlaps with her own mourning of her husband and several friends. However, as Shelley's *Journals* and Lionel's narrative both demonstrate, writing recreates the "mortal sting" of loss, even as it reconnects writers to their lost loved ones.[13] A passion that mutually defines novelist, fictional author, and narrator, writing offers both alleviation from and renewal of pain.

While the "Introduction" traces strong similarities between Shelley, the author-editor, and Lionel, it is careful to keep them distinct from each other, blurring but not erasing lines of identity. Its temporal instability precludes not only Lionel from being the introducer of his prophetic tale but also Shelley, whose travel experiences inflect but do not reflect those described in the "Introduction." Although Shelley's *Journals* indicate that she and Percy visited Naples in 1818 and toured the supposed cave of the Cumaean Sybil, there is no record that they (or anyone else) found fragments of writing there or even that *The Last Man* was conceived within the mysterious cavern.[14] Binding the author of the "Introduction," Shelley, and the novel reader in an uncertain relationship with the protagonist of the main text, the "Introduction" plays out Carlson's suggestion that for Shelley "personalities are construed as transpersonal, intertextual, and deeply literary" (3). The author of this unusual frame is unnamed, genderless, and apparently unique; yet this author is shaped by the other "personalities" involved

in the work, including that of the reader, who must track the shifting interrelations of Shelley's, the unnamed author's, and Lionel's tales.

The "Introduction" anticipates the revolting sympathies in Lionel's narrative not only by presenting identity and identification as shifting, "transpersonal," and "intertextual" experiences. It also enacts historical and literary unity as an interplay of disparate pieces, rendering the process of sympathetic reading one of simultaneous connection and disconnection, familiarity and disorientation. As I observed earlier, the "Introduction" describes novel-writing as a process of "selecting" readable fragments, "deciphering" their vague meanings (6), and "adapt[ing] and translat[ing]" them for modern reading (7). Depicting literary creation as contingent and "imperfect" (7), the "Introduction" recasts writing as a process of piecing together the disparate materials available by "accident[s]" of history and nature (7) and by the connective work of an interested individual and reimagines reading as an exercise in filling in the gaps and interpreting the (dis)connections between pieced-together parts.[15] In doing so, the (dis)orienting "Introduction" imagines and invites its own reading as an inherently disjunctive experience, binding author, editor, narrator, and reader in unstable, tenuous relationships.

The "Introduction"'s temporal (dis)location of readers from the novel's first-person narrator bears out this vision of identification as inherently (dis)connective and readerly sympathy as both binding and repellant. Although the "Introduction" seems to go to great pains to establish a difference between 19th-century readers' present and Lionel's 21st-century future, the latter proves

surprisingly similar to the former, generating feelings of simultaneous distance and intimacy in readers. Lionel's republican England and sailing balloons used as reliable means of international travel make his 21st century seem drastically different from readers' own world. But readers soon discover that Shelley's novel illustrates little change in 200 years of supposed social and political progress. America still consists of "uncultivated wilds" (*Last Man* 23); people still travel across land by horse-drawn carriage and across sea by ship; the war for Greek liberation continues; and the new republican government has done little to eliminate the petty squabbles, imperial drives, and hierarchical attitudes that still characterize English politics (and that still characterize politics today). Even the traditional titles of "hereditary rank, and other feudal relics" remain (221), in spite of Ryland's efforts to eliminate them (and, indeed, Lord Raymond rises to office on the platform that he will restore the aristocracy). While a plague destroying the entire human race may have seemed unlikely in Shelley's time, widespread epidemics were certainly not uncommon. The bubonic plague, or the "Black Death," had killed nearly half the population of Europe in the 14th century, smallpox killed more Europeans than anything else in the 18th century, and yellow fever killed thousands of people in the 19th century.[16] Even today, a universally destructive plague does not lie outside the realm of possibility. As I write, the deadly Ebola virus is ravaging several countries in Africa, and biological warfare remains an always imminent threat.

Given the extensive similarities between Lionel's and readers' worlds and the extent the "Introduction" goes to differentiate between them, it becomes

possible to argue that the "Introduction" (dis)orients readers with respect to its narrator and his story as part of the process of identifying with him. For Shelley, sympathy is fundamentally revolting, sometimes generating visceral discomfort or revulsion, sometimes diverging from expected or intended outcomes, and sometimes doing both at once. Through the work of its (dis)orienting "Introduction," *The Last Man* activates such revulsion in its readers, who recoil from participating in Lionel's apocalyptic future at the same time that they identify with the social, political, familial, and literary relations he describes in his story. As readers' confusion and distaste suggest, Shelley's novel continues to disconcert and repulse readers, involving 21st-century scholars in a "puzzlingly unclear" experience (Wells 212), just as it subjected 19th-century critics to a "sickening repetition of horrors" ("The Last Man" 103).

Incomplete and only precariously attached to Lionel's story, the "Introduction" is difficult to account for in terms of the plague narrative that follows it. However, when one understands disjunction as part of the novel's vision of formal as well as familial, social, and national unity, its apparent (dis)connection from the main text comes into focus as a strategic formalization of the concerns thematized in Lionel's story. Making literary intimacy an experience that is simultaneously familiar and "other," the "Introduction" makes present for readers the double-sidedness of identification, a problem that the main narrative plays out in the interpersonal encounters of Lionel, his friends and family, and their fellow humans. This experience of sympathy as both comforting and disconcerting, both attractive and repulsive, both positive and negative,

dispels contemporary illusions voiced by Lionel and Adrian (echoing Adam Smith) that sympathy is a consistently cohesive moral force. Within the main text of *The Last Man*, identification is an unstable phenomenon that produces as much horror, disgust, and violence in response to involvement in the thoughts and feelings of others as it does compassion, moral action, and "improvement." Anticipated and activated in readers by the "Introduction," sympathy as a force of (dis)connection from others "plagues" mankind in Lionel's narrative.

Lionel's Sympathy in Theory and in Practice

In Lionel's story, sympathy first appears as a force of benevolence that characters think will alleviate suffering internationally. With his friend and mentor Adrian Windsor, Lionel Verney attempts to deploy sympathy as a force of universal fellow-feeling and an agent of peaceful change, describing himself as naturally inclined to "social feeling and sympathy" and possessing fellow-feeling as a constitutive "feature in [his] disposition" (*Last Man* 174). With "the plague" yet to appear, sympathy at this point promises to end an ongoing war between Turkey and Greece in which English soldiers, including Lionel and Adrian's friend Raymond, have been fighting.[17] According to Lionel and Adrian, sympathy between people of different nationalities, religions, and ethnicities can overcome the petty differences and personal interests that cause and prolong suffering. In language reminiscent of Adam Smith's theory of sympathy, in which one "enters" into the experience of another and "becomes in some measure the same person as

him" (Smith 13-14), Adrian describes sympathy when he encourages his English compatriots not to "deceive ourselves":

> The Turks are men; each fibre, each limb is as feeling as our own, and every spasm, be it mental or bodily, is as truly felt in a Turk's heart and brain, as in a Greek's…Think you, amidst the shrieks of violated innocence and helpless infancy, I did not feel in every nerve the cry of a fellow being? They were men and women, the sufferers, before they were Mahometans, and when they rise turbanless from the grave, in what except their good or evil actions will they be the better or worse than we? (161-162)

A force of benevolence and a potential deterrent of war, Adrian's Smithian sympathy occurs on the basis of shared humanity rather than similarity in race, religion, or nationality ("they were men and women…before they were Mahometans"). In doing so, it demonstrates a belief in what Nancy Armstrong calls "universal man" or "collective man," a possibility of cross-racial sympathetic union gaining interest (and generating anxiety) in England in the 19th century (*How Novels Think* 24, 103). Eliding difference as he identifies with human emotion, Adrian feels his enemies' suffering "in every nerve" and experiences this shared suffering as a reason to cease the actions that cause it. Sympathizing with the victims of war, Adrian "[can] not sympathize in [the] dreams of massacre and glory" of the aggressors, even when they are Englishmen and friends.

Although Adrian's account of sympathy with the "Mahometans" includes pain, it functions as an impetus for change. Adrian intends sympathy to ease or prevent further suffering by putting all "men and women" on an equal plane of shared "mental [and] bodily" experience. Manifesting Romantic optimism in an imagined future, sympathy in this account renders principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity agents of social improvement.[18] When the plague reaches Europe, Lionel and Adrian try to employ sympathy to combat suffering induced by illness in the same way they advocate it to end war. As English travelers return and foreign refugees flee to England to escape the plague abroad, Lionel applauds the selflessness of the English people who "unlocked their hospitable store, for the relief of those driven from their homes" and "afford[ed]…aid to the victims of…wide-spreading calamity." According to Lionel, "it was impossible to see these crowds [suffering] and not stretch out a hand to save them" (*Last Man* 236). Consistent with Smith's model of sympathy as a moral experience regulated by an "impartial spectator," sympathy for these characters leads to altruism and peace.

Even when the plague poses an immediate threat in England, Adrian insists that sympathy is the best mode of defense. While the current leader (called the "Protector") of now-republican England claims that his official policy is "every man for himself!" (*Last Man* 244), Adrian argues that "we must all remain; and do our best to help our suffering fellow-creatures" (242). Undertaking the Protectorship after Ryland abandons it, Adrian announces that he "can bring patience, and sympathy, and such aid as art affords, to the bed of disease" (247). Through sympathetic benevolence, he will "enchain the plague in limits, and set a

term to the misery it would occasion; courage, forbearance, and watchfulness, are the forces I bring towards this great work" (247). Lionel echoes this conviction of sympathy's power to alleviate suffering when he declares that "our risk is common; our precautions and exertions shall be common also" (246). According to Adrian and Lionel, humans can overcome fatal obstacles by focusing on the shared "risks" and working in sympathy towards solutions to "common" problems.

Adrian and Lionel remain committed to their plan of countering the plague with benevolence generated from sympathy, but their theory backfires in practice. Despite his intentions, Lionel struggles to achieve consistently altruistic responses to others through his sympathetic experiences. He feels others' suffering as his own, "mentally [and] bodily," as Adrian does with the "Mahometans." But instead of generating responses that cease suffering, Lionel's participation in others' experiences leads to the reproduction and proliferation of suffering. Dissolving boundaries between self and other, sympathy proves revolting when the subject and object of sympathy become indistinguishable from one another. As Lionel's encounter with the only black man in the novel explicitly named as such demonstrates, this erasure of difference – represented as painful, terrifying, and revulsive – emerges as a constitutive possibility existing within the sympathetic encounter. The episode of the "negro half clad" (*Last Man* 336) not only exemplifies involuntary disgust emerging as the differences between self and other collapse. It also shows how interpersonal encounters help spread the plague – and how the plague spreads like sympathy – as Lionel contracts the black man's

illness immediately following the encounter. That is, the scene ultimately suggests that the illness Lionel develops and the illness plaguing humankind *is* sympathy, for sympathy as Shelley portrays it not only promotes benevolence but also enables the transmission of disease and disgust. Impossible to regulate by reason or intention, the negative effects of identifying with others become inseparable from its positive outcomes, and the sameness laid bare through the relation becomes as problematic as the differences that inspire it.

In the scene of the "negro half clad," Lionel returns to his temporary residence in London to find a crowd huddled ominously outside. Sensing that something is wrong (as he discovers later his son Alfred has contracted and died from the plague), Lionel hastens inside to find his family when he is accosted by the novel's only person of color. Although he has just returned from a humanitarian mission to locate plague sufferers in the city, and although he advocates sympathy as a solution to suffering, Lionel spurns the "negro half clad" with gratuitous and insensitive violence.[19] This scene is often read as a failure of sympathy, and frequently one with racist implications.[20] I want to suggest, however, that this encounter has as much to do with the revolting operations of sympathy as with racial difference per se. Contrary to Smith's and Lionel's ideal of sympathetic altruism, Lionel's identification with the "negro half clad" involves unexpected visceral revulsion.

Despite the fact that it does not generate "moral sentiments," Lionel's encounter with the black man epitomizes sympathy as Smith describes it, inasmuch as Lionel "enters" into the other man's feelings. When the man reaches

out and holds onto Lionel "with a convulsive grasp," causing Lionel to "[fall] on the sufferer" (*Last Man* 336), the two engage in a physical embrace that enables Lionel to experience his suffering: as the man "wound his naked festering arms round me," Lionel recounts (336), "his breath, death-laden, entered my vitals" (337). By means of this involuntary embrace, Lionel "enters" into the "aching nausea" and physical distress of the other man (337), feeling the man's pain in and on his own body. Much like Adrian feels "in every nerve" the pain of the Turkish "Mahometans," Lionel participates in the man's "agony of disease" as his "sickening qualms" and "death-laden" breath course through Lionel's "vital" organs (336, 337). Lionel's minute attention to anatomical and physiological detail underscores the collapse of boundaries between self and other, which constitutes the revolting nature of the exchange. Despite this intense experience of the other man's suffering, and despite his usual intentions of helping such sufferers, Lionel's sympathy repulses him from the fellow human in need instead of pulling him closer. With "horror and impatience" (336), he "[throws]" the suffering "wretch" aside (337). The suffering black man seeks sympathy, and he finds it; but sympathy proves "sickening" and violent for both participants.[21]

A "disturbing sequence of events" (Lokke 125), Lionel's deviation from his own philosophy of sympathy has been a stumbling block for scholars trying to make sense of what appears to be a racist failure of sympathy in a novel that otherwise seems invested in sympathy as a moral imperative. Such readers register their discomfort with Lionel's inconsistent response by both recognizing and attempting to disprove the possibility that he (and/or Shelley) is racist. As I

suggested earlier, Fuson Wang observes that Lionel rejects the black man but recuperates the scene for a reading of the novel's overarching ethic of sympathetic inclusivity. Following Anne Mellor's argument that the novel locates hope in Lionel's "embrace of the racial other," even if that embrace is involuntary, Wang argues that after Lionel's rejection of the black man, he sees his actions as intolerant, a realization that preserves his life and his status as "the last man." For Wang, sympathetic social inclusivity – the "embrace of alterity" – constitutes the cure, or "natural immunity," to the plague, and the novel finds a humanistic future in voluntary "embrace[s]." In readings like these, Lionel's initial failure to sympathize eventually gives way – or should give way for the reader – to future success in such endeavors.[22]

Under the circumstances, it is difficult not to experience Lionel's revulsion from the "negro half clad" as a racist encounter. And yet, as readers' intense discomfort with the scene attests, it is difficult to reconcile one's sense of the scene's racism with Lionel's (and Shelley's) apparent interest in sympathy as a principle of social organization. Without engaging in a project of recuperation similar to Mellor's or to Wang's, I want to suggest that the scene demonstrates both racism and sympathy – though sympathy conceived as fundamentally revolting. More specifically, the scene shows how the dissolution of differences that occurs in a sympathetic encounter can constitute involuntary racism: an instinctive fear of or revulsion from the (racial) other, whose sudden collapse into the (sympathizing) self is horrifying and inexplicable. What horrifies Lionel in particular is not insurmountable difference between self and other but rather

fundamental sameness. After all, identification does not fail in the scene of the "negro half clad," even though Lionel and the sick man are of different races: Lionel "enters" into the black man's suffering, feeling his ailments in and on his own body, in an experience that both we and the novel understand as sympathy. Here, identification produces a kind of racism, a revolting response of "horror [of] and impatience" with the other that arises out of and as part of sympathy's erasure of difference.

