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Naïveté and the British Novel

(1770 – 1830)

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Lillian Lu

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Naïveté and the British Novel

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Professor Helen E. Deutsch, Chair

This dissertation investigates the trope of the naïve protagonist in the British novel from 1770 – 1830 and its many narrative uses, ranging from feminist satire in Frances Burney's novels to masculine-coded novels about imperialism such as *Waverley*. I argue for a reading practice that is more aware of naïveté and its active formal novelistic qualities. Naïveté is not simply a state of not knowing or lack, a *tabula rasa* that must be corrected through experience; instead, protagonists' naïveté functions meaningfully to ironize, critique, unveil, and uphold state power in turns. Just as knowledge is a form of power, naïveté has a complex and active role in shaping power.

In the chapters that follow, I argue that these protagonists' lack of knowledge actively influences novelistic form and becomes a scholarly problematic. I begin with Frances Burney's first three novels, *Evelina* (1778)*, Cecilia* (1782)*,* and *Camilla* (1796)*,* in which naïveté is a

vehicle for feminist satire against violent masculinity and the patriarchy that works to keep women ignorant. In my second chapter, I investigate how naïveté operates in two Gothic novels produced in the 1790s: William Godwin's *Things as They Are; or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (completed 1798-1799). I argue that for the disenfranchised and disadvantaged protagonists of these novels, naïveté is the epistemological tool that leads them to discover systems of oppression that work to keep them ignorant, but stops just short of revolution. In the third chapter, I argue that naïveté is an important trope in the national tale, used to absolve English subjects of acts of imperialism, and I do so by close reading three novels: Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806), Walter Scott's *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814), and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814). Finally, in chapter four, I examine the powerlessness of knowledge systems in Mary Shelley's apocalyptic tale, *The Last Man* (1826), which posits that, in the face of the apocalypse and the collapse of the British Empire, naïveté—an admission of unknowing—may be the only viable epistemology for the English subject.

The dissertation of Lillian Lu is approved.

Sarah Tindal Kareem

Saree Makdisi

Jonathan Hamilton Grossman

Helen E. Deutsch, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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To my family, for making this possible

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vii
Biographical Sketch ix
Introduction 1
Chapter 1: Naïveté as a Vehicle for Satire in Burney's Novels 13
Chapter 2: Naïveté as a Gothic Epistemology 62
Chapter 3: Naïveté and the National Tale 101
Chapter 4: Undoing and Re-Doing Naïveté in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* 142
Coda: Naïveté Now, Three Case Studies 173
Bibliography 185

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Biographical Sketch

Lillian Lu obtained a B.A. in English with a minor in Film Studies from Tufts University in 2015, graduating *summa cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa. Her published academic works include "'Indelible in the Hippocampus': Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette* and the Tradition of Women's Satire" (*The Rambling* 2018), "Assuming Innocence: The Ingénue's Satire in Frances Burney's *Evelina*" (*Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 2020), "A Full Account: Queer Structures and Narrative Democratization in *Modao Zushi*" (co-authored with Andrea Acosta, forthcoming in *Catching Chén Qíng Lìng* edited by Cathy Yue Wang and Maria Alberto for Peter Lang), and "Teaching Children's and Young Adult Literature, Genre, and the Market" (forthcoming in an MLA teaching volume).

Lillian Lu is also an author represented by Tara Gonzalez at EMLA. Her creative work has appeared in *Immersion: An Asian Anthology of Love, Fantasy, and Speculative Fiction* (Rice Paper 2019), *Whiter: Asian American Woman on Skin Color and Colorism* (NYU Press 2020), and forthcoming in the lickety~split and Yuzu Press.

Introduction

The child is father to the man

--William Wordsworth,
Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood

The flip side of innocence is shame…Shame gives me the ability to split myself into the first and third person…One characteristic of racism is that children are treated like adults and adults are treated like children.

--Cathy Park Hong, "The End of White Innocence," *Minor Feelings*

This dissertation argues for a reading practice that is more aware of naïveté and its active formal novelistic qualities. Rather than a simple character trait, naïveté presents a problematic of novel form and interpretation. This dissertation aims to demonstrate what an attunement to naïveté might make possible for critical thought and reading practices. Naïveté is political, not shorn of agency, responsibility, and meaning as it has sneakily managed to seem.

Just as knowledge has power, so too does ignorance. In "The Privilege of Unknowing," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, "Knowledge is not itself power, although it is the magnetic field of power. Ignorance and opacity collude or compete with it in mobilizing the flows of energy, desire, goods, meanings, persons."[1] Her example is a political one: President Reagan cannot speak French and President Mitterrand can speak both English and French, so they both settle on English, adhering to the limitations of the less knowledgeable person in the conversation. Reagan, the less knowledgeable one, has the upper hand. Ignorance influences *forms* of language and conversation, the social forms that people adhere to, and the formations of sociopolitical

[1] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Privilege of Unknowing: Diderot's *The Nun,*" *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994): 23.

allegiances, alliances, and understanding. In this same chapter, Sedgwick connects the power of ignorance—the claim to "not have noticed," to "not have known"—to cases of sexual assault, wherein men can be legally exonerated because of their lack of knowledge or attention to the women they are raping.[2] Sedgwick extends this line of thought into a later analysis of Diderot's *The Nun,* and critiques common reading practices of the novella that read the ingénue on a binary, as either desiring or not desiring a nonconsensual sexual encounter. While Reagan's ignorance gives him political power (the phrase "home turf" comes to mind), a fictional woman's ignorance is systemically constructed by the patriarchy and weaponized against her: she is kept in ignorance about sex and her body, and at the same time is blamed for her lack of worldliness; or she is read as not ignorant at all, but sexually scheming and materially ambitious.[3] This proves to be both a diegetic problem for the protagonist and a scholarly problem. While Sedgwick uses the term "ignorance" to signify the rhetorical claim to not have known, it is not an empty category, a *tabula rasa*. In direct contrast with Locke's definition, Sedgwick's argument foregrounds that ignorance is literarily, socio-politically loaded.

Many contemporary race studies scholars trace American white innocence back to writers like Wordsworth. Cathy Park Hong, a Korean American scholar, discusses *not knowing* as a politically fraught site and extends this argument into 2020s United States racial politics and relations. Rather than ignorance, innocence is her preferred term, because of its racialized, legalistic, and moral meanings. In *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning,* Hong writes that innocence is a fantasy of white nostalgia, a state in which white children can afford to live

[2] Ibid, 24. Sedgwick makes clear that she says "men" even though it is not only men who rape. Her argument is about power dynamics, and in the cisheterosexual patriarchy, it is frequently men assaulting women.
[3] Ibid, 42-26. See Sedgwick's reading of scholarly readings of Suzanne in *The Nun.* In the English context, one thinks of the Pamela/Shamela effect, as well as *Clarissa.*

and that non-white children cannot. "One characteristic of racism," she writes, "is that children [of color] are treated like adults and adults are treated like children."[4] [5] Children of immigrants watch as their parents are degraded by a white social order, which early on gives them knowledge of—a keen and painful awareness of—the shame of being Other. Shame is "the flip side of innocence,"[6] and is cause for the child of color's "ability to split [them]self into the first and third person."[7] Hong, like many scholars who have investigated the history of innocence and its relationship to concepts of childhood, traces the origins of the manufacturing of white American nostalgia back to Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," which, told from the adult's perspective, sees "the boy as a surrogated vessel into which the adult, consternated by his failures, pours his reveries."[8] She tracks this genealogy of white nostalgia through to the character Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye*, the filmmaker Wes Anderson, and everyday racism in the New York subway system, where her white friends' ability to be shocked and confused by the racism they witness lies in stark contrast to Hong's own weary worldliness.

While this dissertation does not take up as its textual examples contemporary Asian America or Asian American culture and art, I find myself inextricably linked to and influenced by my worldly circumstance as an Asian American scholar of British Romantic literature. Following Hong's and Sedgwick's usages of the words, I define "ignorance" as a more general state of not knowing something specific ("I haven't read enough about that so I'm ignorant of it,"

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[4] Cathy Park Hong, "The End of White Innocence," *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (New York: One World 2020): 77.
[5] See also Nader Shalhoub-Kevorkian's *Incarcerated Childhood and the Politics of Unchilding,* for another context. Shalhoub-Kevorkian explores how settler-colonial states permit "the authorized eviction of children from childhood," with particular focus on Zionist settler-colonialism in Palestine (Nader Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Incarcerated Childhood and the Politics of Unchilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2019): 122).
[6] Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings,* 75.
[7] Ibid, 77.
[8] Ibid, 70.

"I didn't know XYZ," "Reagan is ignorant of the French language; he doesn't have the French language," a mixture of willful and/or accidental unknowing), while "innocence" is an actively, socio-politically constructed fantasy of nostalgia for childhood and purity, which necessarily includes notions about race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability. Innocence bears legalistic, moral, and Christian-coded meanings of being free from sin or absolved from sin. The minoritarian subject can be naïve without ever being innocent—without ever being able to afford to be innocent. For this dissertation, "naïveté" is a helpful category that bridges these two ideas: it describes the literarily constructed notions about intellectual capacity (or seeming lack thereof), agency (or seeming lack thereof), and responsibility (or seeming lack thereof). Naïveté operates in one manner as ignorance does: seemingly benign, enabling statements such as "Edward Waverley did not know what he was doing on the battlefield"—but it also operates to absolve characters who have all the means to access education, knowledge, and power. Waverley, for instance, has no social or economic excuse to be so naïve about the Jacobite Rising: his family is in politics, he has money, he is a man who lives in the world. On the level of the novel, Waverley's naïveté is not a simple quirk of character; it functions to explain away his bumbling adventures even as he works to help colonize the Scottish Highlands. Waverley is a prime literary example of how pro-English, pro-imperialist discourse is enabled through the construction of (English, white, imperialist) naïveté, and how insidiously powerful unknowing is as a rhetorical, political, novelistic tool.