Seen in this light, the episode complicates Adrian's earlier idealization of sympathy with the Turkish "Mahometans," emphasizing the unpredictability of interpersonal encounters. Indeed, the black man's uniquely specified race signals a 19th-century context for sympathy that shares Adrian and Lionel's idealized, Smithian conception of the phenomenon as a force of moral action: debates over the abolition of slavery.[23] As I discussed in Chapter One, activists on both sides of the issue deployed sympathy in similar ways as Lionel and Adrian do, advocating for it as a mode of fostering personal, social, and political improvement. Just as Adrian does in his reflections on the Turkish "Mahometans," abolitionists attempted to evoke Britons' sympathy with the sentiments and struggles of enslaved fellow humans, no matter their skin color. Anti-abolitionists, on the other hand, attempted to accomplish their goals by activating Britons' sympathy with racial others who, they insisted, could not help themselves and required the security and support provided by slavery's patriarchal framework. As Amit Rai has documented, within their own political outlooks, both sides invoked sympathy in Smith's terms as a mode of relation with positive outcomes, voicing their desire

to act with benevolence and altruism. In this manner, Shelley's white British male contemporaries used sympathy in Smith's terms as a "strateg[y] of governmentality" to preserve a social and political hierarchy through which they maintained control over potentially unruly others, including slaves, former slaves, and people of color, who somehow had to be integrated into British society (Rai, *Rule of Sympathy* 104). By recalling contemporary uses of sympathy in debates about slavery, the black man's appearance in the novel registers Shelley's critique of a way of deploying sympathy, as she demonstrates how the same phenomenon said to promote benevolence and peace can generate the interpersonal revulsion at the heart of racism. What surprises and disturbs in this scene is that sympathy ends in a drastically different result from the one that Lionel, the black man, and readers intend for it and expect of it. Although Lionel thinks that sympathy will generate compassion and altruism, it elicits instead a visceral reaction disturbingly at odds with the sick man's suffering.

Sympathy as Plague

The scene of the "negro half clad" illustrates sympathy's dynamic potential to generate revulsion and disgust. But it also describes transmission of the plague in terms of sympathy, linking sympathy and suffering in ways that ultimately point beyond the plague to interpersonal relations as the primary source of pain and loss in *The Last Man*. After he extracts himself from the sick man's embrace, Lionel very quickly reports that a "sickening sensation of disease gained

upon me" and that he feels "oppressed by fever and aching pain" (*Last Man* 337). Hiding his illness from his family and friends, Lionel observes in private that "sickness and shuddering ever and anon came over me; my head was heavy, my chest oppressed, my legs bent under me; but I threw off resolutely the swift growing symptoms of my disorder, and met Idris with placid and even joyous looks" (338). Soon, however, Lionel's wife Idris notices that his "eyes were bloodshot, starting from [his] head; every artery beat…audibly, every muscle throbbed, each single nerve felt" (340). Inducing a painful, intolerable increase in feeling, the plague appears to literalize the heightened emotional state of sympathy.

While Lionel does not die from the plague, the unpredictable nature of his illness underscores similarities between how the plague and sympathy operate. Like sympathy in the scene of the "negro half clad," the plague is spontaneous, unpredictable, and revolting. Even in close proximity to a diseased person, "individuals may escape ninety-nine times, and receive the death-blow at the hundredth; because bodies are sometimes in a state to reject the infection of malady, and at others, thirsty to imbibe it" (*Last Man* 231). Picking up on Lionel's assertion that "the plague was not what is commonly called contagious," Anne McWhir has argued that Shelley espouses an "anti-contagionist" perspective, a contemporary belief that disease spread through the air and not through direct contact with infected people or objects. However, Lionel dwells more on what people don't know about the plague than on what they do know. Although "[i]t was called an epidemic…the grand question was still unsettled of

how this epidemic was generated and increased. *If* infection depended upon the air, the air was subject to infection" (231; emphasis mine). Whether or not it spreads through the air, what is concerning about the plague is that it is "evil…wide-spreading,…violent and immedicable" (231) – just like the revolting sympathies that Lionel and his friends encounter again and again in the novel.

Importantly, the plague is not the only entity that Lionel describes in these terms, which suggests that physical illness is one of several problems that the novel links to human intimacy. When he recalls the entrance of travelers and refugees into England, Lionel's language demonstrates anxiety about both the possible spread of disease and other disturbing effects of a burgeoning population and empire. Apparently celebrating the "hospitable" actions of his country people, Lionel also notes that "[t]he English, whether travelers or residents, came pouring in one great revulsive stream, back on their own country; and with them crowds of Italians and Spaniards. Our little island was filled even to bursting" (*Last Man* 236). Although he remembers the abounding "spirit of benevolence" demonstrated by the English people who received refugees, Lionel's language also registers intense discomfort with the increased number of bodies circulating through his "little island." The erasure of national barriers in the name of sympathy causes as much involuntary "revulsion" as the dissolution of difference between self and other. In conjunction with his advocated solution to problems of disease and unrest, Lionel intends to be hospitable. But in addition to compassion and benevolence, he experiences anxiety and disgust as part of the sympathetic encounter.

The "revulsive stream" of people is threatening not only because it may carry disease. It heralds another kind of disaster: the threat of revolt or revolution against imperial England and the politics of sympathy by which it unites a vast empire composed of racial and ethnic others. As Paul Cantor notes, the plague migrates to England in the reverse direction of 18th- and 19th-century English imperialism – from the East and West back to England – as if playing out colonized peoples' revenge on the nation that conquered them. Tracing the movements of refugees from America to Belfast to Scotland, Lionel notes that, finally, "all poured with one consent into England" (*Last Man* 297), where they "took a delight in thrusting the possessors from the houses; in seizing on some mansion of luxury…till, the ruin complete in one place, they removed their locust visitation to another" (298). In language used elsewhere to describe the plague, Lionel recounts how foreign invaders combine forces with locals and other groups along the way and "spread their ravages wide," coming "from the east and the north…without apparent motive…like a conquering army, burning—laying waste—murdering" (298). Inducing "evil…wide-spreading,…violent and immedicable" suffering, the sympathetic hospitality of Lionel and his friends has dire consequences. Lionel and his friends value sympathy so highly that they institute it as political policy, echoing 19th-century policies that used Smith's notion of sympathy to unite the British empire, as I explained in Chapter One. However, sympathy brings the novel's 21st-century Britons an infection of selfishness, violence, and greed along with acts of compassion and benevolence. Moreover, the wide-spread "ravages" that result from English hospitality are

carried out not only by distinctly foreign invaders but also by locals who join the invaders' party and by refugees of English heritage, particularly Americans. Part of the horror here is that such "violent and immedicable" suffering results from shared histories, cultures, and values – from deep-seated similarities rather than from irreparable differences.

Alan Richardson has argued that "Shelley's plague seems, in large measure, a reflex of English disgust at the colonial other, a disgust inextricable from commercial domination" ("*The Last Man*").[24] As others have also noted, the plague does not signify contagious physical illness but rather points to contemporary cultural and political concerns. I am arguing that the primary concern Shelley encodes in the inexplicable, fast-moving plague is that the experience of sympathy that underlies 19th-century politics of community- and nation-formation can and sometimes does generate violence, discord, and inequality in place of mutually beneficial relationships: not only "ravages" and "murdering" but also "disgust at the colonial other" and exploitative "commercial domination." Revolting sympathies in *The Last Man* challenge the logic of 19th-century political projects undertaken in the name of sympathy as moral action, such as humanitarian and charitable missions aimed at helping poor and racial others. As I described in Chapter One, such missions inculcated people in need of assistance into British cultural norms and values, but they did so in order to keep those potentially unruly others in their socially inferior places, eliminating the threat they posed to the established British social hierarchy. *The Last Man*'s depiction of revulsive self-other encounters suggests that sympathy can result in

the very uprisings that Smithian accounts of it aim to prevent, in personal and political relationships.

Indeed, revolting sympathies contribute to almost all of the suffering in the novel, including grief endured from the loss of a loved one as well as the physical pain of disease and the horrors of foreign invasion and conquest. Most of the characters closest to Lionel suffer and die from complications of sympathy: Greek princess Evadne Zaimi dies during battle in Constantinople, where she follows her lover, Lord Raymond, who also dies there; Perdita, Lionel's sister and Raymond's wife, kills herself at sea so she can be with the dead husband with whom she so closely identifies; Idris dies of a broken heart following the death of Alfred; and Perdita and Raymond's daughter Clara drowns with Adrian in a freak storm at sea after their judgment is clouded by Clara's desire to visit the graves of her parents.[25] Interpersonal encounters are dangerous because they help spread and increase suffering from disease but also because they generate debilitating pain and loss. The strained relationships between Lionel's friends and family members reveal that the problem with sympathy is that alienation, loss, and despair – along with repulsion and disgust – live within and as part of structures of intimacy.

Perdita and Evadne, for example, so closely identify with Raymond that each woman's sympathy becomes acutely painful when she is separated from him. Even after Raymond commits adultery, goes to war, and dies, Perdita tells Lionel that she "can live here only [by Raymond's tomb in Greece]. I am part of this scene; each and all of its properties are a part of me. This is no sudden fancy; I live by it" (211). When Lionel forces her onto the ship that will return her to

England, Perdita jumps overboard, fulfilling her desire to live with Raymond by drowning herself near his grave.[26] Feeling as strongly "mingled" with Raymond as Perdita does, Evadne follows Raymond to Greece and succumbs to a wound received on the battlefield she shares with him. The first of the group to pass away, Evadne offers in her final words the novel's most cogent link between love and pain and between sympathy and plague: "'This is the end of love!—Yet not the end!'—" she cries,

> and frenzy lent her strength as she cast her arm up to heaven: 'there is the end! there we meet again. Many living deaths have I borne for thee, O Raymond, and now I expire, thy victim!—By my death I purchase thee—lo! the instruments of war, fire, the plague are my servitors. I dared, I conquered them all, till now! I have sold myself to death, with the sole condition that thou shouldst follow me—Fire, and war, and plague, unite for thy destruction—O my Raymond, there is no safety for thee!' (181)

Opening the way for plague in the novel, Evadne's curse connects the various sources of suffering that pervade the novel – "war, fire, the plague" – and the principle of sympathy, which induces visceral revulsion and unexpected outcomes in the process of binding people together.[27] Lionel reiterates the connection when, "[w]ith shuddering horror" he wraps up Evadne's dead body, "this monument of human passion and human misery" (182).

For Idris, too, "passion" and "misery" are linked inextricably in sympathy. Like Perdita and Evadne, Idris locates her identity wholly in other people – in this

case, in her husband and children. For Idris "[t]o watch her children hour by hour, to sit by [Lionel], drinking deep the dear persuasion that [Lionel] remained to her, was all her pastime" (*Last Man* 334). Seeing death spreading quickly around her and anticipating her children's misery, Idris's "sorrow" becomes "life-consuming" (334). The "illness" that apparently kills her follows Lionel's illness after his encounter with the "negro half clad," but Lionel attributes her suffering a broken heart: "[w]hen I had been attacked by illness," he observes, "[Idris's] cheeks were sunk, her form emaciated; but now, the vessel, which had broken from the effects of extreme agitation, did not entirely heal, but was as a channel that drop by drop drew from her the ruddy stream that vivified her heart" (344). For Idris, sympathy and plague become one and the same.

According to Anne Mellor, such deaths in the novel draw attention to the limited roles available to women, who exist only through identification with others (*Mary Shelley* 156).[28] However, the female characters' fates in *The Last Man* also demonstrate how women's propensity for sympathy involves them in acute misery, horror, and disconnection, even as it binds them in strong interpersonal relationships.[29] By (re)presenting sympathy as revolting, Shelley rewrites 19th-century assumptions that women's sympathetic "disorder" (Barker-Benfield) can be tamed by the reasoned interventions of men, an assumption I explored in Chapter One. In doing so, Shelley challenges the political promise of Smithian sympathy with an account of self-other relations as completely outside the realm of human control – an imminent and unstoppable plague to humankind.

Personally and politically threatening, the suffering and discord involved in human intimacy shape the structure and plot of *The Last Man*. For characters and readers alike, what is horrifying in this novel is that alienation, loss, and debilitating grief exist within the experience of sympathy. Previous critics have attempted to explain Shelley's apocalypse by tracing the plague to historical, political, and literary sources.[30] I am arguing that the plague crystallizes Shelley's long-standing preoccupation with the unpredictable and dangerous possibilities of sympathetic communication, playing out the novelist's anxiety about the structures of intimacy at the heart of social life: that sympathy is both the force that creates interpersonal and international relationships and the force that constrains and contorts them.

This doubled-edged conception of sympathy underlies the novel's strategies for engaging its readers, illuminating in particular the infamous (dis)connection mobilized by the "Introduction" and the confusion, uncertainty, and intolerance with which readers have responded to Lionel's pleas for compassion. Despite the "Introduction"'s assertion of temporal distance, the novel invites readerly identification with Lionel that includes disorientation and disgust alongside familiarity and compassion. The novel appears to lack imagination in its depiction of the future, but the surprising similarities between the 19th and 21st centuries are part of Shelley's point. The unlikely convergences become much more disconcerting than the differences one expects, as the similarities seem to foreshadow a similar future of suffering and strife for readers as for Lionel. The "Introduction" thus engages readers in an experience of the novel that reproduces

the revolting sympathies illustrated in the main text, such as Lionel's disturbing encounter with the "negro half clad," his account of the "revulsive stream" of refugees welcomed into England, Idris's selfless love for her children, and Lionel's unexpected revulsion from *Macbeth* at the Drury Lane Theatre.[31] Describing revolting sympathies as a fact of interpersonal relation, *The Last Man* projects Shelley's 19th-century concerns onto Lionel's apocalyptic future. By involving readers in uncomfortable intimacies that prove so dangerous in the world of the novel, *The Last Man* proffers an urgent warning about sympathy's negative potential to readers of a culture deeply invested in sympathy as political policy and literary convention. For 21st-century readers as for 19th-century ones, the novel shows readers – by making them (us) feel – that although we think sympathy alleviates suffering and facilitates peace in social, political, personal, and literary contexts, it has the revolting potential to generate outcomes at horrifying odds with those we intend for it and expect of it.

Even so, *The Last Man* demonstrates in form and in content that while sympathies are fundamentally revolting, their infectiousness makes them productive and prolific as well. Lionel's encounter with the "negro half clad" reproduces the suffering man's discomfort instead of stopping it. Similarly, readers' encounter with the novel reproduces Lionel's (and Shelley's) discomfort, illuminating the underside of sympathy ignored by contemporary political accounts of it. Although interpersonal encounters can generate disgust and revulsion, *The Last Man* suggests that they are inevitable and even necessary, as they also communicate less common thoughts and feelings and alternative

perspectives. As *Villette*'s "penetrating" sympathies demonstrate in the next chapter, intimacy thus serves as a modality of important identification and recognition, even when its invasiveness makes it more akin to sexual violation than compassionate benevolence. Like *The Wanderer* and, as we will see, like *Villette*, *The Last Man* engages readers in an unconventional, uncomfortable, disconcerting mode of novelistic intimacy in order to (re)present the instabilities of self-other relations, complicating assumptions that sympathy is moral, mutually beneficial, and community- and nation-building. Morally and affectively unstable, sympathy as Shelley portrays it can be both comforting and terrifying, both unifying and divisive, both relationship building and utterly alienating. Chapters Two and Three have shown how sympathy proves "difficult" and "revolting" in *The Wanderer* and *The Last Man*; Chapter Four explores its painfully "penetrating" possibilities as illuminated by *Villette*.

NOTES

[1] Although Shelley completed *Mathilda* in 1820, the short novel or novella did not see publication until 1959. Shelley had sent it to her father, William Godwin, to find a publisher, but (not surprisingly) he declined to do so because of what he deemed its improper content. *The Last Man* is therefore Shelley's third prose publication.

[2] Mellor repeats this argument in "Response to 'The Last Man and the New History' (Greg Kucich)."

[3] As I suggested briefly in the Introduction, these are questions also explored by Susan Sontag. While Sontag discusses sympathy as something we can choose to engage in or not, I am suggesting that Shelley portrays the disadvantageous aspects of "imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others" to which Sontag refers (affective distance, "impotence," "privilege") as constitutive parts of sympathy described as an inevitable and unstable phenomenon.

[4] Quotations from *Mathilda* come from the unpaginated version available online through Project Gutenberg. This ebook follows the 1959 edition edited by Elizabeth Nitchie. Instead of page numbers, I provide chapter numbers in parentheses.

[5] The term "monstrous intimacies" is especially apt in signifying the potential negativity of sympathetic relationships, as the affectively unstable relationship between Frankenstein and the "monster" that he creates demonstrates. "Monstrous intimacies" also recalls Christina Sharpe's book by that name, which explores the intertwinement of conflicting affects and outcomes in racialized and post-slavery contexts.

[6] Marshall's understanding of failed sympathies in *Frankenstein* is echoed by more recent critics. Jeanne Britton admirably expands the parameters of sympathy beyond the spectatorial limits (in her words, the "visual experience") of Adam Smith's theory, but argues that "the production and transmission of narrative" in *Frankenstein* makes up for "the failures of face-to-face sympathetic experience" (3). Also noting "failures" of sympathy, James Hatch suggests that involuntary negative "affects" such as "shame and disgust undermine the role of sympathy that Adam Smith theorized as the determiner of social relations" (34). For Hatch, *Frankenstein* "places sympathy into conflict with the power of affect," which will interrupt sympathy unless properly controlled (43, 42). See also Debbie Lee, who uses the word "alterity" to signify Smithian sympathy in the Romantic period but who similarly describes *Frankenstein* as a novel about the "devastating failure of alterity" (174).

[7] This language of monstrosity returns yet again when Frankenstein destroys the creature's female companion. The creature responds "with a howl of devilish despair and revenge" (*Frankenstein* 139), "gnash[ing] his teeth in the impotence of anger" (140).

[8] Quoted in full, Marshall argues that *Frankenstein* "suggests the dangerous effects of both sympathy and a lack of sympathy: the failure to recognize others as fellow creatures with fellow feeling turns both oneself and others into monsters, while sympathy itself seems to result in monstrous forms of reproduction—both the monstrous images and figures of likeness that reflect horrid resemblance and the horrifying sexuality that seems like incest in its union of too much sameness and not enough difference" (213).

[9] For a discussion of the relationship between Mathilda and her father that does not assume sexual desire, see Julie Carlson's reading in *England's First Family of Writers*. Attempting to dispel the theory that Shelley records in *Mathilda* anxieties about her own sexual "excessive & romantic attachment" to her father, William Godwin, Carlson argues that *Mathilda* explores anxieties about filial identification (and identification through literature) rather than filial desire: "Recognizing the shaping power of fiction, the capacity of stories to insinuate themselves into a person's blood,

dreams, and feelings, is part of the formulation of the subject's formation that *Matilda* explores. This *is* Mary Shelley's story – not that her 'excessive & romantic attachment' to her father is incestuous but that her formation as a daughter-subject is informed by literature and by a literary tradition that has little language for characterizing deep connections between fathers and daughters other than incest" (112).

[10] On incest and/or sympathy in *Mathilda*, see Joel Faflak, "Mary Shelley's Matilda: Beyond Sympathy" (in *Questione Romantica: Rivista Interdisciplinare di Studi Romantici* 1.1 [June 2009]); Elizabeth Delaney, "Radical Moments: Jane Barker, Mary Shelley, and Incest" (in *Transgression and Taboo: Critical Essays* [2005]); Tilotamma Rajan, "Mary Shelley's 'Mathilda': Melancholy and the Political Economy of Romanticism" (in *Studies in the Novel* 26.2 [Summer 1994]); and essays by Judith Barbour, Audra Dibert Himes, and Ranita Chatterjee in *Iconoclastic Departures: Mary Shelley After Frankenstein: Essays in Honor of the Bicentenary of Mary Shelley's Birth* (1997).

[11] According to Carlson, Shelley, like her parents, was acutely "receptiv[e] to the magical properties of writing," which "helped to facilitate [her] openness to alterity. [She] recognized human attraction to things, to being thing-like, and [she] characterized attractions to persons as electric and magnetic" (17). I argue that sympathetic "receptivity" to "alterity" in Shelley's writings includes negative responses, such as revulsion, as well as the positive elements that "openness" usually connotes, such as compassion and inclusivity.

[12] Sophie Thomas echoes Wells' reading of the Introduction's importance to Lionel's narrative: in contrast to critics who argue that the Introduction is "a convenient, if extravagant fiction that can be quickly forgotten once it has done its work of facilitating the reader's entry into Lionel Verney's world," Thomas suggests that "closer examination reveals how tightly interwoven it is with the material of the novel" (33).

[13] *The Last Man* has long been regarded by critics as a roman à clef in which Shelley memorializes her late husband Percy Shelley, her close friend, Lord Byron, and her dead children. At the very least, the novel is considered heavily inflected by the novelist's many losses of family and friends: by the time she completed and published *The Last Man*, Shelley had outlived not only her husband, who had drowned with their friend Edward Williams in a boating accident in 1822, and Byron, who had died in the war for Greek independence in 1824. At 28, she had also survived her half-sister, Fanny (Imlay) Godwin, who committed suicide in 1816, and several children who died in infancy and miscarriage. An oft-quoted journal entry suggests that Shelley identifies with the novel's grieving narrator: "The last man!" she wrote on May 14, 1824, "Yes I may well describe that solitary being's feelings, feeling myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions, extinct before me—" (*Journals* 476-477). With this journal entry as evidence of autobiographical inspiration, many readers have noted the strong resemblance between the poetic Adrian Windsor and Percy Shelley and between the Byronic Lord Raymond and Byron himself, as well as between "last" authors Lionel Verney and Mary Shelley. (It is also possible to see Shelley in Perdita, who is passionate but reticent, and in Idris, who dies grieving for her dead family members and for the future of her living ones).

[14] Emily Sunstein's biography of Shelley links the novelist's conception of *The Last Man* not to the Naples cave exploration in 1818 but rather to a visit to Shaklewell Green in 1823, during which music, "'the master key' to her emotions," caused "new ideas [for a novel] [to] rise & develop themselves'" (Sunstein 245). Sunstein quotes a letter from Shelley to Leigh Hunt.

[15] The "Introduction" thus rewrites contemporary Romantic ideas about poetic genius and the creative power of the individual imagination, positioning itself against contemporary beliefs that poets convey truths to readers through sympathy (a belief espoused by Percy Shelley and many of the Romantic poets).

[16] Shelley herself contracted smallpox while in Paris in 1828.

[17] By all indications, this is the same war in which Byron had died in 1824. In Shelley's imagined future, a war begun in the 19th century is still being waged more than 200 years later.

[18] Lionel draws a connection between his 21st-century present and the French Revolutionary past (the recent past of 19th-century novel readers) when he compares the English "spirit of benevolence" towards refugees of plague who are seeking asylum in England to "the conclusion of the eighteenth century," when "the English unlocked their hospitable store, for the relief of those driven from their homes by political revolution" (*Last Man* 237, 236).

[19] The fact that Lionel is returning from a successful humanitarian mission makes his negative encounter with the "negro half clad" all the more disturbing and inexplicable. Just before his unexpected revulsion from the man's suffering, Lionel and Adrian rescue an orphan whose guardians have all died and bring her home with them.

[20] See, for example, Richardson's "*The Last Man* and the Plague of Empire."

[21] In its entirety, the scene reads as follows: Lionel

> snatched a light, and rushing up stairs, and hearing a groan, without reflection I threw open the door of the first room that presented itself. It was quite dark; but, as I stept within, a pernicious scent assailed my senses, producing sickening qualms, which made their way to my very heart, while I felt my leg clasped, and a groan repeated by the person that held me. I lowered my lamp, and saw a negro half clad, writhing under the agony of disease, while he held me with a convulsive grasp. With mixed horror and impatience I strove to disengage myself, and fell on the sufferer; he wound his naked festering arms round me, his face was close to mine, and his breath, death-laden, entered my vitals. For a moment I was overcome, my head was bowed by aching nausea; till, reflection returning, I sprung up, threw the wretch from me, and darting up the staircase, entered the chamber usually inhabited by my family. (336-337)

[22] Other critics also attempt to redeem Lionel (and/or Shelley) from accusations of racism. As I mention above, Anne Mellor suggests that the interaction between Lionel and the black man is an "unwilling but powerful embrace of the racial other," through which Lionel "both contracts and, recovering, becomes immune to the plague" ("Introduction" and "Response to"). Lionel does not want to embrace the man – whether because he is black or for another reason – but the fact that he does so (even if "unwilling[ly]") redeems his racism as a step towards sympathetic inclusivity. In another vein, Peter Melville defuses the possibility of racism by suggesting that Lionel's rejection of the black man stems more from an urgent desire to help his suffering family, which always comes first for him: "Concern for the well-being of the son," argues Melville, "renders Lionel incapable of compassion for the other…Compassion for others ultimately remains relative" (835). This reading allows Lionel to prioritize his family and friends over a black stranger and still not be racist. See also Lisa Hopkins.

[23] The slave trade had been dissolved in 1807, but slavery itself was not abolished in England until 1833. See Chapter One for examples of how sympathy entered both debates as part of political policy.

[24] On the plague as product of imperial contact, see also Alan Bewell's *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*.

[25] In addition to these experiences of suffering and death that I am linking to the revolting dangers of sympathy, the "ex-queen" (Idris and Adrian's mother) dies of old age, and Lionel's younger son, Evelyn, succumbs to typhus.

[26] Perdita and Raymond are so connected that they constitute "[o]ne heart, one hope, one life" (126): "[t]he very heart and soul of Raymond and Perdita had mingled, even as two mountain

brooks that join in their descent, and murmuring and sparkling flow over shining pebbles" (130). Their sympathy is such that the defection of one puts the other in imminent danger: "but let one [of the mountain brooks] desert its primal course, or be damned up by choaking [sic] obstruction, and the other shrinks in its altered banks" (130).

[27] For Orianne Smith, whose book considers *The Last Man* in terms of the tradition of the female prophet/poet, "[t]he destructive force of a woman's curse becomes apocalyptic in the novel, when the spurned and dying Evadne curses Lord Raymond, ushering in the plague that wipes out the earth's inhabitants" (212). Addressing Evadne's curse from the lens of the imperial rather than the prophetic, Bewell suggests that Evadne is "a dangerous moral contagion that is undermining British society" and that she "emblematizes their [the East and the West's] epidemiological link" (Bewell 299).

[28] According to Mellor, *The Last Man*'s female characters "have only a relational identity, as wife or mother. They are never self-centered or self-sufficient" (*Mary Shelley* 156). Mellor reads this "relational identity" as Shelley's critique of women's roles in society: "Perdita's death…embodies Mary Shelley's recognition that the gender-determined role of devoted wife within the bourgeois family is inherently suicidal: the wife submerges her identity into that of her husband, sacrificing her self to his welfare" (154). In Idris, Shelley "underlines the heroic but self-destructive dimensions of motherhood. Because Idris identifies so closely with her children, she has no life of her own—her sons' deaths annihilate her as well" (155). When separated from their partners in sympathy, women in *The Last Man* have nothing left to sustain them.

[29] Shelley's *Journals* reveal that she herself experienced acutely the duality of sympathy she describes most vividly in *The Last Man*'s female characters: both loving union and lonely alienation. In addition to a sense of "lastness," Shelley's *Journals* demonstrate a desire for and an inability to evoke compassionate sympathy in those around her. Longing "[b]ut for one instant of Sympathy!" with her departed husband, Shelley laments the absence of interpersonal "communication" that Percy's death has caused her (*Journals* 466). But she also struggles to activate in her remaining friends the sympathetic kindness that she thinks her thoughts and feelings warrant. Several months after Percy's death, she writes that "[n]o one seems to understand and to sympathize with me. They all seem to look on me as one without affections – without any sensibility – my sufferings are thought a cypher – & I feel myself degraded before them; knowing that in their hearts they degrade me from the rank which I deserve to possess" (440-441). As the *Journals* editors document, despite Shelley's acute suffering at the loss of a dearly loved husband, Jane Williams and others continued to see her as the "cold," emotionally distant wife as which Percy had sometimes portrayed her (429-430, including editors' notes).

[30] As noted above, Anne McWhir searches for a historical source amongst "anti-contagionist" views of disease in 19th-century England. Paul Cantor, Alan Richardson, and Alan Bewell – as well as Audrey Fisch – consider the plague an outgrowth of British imperialism and "Eurocentric" attitudes (Fisch 271). Numerous critics have treated the plague as Shelley's version of the popular "last man" narratives published in the early 19th century. And others have noted how it resists interpretation altogether, reflecting the instability and unrest characteristic of the period. For Robert Lance Snyder and for Morton Paley, for example, the plague is vague, incoherent, and lacks any "rational explanation" (Paley 110).

[31] Lionel's experience at the theatre serves as a fictional model for the aesthetic experience that the novel attempts to elicit in readers. Like *The Last Man*, which begins with a fantasy about an unlikely Sibyl's prophecy about a far-fetched future, *Macbeth* begins for Lionel as a supernatural fiction "contain[ing] little directly connected with our present circumstances" (*Last Man* 281). It ends, however, in a disturbing moment of identification that drives Lionel from the theater. Reflecting on the "high wrought sympathy" he experiences while watching the play, Lionel explains that he "had entered into the universal feeling—I had been absorbed by the terrors of Rosse—I re-echoed the cry of Macduff, and then rushed out as from an hell of torture, to find calm in the free air and silent street" (283). Lionel's unexpected identification with characters whose

situations initially feel entirely different from his own includes revulsion alongside mutual grief and compassion.

CHAPTER FOUR

Penetrating Sympathies in *Villette*

From the global concerns of "revolting" sympathies in *The Last Man*, we return with Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) to the more personal concerns of what this chapter calls "penetrating" sympathies: interpersonal encounters in which one participant invades the private thoughts and feelings of the other and assimilates the other's perspective to coincide with his or her own. While revolting sympathies threaten national and international peace by proliferating revulsion and disgust alongside compassion and benevolence, penetrating sympathies threaten privacy and personal identity by undermining individuals' assumptions that they are autonomous and unique. Focusing on the existential crises that identification can induce and rewriting the cues through which novels and narrators construct intimacy with readers, *Villette* illuminates yet another painful paradox of interpersonal encounters, portraying sympathy as both inclusive and invasive, both revelatory and bewildering, both self-empowering and self-alienating. Despite narrator Lucy Snowe's insistence on her own privacy and discrete identity, *Villette*'s modality of sympathy (re)presents individuality as social and shifting, and privacy as always available for public consumption.

Although *Villette* crystallizes Brontë's attitude towards interpersonal relations, the novelist finds the terms to describe such encounters as early as *Jane Eyre* (1847). Reflecting on her sympathetic attraction to Mr. Rochester, Charlotte Brontë's best loved heroine, Jane Eyre, "wonder[s]" that other women can

"receive with calm that look [of his] which seemed to me so penetrating": "'He is not to them what he is to me,' I thought: 'he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine; – I am sure he is, – I feel akin to him, – I understand the language of his countenance and movements: though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him'" (253). A novel celebrating the "perfect concord" (554) of a sympathetic marriage, *Jane Eyre* registers but does not dwell on the "penetrating" and "assimilat[ing]" powers of sympathy that underlie Jane's feeling of "kin[ship]" with Rochester. Smoothed over in Brontë's first published novel to facilitate readers' identification with a plain and middle-class heroine (and to avoid troubling the problems of "rank and wealth" that Jane herself observes as obstacles to romance with her employer), these darker aspects of self-other relations become central concerns in the novelist's third publication. In *Villette*, identification functions as invasion and appropriation. Tracing its heroine's preoccupation with guarding her privacy against the intrusions of others – and arguably its novelist's preoccupation with maintaining her privacy in the wake of public recognition as a writer[1] – *Villette* involves its readers in sympathy imagined as an inevitable, invasive force.

Following *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* (1849), *Villette* returns to the figure of the governess-heroine. In her reserved but fiery spirit, plain features, and apparently orphaned status, first-person narrator Lucy Snowe resembles the well-loved Jane Eyre. However, Lucy insists on a degree of privacy and a skepticism of sympathy that even Jane sacrifices for the social pleasures of friendship and

romantic love. A deep source of frustration for characters who try and fail to get to know her – "[w]ho *are* you, Miss Snowe?" Ginevra Fanshawe asks Lucy again and again (*Villette* 307) – Lucy's personal inaccessibility has also been a source of frustration for readers, who expect a similar relation to Lucy as they enjoy with Jane. Complicating this relationship with a narrator who evades and contemptuously addresses her readers, *Villette* instead "puts its readers through the hard work of getting to know Lucy" (Dolin xxvii). The novel's subject matter, narrator, and strategies resemble those of *Jane Eyre*, but *Villette* makes sympathizing with its taciturn heroine an uncertain and unsettling experience.