Although "whiteness" as we theorize and talk about it in the United States now did not exist as such in early-nineteenth century Britain, protagonists' naïveté in the British novel was such a popular trope that I would be remiss in not linking it to the active construction of Englishness. Edward Said's writing about the novel as imperial narration is especially important

to my criticism: "Processes of imperialism occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions, and—by predisposition, by the authority of recognizable cultural formations, by continuing consolidation within education, literature, and the visual and musical arts—were manifested at another very significant level, that of the national culture, which we have tended to sanitize as a realm of unchanging intellectual monuments, free from worldly affiliations."[9] He goes on to say: "Nations themselves *are* narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them."[10] One of the implications of my dissertation is that naïveté as a protagonist trope is central to laying the foundations for constructing what it means to be an English subject when encounters with ethnic and socioeconomic difference became increasingly common in the novel as in everyday life. This line of argument is also indebted to Saree Makdisi's *Making England Western,* in which he argues that "the Romantic period constituting the decades straddling the turn of the nineteenth century was the moment in which England really started to become a metropolitan center…on terms that would involve weaving together more and more people, and ultimately the national population, into a putatively homogeneous 'we,' a collectivity that could claim to possess—or rather, one whose proponents and champions claimed it possessed—cultural and racial homogeneity."[11] In this period characterized by the process of making, constituting, and constructing a univocal Englishness, the novel and its obsession with naïve subjects and subjectivities are not apolitical in the least.

[9] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1993): 12-13.
[10] Ibid, xiii.
[11] Saree Makdisi, *Making England Western: Occidentalism, Race, and Imperial Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2014): ix-x.

The function of naïveté in the novel at times obfuscates the imperial project, and at other times makes visible the processes of patriarchal oppression (while still uncertain as to viable solutions).[12] About this, Joanne Faulkner writes, "Another means of conceiving the amnesiac function of innocence, aside from as *tabula rasa*, concerns its fetish value—in particular, that it makes a fetish of both vulnerability and of memory. The fetish, for Marx and Freud alike, allows a material fundament to remain unacknowledged…The value of the fetish is its power to obscure the real—to keep matters unchallenging and uncomplicated, so that the subject can maintain an illusion of its own completeness."[13] Faulkner does not take it in this direction, but I would say that maintaining the innocence—political and mental—of a character creates a kind of plot and political stasis: the status quo of colonialism, sexism, violent masculinity might be put into question but are not changed. The upshot of innocence in the texts explored in this dissertation is that English responsibility is deflected and revolution deferred.

Characters who are naïve seem to deflect and be shorn of agency, receiving the twists and turns of plot (rather than causing them) and reacting to plot—or not even reacting to plot at all! Naïve protagonists do not *seem* to do anything, and therefore other characters (and scholars) think these naïve characters do not *think* anything either. In essence, my argument about naïveté bears a lot of similarities to what Wendy Anne Lee theorizes in *Failures of Feeling* as insensibility: "Insensibility makes short work of skepticism and emotional certainty and emotion. Ontological beliefs, the attribution of mental states, and conceptions of fellow feeling no longer

[12] Joanne Faulkner, "Vulnerability of 'Virtual' Subjects: Childhood, Memory, and Crisis in the cultural Value of Innocence," *SubStance,* vol 42, no 3 (Issue 132): 128. "As an apparently magical, tender fragility, innocence is maintained in children through a protective segregation that assumes great wealth, but does not ask from whence this wealth has come." The fetish is that which conceals the ideology-ness of ideology.
[13] Ibid.

avail. The principle of causation…seizes up."[14] The insensible character, epitomized by Richardson's Clarissa, does not react as they are expected to; they seem, to their diegetic readers (men in particular) and their real-world readers, in many ways, not to respond and are assumed then to be incapable of feeling, which produces difficulty for the other characters reading them and for scholars reading them as well. Lee writes: "The insensible does not…mark the spot where 'privacy and society were conjoined' but keeps working the pressure point of their codependency, a leaden finger on a panic button continuously setting off the epistemic violence of the novel's mandate to behold interior motion, to make it move, speak."[15] By creating epistemological and interpretive difficulty for their readers, the insensible creates and frustrates plot just as the naïf does. Both are vulnerable to judgements on their intellectual capacities: one seems too immovable, the other—the naïf— seems too moved to the point of illegibility to readers (does the ingénue's blush signify innocence or knowing?), even as they move quite a lot across narrative time and storyworld space.

But whereas the insensible is seemingly opaque and immovable, stoic and nearly inhuman or perhaps superhuman, the naïf moves along with the momentum of the vicissitudes of plot, and is seemingly transparent, feminine, and doe-eyed, if not called foolish outright. (An accessible example for a more contemporary American audience might be Forrest Gump, pulled along by the whims of history!) In the minds of diegetic characters, narrators, and scholars alike, the problem of the naïve protagonist is that they seem *too* human, too vulnerable to judgement, too reactive. In this way, the naïf is the opposite of insensible, even though they both may produce the same interpretive frustrations. This reactive trait of naïveté makes it at once powerfully feminist in Burney's novels and exceedingly masculine, imperialist in novels of the

[14] Wendy Anne Lee, *Failures of Feeling: Insensibility and the Novel* (Stanford 2019): 28.
[15] Ibid.

early nineteenth century. To the first, feminist novels featuring female protagonists and focalized through these characters' points of view demonstrate the humanity of the seemingly ignorant. Naïveté becomes a lens through which the machinations of the world are made visible and critiqued as jaded, violent, mechanical, and unshakeable—in contrast with the naïf. Whereas naïveté makes young ingénues—innocent female protagonists—resilient and adaptable, the world around them nonsensically sticks to the status quo. To the second, however, naïveté when co-opted by male characters who are agents in the British colonial project is a powerful, insidious political tool that works to absolve these characters, deflect responsibility, and shed agency. For these characters, naïveté in its resilience—in its ability to encounter trials in the world and come out more or less unscathed—becomes more akin to mobility—militaristic, naval, surveilling, occupying.

I join several scholars in the recent wave of interest in innocence and non-teleological ways of reading the novel, Stephanie Insley Hershinow the most recent and prime example. In Hershinow's *Born Yesterday: Inexperience and the Early Realist Novel* (2019), she argues that the novice—generally but not always a young woman, one who lacks worldly experience—was a complex site of "suspended possibility rather than […] a catalyst for development" in the eighteenth-century novel.[16] Hershinow suggests that we read these early realist novice protagonists not as teleological characters who must grow and who must be offered a moral corrective and *learn* from mistakes in a kind of telos; rather, we should read them as granted "a position of moral authority from which to understand that society—or even, by comparing it to a more idealistic vision, to improve upon it."[17] The novice, then, is not the one who needs to learn,

[16] Stephanie Insley Hershinow, *Born Yesterday: Inexperience and the Early Realist Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019): 2.
[17] Ibid, 7.

but the one from whom others need to learn; the novice is more static than we have previously thought. A prime example of this for Hershinow is Frances Burney's Camilla, whose life is "unmolested by experience, a plot that is not really much of a plot at all," and whose male counterparts are critiqued again and again in the narrative for appealing to their worldly experience for authority.[18] It is the experienced patriarchs who are offered a corrective, while Camilla remains very much the same throughout: a novice suspended in worldview.

While my reading of Frances Burney does argue that naïveté is a site of feminist satirical possibility, most of the case studies in this dissertation do not take as optimistic a view. This dissertation investigates the trope of the naïve protagonist during the period of 1770-1830 and its many novelistic uses, ranging from feminist satire in Burney's novels to masculine-coded novels about and defending imperialism such as *Waverley*. Extending Hershinow's argument into these case studies and into discussions of race and empire, I argue that naïveté is not simply a state of not knowing or lack, a *tabula rasa* that must later be corrected through experience; instead, protagonists' naïveté in these novels functions meaningfully to ironize, critique, unveil, and uphold state power in turns. Just as knowledge is a form of power, naïveté has a complex and active role in shaping power. When the ingénue Evelina—orphaned, isolated, deemed an innocent again and again by her male peers—can narrate her own story and satirize violent masculinity in her first-person accounts, feminine naïveté becomes a position from which the ingénue can critique the more jaded and rigid structures around her. In such a case, naïveté is itself a way of knowing and unmasking the dangers of toxic masculinity. Decades after Burney's debut book, when Waverley repeatedly claims he does not know what he is doing as he is actively participating in a war that will quell Scottish Highlander culture, his naïveté functions as

[18] Ibid, 121.

an absolution of English agency in projects of colonialism. Although a cluster of scholars have written about unknowing, inexperience, and non-teleological forms of the novel, a more thorough study of the Romantic novel's relationship to naïveté—and its relationship to gender, race, and imperialism, as well as to novelistic form—has yet to be published.

*

In the chapters that follow, I tell a story about British Romantic novels that feature naïve protagonists: I argue that these protagonists' lack of knowledge actively influences novelistic form and becomes a scholarly problematic. Although the chapters generally follow the chronological order in which these novels were published,[19] the novels ultimately resist a neat history of naïveté and its uses. For example, in the prospective version of my argument, I claimed that naïveté begins as a tool for feminist satire in Burney's novels and ends up being co-opted by male authors for novels featuring male characters. While this is generally true—male authors did co-opt forms that were popularized by women writers, Walter Scott among them—my dissertation ends with Mary Shelley's *The Last Man,* which upends and undoes this trajectory.

I begin with Frances Burney's first three novels, *Evelina, Cecilia,* and *Camilla.* Burney is one of the best theorizers of how naïveté is culturally constructed: how the patriarchy actively creates and sustains feminine ignorance about sex, social forms, and capital, and thereby blocks women's access to their own wealth, their titles, and worldly experience. I investigate how Burney leverages this scathing critique through, in her debut novel, first-person prose and then later third-person perspective that lays bare masculine machinations against women. Although

[19] Although this isn't even neat, either. Publishing dates for some of the novels were years after they were written and sold to publishers. *Northanger Abbey* is a prime example.

the men are the ones *plotting,* the female protagonists' naïveté create, respond to, and inform plot and a proto-feminist ethos of frustration, exhaustion, and lamentation.

In my second chapter, I investigate how naïveté operates in two Gothic novels produced in the 1790s: William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey.* I argue that for the young, disenfranchised and disadvantaged protagonists of these novels, naïveté is the epistemological tool that leads them to the discovery of dark secrets, revealing systems of oppression that work to keep them ignorant; for Caleb, his curiosity leads him to have a sneaking suspicion that his employer, Falkland, is a murderer (which is correct), and for Catherine Morland, her fannish reading of Gothic novels leads her to believe that the father of her love interest is an insidious, neglectful man (also correct, though not in exactly the way she imagines). Following the historical year of 1793, with the Reign of Terror and domestic suppression occurring in England, however, these novels are not hopeful about naïveté as a political and epistemological tool: while protagonists may uncover systems of oppression, they fail to change the system and, I suggest, end up further enmeshed in the power structures that be.

My third chapter argues that naïveté is an important protagonistic trope in the national tale genre. I read three novels that have been canonically placed either in the national tale genre or adjacent to it. In Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), the bumbling naïf Horatio, the son of an English nobleman, is exiled to Ireland to improve his moral character. There, he falls in love with the Irish princess Glorvina, whose land was stolen by Horatio's ancestors. His naïveté to this history and to the fact that during the entirety of the novel, his own father is engaged to Glorvina, works to absolve his presence in and occupation of Glorvina's land and people. In Walter Scott's *Waverley,* set decades before the publication of the novel, the eponymous character's slow realization that he is on "the wrong side" of the Jacobite Rebellion

and his remediation as a loyal British subject absolves English colonialism while simultaneously disciplining this ignorance as an aesthetic relic of the past. If English ignorance is aesthetic, it cannot be harmful or threatening. Finally, in *Mansfield Park,* scenes of Fanny's ingénue behavior are also, I argue, scenes in which the novel works through complicity in a system that continues to oppress and exile her. They are scenes meant to test her allegiances and by the end, she is only more entrenched.

Finally, in chapter four, I examine the powerlessness of knowledge systems in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826). Written at the waning of the British Romantic Period, the novel employs several layers of narrative: the frame narrative recounts the narrator finding Sibylline leaves in a cave in Naples and the diegesis is a supposed transcription of the prophecies, set in 2092 at the end of the world, focalized on a growing Lionel Verney who witnesses Europe beset by war, famine, and plague. The novel as a whole presents several circuitous knowledge systems: the 1820s, the 2090s, and the ancient Sibylline past are too temporally spread out for characters or narrators to be able to do anything useful with that knowledge. All epistemological tools prove futile in the face of the apocalypse: neither Lionel's more pastoral naïveté nor the prophetic frame narrative prove helpful. The plot happens and opens out into an empty sea. Split between innocence and shame, and recalling Hong's bifurcated first- and third-person perspective, the English subjects find themselves, against all odds, in a minoritarian position. Even with such a tool as prophecy, the Englishman is left only with his naïveté.

Chapter 1: Naïveté as a Vehicle for Satire in Burney's Novels[20]

> Satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own.[21]

Eighteenth-century novels are replete with naïve protagonists. Especially in satire, these naïfs are instrumental to making societal critique manifest. They are the glass in Jonathan Swift's famous definition of satire. It is through Gulliver's naïve telling of his adventures, for example, that the absurdity of human ambition and selfishness come to light. It is also through his narration that we see the limitations and hypocrisies of his own vantage point, his narration folding in upon itself at the end. The once carefree, picaresque hero Gulliver—who can come and go as he pleases, no matter his domestic affairs and responsibilities—becomes so absorbed in the world of the Houyhnhnms that he cannot bear to be around the human smells of his own family. At first satirizing the world outside of himself, in surrendering and eventually succumbing to the vicissitudes of masculine experience in the world, such as voyaging and reporting on lands heretofore uncharted by European explorers—albeit, fantastical ones—the naïf ultimately sheds his own humanity, the satire pointing to the narrator as well. Swift's satire

[20] An earlier iteration of a section of this chapter is published as "Assuming Innocence: The Ingénue's Satire in Frances Burney's *Evelina," Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* vol 33, issue 1 (Fall 2020): 57-76. There, I argue that Evelina's newness to the world is a vehicle for her satirical critique of jaded Londoners; her innocence is an epistemology that allows for a novelistic defamiliarization of masculine violence in particular. "Innocence" as an operative and recuperative word in my argument functioned to capture an optics and satirical bent. In this dissertation, I use "naïveté" overarchingly to capture the wide-ranging functions of protagonistic inexperience that formally affect the novel in various ways. Even within the span of Burney's career, protagonistic innocence transforms. This chapter is a divergence from the article in thinking about *Evelina* in relation to Burney's later works.

[21] Jonathan Swift, *The Battle of the Books*, ed. A. Guthkeleh (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), lxv, HathiTrust.

is so thorough-going, leaving no one unscathed, that even—or perhaps especially—his first-person protagonist cannot see his own face in the mirror—the mirror of the text—he has held up.

In her 2019 monograph titled *Born Yesterday: Inexperience and the Early Realist Novel,* Stephanie Insley Hershinow argues for the importance of inexperience in the eighteenth-century novel: "inexperienced novelistic characters [should be] read on their own terms: as neither backward nor forward looking, neither hobbled by formal demands nor yielding to historical pressures, but as a central, affirmative component of the novel project in the second half of the eighteenth century."[22] Inexperience, Hershinow argues, troubles the telos of the Bildungsroman: the novice remains static, changing the world around them instead of being changed by the world. This phenomenon reflects a vision, exemplified by Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), of a world in which the novice's goodness need not be sacrificed in the face of experience.[23]

Like Hershinow, I am interested in the ways in which naiveté has active, formal effects on the novel. However, I don't share her more optimistic view of the potential of an inexperienced protagonist to change the world around them. Gender and naïveté have a rather complicated novelistic history: naïfs like Gulliver, Candide, Pamela, Clarissa and Arabella are vastly different in their epistemology, satire, and worldview. While Hershinow includes Burney in her analysis of inexperience, she does not treat Burney's *Evelina* or *Cecilia* but her later novel *Camilla* (1796); when we focus on Burney's early fiction, a different narrative emerges. Naïveté in my account of Burney's work, in other words, is neither a panacea to the ills of the world nor a hamartia that must be corrected in the scope of the novel. In my account of Burney's first two novels, naïveté falls short of being a solution to violent masculinity, masculine plots, and the

[22] Stephanie Insley Hershinow, *Born Yesterday: Inexperience and the Early Realist Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019)*,* 6–7.
[23] Hershinow, 28.

insidious mechanisms of society that these protagonists critique. What naïveté does succeed in doing, in *Evelina,* is to create community and instigate critique. In *Cecilia,* naïveté manifests differently, not the least because this novel is told in third-person perspective. More than *Evelina, Cecilia* lays bare the systemic ignorance and powerlessness to which women—regardless of socioeconomic status—are subjected. My reading of *Camilla* is not restricted to Dr. Marchmont, the figure of patriarchal authority, but addresses the novel as a whole in order to argue that naïveté is a Gothic condition in which the patriarchal family system keeps young women—and even more so young, variably-embodied women like Eugenia.

The example of Evelina, though steady in her ingenuousness, flips Hershinow's paradigm of inexperience: Evelina is able to modify her orientation to the world throughout the course of the novel, while the ridiculous characters she encounters remain static. Innocence in *Evelina* therefore does not operate towards a philosophy of optimism, but from a feminist ethos of frustration, exemplified by how an innocent and intelligent young woman is constantly hindered by those around her: from movement, from speaking, from writing. And thus emerges the grounds for first-person epistolary satire.

In this chapter, I argue that Frances Burney uses naïveté as a vehicle for her social critique, especially of violent masculinity and its effects on women's endeavors to speak, write, and move autonomously. Throughout her writing career, protagonistic naïveté does not remain static and never is it a cure-all for society's ills. It begins as a more optimistic testament to the power of the ingénue's satirical powers, and grows more and more Gothic, becoming a lamentation on the structures that keep even worldlier women in ignorance and disenfranchisement, and a critique of masculine-coded suspicious reading of feminine subjects. While her first novel demonstrates the satirical power of the ingénue, her later third-person

novels become more meta in their satirical approaches, critiquing what Sedgwick calls a masculine reading of female characters and showing that even if the ingénue is educated about the world, she stands little chance against the systemically empowered masculine readings levied against her. In Burney's work, we see the culmination of eighteenth-century novelistic cogitations on naïveté's role in satire which kick-starts the transition into later, Romantic engagements with novelistic naïveté as an epistemology.

Evelina: Ingénue as Satirist

Frances Burney's first novel, *Evelina* (1778), contains multiple scenes in which characters of more social authority than the eponymous young woman assess her intellectual capabilities—or attempt to. Her guardian, the Reverend Arthur Villars, writes to Lady Howard that Evelina "is quite a little rustic" who "knows nothing of the world,"[24] with a "guileless and innocent soul" and "ingenuous simplicity."[25] At an early ball, the two men who have interacted with her, Lord Orville and Sir Clement Willoughby, debate over whether she is "ignorant" or "all intelligence and expression,"[26] respectively. This is a world in which Evelina is repeatedly judged as either a coquette—that is, a knowing woman, as the satirical Mrs. Selwyn jibes—or as an ignoramus, her innocence either charming or laughable to those around her.

The diegetic discourse that frames Evelina's intelligence as a contradiction and apparent undoing of her innocence occasionally leaks into scholarly discourse on the novel's heroine. Joanne Cutting-Gray claims, rightly, that Evelina's innocence allows her to read the social scene around her in complex ways, yet she also implies that Evelina's "ready adaptability to fit herself

[24] Frances Burney, *Evelina; or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World,* ed. Edward A. Bloom (1778; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21. References are to this edition.
[25] Ibid, 127.
[26] Ibid, 36-37.

to new social situations is belied by the way her letters attire her in innocence."[27] The assumptions embedded here are that Evelina's innocence is a guise, and that her innocence and intelligence—her ability to perceive, critique, and satirize—exist in negative correlation to one another. Some scholars have in brief, isolated moments acknowledged that Evelina is a satirist.[28] However, the relationship between Evelina's innocence and her satirical capabilities has gone undertheorized. This chapter will argue that Burney's first novel articulates a model of satire that is enabled by Evelina's innocence. I borrow from George A. Test in his definition of satire as a "faculty ... [that] will in its essence manifest itself in an expression or act that in various ways combines aggression, play, laughter, and judgment."[29] For Evelina, the faculties of innocence and satire are mutually constitutive.

Reading the ingénue as a satirist allows for rich epistemological returns: it gives us a way of reading innocence as a valuable epistemology in and of itself, an epistemology capable of development, even as its value does not hinge solely on this development. The novel frames Evelina's innocence as a way of perceiving scenes and people as new, striking, and strange; it is a faculty that enables her to satirize the mechanicalness of Londoners—particularly men's sexual aggression, violence, and cruelty—and disrupts the mechanisms of genre. This faculty is neither limitless nor a panacea to social issues; Evelina consistently encounters hindrances, with which Burney would have been familiar herself, having been barred from exercising her full satirical

[27] Joanne Cutting-Gray, "Writing Innocence: Fanny Burney's *Evelina*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 9, no. 1 (1990): 46, 47, https://www.jstor.org/stable/464180.
[28] Helen Thompson calls Evelina "an apt satirist" of her absurd cousins in "Evelina's Two Publics," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 39, no. 2 (1998): 156, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23596102. Ruth Yeazell writes that "even the modest Evelina doubles as a satirist" in *Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 142.
[29] George A. Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art* (Tampa: University of Southern Florida Press, 1991), 12.

capabilities even after the successful publication of *Evelina.*[30] Yet, this faculty helps the heroine survive, and, in its encounters with the mechanical cruelty of the world, reveals the world to itself.