Indeed, Brontë's fourth and last written novel proves surprisingly difficult to engage with in ways 19th-century readers expected of first-person narration presented in the form of a bildungsroman. Even more inaccessible than *The Wanderer*'s Juliet Granville, Lucy Snowe begins with a series of false starts, distracting readers first with Polly Home and then with Miss Marchmont before finally travelling to the titular city of Villette and turning to the real substance of her narrative. Lucy also conceals important aspects of her personal history (unlike our knowledge of Jane Eyre, we never know anything about Lucy's parents or childhood); frequently writes in abstractions (for example, apostrophes to "Imagination" and "Reason"); inserts untranslated paragraphs of French; and – most importantly for the focus of this chapter – directly addresses readers with great ambivalence, sometimes interpellating them as friends and confidantes and sometimes pushing them away with aggression and contempt. Conventionally speaking, Lucy's story is "sympathetic": a poor, apparently orphaned but

educated young woman travels alone from England to fictional Labassecour, obtains employment, works her way from governess to teacher to boarding school directress – all while adhering to her Protestant values – and suffers the tragic loss of her fiancé just as she is about to marry him. Enduring hardships at least as great as Jane Eyre's and achieving financial and personal independence still greater, Lucy appears to be a heroine after the hearts of ambitious middle class readers. She seems to deserve our compassion. Yet Brontë has Lucy keep readers at arm's length, erecting stylistic and structural roadblocks that reroute the identification readers expect.

Critics of *Villette* have seen Lucy's addresses as either proto-feminist tactics through which Lucy constructs an audience that will respect her privacy and individuality or as evidence of misanthropy (a turn away from sympathy). Working in the feminist tradition, Brenda Silver, for example, argues that Lucy's ambivalent addresses appeal to two different kinds of reader: traditionalists who are not receptive to Lucy's resistance to gender norms and non-traditionalists who are. By gradually merging the two kinds of reader, Silver argues, Lucy's direct addresses construct an audience amenable to her rewritten social and literary conventions. In readings like Silver's, Lucy's appeals gain readers' allegiance through sympathy.[2] Christopher Lane and Elisha Cohn, on the other hand, focus on the narrative violence that gets elided from recuperative gestures like Silver's, arguing that Lucy's sometimes contemptuous appeals to readers "[have] no necessary relationship with social transformation" (Cohn 857). In *Villette,* Brontë suggests that hatred and aggression are "inseparable from society" and from

interpersonal relations (Lane 199) but portrays them as inevitable facts of reality rather than injustices to be redressed. In this chapter, I attend to the negative affects upon which Lane and Cohn insist, but I argue that Lucy's antagonism is a facet of intimacy with others and not its anti-social opposite. In other words, hatred and aggression – along with the alienation, loneliness, and pain that sometimes follow – do not work against sympathy in *Villette* but rather as "inseparable" parts of it. *Villette*'s ambivalent direct addresses work within the narrative conventions of realist fiction to (re)present sympathy not as a facilitator of "perfect concord" but rather as a deeply uncomfortable, often painful medium for constructing and reconstructing never-quite-private selves in relation to always-encroaching others.

While the narrator of *Jane Eyre* exemplifies 19th-century conventions of sympathy, directly addressing her readers to encourage them to identify with her, Lucy Snowe complicates readers' identification by using direct addresses that veer unpredictably between friendly and antagonistic, between companionable and contemptuous. When negative, such addresses appear to fall outside the parameters of sympathy; I argue, however, that Lucy's direct addresses make intrusion and discomfort, together with companionship and compassion, constitutive parts of interpersonal and reader-text relationships. In this manner, direct address in *Villette* formalizes the moments of sympathy Lucy describes in the novel, in which her identification with others – including Madame Beck, the King of Labassecour, and Vashti – always involves an uncomfortable collapse of the self, as Lucy both invades and is invaded by others' perspectives and

experiences. Although Lucy struggles to preserve her privacy, her identity, and her adherence to reason (over imagination and romance, for example), sympathy in the world of Brontë's novel explodes the boundaries between self and other and public and private, as well as the boundaries between imagination and reality, performance and reality, and pleasure and pain. Perhaps most discomfiting for readers, the novel's penetrating sympathies disrupt gendered notions of sympathy as a moral experience exemplified by women, illustrating in its heroine and activating in its readers a violent, implicitly sexual, and stereotypically masculine model of sympathy as penetration. By making sympathy most effective when most painfully penetrating, *Villette* illuminates the sexual politics that sometimes underpin interpersonal encounters and within which conventional realist strategies for sympathy trap female characters and readers.

Although they are invasive and appropriating, however, penetrating moments of identification also serve in *Villette* as powerful modes of accessing alternative ways of being and living, such as Vashti's cross-gender sensibilities and Lucy's unmarried independence.[3] As we will see, Lucy's direct addresses enable novel readers to penetrate her icy exterior and gain access to her inner thoughts and feelings. But the same addresses also pierce through readers' expectations for how heroines address readers, behave within plots, and find happiness in marriage in the conclusions of realist novels. Aligning penetrating sympathies with the physical impressions made by writing, Lucy's direct addresses imprint readers with the narrator's dual experience of interpersonal relations. They motivate sympathies in which readers penetrate and are penetrated

by others' ideas and emotions. Strategic direct address in *Villette* thus challenges assumptions that sympathy is consistently comforting and cohesive, assimilating readers to the self-other relations of a novel in which hostility and aggression are parts of social interaction. This strategy does not "redeem" Lucy's actions for social improvement. Rather, it reorients readers' perspective on social and gender relations, (re)presenting intimacy as both comforting and painful, both self-expanding and self-destructive, both a discomfiting component of interpersonal encounters and an unsettling part of novel-reading.

Encountering the Narrator: Sympathy and Direct Address

For readers of *Villette* expecting a reading experience like that of *Jane Eyre*, Lucy Snowe's evasion, manipulation, and contempt are doubly astonishing. Wildly popular from 1847 to today, *Jane Eyre* remains a favorite with readers, in part, because of the identification it facilitates between narrator and a "Reader" whom Jane calls upon as such. As one teacher of the novel observes, "[f]or sheer intensity of the readerly relationships she inspires, Jane Eyre stands by herself, among my students" (qtd in Keen 77). Trustworthy and sympathetic, Jane builds a strong bond with her readers through the realist strategy of direct address, calling on her "romantic reader" (*Jane Eyre* 179) to take her position with respect to the events she narrates. In over 30 instances of direct address, Jane guides reader response ("you are not to suppose, reader" [251]); appeals to the reader for verification and support ("the reader knows" [252]; "I have told you, reader"

[264]; "is it not, reader?" [439]); and calls on the reader as an intimate friend and confidante ("Reader!—I forgave him at the moment" [388]; "Reader, I married him" [553]). As Garrett Stewart observes, *Jane Eyre* interpellates its real-life reader as "a second self listening in on desire" (249) – as another version of the narrator created through the identification facilitated by direct address.

Although Jane's appeals to her "Reader" sometimes anticipate Lucy's bitterness and cynicism, they are predominantly earnest and un-ironic. In this respect, Jane exemplifies what Robyn Warhol calls an "engaging" form of direct address. A mode of narration that, for Warhol, epitomizes realist strategies, "engaging" direct address is especially attuned to evoking sympathy in readers. While "distancing" narrators "set the actual reader apart from the 'you' [addressed] in the text," engaging narrators directly address "a 'you' that is intended to evoke recognition and identification in the person who holds the book and reads" ("Toward a Theory" 811).[4] Engaging narrators' use of "earnestly confidential attitudes towards 'you' encourage actual readers to see themselves reflected in that pronoun" (814). According to Warhol, such narrators "intrude" in the story "to remind their narratees—who, in their texts, should stand for actual readers—that the fictions reflect real-world conditions for which the reader should take active responsibility after putting aside the book" (815). Engaging direct address should "move actual readers" to sympathize with the "real-life" people for whom characters stand in: "real-life slaves, workers, or ordinary middle-class people" (811), such as plain but resourceful governesses who fall in love with their employers.

Although Jane narrates in the first person, while Warhol's exemplars are third-person narrators, her sincere style and insistence on "real-world" relevance result in direct addresses that reach through the pages of the novel to "move actual readers" with "real-life" compassion. In one especially "moving" instance, Jane addresses the reader with an appeal to her "real-world condition": "Gentle reader," she implores as she leaves Rochester on the night of their first, aborted wedding, "may you never feel what I then felt! May your eyes never shed such stormy, scalding heart-wrung tears as poured from mine. May you never appeal to Heaven in prayers so hopeless and so agonized as in that hour left my lips: for never may you, like me, dread to be the instrument of evil to what you wholly love" (413). Although Jane expresses a wish that the reader not feel "like me," she encourages the reader to avoid these sentiments by asking her ("you") to put herself in Jane's place. Engaging direct address in *Jane Eyre* not only facilitates readers' sympathies for an unconventional heroine; it also underscores the narrator's honesty and sincerity and thus the realistic nature of her narrative. As Jane is "merely telling the truth" (177), readers can take comfort in extrapolating from her story to their own "real" lives.

Through the trusting relationship it creates between narrator and reader, "engaging" direct addresses such as those in *Jane Eyre* perform a crucial function in realist fiction aimed at representing "real life." As Lilian Furst explains, a narrator's relationship with his reader is of the utmost importance in 19th-century novels aimed at truthfulness: "[W]hat matters is not the narrator's actual knowledge," writes Furst, "but rather his posture of mastery. 'Realist novels,'

Douglas Hewitt observes, 'do not affect us as being like life: they are like the experience of being told about life by someone we trust.' The fundamental trust is essential, and the realists, well aware of this, took care to cultivate the image of reliability and stability in their narrators" (*All is True* 55). Steady, thorough, and sincere, Jane Eyre exemplifies this relationship of "reliability and stability" as she interpellates readers as active participants in fictional events in the world of *Jane Eyre* and trains them to face similar events in "real life."

In *Villette,* Lucy Snowe uses direct address to create the illusion that she is "reliable and stable" but proves a surprisingly unreliable, unstable narrator. Although *Villette* is immediately preceded by *Shirley* and not *Jane Eyre,* its notable similarities to *Jane Eyre* – including its orphaned and neglected heroine, boarding school setting, Byronic anti-heroes, and Gothic figures and scenes, in addition to its first-person narration – undoubtedly recalled to readers the pleasures of Jane's engaging narration.[5] Surely readers approached *Villette* expecting to sympathize with its heroine as they had with her first-person predecessor. But while *Villette*'s strategies for addressing its readers appear, at first, to replicate the "engaging" strategies employed in *Jane Eyre*, Lucy Snowe quickly becomes a very different kind of narrator. Mixed in with Lucy's "earnest interventions" are what look like distancing strategies that belie readers' expected identification, quite forcefully pushing them away. With Jane, Brontë constructs a "second self" for the heroine in her reader, but with Lucy, she asserts her ability to "fully master the reader," an ability that "outstrips the kill of every other female or male English novelist, living or dead" (Swinburne qtd in Burstein 179). Where

Jane befriends, Lucy "masters" – "kills" – empowers herself where she feels most vulnerable: in sympathetic relations with others. I want to suggest, however, that Lucy's ostensibly "distancing" strategies engage readers differently – that is, in sympathy that includes the uncomfortable, the painful, the noxious, and the penetrating within the scope of its possibilities for self-other relations. When entering into sympathy with a heroine, *Villette* suggests, a reader may not always like or enjoy – or even recognize, at first – the self she discovers there.

For much of *Villette*, Lucy's direct addresses cultivate the illusion that she is the "reliable and stable" narrator that Warhol and Furst associate with realist narration. Lucy's direct addresses support her reliability by providing information for readers' benefit[6] and build common ground with readers by interpellating them as participants in her culture and values.[7] They are most "engaging" in Warhol's sense of the term, however, when they ask readers to put themselves in Lucy's place before jumping to conclusions.[8] Acknowledging the strangeness of a woman traveling unaccompanied to London, for example, Lucy assures the reader that "[i]n going to London [after Miss Marchmont's death], I ran less risk and evinced less enterprise than the reader may think" (45). While such an "enterprise" may look suspicious according to the usual standard of female behavior, Lucy uses her knowledge of such suspicions to divert readers' attention to her awareness of polite manners and appropriate behavior. She performs a similar deflection when she justifies her appeal to Madame Beck for employment: "Before you pronounce on the rashness of the proceeding, reader, look back to the point whence I started; consider the desert I had left, note how little I periled:

mine was the game where the player cannot lose and may win" (60). Assuming that readers will arrive at a conclusion in agreement with her actions, Lucy exemplifies engaging narration when she intervenes "in the spirit of sympathetically and earnestly attempting to convert the narratee to [her] own point…of view" (Warhol, "Toward a Theory" 814). Encouraging readers to identify with the sentiments that led to her unconventional actions, Lucy uses "engaging" narration to ally herself and readers.

By engaging readers in this manner, Lucy gets away with violations not only of gendered conventions of behavior but also of social rules governing politeness and respectful treatment of others. While Lucy sometimes uses direct address to excuse her own behavior, she also uses it to advance some not-so-nice commentary on the behaviors and personality traits of others. After painting a gratuitous picture of the servant Rosine's coquetry, Lucy undertakes a half-hearted retreat, spinning the unattractiveness of the portrait as the reader's construction and not her own: "The reader must not think too hardly of Rosine; on the whole, she was not a bad sort of person" (122). Targeting first Rosine and then the reader, Lucy's engaging addresses turn passive-aggressive and even mean, implicating readers in her frequently nasty treatment of others. Darkly humorous at times, such commentary is even nastier when directed at her friends. Later, Lucy claims that she never saw M. Paul's spaniel "but I thought of Paulina de Bassompierre: forgive the association, reader, it *would* occur" (415). In building common ground with her readers, Lucy interpellates them both as participants in her hardships (the "desert" from which she extracts herself and by

which she justifies improper actions) and as co-conspirators in her bad behavior towards others.

In this manner, ostensibly engaging narration in *Villette* turns into (and back out of) a series of discomfiting manipulations and subversions of fellow-feeling that strain readers' relationship with Lucy. Although Lucy's direct addresses sometimes suggest that she is trustworthy, reliable, and conventionally sympathetic – a friend and compatriot – others not only implicate readers in her contempt of others but actually direct her contempt at readers themselves, violating the trust that Lucy establishes elsewhere. An early example of Lucy's contempt for her readers occurs when she shifts her narrative from her residence with the Brettons to her residence with Miss Marchmont. Reflecting on how she "betook [herself] home, having been absent six months," Lucy supposes that

> [i]t will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred. Well! the amiable conjecture does not harm, and may therefore be safely left uncontradicted. Far from saying nay, indeed, I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbor still as glass…A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest? (35)

Although Lucy appears to mildly "permit" her reader to indulge in fantasies that are not true to her story, her sarcasm about the "great many women and girls" who "are supposed" to live in luxury and happiness illuminates Lucy's bitterness

about the unreality of readers' expectations and, furthermore, about the unreality of fantasies about women's lives – fantasies sometimes perpetuated by female readers who insist on the pleasantries and happy ending that Lucy does not experience. Unlike the fictional women and girls who enjoy "halcyon weather" – "idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck" – Lucy experiences a metaphorical shipwreck. A "nightmare in which "the ship was lost, the crew perished" (35), Lucy's experience is much different than that expected by the implied novel reader she addresses. While her direct addresses in this scene correct readers' unrealistic expectations, they do so with striking aggression, jolting readers out of compassion and into a more complex sympathetic relation.