What sets *Evelina* apart from Burney's later novels is the tension between how characters read Evelina and how Evelina laughs at others in her narration. Unlike Burney's later protagonists, Evelina finds her intelligence is constantly questioned by other characters; yet, her narration reveals that she is incredibly discerning—incredibly, especially to those who misread her—and possesses a capacity for judgement. Evelina is singular in her unique mode of development in Burney's first novel, in which her capacity for satire works in tandem with her innocence.

Though numerous critics have drawn connections between the narrator Evelina and the author Burney that help to illuminate how Burney uses her protagonist as a satirical tool,[31] I avoid reading Evelina primarily as an avatar of Burney in order to open up ways of reading Evelina as a satirist in her own right. I also step away from arguments that hinge upon discerning what Evelina does or does not know, and whether she is sincere towards her intended readers

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[30] See Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). Margaret Anne Doody offers a thorough examination of Burney's comic play, *The Witlings,* which was barred from production in 1780 after her father, Charles Burney, discouraged it. Doody, "Chapter Three: *The Witlings*: The Finished Comedy," in *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 66–98.

[31] Collapsing author with narrator is a logical leap made by readers more frequently towards women authors, as Julie Park argues: "Instances of gross conflations of Burney and her book product occurred when Dr. Johnson called her 'Evelina' ... and when two girls in a shop stared so intently at her ... 'as if they expected to read in [her] Face all the Characters in [her] Book.' The move into the third person ... was not so much an act of 'daring' to have opinions or judgement, as it was a strategy for both hiding the writing self and for displaying." Park, "Pains and Pleasures of the Automaton: Frances Burney's Mechanics of Coming Out," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 1 (2016): 36, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053490. For the parallels between Burney's life and Evelina's, see Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women*; and Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and Doody.

(Villars and Maria Mirvan) and therefore the novel's reader when she represents herself as doe-eyed, swept up in the vicissitudes of London life. Such readings tend to generate what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls a "masculine relation" to the text, a reading practice that surmises a female character's knowledge of her own mind, and authorizes itself to guess at whether the character is intelligent or self-aware.[32] My resistance to a "masculine relation" to the texts follows Burney's cue: Burney's novels challenge masculine-coded reading practices that attempt to calculate the authenticity of feminine subjects and the earnestness of feminine behavior. The novels also criticize those who lament deviation from feminine modesty and ignore what feminine subjects say about themselves.

In *Evelina,* the leaps from looking at, to reading, to assuming knowledge of a character are usually done by men unto women. An epistolary narrator, Evelina necessarily knows that she must be careful about how she represents herself, including taking care with how she represents this carefulness, lest she be called too conscious, too knowing, and thus too much of a plotter, as Richardson's Pamela was interpreted as being. However, as Frances Ferguson says in her famous reading of *Clarissa*, Richardson insists on a "fundamental mistake" by equating epistemology and psychology.[33] It is a mistake to equate, in Clarissa's case, feminine desire and intentions with formal knowledge of Clarissa, to assume, as Lovelace does, that because she acts a certain way, she feels a certain way. Ferguson observes such an interpretative mistake extend into scholarship about *Clarissa* and Clarissa, as scholars seek to read into Clarissa's letters (the form that her psychological interiority takes) in order to find a key to her intentions, agency, and desire.

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[32] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Privilege of Unknowing: Diderot's *The Nun,*" in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 46. Sedgwick writes namely about readers' tendencies to interpret the protagonist Suzanne in Diderot's *The Nun* as either sexually cunning or ignorant, and our need for a more specific, pluralized idea of innocence (30-32; 42-43).

[33] Frances Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel," *Representations,* no. 20 (Autumn 1987): 108, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2928503.

Extending Ferguson's argument, I suggest that readers should treat Evelina's representation of her interiority as separate from any claim to know her interiority.

Although her reported laughter ebbs, Evelina remains an astute critic set apart from London caricatures. As she asserts herself as an individual who can navigate the social world, her satire straddles individualism and community. Ronald Paulson reads this in-betweenness as a shift in eighteenth-century satire itself: "*Evelina* is a careful balance between old and new: the anatomy of society is still present, and the protagonist is still functioning as a satiric device, but the fictional form given these matters is about to absorb and subordinate them all to a single theme of a protagonist's growing self-awareness."[34] While Marcie Frank agrees about the hybridity of genre, she reads *Evelina* less as a story of the formation of an individual and more as a microcosm of theatricality focused on "depicting the social world."[35] The temporal gap between Paulson's and Frank's claims is nearly fifty years; the longevity of this discussion about whether *Evelina* is about the individual or society speaks to the very symbiosis of Evelina's innocence and satire. It is precisely this symbiosis that marks her as an individual and, at the same time, places her in relation to the world.

Innocence denaturalizes both the mechanicalness of diegetic characters and the mechanisms of genre. Evelina's innocence of the conventions of London social life reveals that literary genres, like social fields, are organized systems of rules, assumptions, habits, and tendencies; the generic plurality of *Evelina* is therefore consistent with the novel's project of making strange and critiquing, in that order, the persistent debate over *what a young woman knows* that underlies literary and social orders alike. Through the innocent satirist Evelina,

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[34] Ronald Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 291.
[35]Marcie Frank, "Frances Burney's Theatricality," *ELH* 82, no. 2 (2015): 631, https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2015.0012.

Burney is able to perform several genres and allow for an ingénue to grow against an inelastic social world. This chapter lays out how Evelina's innocence functions as an epistemological and satirical tool, and traces how the satire it enables becomes progressively diffuse, shared—though not evenly or uniformly—among a network of women in the novel.

Looking outward: Evelina Watching the World

How or even whether Evelina manifests responsiveness to her world has long been a topic of debate. Ruth Yeazell has theorized Evelina's self-effacing tendency to display feminine modesty within social strictures and disappear from (or into) the letters she is authoring. Yet in also calling Evelina a satirist, Yeazell points to the outward-looking quality of Evelina's narration, which to Margaret Anne Doody is "not egotistical or self-dramatizing (or self-knowing); ... she does not think ahead; when she begins a paragraph she does not know how it will continue."[36] The guilelessness of Evelina's epistolary style naturalizes the dynamics that potentially lend themselves to satire, such as her reflexive tendency to refer to her own feminine position of not knowing: in one of her first letters from the city, she writes, "Well, my dear Sir, was it not a strange evening? I could not help being thus particular, because, to me, every thing is so new."[37] The link between Evelina and perceived (patriarchally constructed) naturalness is mentioned time and time again. As early as the preface, Burney professes that "the heroine of these memoirs, young, artless, and inexperienced, is ... but the offspring of Nature, and of Nature in her simplest attire."[38] What does it mean for a woman of nature to also be a satirist?

[36] Doody, 47.
[37] *Evelina,* 36.
[38] Ibid, 10.

For Burney, it means recognizing earnest lack of understanding as a crucial site of critical insight. While Evelina is new to the world, she knows when she encounters something strange, and she is able to make judgments based not on a full understanding of what she witnesses but on her own reactions. Her unfamiliarity with the world does not deprive her of epistemological tools; it is, rather, the foundation of her critical perspective. Burney weaves together the trait of feminine innocence and the capacity for acute awareness through the embodied phenomenon of blushing. At the theatre, men debate the meaning of a woman's blush: Mr. Lovel, the fop, claims that he knows "so many different causes for a lady's colour ... that I never dare decide to which it may be owing,"[39] to which Lord Orville replies, "the difference of natural and of artificial colour, seems to me very easily discerned; that of Nature, is mottled, and varying; that of art, *set,* and *too* smooth."[40] Although they speak about women's appearance, they are also theorizing a definition of character that distinguishes the fixedness of artifice from a natural vulnerability to expressiveness and transformation. Evelina, as Nature incarnate, is "mottled, and varying." Her inadvertent indiscretions set her superlatively apart from those she encounters in ways that she finds mortifying, but that reveal a vibrant social intelligence.

For example, her laughter at the absurd rituals of the ballroom is not merely a reaction to one ridiculous character, but a signal that her character is not pre-scripted by the patterns of social life. Evelina recounts:

> The gentlemen, as they passed and repassed, looked as if they thought we were quite at their disposal, and only waiting for the honour of their commands; and they sauntered about, in a careless indolent manner, as if with a view to keep us in suspense. I don't speak of this in regard to Miss Mirvan and myself only, but to

[39] *Evelina,* 81.
[40] Ibid.

> the ladies in general ... I thought it so provoking, that I determined, in my own mind, that, far from humouring such airs, I would rather not dance at all, than with any one who would seem to think me ready to accept the first partner who would condescend to take me.[41]

Evelina's newness to the scene grants her a perspective from which she astutely observes the social dynamics that dictate the overall ritual of the ball. That the men pass and repass, and that they seem to perform this way to all women, renders them perfunctory and interchangeable. Evelina finds this repetitiveness annoying and, when aimed at her, laughable. She is particularly provoked by Mr. Lovel, a caricature of chivalric clichés referring back to Restoration theatre, whose speech is littered with em dashes signalling dramatic pauses or an overeager breathlessness. Evelina laughs when he initially holds out his hand, and laughs again when, after a pause, he holds out his hand again. The multiple layers of repetition in Evelina's report from the ball indicate that her laughter is not simply a reaction to Lovel's ridiculous character, but a response to the generally odd and artificial mechanics of socially ritualized behaviour—for example, the way, in such a short span of time, he has attempted and reattempted the same action with no encouragement. She has observed the same tendency in the throngs of men sauntering through the ball; a generalized masculine foible has been distilled and magnified in the specific caricature of Mr. Lovel. While Mr. Lovel continues to act this way throughout the novel, signifying the tedious immutability of the social scene writ large, Evelina cultivates new ways of behaving based on her observations and self-reflection.