Indeed, contrary to her claims to be filling in gaps in information for readers' "benefit," we eventually discover that Lucy has been constructing what Mary Jacobus calls "deliberate ruses, omissions and falsifications [that] break the unwritten contract of first-person narrative (the confidence between reader and 'I')" (43).[9] While Lucy's direct addresses seem at first to "engage" readers in Warhol's terms, they are also involved in what looks like a project of "distancing" – of "deliberate" re-inscription of the boundary between reader and narrator. The most striking example of this apparent distancing occurs when Lucy announces to the reader that, unlike the reader, she is *not* surprised that the pensionnat physician, Dr. John, turns out to be the same person as her estranged godmother's son, Graham Bretton. When, in the middle of a conversation with a man introduced to readers as "Graham," Lucy calls him "Dr. John," she explains herself by directly addressing her reader: "For, reader," she declares, "this tall

young man—this darling son—this host of mine—this Graham Bretton, was Dr. John: he, and no other" (174). Lest the reader suppose that Lucy is shocked by this revelation, she goes on to declare that

> [w]hat is more, I ascertained this identity scarcely with surprise. What is more, when I heard Graham's step on the stairs, I knew what manner of figure would enter, and for whose aspect to prepare my eyes. The discovery was not of to-day, its dawn had penetrated my perceptions long since…Dr. John Graham Bretton retained still an affinity to the youth of sixteen [as Lucy had last seen him]: he had his eyes; he had some of his features; to wit, all the excellently moulded lower half of the face; I found him out soon. I first recognized him on that occasion, noted several chapters back, when my unguardedly-fixed attention had drawn on me the mortification of an implied rebuke. (174-175)

Pleased with her powers of perception, Lucy takes still more pleasure in unsettling her reader, flaunting her omission of information with dramatic references to the impressive "what is more" that exceeds readers' apparently limited knowledge. No longer concerned with the reader's "benefit," Lucy explains her silence on Dr. John/Graham Bretton's identity as a matter of personal preference and, paradoxically, a strategy for maximizing closeness:

> To say anything on the subject, to hint at my discovery, had not suited my habits of thought, or assimilated with my system of feeling. On the contrary, I had preferred to keep the matter to

> myself. I liked entering his presence covered with a cloud he had not seen through, while he stood before me under a ray of special illumination, which shone all partial over his head, trembled about his feet, and cast light no further. (175)

Counterintuitively, Lucy comes closest to Dr. John – feels him most "illuminated" to her perception – when she most distances herself from him. Although her explanation masquerades as an explanation of why she never told Dr. John (who never recognized her as the Lucy Snowe of his childhood) that she knew him as Graham Bretton, it also functions as a response to readers' tacit wonder about why she never revealed it to them. As with characters, with whom Lucy prefers to remain aloof, with readers she insists on maintaining the same distance. Providing more information and insight into her character "had not suited [her] habits of thought"; yet Lucy's announcement about the distance she preserves between herself and others tells us more about her feelings for Dr. John/Graham Bretton (and his "excellently moulded lower half of the face") than any of the explicit information she gives elsewhere. Just as distance from Dr. John/Graham Bretton augments Lucy's closeness to him, as she "enter[s] his presence covered with a cloud he had not seen through," distance from Lucy enhances readers' participation in her experiences of social life. Contemptuously drawing a line between herself and readers, Lucy "illuminat[es]" her own private (now public) thoughts. Counterintuitively, distance better enables Lucy and readers to penetrate into the inner lives of others.[10]

Among 19th-century readers, Lucy's strategy of feigning intimacy only to eschew and deny it provoked varied responses, ranging from aversion to "interest" to admiration at the author's "originality" in approaching the conventional with "contempt." For the *Edinburgh Review* critic, Lucy "presents rather an interesting study than an attraction or charm" ("ART.IV-1" 387); she does not fascinate readers with the usual "charm" but rather by her lack thereof. The critic for the *Westminster Review* admires this unconventionality, locating it in both the novel's ideas and its narrative style: "[c]ontempt of conventions in all things, in style, in thought, even in the art of story-telling, here visibly springs from the independent originality of a strong mind nurtured in solitude" ("ART. VI-Ruth and Villette" 485).[11] The *Dublin Review* writer, however, cannot get past the narrator's "cold and distrustful spirit"; he can "sympathiz[e]" with Lucy's "evident cleverness, and the independence of her disposition," but he finds her iciness and disregard for others a persistent source of aversion and dislike ("ART VI-1" 188).

More recent critics have pondered the possible purpose and effects of Lucy's ambivalent treatment of readers. Brenda Silver suggests that Lucy uses direct address to align two different kinds of reader: conventional readers tied to the patriarchal culture that limits Lucy's freedom (both to live independently and to narrate candidly) and readers open to her different, proto-feminist story.[12] By gradually merging both kinds of reader over the course of the novel, Silver argues, Lucy "rewrit[es] the traditional novel to illustrate the limited plot available to women in literature, as in life" (110). In a similar vein, Helen Davis

argues that direct address helps Lucy construct an audience that is amenable to her unconventional worldview. Even while Lucy withholds information and misleads readers, her direct addresses "help to create an authorial audience who accepts the narrator's [evasions] by attempting to use those moments to bond with the narratee" (Davis 205). Even when Lucy withholds and manipulates information, Davis proposes, her direct addresses target an audience that, in becoming complicit with the narrative evasions, accepts them as central to Lucy's self-asserted privacy and independence.

Charting the relationship between *Villette*'s thematic interest in privacy and its formal strategy of direct address, these analyses have been invaluable for feminist critics of the novel. However, they sidestep the narrative violence of Lucy's addresses to all kinds of readers, including those willing to accept her as she is. Lucy is not merely a reserved narrator and character, as are the third-person narrator and the heroine of *The Wanderer*; Lucy actively complicates her relationship with the reader in the most disruptive, condescending ways, prompting some recent critics to suggest that she exudes hatred and hostility. Viewed in terms of Warhol's theory of the engaging narrator, Lucy's distancing strategies interrupt or discourage sympathy, looking like antagonism and misanthropy instead. I want to suggest, however, that direct address in *Villette* continues to operate in conjunction with sympathy – albeit sympathy that is deeply, painfully penetrating.

I am arguing that Lucy involves the reader in a project of simultaneous engagement and distance: complicating Warhol's neat dichotomy, Lucy engages

by distancing and distances by engaging. This ambivalent strategy looks, at times, like a way of shoring up the boundaries between narrator and reader (as when Lucy reveals that she hasn't let readers entirely into her secrets), but it actually facilitates a surprising collapse of those boundaries, forcing readers to enter into the less socially acceptable sentiments that Lucy frequently expresses in her meta-narrative asides. Rather than creating obstacles to sympathy through distancing addresses, Lucy invokes distance (as well as negative affects like frustration and contempt) as constitutive parts of sympathetic identification that sometimes resemble sexual violation more than mutual benevolence. Through its narrator's ambivalent direct addresses, *Villette* demonstrates that entering into the feelings and thoughts of others involves undergoing experiences you were not expecting or would rather not encounter. Instead of either "engaging" or "distancing," then, Lucy's direct addresses penetrate readers' expectations of compassionate identification (as in *Jane Eyre*) to involve them in unstable sympathies that discompose and discomfort them but that nonetheless allow them to participate more fully in Lucy's socially disjunctive experiences.

What is "real," after all, in Lucy's experience of self-other relations is not the "reliability and stability" that Furst associates with realist narration, or even the "earnest" sincerity of Warhol's "engaging" realist narrators. Rather, Lucy's interpersonal relationships are unreliable and unstable (not to mention undesired and sometimes violent); they impose distance even as they penetrate surfaces and exteriors; and they dissolve the ostensible boundaries between participating subjects, raising questions about the status of self and other, private and public.

Lucy's direct addresses evoke in readers the shifting responses that Lucy herself experiences in sympathy with others. Such addresses dispel illusions that identification with others is always a pleasantly cohesive experience and expose grim realities about people, about literature, and about social and political life that readers may not have seen, felt, or responded to otherwise – such as the discrepancies between "halcyon weather" and shipwreck, between social pleasantries and raw responses to others, between the fates of heroines and real working women, and between readers' expectations of novels and their own "real" lives. When we notice that Lucy experiences sympathy with characters within the novel as similarly penetrating, her simultaneously engaging and distancing strategies emerge as way of reproducing in readers her penetrations of and by the perspectives and insights of others.

Privacy, Identity, and the "Sympathetic Faculty"

Lucy spends most of *Villette* trying to preserve a hidden, inner self while feeling ceaselessly bombarded by the interventions and intrusions of others. In spite of her expressed preference for solitude, however, Lucy discovers that she literally cannot survive without sympathetic contact. Left alone in the pensionnat over a lonely "long vacation" with only a dull "crétin" student for company (156), Lucy has a nervous breakdown that she later attributes to an unconquerable "want of companionship." In spite of her efforts to remain private and self-sufficient, desire for intimacy explodes out of Lucy as "a feeling that would make its way,

rush out, or kill me" (185). As Lucy realizes, describes, and evokes for her readers, interpersonal encounters are necessary and inevitable, even while they can be unbearably painful. In moments of identification with Madame Beck, the King of Labassecour, and Vashti, Lucy describes sympathy as a painful, penetrating, and yet regenerative force by which she (re)constructs a self in relation to others. I suggest below that Lucy's well-documented insistence on privacy, independence, and autonomy is determined both by the proto-feminist sensibilities cited by Silver, Davis, and others and by her awareness of sympathy's double-sided power. For Lucy, as for Brontë, identification threatens to violate privacy and discrete selfhood, but it also illuminates unnoticed, unappreciated, and *shared* aspects of others, recasting identity as public rather than private and multiple rather than discrete or unique. As Sally Shuttleworth observes, "[i]dentity [in *Villette*] is not a given, but rather a tenuous process of negotiation between the subject and surrounding social forces" (242).

Scholarship on *Villette* has long observed that Lucy's cultivation of privacy stems from a desire to act and think differently than the models of womanhood embodied by the novel's other female characters. From Louisa Bretton to Polly Home/Paulina de Bassompierre to Miss Marchmont to Ginevra Fanshawe to Madame Beck and even to Madame Walravens, *Villette* provides Lucy with a number of female role models: doting mother, dutiful daughter and marriageable young woman, disappointed lover, heartless coquette, despotic business woman, bitter and greedy widow. Against these roles available to women, Lucy appears to "be among those who do not fit" (Boumelha 105).[13]

Instead, Lucy reports having "shades of peculiarity…engrained in [her] nature—shades, certainly not striking enough to interest, and perhaps not prominent enough to offend, but born in and with me, and no more to be parted with than my identity" (*Villette* 108). Although she is "in public…by nature a cypher" (356), Lucy's cryptic allusions to identity suggest that in private, she hides a more substantive sense of self – a self that doesn't "fit" available structures and strategies.

As she describes it, Lucy's "peculiarity" amounts to a divergence from social expectations for women and an insistence on autonomy and independence. For instance, Lucy turns down an offer to be Paulina Mary's companion because she "was no bright lady's shadow": any "dimness and depression" of circumstances "must be voluntary" (298). Eschewing a traditional occupation for a well-mannered poor woman, Lucy prefers her own plan of hard work and self-sufficiency. Although she half-jokingly suggests to Ginevra Fanshawe that she is "[p]erhaps a personage in disguise" (308) or "a rising character," in doing so Lucy reveals that she measures people differently from Ginevra and "the World": for Lucy, "pedigree, social position, and recondite intellectual acquisition" have little to do with identity or integrity (309). This does not tell us if Lucy is "nobody" or "somebody," as Ginevra wants to know (308), but it does show that Lucy measures herself by a different standard – one in which neither poverty nor lack of family relations nor status as a woman prevent her from earning an honest, respectable, independent living, or from starring in her own novel. As Lucy describes it, privacy and self-reliance signal her difference from existing models

of womanhood. However, Lucy's interactions with others suggest that her sense of self comes from an accumulation of others' perspectives, which she has penetrated and appropriated for her own purposes – from a multitude of partial similarities to others rather than from clearly delineated differences.

Lucy's repulsion from Madame Beck, for example, emerges out of an intense moment of identification, in which Lucy is "fascinated" by the other woman's audacity and efficiency and then suffers from a discomposing "inward tumult" (118, 119). Upon returning to the dormitory one evening, Lucy finds the directress snooping through her belongings and, instead of confronting Madame Beck, continues spying on her as she snoops. In fact, Lucy enters the scene as stealthily as Madame Beck investigates her possessions. Creeping into the dormitory with eyes peeled and ears perked up, Lucy notes that "[a]ll the white beds…lay visible at a glance; all were empty…The sound of a drawer cautiously slid out struck my ear," and she positions herself so that her "vision took a free range, unimpeded by the falling curtains" and out of sight of Madame Beck (118). As she watches Madame Beck opening "each succeeding drawer in turn," leaving "not an article of their contents" unexamined, Lucy expresses not anger at the intrusion into her privacy but admiration at "the adroitness" and "exemplary care with which the search was accomplished" (118). Lucy watches her employer "with a secret glee": "she was so handy, neat, thorough in all she did" (118). Although Lucy assumes the role of student here, watching and learning from Madame Beck's experienced surveillance, Lucy's own skills at detection suggest that their roles could be reversed. This is a scene of identification, in which Lucy

recognizes in Madame Beck her own disciplined observation of others, a skill we see her deploy on numerous occasions.[14]

Surprisingly, Madame Beck's inspection of Lucy's private items does not threaten Lucy, but the prospect of Madame Beck seeing Lucy spying on her as she snoops – that is, mutual recognition of each other's penetrations into others' secrets – does become threatening. Lucy "stood…fascinated" watching Madame Beck (118), but it "was necessary to make an effort to break this spell… The searcher might have turned and caught me… and she and I would have had to come all at once, with a sudden clash, to a thorough knowledge of each other: down would have gone conventionalities, away swept disguises, and *I* should have looked into her eyes, and *she* into mine" (119). Lucy's identification with Madame Beck is both "fascinating" and repulsive, such that "a retreat must be beaten" (119). It violates the privacy insisted upon by both women, if not with respect to their material objects then to their inner-most thoughts and feelings, as well as their shared strategies for keeping others at a distance by getting closer to them. Lucy explains that if Madame Beck had seen her as she saw Madame Beck, "we should have known that we could work together no more, and parted in this life for ever" (119). Lucy identifies with Madame Beck, but by preventing Madame Beck from identifying with her, she retains a sense of power over the other woman, keeping sympathy an appropriative relation through which only she benefits.

Paradoxically, however, sympathy in this scene both reaffirms Lucy's individuality by remaining a non-mutual, asymmetrical relation and discomposes

Lucy by revealing her striking similarities to her employer. After Lucy "retreat[s]" to keep her spying hidden from Madame Beck, she reports feeling alarmingly unlike herself: "I never had felt so strange and contradictory an inward tumult," she tells us, "as I felt for an hour that evening: soreness and laughter, and fire, and grief, shared my heart between them…Complicated, disquieting thoughts broke up the whole repose of my nature" (119). Even though Lucy has spied undetected, the moment of identification has altered her "inward[ly]," infiltrating what she considers the "whole repose of my nature" with the knowledge that she is not alone, even in her self-enforced solitude from the company of others. For some, such company might be comforting, but Lucy experiences it as "strange" and "disquieting," for part of what defines "Lucy Snowe" – introversion, observation, self-reliance – also defines Madame Beck. Lucy's "retreat" has prevented sympathy from becoming a mutual experience, but her identification with Madame Beck has still blurred the boundaries of "Lucy Snowe," challenging distinctions between self and other, private and public. Through sympathy with her employer, Lucy both penetrates and is penetrated by an other.

Later in the novel, Lucy describes this mode of interpersonal relation as the "sympathetic faculty," which she distinguishes from "rational benevolence" towards others. According to Lucy, the "sympathetic faculty" is a natural, instinctive response to others, while "rational benevolence" denotes an unfeeling, personally beneficial relation. While "rational benevolence" penetrates and assimilates others under the illusion of complete power, "the sympathetic faculty" includes the double-sidedness of interpersonal relations that Lucy experiences

throughout the novel: both penetration of others and penetration by others. Exemplified by Madame Beck (and thus one point on which Lucy and her employer do not coincide), "rational benevolence" is defined as charity without emotion, carried out with one's own interests in mind: Madame Beck, Lucy reports, acts kindly on occasion, but "interest was the master-key of [her] nature—the mainspring of her motive—the alpha and omega of her life" (74). Lucy describes the difference between Madame Beck's humanitarian acts and real fellow-feeling as a difference between "charity" and "mercy": "While devoid of sympathy, she had a sufficiency of rational benevolence: she would give in the readiest manner to peoples she had never seen—rather, however, to classes than to individuals. 'Pour les pauvres,' she opened her purse freely—against *the poor man*, as a rule, she kept it closed" (74). Appealing to Madame Beck's "*feelings*" will "rouse her antipathy" (74), but appealing to her personal "interest" may stir up an act of charity.