Evelina's newness to the world gives her a perspective that others lack, one that sensitizes her to forms to which others have become jaded. In their minute documentation of

[41] Ibid, 30.

repeated actions and recurrent postures, her letters critique the behaviours that are ubiquitous in a male-dominated world and discern pervasive forms, at once literary and social, of male sexual aggression. From her letters, we are able to see Mr. Lovel and Sir Clement Willoughby, a fop and a libertine respectfully, sharing a love for fashion and form and a tendency to invade Evelina's private space. There is an evident distinction, too, between Mr. Lovel's theatrical foppishness, in the stage tradition of Sir Fopling Flutter[42] who equates form (of behaviour, of dress) with content (of character), and Sir Clement's libertinism, which deploys conventional forms of verbally overpowering women to physically manipulate and entrap them. Though distinct *in* character, Evelina's formal analysis of both men *as* characters reveals the extent to which each of them simply goes through a rote set of masculine motions. By contrast, Evelina as narrator—and, as in the ball scene, narrated character—remains dynamic by virtue of her ignorance of the behaviours to which others are conditioned. As a number of scholars have noted, Burney maps the distinction between mechanical performance and more ingenuous ways of being onto the literary divide between theatre and the novel.[43] As Emily Allen observes, in Evelina's letters, the historical contest between these forms constitutes a struggle "between a publicizing, performative drive and a naturalizing desire for privacy and propriety."[44] Evelina presents to her reader laughable characters appropriate to the Restoration stage because their society is strange to her, but also to set herself apart both in style and substance: a narrator capable of adapting to social life without having to resort to disguise and dissembling. By denaturalizing the behaviour of the fop and the libertine, she naturalizes her own strategies of

[42] The title character in *The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676), a comedy by George Etherege.
[43] For example, see Frank; Emily Allen, "Staging Identity: Frances Burney's Allegory of Genre," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 4 (1998): 433–51, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053886; and Francesca Saggini, *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theater Arts*, trans. Laura Kopp (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012).
[44] Allen, 442.

demeanor—and vice versa. Though a way of receding from public scrutiny, Evelina's narrative bearing is not simply feminine modesty, which Yeazell, drawing on Hume, describes as a "preceding backwardness," a way of looking at oneself as if from a future self's point of view, and conducting oneself accordingly.[45] Evelina's innocence is not a retreat from the world, but a way of looking outward at it, changing in relation to it rather than being overtaken by it. It is also a tactic for directing critique, by turning the reader's gaze from her to society.

Though the narrating Evelina may represent her character self as frequently silent, this silence is not devoid of judgment. Even when Evelina spends most of a letter quoting the men in the room, the force of her critical gaze compels male speakers to, in effect, satirize themselves. At one point, after the group has seen an opera, Lord Orville realizes the men have dominated the conversation; he turns to Miss Mirvan and Evelina, asking for their opinions. The women answer, but are cut off by Captain Mirvan's diatribe: "What signifies asking them girls? Do you think they know their own minds yet? Ask 'em after anything that's called diversion, and you're sure they'll say it's vastly fine; —they are a set of parrots, and speak by rote, for they all say the same thing."[46] After quoting him, Evelina adds, "This reproof effectually silenced us both for the rest of the evening. Nay, indeed, for some minutes it seemed to silence every body else."[47] This silence is heavy with communal shock and disapproval. (Only Mr. Lovel offers the Captain a rejoinder, looking for a fight which Orville must prevent from happening.) In simply describing the Captain's repeated violent acts with the steadfastness of one who refuses to become acclimated to them—who persists in finding his behaviour noteworthy, because outrageous—Evelina points to his flaws and indicates her own displeasure without having to say much at all.

[45] Yeazell, 22.
[46] *Evelina,* 110.
[47] *Evelina,* 110.

Her silent disapprobation of his behaviour, while it allows her not to participate in such public "scenes," does place her in a community: she, Miss Mirvan, and Lord Orville are bound by their shared silence, in sympathy with the whole company who feel "sorry" when the Captain enters a room.[48] While his relations are ashamed of him because he is their patriarch, Evelina's inclination to share their mortification, her capacity to be shocked by the behaviour itself as an outside observer, turns their embarrassment into a site of disinterested critical perspective.

Innocence Becomes Satire: Evelina Laughing

Evelina's innocence enables her laughter. Henri Bergson theorizes that we laugh at "all inelasticity of character[…] because it is the sign of an eccentricity."[49] We laugh, that is, at what seems insensible to the organic activity of the world, and we interpret this insensibility as eccentric. Evelina's insistence on the insensibility of others inverts a patriarchal model that otherwise would call young women insensible; Wendy Anne Lee describes that patriarchal reading practice "as a leaden finger on a panic button continuously setting off the epistemic violence of the novel's mandate to behold interior motion, to make it move, speak."[50] Evelina demonstrates that, though undeniably strange, inelasticity is common among Londoners, the people around her. Both in laughing at Mr. Lovel within the ball scene and in criticizing him in her subsequent narration, Evelina illuminates his mechanical bowing as a symptom of, as she writes, a "careless indolent" character. She points out that Mr. Lovel's behaviour should not be typical, even if it is near-ubiquitous among a certain set of men in London. In contrast, her future

[48] *Evelina,* 399.
[49] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic,* trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 119.
[50] Wendy Anne Lee, *Failures of Feeling: Insensibility and the Novel* (Stanford 2019): 28.

husband Lord Orville is, she says, "far from being indolently satisfied with his own accomplishments."[51] Whereas Mr. Lovel, Sir Clement, and Captain Mirvan display the same repeated behaviors, Lord Orville demonstrates an elasticity that renders him a more suitable match.

Evelina laughs noticeably less as the novel progresses, but the critical apparatus her laughter has established remains active. As her laughter wanes, a polyphony commences, other characters' voices taking up more space in the narration. The novel's increasing polyphony reflects Evelina narratorially carving out a space for herself apart from inelastic others, and among others as a social being. Though as a character she is materially situated in the world of the text in the particular ways that women are, namely subject to the scrutiny and appraisal of men, as a narrator she turns the tables, becoming a pair of eyes set on the world around her.[52] This is especially significant in light of what Allen calls Evelina's scopophobia: a fear of being seen or stared at by others, which "seems driven not only by propriety but by her fear that being seen is a kind of violation, that sight alone gives the viewer a knowledge of the viewed."[53] In wishing to avoid becoming "a site for the sight-seeing gaze of the London male,"[54] Evelina raises an objection to the gendered dynamics of social observation that resonates with Sedgwick's and Ferguson's words of caution about how we read literary characters. At the same time, Evelina does not hesitate to cultivate her own subjectivity through the observation of others.

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[51] *Evelina,* 74.
[52] Thompson describes the tension between Evelina's material and epistolary selves as "the uneasy synchrony of femininity's limits, (self) representation and (literary) production." Thompson, 156.
[53] Of a conversation between Captain Mirvan and Mr.. Lovel, who debate what women know as they themselves gaze at the women, Allen writes, "It is precisely this semantic slide between looking and knowing that Evelina wants to avoid ... To remain unknown and therefore uncompromised, Evelina stages assorted scenes of radical interiority, an attempt to render herself as subject rather than object." Allen, 439.
[54] Allen, 439.

Evelina's critique does not end just because she increasingly withholds her laughter and dialogue.[55] Rather, it changes form and tone in response to the particular pressures on a "young lady" as she enters the world. Male innocents of eighteenth-century fiction such as Candide, Roderick Random, and Joseph Andrews are similarly beset by episodic conflicts as they are thrown from one part of the world to another, but they emerge from their trials relatively unchanged, as does the comedy of their narratives. Even murder, piracy, and robbery pose no threat to the tone of their stories. Evelina faces, in contrast, not only the punishing strictures of feminine modesty but also the perpetual threat of sexual violence. The male picaresque's main task is, like Roderick Random's tennis ball, to escape misfortune intact: in the first chapter of Smollett's novel, Roderick recounts a dream his mother had when pregnant with him: "She dreamed she delivered of a tennis-ball, which the devil (who, to her great surprise, acted the part of a midwife) struck so forcibly with a racket that it disappeared in an instant…when all on a sudden, she beheld it return with equal violence, and enter the earth."[56] Unlike Roderick, Evelina must learn something from her encounters in order to continue to preserve her epistolary authority, in the face of them. Like Evelina herself, her satiric mode survives the world's trials by its elasticity. Rather than maintaining a stable comic tone, her satire demonstrates a feminine responsiveness to specific conditions. Its mobility of genre—its capacity to maneuver quickly

[55] Jeffrey Hopes laments this trajectory into increasing silence, remarking that Evelina "gains a husband but loses a voice." Hopes, "'She sat like a cypher': Discursive Ventriloquism in Evelina," *XVII–XVIII*, no. 70 (2013): 16, https://doi.org/10.4000/1718.536. Alternatively, Juliet McMaster calls Evelina's silence "covert feminism," the kind that manages to operate under the expectations that a woman must maintain propriety and feel guilty for self-expression. McMaster, "The Silent Angel: Impediments to Female Expression in Frances Burney's Novels," *Studies in the Novel* 21, no. 3 (1989): 237, https://www.jstor.org/stable/29532649.

[56] Tobias Smollett, *Roderick Random,* ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (1748; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.

into different generic registers—affords the heroine mobility through genre, that is, the ability to survive the world's various plots.

Evelina's innocence is instrumental to this generic mobility, as it allows her to register starkly how male changeability can influence the tone of a scene and compel shifts in mood, action, and even genre. In public scenes, Evelina laughs at inelasticity of character, which Bergson defined as "something mechanical in something living."[57] However, when that paradigm is inverted—when Evelina detects something living in something mechanical, for example an imminent threat of sexual violence in a rake's rehearsed movements—the novel indicates the convergence of absurdity and danger by shifting registers from comedy to the gothic. When, in an attempt to escape from her relatives at the theatre, Evelina ends up in Sir Clement Willoughby's carriage alone with him, he startles her with his expressions of devotion. The expressions themselves are familiar enough forms: he attempts to take her hand several times, a repetition of action that echoes Mr. Lovel's, and his speech also begins to mirror Mr. Lovel's, filled with em dashes: compare Mr. Lovel's "'Madam—may I presume?...the honour and happiness—if I am not so unhappy, as to address you too late—to have the happiness and honour—'"[58] at the ball to Sir Clement's "'Whence this alarm, my dearest angel?—What can you fear?—my life is at your devotion, and can you, then, doubt my protection?'"[59] in the carriage. Yet, due to the difference in setting and situation, these routine masculine gestures tell a different story from those of the ball scene. Evelina recalls, "Never, in my whole life, have I been so terrified"; far from laughing, "I was quite silent, having too much apprehension to make reproaches, and too much anger to speak without."[60] By showing how suddenly the mechanisms

[57] Bergson, 77.
[58] *Evelina,* 30.
[59] Ibid, 100.
[60] Ibid.

of masculine behaviour can turn social comedy into a gothic nightmare, the spectre of gendered violence—abduction indeed, and sexual assault a possibility—looming over this scene, Evelina's nimbleness of tone contains a critique of how patriarchy places women in a generically unstable world and holds them responsible for knowing how to navigate and respond to it.

Evelina manages to escape the gothic subplot of Willoughby's repeated advances by using her satirical capacities: she derails her aggressor's gothic—tragic for her, yet honeyed in the language of sentiment for him—plot by denaturalizing his behaviour. In this carriage scene, Evelina chastises Willoughby—not only in her narration of his behaviour, but aloud in the moment, in quoted dialogue. While her physical safety is in peril, and though, as Julia Epstein writes, the novel depicts "physical and mental pain to satirize the cruelty of social and behavioral strictures, especially for women,"[61] there is also Evelina's anger to contend with, an anger informed by the same critical acumen that in other scenarios drives her to laugh. Understanding Willoughby's behaviour as an expression of the "cruel" social mechanics of libertine masculinity, she appeals to a less overtly threatening version of masculinity: "You ask a promise which you must be sensible I ought not to grant, and yet dare not refuse."[62] As Evelina lays out the physical and social bind he has put her in by abducting her, she emphasizes the question of whether he is *sensible*—that is, whether he conscious of what he is doing. This is a crucial turn of the table: she returns to him the question of consciousness, of knowing one's own mind, a question that the men in the book have heretofore asked of her in assessing her fitness for society. By exposing his rakish advances as a version of Bergson's "slumbering activity," a series of motions of which he is not consciously in control, Evelina eviscerates the fantasy that such behavior confirms his autonomy over her. His masculinity in question, he returns her home.

[61] Epstein, 86.
[62] *Evelina,* 101.

The Uses and Misuses of Innocence

Evelina is quick to discern ignorance badly feigned. However often male characters dismiss women's ignorance as weakness of character, they themselves adopt ignorance as a powerful narratorial posture in explaining, and excusing, their own actions. It is possible to read, as some have, Evelina's letters to Villars as a similar kind of manipulation.[63] In her first letter asking him for permission to go to London with Lady Howard and the Mirvans, she writes that she does not want to pressure him into allowing her to go, but at last bursts forth: "I believe I am bewitched! I made a resolution when I began, that I would not be urgent; but my pen—or rather my thoughts, will not suffer me to keep it—for I acknowledge, I must acknowledge, I cannot help wishing for your permission."[64] Regardless of whether we read her rhetoric of powerlessness as genuine or feigned, it is clear that as a woman without a surname, shuttled from guardian to guardian, Evelina is someone who has to ask for permission to even begin to be mobile in the world, to even gain experience.

Compared to Evelina's necessary appeals to authority and her acknowledgement of her own innocence, various men in London assume postures of ignorance and helplessness to more sinister ends. When the tireless Sir Clement Willoughby, for example, abducts her in a carriage a second time as part of a prank organized by Captain Mirvan, he disavows any responsibility for

[63] See Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660–1785* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 221–266. Sherman draws a link between Burney's "pretending to her father…that she was composing journal letters to Susanna" when in fact she was completing *Evelina,* and Evelina's letter to the Reverend requesting she join the party to London, claiming a lack of willpower over her own pen (Sherman, 259). Epstein writes that Evelina is a "storyteller with an ulterior motive" (99). Irene Tucker argues that there is deception in Evelina's letters, and that Evelina "learns to lie," which allows for her selfhood. Tucker, "Writing Home: *Evelina*, the Epistolary Novel and the Paradox of Property," *ELH* 60, no. 2 (1993): 430, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2873385.

[64] *Evelina,* 26.

his actions by explaining, "The scheme was the Captain's; I even opposed it: though, I own, I could not refuse myself the so-long-wished-for happiness, of speaking to you once more, without so many of—your *friends* to watch me.'"[65] This claim to a lack of agency over one's own will rhetorically echoes Evelina's letter to Villars at the start of the book, but the difference in Willoughby's motivation—his determination to isolate and violate her—and the stark contrast between their access and mobility change the stakes of such strategies of self-presentation. Evelina's disgust is fed by the clarity with which she sees through him and his many postures: "Sir Clement ... seems disposed to think that the alteration in my companions authorizes an alteration in his manners. It is true, he has always treated me with uncommon freedom, but never before with so disrespectful an abruptness. This observation, which he has given me cause to make, of his *changing with the tide,* has sunk him more in my opinion, than any other part of his conduct."[66] His changeability contrasts sharply with Evelina's own capacity to change: while he can adjust his behaviour to different social contexts, every shift is part of a single-minded pursuit of Evelina. While she gains critical understanding by developing varied responses to those around her, he shows how many guises an obstinate character might adopt.

Evelina is not alone in seeing through Willoughby. She and Madame Duval share little in common, but they are aligned in perceiving Sir Clement's deceptions. When he pretends innocence about the carriage abduction, Madame Duval, who was the Captain's main target in the attack, insists, "I know it *was* you."[67] Not being able to control how he is seen is a form of comeuppance for Willoughby, as we see in his response to being laughed at by others witnessing the scene: "the ha, ha, ha's, and he, he, he's, grew more and more uncontroulable, as if the

[65] *Evelina,* 148.
[66] Ibid, 203.
[67] Ibid, 213.

restraint from which they had burst, had added to their violence. Sir Clement could no longer endure being the object who excited them, and, having no answer ready for Madame Duval, he hastily stalked towards Mr. Smith and young Branghton, and sternly demanded what they laughed at."[68] Of note is the second onomatopoeia denoting the group's laughter, the repetition of "he, he, he," a subject pronoun that could refer to Willoughby, but stays shrunken as a sound, never rising to the status of a pronoun by being attached to an action verb. Deemed an "object," Willoughby's power is diegetically and narratorially revoked. The target of the onlookers' laughter, Willoughby is additionally taunted by Evelina's transcription, which introduces the word that would confirm his status as subject only to withhold it from that purpose, lending it instead to the laughter that objectifies him. In its depiction of his frustration, this scene works to make communal ties possible between Madame Duval and Evelina, despite their differences. Jeffrey Hopes reads this closeness as a kind of "ventriloquist's act," in which Evelina expresses herself through her more boisterous grandmother, who is able to "efface the social deference accorded to Willoughby" by saying aloud the things Evelina only says in silent narration to herself and her reader.[69] Buoyed by the Branghtons' laughter, Madame Duval's criticism is pointed and powerful, exposing Willoughby's failed affectations of ignorance and denying him the agency they were meant to secure. His ultimate confusion about their laughter only secures his place as the object of the group's shared satire.

While Evelina, like her grandmother, sees through Willoughby's affectations, understanding what he means to achieve by them, Mr. Lovel, the first bachelor Evelina encounters, presents more of a quandary. The vehicle through which she laments the scrutiny women must undergo in public, Mr. Lovel's affectations, like his excessive attention to her, seem

[68] *Evelina,* 213.
[69] Hopes, 11.

gratuitous rather than strategic. She describes, for example, Mr. Lovel at one point pretending not to have paid any attention to a play the group has attended, so far as to have no idea what the play was—for, he claims, he only attends the theatre to socialize. "I have no time to read playbills," he asserts; "one merely comes to ... shew that one's alive."[70] Later, when she is reflecting upon these claims to Villars, Evelina writes, "How strange it is, Sir, that this man, not contented with the large share of foppery and nonsense which he has from nature, should think proper to affect yet more! For what he said of [the show's character] Tattle and of Miss Prue, convinced me that he really had listened to the play, though he was so ridiculous and foolish as to pretend ignorance."[71] Evelina is astonished that Mr. Lovel would put on airs not of greater knowledge than he possesses, as someone such as Captain Mirvan might, but of greater ignorance. Some time later, she herself experiences the social pressure that might compel one to feign such negligence. When Evelina watches an opera, she relishes the music, but finds that her interest in the performance makes her an object of ridicule: "I lean'd my head forward to avoid hearing their observations that I might listen without interruption; but, upon turning round ... I found that I was the object of general diversion to the whole party ... This discovery determined me to appear as inattentive as themselves; but I was very much provoked at being thus prevented enjoying the only pleasure, which, in such a party, was within my power."[72] In addition to lamenting the company she must keep, Evelina despises the affectation she must put on as a woman in public to escape judgment, but she does it, though resentfully. Rather than engender some sympathy for Mr. Lovel, her experience serves only to alienate her further from the company by which she is continually surrounded. In continuing to find fault with Lovel's

[70] *Evelina,* 82.
[71] *Evelina,* 84.
[72] Ibid, 94.

foppishness, Evelina casts judgment on his perpetuation of the social absurdities that beset her. He has gratuitously normalized his own unnatural behaviour, and she must now endure it.

Evelina's narration makes it clear that not all forms of presenting oneself as ignorant are equal. While she does it to gain access to the social world that might otherwise be denied her, men like Willoughby do it to take advantage of others without taking responsibility for their transgressions, and men like Lovel do it to no substantial end at all. By juxtaposing these gendered differences in postures of ignorance, Evelina emphasizes the gender inequities in her world: considering the social power they possess, men's disavowals of their own knowledge and agency are wanton at best and sinister at worst. Her ignorance, in contrast to theirs, is projected onto her, and learning how to control how she is received by others who insist on reading her as ignorant is a tactic of social mobility and survival.

Laughing with: The Varied Community of Satirists in "Evelina"

Evelina's laughter departs from Simon Dickie's influential theory of eighteenth-century laughter, which hinges on cruelty.[73] Hers is, instead, a laughter of community (however imperfect) and survival. *Evelina* has been called a comedy of manners, a conduct book for young people (something that the protagonist expresses her own wish for as she makes her way into society), a biting social critique, and "a feminist novel of education and … the story of a young woman whose nefariously ambiguous position forces her to learn how to keep others from making decisions for her."[74] To those who lament the gradual disappearance of Evelina's laughter and action within her own letters, the novel seems to subsume its protagonist into its

[73] Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2011.
[74] Epstein, 95.

marriage plot: ingénue marries rich hero, reunites with her biological family, gains her rightful inheritance, and lives happily ever after, but as a diminished version of what she might have been. I suggest that we read this novel instead as a demonstration of a young satirist honing her satire in response to complex social dynamics and in relation to the satirical modes of others. Just as she is not the only character capable of performing ignorance, Evelina is not the sole satirist in the novel. In fact, there is a loose network of satirists scattered throughout the novel, each displaying different motivations for and methods of ridiculing others. Satire is shown to be an ever-modulating craft with shifting alignments, that only functions socially, in relation to others. With whom does Evelina laugh?