By linking Madame Beck's "rational benevolence" and "charity" towards far-away "peoples," Brontë associates it with the conception of sympathy employed in contemporary humanitarian projects, especially religious missions in the European colonies. Lucy notes that "[i]n philanthropic schemes, for the benefit of society at large, [Madame Beck] took a cheerful part; no private sorrow touched her: no force or mass of suffering concentrated in one heart had power to pierce hers" (74). In acting charitably without feeling for or with others, Madame Beck follows Adam Smith's distinction between feeling and "sympathy," which Smith conceives as an impartial, improving, and rational act, regulated by the

approval of an imagined third party, "the examiner and judge" of the self-other relation (Smith 135-136). As several commentators have observed and as I have shown in previous chapters, Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), along with its claim of a "rational" version of sympathy as the baseline for moral action, underlies many of the political and religious projects of the 19th century. Lara Freeburg Kees explains that such projects, like the conception of sympathy they deploy, are "not purely altruistic, since [the] kind of magnanimity [on which they rely] earns one public regard, and that social reward ensures moral social behavior" (875-876).[15] Driven by personal "interest" more than "compassion," Madame Beck engages in philanthropy for its social rewards, without any "*feelings*" for the objects of her sympathy.[16]

Brontë furthers her association of rational benevolence with contemporary political projects rooted in Smithian sympathy towards the end of the novel, when Madame Beck conspires with the Catholic priest Père Silas and the greedy widow Madame Walravens to send M. Paul to a remote West Indian colony. Outwardly, Paul's task in Guadeloupe resembles contemporary religious missions, which often employed the language of sympathy to garner support.[17] Couching colonizing gestures in terms of sympathy and thus recalling St. John Rivers's imperial mission in *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*'s Père Silas claims to participate in the Guadeloupe project because of its "prospective improvement for the sake of religion and the church" (461). Although Père Silas, Madame Walravens, and Madame Beck are Catholic, and not the evangelical Christians whose deployment of sympathy would have been familiar to Brontë, they use sympathy as rational

benevolence in much the same way.[18] Lucy, however, describes their project as a self-interested endeavor to make money. When Madame Walravens discovers that her estate in the West Indies can make her rich "if duly looked after by a competent agent of integrity," Madame Beck and Père Silas, "for money reasons, equally and sincerely interested in the nursing of the West-Indian estate," propose M. Paul for the job (461). Referring to such projects as "the work of craft" masquerading as "sincerity" (495), Lucy implies that rational benevolence, like Madame Beck's practice of surveillance in maintaining control of her establishment, is a selfish form of personal empowerment, enabling one party to penetrate the secret recesses of the other and assimilate the other to her own interests and motives.

Although the "sympathetic faculty" also allows Lucy to penetrate surfaces and exteriors and "to seize quickly another's feelings" (190), it acknowledges her vulnerability to others' penetrations in a way that "rational benevolence" does not. Differentiating from both rational benevolence and "acute sensibility," Lucy describes the sympathetic faculty as a capacity that enables one to experience "refinements of perception, miracles of intuition": to enter into, or participate in, "another's feelings" as if they were one's own (190). "Miraculous" and "intuitive," sympathy in this sense has little to do with powers of intellect or the "rational." While the Smithian rational benevolence used in political and religious missions relies on "impartial" human reasoning, the sympathetic faculty is rooted in more occult understandings of the phenomenon. Brontë imports the term from the contemporary pseudo-science of phrenology, in which the shape of the skull

indicates moral and mental faculties (a study for which Brontë herself had served as subject at least once). However, Lucy's descriptions of the sympathetic faculty echo more broadly other definitions of sympathy as unstable, non-rational, and potentially negative. For example, Lucy at one point envisions "an electric chord of sympathy" connecting Ginevra Fanshawe and her lover: "a fine chain of mutual understanding, sustaining union through separation of a hundred leagues—carrying across mount and hollow, communication by prayer and wish" (159). Lucy's vision of sympathy as "electric" and as physically connective recalls 17th- and 18th-century medical conceptions of sympathy, which was thought to communicate disorders or remedies (good as well as bad) between different parts of the body, as Chapter One explained. Equally incomprehensible in many cases, sympathy between people was often described in similar terms.

Lucy's vision of Ginevra's sympathy as an "electric chord" recalls two such scenes of occult sympathy in *Jane Eyre*, both of which describe sympathy as affectively unstable and as outside the realm of reason and control. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester describes his sense of being "inextricably" bound to Jane as "a queer feeling…as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in a corresponding quarter of your little frame" (337). Evoking David Hume's comparison of people in sympathy to "strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicat[ing] itself to the rest" (Hume 368), Rochester envisions sympathy as an inevitable, inescapable bond. Notably, he finds this "cord of communion" distinctly uncomfortable, especially in light of the constrictions it imposes on the individuals sympathetically connected to one

another: “if that boisterous channel, and two hundred miles or so of land come broad between us,” he tells Jane, “I am afraid that cord of communion will be snapt; and then I’ve a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly” (337). Jane and Rochester’s “natural sympathies” (224) – elsewhere described as their “likeness” and “equal[ity]” (339) – allow them companionship but are individually compromising and acutely painful.

Although the scene concentrates on Rochester’s discomfort, the sympathetic connection is presumably even more painful for Jane, who remains implicitly subordinate to Rochester, both as employee and as woman. As Kees observes, Rochester’s description of sympathy as a “string” connecting his “left ribs” to Jane’s also recalls the Genesis story of woman created out of man’s rib as a conjugal companion for him (Kees 881). While Rochester expresses a fear of “bleeding inwardly” as a result of the “inextricable” sympathetic connection, Jane’s status is even more precarious because Rochester maintains priority in the relationship. Indeed, Jane suggests that her “natural sympathies” with her lover are not so “equal” when she describes her sympathetic self as having “assimilate[d]…mentally to him” (253). Rochester’s “penetrating” power is sympathetic, but it is also violent, implicitly sexual, and thereby gendered male.

In spite of these implications of sympathy’s sexual politics, Jane’s sympathetic relationship with Rochester ends happily, with the “cord of communion” allowing her (like Ginevra) to hear her lover calling over a distance of many miles and to come happily to his aid.[19] However, Lucy’s experiences of sympathy in *Villette* bear out this darker side of romantic and social relations.

Finding herself again and again drawn involuntarily to other people, Lucy compares her inexplicable movements to "yielding to some influence, mesmeric or otherwise—an influence unwelcome, displeasing, but effective" (222): attraction by "strong magnetism" (238). Although she wants to be mistress of herself and her relationships, Lucy discovers that sympathy will not be controlled: "our natures own predilections and antipathies alike strange," she observes, "[t]here are people from who we secretly shrink, whom we would personally avoid, though reason confesses that they are good people: there are others with faults of temper, &c., evident enough, beside whom we live content, as if the air about them did us good" (180). At the mercy of her "sympathetic faculty," Lucy is drawn into relations with others in spite of her personal desires and motivations.

By situating sympathy in both a discourse of the "miraculous," "intuitive," and potentially painful and a discourse of the intentional, rational, and consistently "benevolent," Brontë reminds readers that sympathy does not always catalyze social and personal "improvement." Rather, sympathy is a radically unpredictable phenomenon that is sometimes underpinned by self-interest and sexual politics, complicating claims that it facilitates equality and mutual exchange. Characterized by the appropriative gesture of "seizing," sympathy in *Villette* can be intensely self-empowering, painfully self-compromising, or both, depending on whether one is seized or whether one is doing the seizing. As the next section demonstrates, Lucy's sympathy with the King of Labassecour and her sympathy with the actress/character Vashti illuminate the moral and affective instability (re)presented in the novel. While in sympathy with the king Lucy

penetrates his inner thoughts and feelings, in sympathy with Vashti Lucy is penetrated by the actress's/character's experiences. Together, the scenes illustrate the ways in which penetrating sympathies can both empower the self by (re)writing others and collapse distinctions between self and other, private and public, male and female, performance and reality. They suggest that interpersonal encounters are frightening and painful but also powerful ways of reevaluating and reconstructing selves in relation to others, not only in everyday social life but also in literary relationships.

Sympathy as "Seizure"

At a concert attended by the "King, Queen, and Prince of Labassecour," Lucy illustrates her ability to "seize quickly another's feelings" (207) and appropriate them for her own use. She "had never read, never been told anything of [the King's] nature or his habits; and at first the strong hieroglyphics graven as with an iron stylet on his brow, round his eyes, beside his mouth, puzzled and baffled instinct" (213). However, by "read[ing]" the king's facial features as written letters open to interpretation, Lucy is soon able to enter into his sentiments by projecting her own recent feelings onto him. Using her own imaginative "stylet" to penetrate and rewrite his ailments as her own, Lucy sympathizes with the king's loneliness and "Hypochondria": "if I did not *know*, at least I *felt*, the meaning of those characters written without hand. There sat a silent sufferer—a nervous, melancholy man. Those eyes had looked on the visits of a certain

ghost—had long waited the comings and goings of that strangest spectre, Hypochondria" (213). Although Lucy claims to identify with the king by instinct rather than by the prior knowledge and reasoning of "rational benevolence," her "sympathetic faculty" functions here as an act of appropriation that Brontë also associates with "reading" and (re)writing. Exemplifying Audrey Jaffe's description of Victorian sympathy as "replacing [the other] with cultural fictions and self-projections" (*Scenes of Sympathy* 7), Lucy uses sympathy as a tool of penetration and inscription to explore (in her terms) the hidden depths of the most private of public figures. In this manner, she renders her idea of the king's private tribulations matter for public, particularly novelistic consumption. The image of the "stylet" links social encounters to literary ones, as it can signify both a tool for penetrating surfaces (such as a surgical probe or a dagger) and an instrument for inscribing or engraving.[20] Lucy's sympathy with the king suggests that acts of reading and writing can also operate as invasive acts of sympathetic penetration – and thus as implicitly violent, stereotypically masculine actions.

As Joseph Litvak observes, Lucy's identification with the king is "both sympathetic and aggressive" (*Caught in the Act* 97): sympathetic as she "feels" his pain as her own and aggressive in her violation of his privacy and dignity as she projects her own feelings onto him. When we understand Lucy's sympathetic faculty as an appropriative act of emotional seizure, however, we find that "aggression" is not necessarily at odds with sympathy. Rather, aggression is a constitutive part of sympathy – both for the sympathetic subject (Lucy) and for the object of her sympathy (the king). Lucy both participates in the king's

affective experience, arriving at a greater appreciation for his melancholy and violates his personal privacy, penetrating his dignified exterior and "seizing" his hidden thoughts and feelings as her own. Like Madame Beck's "rational benevolence," in which the act of charity masks underlying personal motives, the "sympathetic faculty" invades and "seizes" the other for personal advantage. Through her sympathy with the King of Labassecour, Lucy both validates her own "Hypochondria" and celebrates an insight into others that she finds lacking in the people around her. Compassion, "benevolence," and altruistic action towards the other drop out of the sympathetic experience altogether. By linking the non-rational "sympathetic faculty" and stereotypically masculine aggression, Brontë suggests that the potentially negative "disorder" historically associated with feminine, novelistic sympathy is a feature of sympathy in general and not a tendency innate in or exemplified by women or novels.

Lucy's sympathy with Vashti demonstrates the gender-blind operations of penetrating sympathies as well as the unpredictable double-sidedness of sympathetic experience. While Lucy's sympathetic faculty allows her to "seize quickly" the king's feelings in the concert scene, the same faculty leaves her vulnerable to being "seized" by Vashti at the theater. Lucy's identification with Vashti demonstrates that, as unsettling and violent as interpersonal relations can be, they can have lasting, life-changing effects. They enable one to access – or force one to encounter – alternative ways of living and being and, in doing so, drive continual reshaping of the unstable, fundamentally shifting self. In Lucy's words, moments of sympathy can irreversibly "impress" one with their novelty

and import (159), rendering the sympathetic subject (as well as object) a surface to be written on and thus permanently altered. While Lucy does the penetrating in sympathy with the king, in sympathy with Vashti she is penetrated by the actress's powerful performance.

In addition to demonstrating sympathy's power to collapse distinctions between self and other, private and public, and pleasure and pain, this scene thus underscores the collapse of boundaries between performance (fiction) and reality that sympathy also facilitates. It suggests that however painful and uncomfortable, sympathy with fictional characters can be as transformative an experience as sympathy with the people one encounters in everyday life. In (re)presenting sympathy with fictional characters as painfully penetrating, Brontë resists the convention of Smithian sympathy that Jaffe locates in Victorian novels. According to Jaffe, in mid to late 19th-centry novels, "the distinction between sympathy for fictional characters and sympathy for actual people…may be reformulated as…the difference between the pleasurable sympathetic feelings fiction invites and the potential threat of an encounter with an actual person" (7). Lucy's identification with Vashti and novel readers' identification with Lucy may feel less immediately "threatening" than, say, Lionel Verney's encounter with the "negro half clad" in *The Last Man* or my encounter with a beggar on the street corner (one of Jaffe's examples). However, the moments of identification mediated through fiction are still violent, penetrating, and disconcerting and, as I suggest below, they can bleed into "actual" experience. (Re)presenting sympathy

as neither comforting nor "pleasurable," Brontë suggests that sympathy with fictional characters is at least as "impressive" as sympathy with "actual people."

Penetrating Lucy's consciousness with a "strong magnetism" that "drew [her] heart out of its wonted orbit" (259), Vashti's performance strikes Lucy as both "a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation" and "a spectacle low, horrible, immoral" (258). While Lucy's sympathy with the King of Labassecour enables her to penetrate the depths of his private sentiments as she projects her own sentiments onto him, Lucy's sympathy with Vashti draws out feelings that Lucy has only vaguely experienced before. "I had seen acting before," Lucy recalls,

> but never anything like this: never anything which astonished Hope and hushed Desire; which outstripped Impulse and paled Conception; which, instead of merely irritating imagination with the thought of what *might* be done, at the same time fevering the nerves because it was *not* done, disclosed power like a deep, swollen river, thundering in cataract, and bearing the soul, like a leaf, on the steep and steely sweep of its descent. (259)

Not merely amused by Vashti's performance, Lucy finds herself – against "Hope," "Desire," and her usual "Impulses" and expectations – physically assaulted by the "power" of the sentiments conveyed. Exceeding Lucy's control, the "thundering" water imagery recalls previous instances in which her experiences have been dictated by powers beyond her control and anticipates similar events to come. Like the "electric chord of sympathy" spanning time, space, and logic to link disparate others such as Jane Eyre and Rochester, Lucy's

sympathy with Vashti is unstable, non-rational, and assimilating: the self-other relation shatters Lucy's claims to privacy, self-control, and self-reliance, subjecting her to the affective and physical invasion of another's feelings and experiences.

Lucy's identification with Vashti is uncomfortably "impressible" in the sense that Lucy is physically altered, imprinted, and "brand[ed]" by it (260). Recalling the image of the "stylet" as a tool of sympathetic penetration encoding acts of writing, sex, and masculinity, Lucy's encounter with Vashti overpowers and assimilates Lucy to the actress's unconventional representation of a female artist. Despite its invasive violence, the experience is a "mighty revelation" to Lucy because it stirs up passionate feelings that she has shared all along, though she has attempted to keep them hidden (in M. Paul's words, to "keep down" her fiery proto-feminist tendencies). Leaving "a deep-red cross" in her "book of life" (260), sympathy with Vashti imprints on Lucy new possibilities of female empowerment.

From the beginning of the scene, Lucy makes clear that part of what she finds so fascinating about Vashti is that her performance transgresses conventions of female behavior that Lucy has already experienced as personally constraining,[21] such as the convention in which women do not penetrate others, sexually, emotionally, or otherwise. Although Lucy goes to the theater expecting to see a "plain" woman with "bony harshness and grimness—something angular and sallow," she is confronted instead with "the shadow of a royal Vashti: a queen, fair as the day once, turned pale now like twilight, and wasted like wax in

flame" (257). In bestowing the name "Vashti" on the otherwise nameless professional, Lucy associates her with the Biblical Vashti who defies her husband and prompts him to institute patriarchal rule.[22] Like her Biblical namesake, the actress Vashti (who collapses into the character she is playing) overturns the gender stereotypes that underpin sexual and literary politics, refusing to behave like a conventional, mild-mannered, submissive woman. Observing that there is something "upon [Vashti] neither of a woman nor of man," Lucy at first seems to be as disgusted by the actress as the other theater-goers, recalling that "in each of her eyes sat a devil" (257). However, Lucy's description of the actress as "a royal Vashti" (even if only the "shadow" of one) suggests that she invokes such opinions with sarcasm. In conventional discourses of femininity, in acting like "neither…woman nor…man" Vashti becomes a "devil" – and if not a devil, a woman struck by "Hate and Murder and Madness" (257), contemporary diagnoses for women who spurn patriarchal values. Contrary to this perspective, Vashti is a "mighty revelation" to Lucy *because* she is "low, horrible, immoral" according to convention. "[N]either yielding to, nor enduring, nor…resenting [her suffering]," Vashti reaffirms the scene of resistance Lucy has been rehearsing in the pensionnat.[23] "Impressing" her vision upon Lucy, "she stood locked in struggle, rigid in resistance" (258).

The final scene of Vashti's performance clarifies her challenge to the sexual politics of sympathy, as Lucy describes sympathetic identification not only as the dissolution of self into other (and of fiction into reality) but also as sexual violation. "Towards midnight," Lucy tells us,

> when the deepening tragedy blackened to the death scene, and all held their breath…when the whole theatre was hushed, when the vision of all eyes centred on one point, when all ears listened towards one quarter—nothing being seen but the white form sunk on a seat, quivering in conflict with her last, her worst-hated, her visibly-conquering foe—nothing heard but her throes, her gaspings, breathing yet of mutiny, panting in defiance: when, as it seemed, an inordinate will, convulsing a perishing mortal frame, bent it to battle with doom and death, fought every inch of ground, sold dear every drop of blood, resisted to the latest the rape of every faculty, *would* see, *would* hear, *would* breathe, *would* live, up to, within, well nigh *beyond* the moment when death says to all sense and all being—
>
> "Thus far and no farther!"
>
> Just then a stir, pregnant with omen, rustled behind the scenes—feet ran, voices spoke. What was it? demanded the whole house. A flame, a smell of smoke replied. (260)

Undermining social and sexual conventions in which women do not penetrate others, Vashti causes "the whole theatre," including Lucy," to experience her "quivering," "gasping," and "convulsing" as physical and affective "rape." Both terrifying and compelling, the penetrating sympathies Vashti inspires shatter all binary structures of distinction (self/other, male/female, pleasure/pain, fiction/reality), an event Brontë literalizes by setting the theater on fire at the

climax of Lucy's identification.[24] The subjective boundaries between Lucy and Vashti (and between Vashti and character) dissolve, as the passage's ambiguous syntax underscores. But Vashti's unconventional passions also collapse the boundaries between performance and "actual" experience, as they spread symbolically through the fire to Lucy's (fictional) reality, incinerating the gender norms by which Lucy has long felt oppressed.

Extending Vashti's "rape of every faculty" to Lucy and her physical surroundings, the fire ends the scene at the theater, but it continues to heat Lucy's imagination with ideas about female power and independence. The proto-feminist Lucy we encounter in *Villette* owes much to her sympathetic relations with others, even though she eschews them throughout the novel. In Helene Moglen's words, "[a]lthough Lucy deeply fears such a loss of rational control [in identifying with Vashti], she is magnetically drawn by the potential for extension and self-exploration which the irrational seems to hold out to her" (217). Unavoidable, unpredictable, and uncomfortably penetrating, sympathy is both deeply painful and absolutely crucial to (inter)personal growth. It is this understanding of sympathy as penetrating and appropriating – yet inevitable and necessary – that Brontë formalizes in Lucy's direct addresses, through which readers both penetrate Lucy's icy exterior and are penetrated and "impressed" by the sentiments and actions of an unconventional heroine.

Reading *Villette* Sympathetically

As John Hughes, Joseph Litvak, and others have observed, reading *Villette* is an unsettling experience because the novel "disquietingly *reads* the reader," penetrating and exposing "his fascinations and insecurities" (Hughes 714). "Impressing" and rewriting readers much as Lucy "reads" the King of Labassecour and as Vashti "impresses" Lucy, the novel transposes the experience of characters within the novel onto readers interacting with them. As Litvak explains, "it is not just the characters who feel the unpleasant effects of the manipulation and antagonistic voyeurism that dominate *Villette*" (*Caught in the Act* 86) and that I have described as components of sympathy, as the novel portrays it. Because the novel aligns reading, spying, and sympathy – allowing us, for example, to penetrate Lucy's thoughts and feelings in a way that her fellow characters cannot – "we repeatedly find ourselves inserted in the discomforting, even humiliating, position of Madame Beck [both as surveillant and as object of surveillance], by the kind of rhetorical one-upmanship in which Lucy excels" (86). In particular, Lucy's direct addresses make reading *Villette* an unstable experience of penetrating sympathies, as they both expose readers' desires and defy their expectations. Continuing to address readers with great ambivalence, the novel's conclusion ultimately hands readers Lucy's discomfort with and evasion of contemporary social and gender norms as the unexpected, undesired, and irrevocable effect of sympathizing with its heroine. This sympathetic "impression" of Lucy's discomfort grates against what is familiar for readers of 19th-century novels, but it (re)presents disjunctive social life as Brontë envisions it and as Lucy experiences it.

Providing a glimpse of the happy ending that conventional readers desire, Lucy suggests in the final paragraph of the penultimate chapter that her surprising sympathy with M. Paul will lead to a Jane Eyre-like "perfect concord" in marriage. Employing the language of sympathy as a penetrating and assimilating force, Lucy implies that their previously irreparable differences (including religious differences and Paul's conventional attitudes about women) no longer matter because their romantic relationship subordinates her to him: "he deemed me born under his star," Lucy recalls, "he seemed to have spread over me its beam like a banner…Now, penetrated with his influence, and living by his affection…I preferred him before all humanity" (492). "Having his worth by intellect, and his goodness by heart" (492), Lucy describes the deep intimacy between them as a sexual hierarchy in which the man masters and the woman serves. After previously identifying herself as a unique individual, Lucy not only now becomes "penetrated with his influence" and assimilates to "his star"; she also describes Paul as her "master" and herself as his "faithful steward" (487). When Paul returns from Guadeloupe, Lucy suggests, they will be married in "perfect concord," since Lucy, like Jane Eyre, has "assimilate[d]" to her lover.

In the next chapter, Lucy directly addresses her readers to jolt them out of such conventional expectations for the novel's conclusion. When Lucy tells us that "M. Emmanuel was away three years," we expect the story of his happy return to follow. However, she complicates our expectations of happiness with the ambiguously engaging claim that "Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life" (493). We get the expected term "happiest," but in an unexpected

context. Shouldn't Paul's return, not his absence, be the "happiest" part of this memory? Foreshadowing the conclusion's derailment of readers' expectations, Lucy follows this direct address with the patronizing question "Do you scout the paradox?" and the cryptic injunction to "Listen!" (493). Lucy describes her separation from Paul as "happy"; they enjoy a fulfilling correspondence in which "his letters were real food that nourished, living water that refreshed" (494). Yet her direct addresses continue to complicate this romantic "happy" ending by suggesting that there is a "paradox" lurking within it.

In spite of these jarring calls to "scout the paradox" and to "[l]isten!" – and, indeed, in spite of Lucy's earlier antagonism – readers continue to fluctuate between compassion and confusion as Lucy disingenuously anticipates Paul's return and their marriage. Building urgency and unease, the final scene encourages readers to identify with Lucy as a "dark" storm clouds Paul's expected arrival. While a conventional realist novel might return Paul safe from the "storm [that] roared frenzied for seven days" and left "the Atlantic…strewn with wrecks" (495),[25] *Villette* concludes Lucy's "agony" by abruptly interrupting both identification and the desired movement towards happy ending. Directly addressing readers, Lucy issues an order to

> Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the

> fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life. (495-496)

Lucy invokes the happy ending that "kind heart[s]" and "sunny imaginations" desire, inviting conventional readers to anticipate a favorable resolution to the heroine's "terror." But she does so not to bring about such resolution but rather to disrupt readers' illusions of "union" and "happ[iness]" with the implicit suggestion of the contrary: the heroine's continuation in an unmarried state. As ambiguous as the conclusion itself, Lucy's final direct address penetrates readers' optimistic expectations and reshapes their responses into unresolved uncertainty that better reflects Lucy's actual experience. Instead of "perfect concord" in sympathetic marriage, *Villette* offers a single woman operating her own school. Instead of the compassion and comfort readers expect from novelistic sympathy, the novel mobilizes dynamic fluctuation between the pleasures and pains, conjunctions and disjunctions, illusions and realities of self-other relations.

As Gregory O'Dea observes, *Villette* "provo[kes]…an extremely complicated response on the part of the reader" by "fusing together in Lucy Snowe's character qualities of aggression with passivity, distance with familiarity, and antipathy with sympathy" ("Narrator and Reader" 55). I would add that reading is "complicated" because Lucy's direct addresses "impress" these "qualities" upon readers as parts of the experience of sympathetic reading. Contrary to readers' expectations that the first-person narrator will be "reliable and stable," Brontë provides first-person narration that is "open-ended, elusive" (Gilbert and Gubar 439), rewriting realist styles and structures along with readers'

responses. Moglen argues that by eschewing conventional "literary form—the shroud of domesticity and the implied perpetuation of social values," Lucy suggests that such literary conventions "are as inadequate as the social conventions which call them into being" (228). Lucy's ambivalent direct addresses expose not only the unreliability and instability of the first-person narrator but also the fundamental instability of interpersonal and literary encounters. As at least one 19th-century review of *Villette* confirms, sympathy does not produce unmixed "perfect concord" but a wide range of affective responses, from appreciation to "disagree[ment]" to "vehemen[ce]" to "dislike" ("Book Review," *The Gentleman's* 293).

As uncomfortable and violent as sympathy with Lucy proves to be, it effectively frustrates expectations of a happy ending, "impressing" readers with its resistance to "ris[ing] into the unseen and beautiful" ("Book Review," *The Gentleman's* 293) – to transcending grim realities for more appealing illusions.[26] *Villette*'s representation of what 'real life' looks and feels like for its unreliable, unstable narrator – that is, its realism – thus lies in its portrayal of sympathy as an invasive, assimilating, even sexual force. Shuttleworth describes the experience of reading such realities as "maddening" and "tormenting," as we are "forced…to question our cherished assumptions of subjective integrity and literary unity. As readers we, like the protagonists [of Brontë's novels], undergo a fundamental destabilization of selfhood" (247). Noticing that sympathy is the medium through which this "maddening" "destabilization" occurs illuminates *Villette*'s constructions of "selfhood" as social and shifting and of self-other relationships as

radically unstable. Exposing the sexual politics of interpersonal encounters, penetrating sympathies demonstrate the ways in which literary conventions of sympathy conceived as stable perpetuate social norms that confine women (and others at the receiving end of "rational benevolence") to unequal and inflexible roles in domestic, political, and literary life. Even though penetrating sympathies can be similarly violent, they leave room for the shifting feelings, perspectives, and alliances opened up by the recognition that sympathy is an ambivalent, fundamentally unstable phenomenon.

NOTES

[1] By the time of *Villette*'s publication, Brontë (who had previously published under the male pseudonym "Currer Bell") was known widely as the author of *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*.

[2] As I show in a later section, Silver's reading continues to influence 21st-century criticism of *Villette* focused on feminist issues.

[3] By "cross-gender sensibilities," I mean sensitivities, affects, and behaviors that are in part conventionally male and in part conventionally female – both male and female, neither wholly one nor wholly the other.

[4] "Distancing" narrators discourage real readers' identification with the narratee called "reader," pointing out the fictionality of the novelistic text. For example, the narrator of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* employs distancing narration when he addresses the reader as "Jones, who reads this book at his Club" (Warhol, "Toward a Theory" 813). Distancing direct address is frequently ironic and sarcastic. By contrast, "engaging" narrators encourage readers to identify with the narratee called "reader," presenting their stories as "real" or as having "real-life" equivalents and "real-world" applicability. For example, the narrator of George Eliot's *Adam Bede* asks a reader addressed as "you" to "[b]efore you despise Adam as deficient in penetration, pray ask yourself if you were ever predisposed to believe evil of any pretty woman—if you ever could, without hard, head-breaking demonstration, believe evil of the one supremely pretty woman who has bewitched you" ("Toward a Theory" 814). Engaging direct address is un-ironic and sincere, employed "in the spirit of sympathetically and earnestly attempting to convert the narratees to their [the narrators'] own points of view" (814).

[5] By contrast, *Shirley* is an overtly political novel about the Luddite riots of the 1810s. Narrated in the third person by an interested, opinionated, and sometimes confrontational narrator, the novel follows the movements of two heroines: the beautiful and assertive Shirley Keeldar and the pretty, quieter Caroline Helstone. Interestingly, the novel concerns itself with Caroline throughout, introducing the titular Shirley only at the very end of the first volume. Even then, Shirley remains no more central to the narrative than Caroline does. It is clear that Brontë continues to experiment with sympathy in *Shirley*, but her specific use of it there is beyond the scope of this chapter.

[6] For example, when Lucy first arrives at Madame Beck's "pensionnat," she undergoes an inspection by Madame Beck and M. Paul Emanuel that is conducted entirely in French. Although Lucy does not understand French at the time of the interview, she reconstructs it in light of what she has learned since. In an aside to readers, Lucy says, "I shall go on with this part of my tale as if I had understood all that passed; for though it was then scarce intelligible to me, I heard it translated afterwards" (66). Having gained employment even though she doesn't speak the language, Lucy soon afterwards gives a lengthy description of Madame Beck's character. Here again, Lucy reconstructs the plethora of details that she could not have known in this early stage of her residence at the pensionnat: "The sensible reader," she writes, "will not suppose that I gained all the knowledge here condensed for his benefit in one month, or in one half-year. No!" (75). Lucy uses direct address to indicate that it has taken years to gather "all the knowledge" she conveys; but she "condenses" it so the reader can follow the tale.

[7] For example, after describing the affectation, vulgar habits, and propensity for drink of her predecessor at Madame Beck's, Lucy reveals the former governess's nationality as knowledge that English readers would have gleaned already from her description: "I need hardly explain to the reader," Lucy remarks in a conspiratorial tone, "that this lady was in effect a native of Ireland" (70). Later, when Madame Beck pressures Lucy into rising from governess to classroom instructor, she discloses her anxiety about teaching in a popular expression: "tell it not in Gath, I believe I was crying" (77). In addition to fostering intimacy with readers by professing a shared

secret ("don't tell anyone, but…"), Lucy's expression solidifies the cultural foundation she shares with her 19th-century English readers.

[8] Following Gerald Prince, Warhol calls this strategy "overjustification" ("Toward a Theory" 814).

[9] Helene Moglen describes the shift in first-person narrative style from *Jane Eyre* to *Villette* as follows: "for the guilelessness, the straightforwardness, self-awareness, the friendly openness of Jane would be substituted indirection, neurotic rationalization, and narrative 'unreliability'" (196). Joseph Litvak notes that Lucy "deploys a whole repertoire of evasive and duplicitous tactics in telling—and not telling—her story" (*Caught in the Act* 82).

[10] Later in the novel, Lucy withholds information from readers on several other occasions. In one such instance, she reveals that, although she has characterized her relationship with M. Paul as primarily antagonistic, he actually has been leaving thoughtful and welcome gifts in her desk (343). On another occasion, she admits that, although she has portrayed herself as wasting away in wonder at M. Paul's sudden plan to leave Villette, she has "gather[ed] from Rumour…the origin and object of [his] departure" (460). And during her observations at the fête night, she describes an unnamed "third member" of a group she has been watching, only to reveal soon after that she has recognized him all along as M. Paul, not yet departed for Guadeloupe (465). While some of these revelations have stronger implications than others, each evasion alters the way readers experience Lucy's story, misleading them in interpretive and affective directions that turn out to be either wrong or not like Lucy's experience of them.

[11] This reviewer echoes many erroneous claims that the Brontës grew up in a kind of Romantic isolation As biographer Juliet Barker points out, however, this is decidedly not true. See *The Brontës* (2012).