One thing the novel makes clear is with whom Evelina will *not* laugh. Although she and the odious Captain Mirvan share a disgust for ineffectual performativity, as evidenced in their shared distaste for Mr. Lovel and Madame Duval, she refuses his cruel brand of humiliation. This refusal is especially clear following the Captain's scheme to abduct Madame Duval from a carriage, throw her in a ditch, and tie her up with ropes, a prank that left the servants "ready to die with laughter."[75] Of Madame Duval's own account of her horrific experience, Evelina writes: "Though this narrative almost compelled me to laugh, yet I was really irritated with the Captain, for carrying his love of tormenting, —*sport,* he calls it, —to such barbarous and unjustifiable extremes."[76] Though she recognizes her grandmother's absurdities, Evelina finds his physical violence insupportable. Through figures like him she learns the importance of modulating her laughter, to distinguish it from the laughter of cruelty and contention. Scenes like this show that the refinement of Evelina's satire reflects the development of her social alignments. Evelina suppresses her laughter not just for the sake of modesty, not just for the sake of setting herself

[75] *Evelina,* 150.
[76] Ibid, 152.

apart from the servants of a lower class, and not just for the sake of setting herself apart from a brutish man, but for the sake of familial relation. As she acknowledges to Willoughby, it is important to her that people treat her family with respect, even if the individuals to whom she is related are not themselves consistently respectable.

Learning to modulate the tone and mood of her satire equips Evelina for more nuanced modes of social critique than the Captain's crude jokes—tools she needs in order to observe absurdities in people she does not wish to destroy. Her satire may be initially driven by disgust, but as she finds and forms her family and community, she uses her critical capacities to create and calibrate alignments, especially with the women who care for her. These alignments are by no means perfect, but they help her survive. The masculine widow Mrs Selwyn, for example, whose more direct brand of satire Evelina disavows, proves nevertheless a kind of mentor due to her keen eye for how women are read and misread socially. Mrs Selwyn has long been a source of contention among *Evelina* scholars; it has proven more difficult to gauge how the novel wants readers to feel about her than it is with the novel's other characters.[77] She is neither the socially clumsy Madame Duval nor the old women made a violent spectacle in a race; she stands out

[77] Epstein describes Mrs. Selwyn as the "foil for Madame Duval," a tool "Burney uses" "to present a woman who is kind and compassionate to those who deserve it and who achieves independent status without compromising herself either socially or personally" (114). In this interpretation, Mrs. Selwyn is the proper role model for Evelina, one who paves a proto-feminist path of female agency without too egregiously breaking rules of decorum. Yet this reading does not take into account Evelina's own disapproval of her. Other scholars have argued that Mrs. Selwyn, like Madame Duval, offers a cautionary tale of failed femininity: see Kristina Straub, "Fanny Burney's 'Evelina' and the 'Gulphs, Pits, and Precipices' of Eighteenth-Century Female Life," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 27, no. 3 (1986): 233, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41467394; Rose Marie Cutting, "Defiant Women: The Growth of Feminism in Fanny Burney's Novels," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 17, no. 3 (1977): 522, https://www.jstor.org/stable/450083; and Thompson, 155. Yet others read Selwyn as a satirical avatar for Burney: see Susan Staves, "*Evelina*; or, Female Difficulties," *Modern Philology* 73, no. 4, part 1 (1976): 378, https://www.jstor.org/stable/435738; and Paulson, 285. Julian Fung argues that Mrs. Selwyn's "imperfections," as well as Captain Mirvan's, "are not incompatible with their roles as agents of Burney's satire"—in other words, that they need not be infallible or even good to be right in their judgment of others. Julian Fung, "Frances Burney as Satirist," *Modern Language Review* 106, no. 4 (2011): 943, https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.106.4.0937.

singularly as an older woman who is liberated from the strictures of society. I follow Julian Fung's lead when he argues that both Captain Mirvan and Mrs. Selwyn display "shortcomings" that "contribute to Burney's satiric vision": "Through them [Burney] warns her readers against the perils of a society in which all people, no matter how reliable they appear, are possible sources of harm."[78] By the end of the novel, Evelina's satire, though it sometimes takes as its object Mrs. Selwyn and Captain Mirvan, also modulates itself in relation to them—she learns from their negative examples lessons in subtlety and caution. Yet, as the ambivalence of the critical conversation attests, the novel holds open more of a possibility that Evelina and Mrs, Selwyn could cultivate a mutually beneficial social relationship despite their differences as satirists.

For women to be able to form social bonds across difference seems especially urgent in such a varied, volatile, and misogynist world as the one depicted in *Evelina*. Fung's observation that this is a world riddled with unexpected "sources of harm" is driven home in the novel's infamous monkey scene, in which Captain Mirvan unleashes a monkey in a crowded room to make one last cruel jest at Mr. Lovel. In this scene, all is chaos, including the laughter: "Mrs. Selwyn, Lord Merton, and Mr.. Coverley, burst into a loud, immoderate, ungovernable fit of laughter, in which they were joined by the Captain."[79] It is no coincidence that immediately following this raucous scene, Evelina receives Villars's note giving her permission to marry. As disruptive and distasteful as the laughers are, they are all linked socially to Lord Orville and Miss Mirvan, and thus, by association, to Evelina. Her marriage, far from an escape from vulgar social relations, will only result in the solidification of these imperfect and messy social ties. To insulate oneself from the harm posed by one person or faction, one must be willing and able to

[78] Fung, 943.
[79] *Evelina,* 400.

make unexpected connections with another—a lesson Evelina enacts in her reaction to the monkey, which she escapes by jumping onto a chair with the Branghtons, the cousins who heretofore disgusted her. Such social agility is related to Evelina's increasingly expansive range of satiric responses. She feels rage, irritation, fear, love, compassion, and kindness—and she learns to hold contradictory feelings alongside one another as a condition of being in society. She disagrees with her cousins about everything, yet still she leaps in fear alongside them. She agrees with Mrs. Selwyn about many things, yet she refrains from joining her laughter when it turns cruel. In this context, Evelina's self-effacing techniques can be interpreted as a method of satirical diffusion, one that lends its lens to a plurality of women, varied and mottled in their uneasy collectivity. The risks of association are inescapable; the novel shows that a satirical range that allows one to remain both vigilant and adaptable is perhaps a woman's greatest asset.

Evelina is simultaneously, not contradictorily, innocent and quick. At the very start, when Lady Howard writes to Villars, she says, "[Evelina's] character seems truly ingenuous and simple; and, at the same time that nature has blessed her with an excellent understanding, and great quickness of parts, she has a certain air of inexperience and innocency [*sic*] that is extremely interesting."[80] Lady Howard proves correct. Evelina's newness to the world and her ability to see people's behaviour as shocking, displeasing, and potentially harmful sustain a critical vision. Lady Howard, for all of her conventionality as a matriarch, is an apt theorist of Evelina's character. As she, Evelina, and Mrs. Selwyn theorize the people around them, they form a network of observers and thinkers. If Evelina ultimately eludes us as a full and coherent character, that is an effect of her satirical power: to be able to think through others and show what such diffused intelligence looks like.

[80] *Evelina,* 23. It might be worth considering the monetary connotations of the word "interesting" and how Evelina's innocence is seen as something that turns her into an asset on the marriage market.

Cecilia: Limitations on and of Women's Experience

The satire in *Cecilia* shares the frustration about masculine violence and limitations on women's movement in society found in Burney's first novel. However, here, in defiance of these limitations, Burney moves from epistolarity to a new tone and form: a much less optimistic third-person narration. Whereas Evelina's innocence enables her satire and allows her to create—an albeit small and tenuous—community, Cecilia's world is much lonelier and bleaker, even more ridden with frustration. This is a naïveté that is defined by withdrawal *from* the world rather than inexperience *in* it.

Unlike the first-person narration of *Evelina,* which perhaps lends itself to readers questioning Evelina's intellect and disingenuousness, *Cecilia'*s third-person narration leaves the intelligence of the protagonist closed to debate; with the authority of third-person narration (rather than first-person letters), the novel describes Cecilia as a protagonist who is sensible and observant.Cecilia is described as "no stranger to company; she had passed her time in retirement, but not in obscurity."[81] The narrator also describes Cecilia's reactions to the world as disappointment and exhaustion, rather than as a disruptive and critical laughter: "In a short time Cecilia, who every day had hoped that the next would afford her greater satisfaction, but who every day found the present no better than the former, began to grow weary of eternally running the same round."[82] Cecilia's responses emanate from a collection of worldly expectations, as well as a jadedness, that are not present in *Evelina.* While Evelina is empowered by innocence, so to speak, Cecilia suffers from worldly exhaustion.

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[81] Burney, *Cecilia; or, Memoirs of an Heiress,* ed. Peter Sabor and Margaret Anne Doody (1782; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 22. References are to this edition.
[82] *Cecilia,* 53.

Shuttled from male guardian to male guardian, bequeathed with a fortune that she'll inherit upon her twenty-first birthday from her uncle, the Dean of ----, with the caveat that her future husband take her last name, Cecilia finds herself a young heiress. With this change in life, she hopes to find in her childhood friend, Mrs. Harrel, some consolation and companionship. These hopes are disappointed, however, quite soon. She begins to "sicken at the irksome repetition of unremitting yet uninteresting dissipation. She saw nobody she wished to see, as she had met with nobody for whom she could care."[83] The repetitiveness of social life with Mrs. Harrel is tiring and annoying to her; whereas Evelina feels similar annoyance at her surroundings, Burney's first heroine at least feels that the ridiculous people around her are worth noting. With the free indirect discourse, however, both third-person narrator and Cecilia align in their judgment that there is an egregious lack of interesting personalities.

The third-person narration also contributes to the loneliness of the narrative. Julian Fung writes that the move to third-person "counter-intuitively make the satire more immediate and more dangerous. Cecilia is never just an observer of manners and a reporter of absurdities: from the beginning of the novel she is centrally involved in the plot and vulnerable to the predations of her vicious guardians"[84]—and, I would add, non-guardians, particularly the obsessive and possessive Mr. Monckton. Because we are privy to the machinations of Mr. Monckton and to the *plots* formulated by various men, there is an added layer of dramatic irony and tragedy that isn't present in *Evelina.* Burney creates a sense that the world is moving in on and against Cecilia; the novel conveys quite strongly that her intelligence, wealth, education, and status do not give her much of an advantage against masculine schemes.