[12] "Conventional" readers are perhaps best represented by the reviewer for *The Christian remembrancer*, who complains that "[w]e want a woman at our hearth" instead of Lucy Snowe, with her "unscrupulous, and self-dependent intellect" ("Book Review" 442). This reader "cannot offer even the affections of our fancy" to Lucy because her "self-dependen[ce]" and lack of "reverence" make her the opposite of a "legitimate heroine" (442-443): the "woman at [the] hearth." Direct addresses that undermine readers' expectations, such as Lucy's claim to "permit the reader to picture [her]" sailing in luxury and safety, surely are directed at such conventional readers, whose ideas about the personality and life of a "heroine" are at odds with Lucy's lived experience in the novel.

[13] See also Patricia Murphy, who argues that Lucy uses silence strategically to subvert conventional modes of female behavior by "play[ing] with the limited possibilities available to her" (43). For other feminist interpretations, see Moglen and Gilbert and Gubar, in addition to Jacobus, Silver, Murphy, and Davis, mentioned above. See also Warhol's essay on Brontë, "Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*."

[14] That Lucy and Madame Beck are alike is not a new suggestion. Penny Boumelha observes that the "very practices which Lucy holds specific to and characteristic of Catholicism [and Madame Beck], and which most provoke her anger and distaste – that is, surveillance, confession and duplicity – are replicated and examined in the tactics she employs as spectatorial confessional and unreliable narrator" (103). Litvak argues that Lucy not only "replicates" her employer's strategies; she "prove[s] herself a formidable rival of Madame Beck, in whose establishment she has studied and internalized a complex 'system for managing and regulating' others, a system that Lucy even uses to manage and regulate her relationship with the reader" (*Caught in the Act* 85). By reading "replication" and mastery as identification, I hope to describe a version of sympathy as penetrating force by which we might better understand Brontë's innovations in first-person narration – specifically in the narrator's strategic direct address.

[15] See also Amit Rai's book *Rule of Sympathy*.

[16] Brontë offers another example of self-interested, unfeeling "rational benevolence" in the sketch of "Human Justice" that Lucy composes for M. Paul's surprise examination. While the chaos of "Human Justice's" abode is in distinct contrast to Madame Beck's orderly establishment, the "red, random beldame's" lack of "care" for the "suffering souls" around her and her self-satisfying charity (402) recall Lucy's employer, who is equally masculine and self-interested.

[17] I explain this connection in Chapter One, where I explore the implications of Rai's analysis of sympathy as a 19th-century political tool for organizing and controlling others for the contemporary novels studied in this dissertation.

[18] As the daughter of an evangelical minister, Brontë would have heard and read about religious missions in the colonies. Indeed, her eventual husband, Arthur Bell Nichols (curate to her father, Patrick Brontë), even requested assignment to a missionary project after Brontë declined his first proposal of marriage. See Juliet Barker's comprehensive biography *The Brontës: The Story of a Literary Family* (2012).

[19] At the point of giving in to St. John Rivers' request that she accompany him to India, Jane experiences "an inexpressible feeling that thrilled [her heart] through, and passed at once to my head and extremities. The feeling was not like an electric shock; but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling: it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor; from which they were now summoned, and forced to wake. They rose expectant: eye and ear waited, while the flesh quivered on my bones…'What have you heard? What did you see?' asked St. John. I saw nothing: but I heard a voice somewhere cry – …'Jane! Jane! Jane!'…And it was the voice of a human being – a known, loved, well-remembered voice – that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe – wildly, eerily, urgently" (519-520). As Jane learns later, this "eery" event was no figment of her imagination; Rochester actually cried out for her aloud on the same day and at the same time that she experienced this "inexpressible feeling" of sympathy. For cogent discussions of scenes of "occult" sympathy like this one in *Jane Eyre*, see Kees and Rai, "The Black Spectre of Sympathy: The 'Occult' Relation in *Jane Eyre*."

[20] See the *Oxford English Dictionary* for several definitions of "stylet."

[21] For example, Lucy experiences gender double-standards when M. Paul redirects her from the portrait of "Cleopatra" to the painting of "La vie d'une femme" at the picture gallery. Recommended by M. Paul, who discovers Lucy "wondering at" Cleopatra, "La vie d'une femme" depicts the four stages of a woman's life: "Jeune Fille" (young woman), "Mariée" (wife), "Jeune Mère" (young mother), and "Veuve" (widow) (201-202). While neither representation of femininity is acceptable to Lucy, for M. Paul only the Cleopatra is objectionable as an object of Lucy's gaze. Furthermore, Paul allows himself to "look…at the picture ['Cleopatra']…quite at his ease, and for a very long while" (202), even while he polices Lucy's engagement with it. In Paul's patriarchal "doctrine" (202), young women should aspire to "La vie d'une femme" and not to "Cleopatra" – or, for that matter, to Vashti.

[22] See Dolin's notes to the 2000 Oxford edition of *Villette*. Dolin summarizes Esther 1 and 2, in which Vashti "refused to come and display her beauty at [her husband, King Ahasuerus's] command; this caused Ahasuerus, who feared that all women would feel free to despise their husbands, to make a decree of men's sovereignty" (*Villette* 521). Vashti and her story make appearances in all of Brontë's novels. As Dolin also explains, the character Vashti in *Villette* is a fictional version of the 19th-century actress Rachel, whom Brontë saw perform in London in 1851.

[23] Besides the resistance to traditional female roles and "surveillance" described above, other scenes of Lucy's resistance bear proto-feminist qualities. On the ship from England to Labassecour, Lucy observes a young, beautiful, apparently happy woman married to a "greasy" older man and surmises that "[h]er laughter…must be the frenzy of despair" (52). Later, she suggests that Madame Beck's practice of "keeping girls in distrustful restraint, in blind ignorance,

and under a surveillance that [leaves] them no moment and no corner for retirement, [is] not the best way to make them grow up honest and modest women" (73). Still later, she balks at Dr. John/Graham Bretton's ideal woman, who is pure and "child-like" (151), as well as at M. Paul's recommended painting at the picture gallery and his practice of censoring books for the female students at Madame Beck's school, "especially if they were novels" (347). And, perhaps most famously, Lucy resists conventional gender roles when she refuses to trade her cigar-case prize for Dr. John's lady's headdress at the lottery following the concert described above (222).

[24] Brontë's use of the word "rape" to describe Lucy's affective experience suggests both present-day notions of rape as the sexual violation of a woman by a man and 19th-century notions of rape as the act of seizing or taking more generally. A "rape of every faculty" could describe an overwhelming overload of sensation by outside forces. In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that "rape" could even carry ambivalent affective value similar to that of Brontë's sympathy. On the one hand, "to rape" is to commit a destructive, negative act ("to pull or tear down," "to plunder, despoil"); on the other hand, "to rape" is to bestow pleasure or to captivate in a pleasurable way: "to transport with delight, to enrapture." Vashti's "rape of every faculty" seizes Lucy and the rest of the audience in irresistible fascination as well as unbearable suffering, engaging them in a deeply visceral experience of sympathy, as they "see," "hear," "breathe," even "live" alongside the unconventional actress in her unfeminine role.

[25] Patrick Brontë's suggestion that his daughter end her novel in Lucy and Paul's marriage affirms that this would be a conventional ending. Notoriously, the novelist refused to do so, offering only the ambiguous (though implicitly fateful) conclusion in place of the happy ending that her father and other readers desired.

[26] The *Gentleman's Magazine* reviewer's standard for a novel written by a woman is that it is "gentle and womanly" with "good" characters. However, he "unaccountabl[y]" finds himself both "discompose[d]" and attracted by *Villette*'s "vehemen[ce]," "irregular[ities]," and "impulsive movements." At first he projects his own expectations onto Lucy's story, but he ultimately finds his perspective altered by "much that is unaccountable and disagreeable in character and in situation" (293).

CONCLUSION

The "difficult," revolting, and penetrating sympathies (re)presented by *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* diverge from the account of sympathy typically attributed by critics to 19th-century British novels: Adam Smith's conception of it as an intentional act of imaginative representation and a consistently moral, mutually beneficial exercise.[1] These unstable sympathies occur without or against participants' desires, reason, and objective judgment and are affectively and morally shifting, consisting of positive sentiments such as compassion as well as negative and neutral sentiments, such as discomfort, disgust, confusion, and boredom. Immediate and visceral, they resonate more with other conceptions of sympathy circulating within 19th-century culture, such as David Hume's definition of interpersonal encounters as "contagious," "insinuating," and potentially "disagreeable" (*Treatise of Human Nature* 386, 378, 544), than with the Smithian sympathy encoded in 19th-century British politics and in modern critical analyses of 19th-century British novels. Exploring unstable sympathies in *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* reopens a conversation about the political and literary functions of sympathy in the 19th century that has been obscured by the prominence of Smith's theory in contemporary politics and in modern criticism.

In particular, examining unstable sympathies recovers the political valence of the novels' resistance to literary conventions of sympathy, illuminating not only how they make reading uncomfortable but also what is at stake in doing so.

By formalizing unstable sympathies in their structures and narrative strategies, the novels examined here inflect self-other relations typically viewed as social or literary (for example, intimacy between characters or between reader and narrator) with political import, as they disrupt conventions of sympathy that confine women to the not-so-"perfect concord" of marriage and domesticity, as my discussion of third-person omniscient narration in *The Wanderer* and direct address in *Villette* has shown, or that keep former slaves, colonial others, and lower-class citizens subordinate to white British men, as I have suggested in my discussion of Lionel Verney and Adrian Windsor's undermined theory of sympathy in *The Last Man* and Madame Beck's self-interested "rational benevolence" towards the poor and the people of Guadeloupe in *Villette*. Through the reader responses invited by their unusual narrative strategies, the novels studied here demonstrate that novelistic sympathy mobilized as consistently intentional, rational, and moral misrepresents actual social relations, which can be painful, messy, confusing, and alienating. Moreover, these unstable relations can have political ramifications that threaten one's personal well-being as well as national and international peace, as I have argued in my discussions of *The Wanderer*'s association of British domesticity with the French Revolution's "contagious" sympathies, of *The Last Man*'s depiction of sympathy as a plague spreading disease and revolt, and of *Villette*'s exposure of the sexual politics implicit in invasive self-other relationships. All three novels disrupt literary conventions of sympathy as part of a socio-political awareness that affective and moral responses to others are unstable and shifting.

Offering a grim picture of 19th-century sociality, unstable sympathies do not present a more ethical alternative to Smithian intimacy. But they do resist illusions of self-other relations as comforting and compassionate. As Juliet Granville finds amidst the curiosity of her fellow travelers, as Lionel Verney experiences in his involuntary embrace of the "negro half clad" (*Last Man* 336), as Lucy Snowe discovers in Vashti's "rape of every faculty" (*Villette* 260), and as readers of all three novels encounter in their "difficult," revolting, and penetrating sympathies with fictional characters and situations, intimacy is not always desirable, enjoyable, or even beneficial for participants, except as it modifies fantasies of sympathy's social function. By pulling sympathetic readers in unexpected affective and moral directions, the novels expose the underside of sympathy as it was used in a variety of contemporary projects of regulation and control. As I have explained, such projects deployed sympathy conceived in Smith's terms to keep women in subservient domestic positions (positions that *The Wanderer* and *Villette* resist stylistically in their revisions of third-person omniscient narration and direct address and thematically in their illuminations of the confining gender norms and sexual politics upheld by traditional modes of novelistic sympathy); to regulate the threat of racial others amidst debates about the abolition of slavery in England (discourses invoked by Juliet's blackface disguise in *The Wanderer* and by the "negro half clad" in *The Last Man*); to control potential revolts in current British colonies and invasion by former ones (attempts at maintaining power evident in Madame Beck, Père Silas, and Madame Walraven's "rational benevolence" in *Villette* and in Lionel and Adrian's theory

of sympathy in *The Last Man*); and finally to keep lower-class citizens at the mercy of their more wealthy social superiors (an exercise demonstrated by the charitable offers Juliet turns down in *The Wanderer* and, again, by Madame Beck's charitable "rational benevolence" in *Villette*).

Rather than portraying sympathy conceived as stable as a medium of beneficence and "improvement," the novels expose it as a hierarchical construction that establishes and maintains the power of white British men. As (re)presented in the novels, unstable sympathies open new possibilities for organizing difference, even if those possibilities are confusing, frightening, or dangerous, while sympathy in Smith's terms attempts to contain possibilities, along with potential resistance to the status quo. Previous studies exploring sympathy's discontents have discussed negative affects and outcomes as failures of sympathy viewed as ethical. I am arguing that the novels studied here (re)present negativity as part of how sympathy works and sympathy itself as ethically unstable.

Noticing that the negative affects distorting interpersonal and readerly relationships in *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* circulate sympathetically allows us to see that 19th-century novelistic sympathy does not always create or reinforce self-enclosed individuals, as Nancy Armstrong and others have suggested. As I explained in the Introduction, Armstrong argues that 19th-century novelistic sympathy underpins the ethic and aesthetic of individualism that has come to define "realism" in literary criticism. In the logic of individualism, "feelings come from within the individual" and are shared

sympathetically "without compromising [each person's] individuality" (*How Novels Think* 12). Aligning sympathy with "thinking that produces an individual" (11), Armstrong echoes and anticipates other studies of 19th-century novelistic sympathy that describe the phenomenon as intentional, rational, moral, and therefore "realist" (for example, studies by James Chandler, Rae Greiner, and Rachel Ablow) and that describe the experience of sympathetic reading as familiar, comforting, and "pleasurable" (Jaffe 7).

In contrast to these descriptions of how sympathy works in 19th-century British novels[2], the novels explored here make discomfort and displeasure part of the experience of sympathetic reading in order to demonstrate that individuals and self-other relations are fundamentally unstable. Dispelling beliefs that novel-reading can "improve" people and communities by regulating feelings and behaviors, *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* show that such assumptions are illusions of peaceful coherence that mask the particular discomforts they illuminate – that reading sympathetically can involve "difficult," revolting, and penetrating encounters. The novels suggest, then, that examining the discomforts of novel reading as a (re)presentation of unstable sympathies illuminates anxieties about personal, political, and literary relationships that we are not able to see using Smith's paradigm. Attending to the language, structural and narrative strategies, social and political allusions, and scenes of reading and writing employed by particular novels to illustrate and activate self-other relations – without assuming that such relations appear in Smith's terms – opens access to

the complex politics and aesthetics embedded in unusual techniques for moving readers.

Within the critical paradigm of Smithian sympathy, 19th-century novels that are uncomfortable to read are often viewed as outdated, bad, or misanthropic, as *The Wanderer*, *The Last Man*, and *Villette* have been seen. By recognizing their (re)presentation of unstable sympathies, we may reframe them as political or innovative or realistic about relations that traditionally "realist" works cannot capture within the conventions of sympathy typically attributed to them – or that literary critics cannot recover within the current conventions of studying those self-other encounters. As mobilized in the novels studied here, sympathy is an unresolvable convergence of conflicting feelings and ideas, an experience of shifting affiliations and viewpoints that presents alternative ways of feeling, thinking, and living. Less a political program than a mode of ongoing literary-political discussion, sympathy opens up conversations between selves and others that at once irritate, confuse, and inspire. Nineteenth-century novels (re)presenting these unstable sympathies suggest that studying the phenomenon only in Smith's terms obscures the often unpleasant, sometimes self-compromising realities of interpersonal and reader-text relationships.

NOTES

[1] Exceptions include Adela Pinch, who studies Humean sympathies in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*; Amit Rai, who identifies occult sympathies in *Jane Eyre*, and Mary Fairclough, who examines contagious sympathies in novels by Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. However, Pinch's literary critical study explores "epistemologies of emotion" in the late 18th and very early 19th centuries ("Hume to Austen"), while Rai's and Fairclough's accounts focus on philosophical and political discourses of sympathy and not literary ones. Literary criticism of 19th-century British novels generally privileges Smith's theory of sympathy, as the work of Audrey Jaffe, Nancy Armstrong, James Chandler, and Rae Greiner demonstrates.

[2] While Jaffe and Ablow discusses specifically Victorian sympathy, Armstrong, Chandler, and Greiner focus on later 19th-century novels as exemplars of Smithian sympathy but then impose this model on novels published earlier in the century. In this manner, 19th-century novels mobilizing sympathy in ways that fall outside of Smith's paradigm become studied as anomalies or precursors instead of innovators or points of resistance.

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