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[83] *Cecilia,* 53.
[84] Julian Fung, "Frances Burney as Satirist," *The Modern Language Review,* vol 106, no 4 (October 2011): 944.

At the same time, third-person narration offers a kind of interpretative shield over Cecilia: she cannot be read suspiciously in the same way that Evelina has been (as naïve, as unintelligent, as too gullible or too cunning.) In large part because of this narratorial difference, Cecilia is not the same ingénue as Evelina. She has a reported world-weariness from the start that is not up for scrutiny, something that Burney's first protagonist does not have. At the beginning of the novel, she is twenty years old and possesses a social adeptness that Evelina must learn through trial and error. Cecilia is not easily shaken; rather, her critique of a range of social ills—from the frivolities of her childhood friend Mrs. Harrel to the selfishness of her guardian, Mr. Briggs—comes from a feminist impulse of exhaustion. The satire here, then, can be categorized as one of lamentation rather than empowerment, one of persistence balanced with resignation. The unsettling, unsettled mixture of feelings can be connected to what Sianne Ngai calls ugly feelings: "affective gaps and illegibilities…ambivalent situations of suspended agency."[85] The "passivity" is not a lack of feeling, but an "increasingly resigned and pessimistic understanding of its *own* relationship to political action."[86] In the quoted passage above regarding Cecilia's exhaustion at disappointing companions, one can easily imagine the protagonist's sigh and eye-roll. This world-weariness is justified again and again in the novel as a response to patriarchal limitations on Cecilia, and thus the limited possibility of political re-action on her part.

Her naïveté then is less about her level of worldly experience and response to the world than it is a fixed state of being socialized as a young woman. In *Cecilia,* a woman can be as worldly-wise as a man but still have very little agency. Burney's second novel posits that one can and should persist in being moral and charitable, but the only response possible to the oppressive patriarchal system is, as its final sentence puts forth, resignation.

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[85] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College Press, 2005): 1.
[86] Ibid, 3.

The White Domino Effect: Ineffectual Heroes

Although the character of Mortimer Delvile is seemingly chivalric, Burney sprinkles in scenes that demonstrate how steeped he is in patriarchal culture and how he is always teetering on the edge of something more menacing. Through him, *Cecilia* critiques the patriarchy's effects on characters of all genders. Volume One's famous masquerade scene, for instance, demonstrates how something as seemingly trivial as a party costume might be indicative of the social order. The persistent Mr. Monckton who pursues and tries to isolate Cecilia from any other companion, for example, comes as a devil and terrorizes Cecilia the entire night, barring her from socializing with others. Mortimer comes dressed as a white domino, a tent-like cloak reminiscent of Venetian style dress, typically in black or blue[87] and popular at eighteenth-century masquerades. It is striking that the introduction to his costume is described as such: "Dominos of no character, and fancy dresses of no meaning, made, as is usual at such meetings, the general herd of the company: for the rest, the men were Spaniards, chimney-sweepers, Turks, watchmen, conjurers, and old women."[88] In stark contrast to the costumes seemingly more laden with meaning, cultural significance, and recognizability, the white domino is something of a blank slate. This seems to be challenged when Cecilia finds herself beset by the Sir Clement-like attentions of Sir Robert Floyer and Monckton dressed as the devil, and Devile-as-white-domino swoops in to save her: "After some time spent thus disagreeably, a white domino, who for a few minutes had been a very attentive spectator, suddenly came forward, and exclaiming, "*I'll cross him though he blast me!"*[89] He appears to be all heroism, ready to physically fight off other men,

[87] Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilisation: the Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanrford 1986): 59.
[88] *Cecilia,* 106.
[89] Ibid, 111.

and later addresses Cecilia, "Your persecutor, I presume…is known to you."[90] She says she suspects who it might be, but in fact, it turns out, is wrong in her speculations. This continues for the rest of the night: "The white domino…came forward, and spread out his arms as a defence to her, while the devil, who was still before her, again began to growl."[91] Although this tug-of-war keeps Monckton at bay for some time, it does not deter him for long or successfully: for the next several volumes of the long novel, he works to break this pair apart by spreading rumors of her engagements and character to Mortimer's father, one of her three guardians.

It is easy to read Mortimer as a sort of ineffectual victim of the feudal patriarchy. Megan Woodworth argues along these lines, saying that "the blankness of his white costume gestures towards the ways in which identity must be constructed through self-fashioning and suggests that Mortimer himself has the power to decide whether he joins the path of the spiritless machines or acts for himself."[92] However, as the novel goes on, Mortimer begins to be swayed by others and cannot be his own agent.[93] Indeed, his father's prideful disapproval of his attachment to Cecilia because of the Dean's inheritance clause causes Mortimer considerable pain, but his reactions to this—insisting on an elopement twice, despite her hesitation and discomfort, frantically wanting to possess her and acting suspicious of her commitment to him—directly hurt Cecilia. The novel renders the subjection of women "directly attributable to the state of masculinity,"[94] a cause that cannot be addressed until after the liberation of man, now specifically gendered, occurs.

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[90] Ibid, 112.
[91] Ibid, 118.
[92] Megan Woodworth, "'If a man dared act for himself': Family Romance and Independence in Frances Burney's *Cecilia,*" *Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* vol 22, no 2 (Winter 2009-10): 366-367.
[93] Woodworth notes, his "behavior becomes rather more erratic…He seems to be an ideal gentleman…but he cannot translate this virtue into political agency." (Woodworth 367). Woodworth reads this struggle as one of Burney navigating through philosophical questions of man's self-determination during the American Revolution, which coincided with the composition of the novel; Woodworth thus argues that Mortimer is a failure of independence from filial oppression.
[94] Ibid.

Although Mortimer initially seems a chivalric hero, his constant failures to break free from the strictures of his family and his own romantically persistent behavior put this into question.

I argue that we can and should, as Cecilia and the apparatus of the novel invite us to, read Mortimer with more skepticism than what previous scholars such as Woodworth have proposed. It is hard to ignore his very name: Mortimer, while a primarily Anglo first name, comes from the French for "death/dead" (*mort*) and "sea" (*mer*). His last name, of course, bears striking similarity to "devil," or else to "de la ville," French for "of the city." Either way, his name is at the least ominous, evoking death in urbanity or in corruption. One could indeed argue that his last name's devilishness points mostly to the prideful, feudal emphasis that his father places on their name and estate, but that Mortimer keeps his last name in the end, despite the Dean's dying wishes that his niece keep her last name and bequeath it to her husband, is telling.

Mortimer as a white domino begins to prefigure a kind of militaristic white male identity that proliferates later in the Romantic Period and even more so in the nineteenth-century British novel. He is able to defend feminine modesty and rally troops to her cause, protecting her and "act[ing] as commanding officer" at the ball, "assigned to each his station: he desired Cecilia would keep quietly to her seat, appointed the schoolmaster to be her guard on the left, took possession himself of the opposite post, and ordered Mr. Arnott to stand centinel [*sic*] in front."[95] On the one hand, he is defender and hero, deflecting the unwanted attentions of other men and single-handedly, proactively assigning each to their role, with a comprehensive understanding of spatial movements and character functions. But on the other hand, rather quickly after, the novel

[95] *Cecilia,* 115.

presents him as deeply ineffectual and even bumbling, a comparatively naïve reader of situations and people.[96]

Although Mortimer is a victim of his father's oppressive wishes, he consistently performs suspicious readings of the woman he claims to love and claims a patriarchal ownership over her that makes her clearly uncomfortable and angry. We already see a hint of this above at the masquerade, when he presumes that Cecilia knows who the devil is, when in fact, she does not. Compare this to how male characters read Evelina—as knowing little. The opposite presumption, that Cecilia knows more than she knows, is equally violent. On one of their attempts to elope, she runs out of the church but Delvile cries, "'This is insupportable!...turn, I conjure you!—my Cecilia!—my wife!—why is it you thus abandon me?"[97] The passage continues: "He now attempted to take her hand, but shrinking from his touch, in an emphatic but low voice, she said, 'Yes, Sir, I must!—an interdiction such as this!—for the world could I not brave it!'"[98] She continues to run away, and the situation escalates: "She believed Delvile to blame, though she knew not in what, but the obscurity of her fears served only to render them more dreadful. She was now getting into the coach herself, but Delvile, who could neither brook her displeasure, nor endure her departure, forcibly caught her hand, and called out, 'You are *mine,* you are my *wife!*'"[99] She finds this the opposite of romantic, leaving impatiently, defying his claims to ownership. If it isn't clear at this point that Mortimer is not the chivalric hero, it becomes so later on: more directly detrimental to her health is his suspicious reading of her meeting with Mr.

[96] This form of white, masculine, British identity will come to the fore in Chapter Three of this dissertation. I am thinking mostly of Waverley who is unable to read people in their contexts, even though he is a soldier, from a well-to-do family. I think it is extremely fascinating that Burney's work increasingly anticipates this insidious aspect of naivete, by re-figuring naivete as a trait that male characters can and often have.
[97] *Cecilia,* 627.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid, 628.

Belfield, despite her many explanations in the past of her platonic and charitable intentions. He even goes so far as to meet one-on-one with Belfield to get the man's perspective on what seems, to him, to be a romantic tryst, to verify Cecilia's account. When he is assuaged, he goes to find her, but it is too late—she has already been driven mad.

Cecilia's Non-Doing and Undoing

Cecilia's madness is not so much the result of losing her romantic relationship with Mortimer as it is a result of constantly being misread and mishandled for the past nine-hundred pages of the novel. She has been read suspiciously and violently by those around her. In the climactic moment when he barges into the scene of Cecilia and Belfield talking privately, he has already formulated his conclusion: "When the door was open, he stopt short with a look half petrified, his feet seeming rooted to the spot upon which they stood."[100] That he has just arrived but seems firmly planted there as if he was always there speaks to the resoluteness of his assumptions. He flees the scene with Cecilia frantically trying to ask him for patience and conversation. As he leaves, she embarks on a frenzied journey to make amends with him, going to a coffee-house, the Delvile estate, and to a coach imploring him to give chase—all to no avail. At last, the coachman refuses to drive her:

> The inebriety of the coachman became evident; a mob was collecting; Cecilia, breathless with vehemence and terror, was encircled, yet struggled in vain to break away; and the stranger gentleman, protesting, with sundry compliments he would himself take care of her, very freely seized her hand.

[100] Ibid, 886.

> This moment, for the unhappy Cecilia, teemed with calamity; she was wholly overpowered; terror for Delvile, horror for herself, hurry, confusion, heat and fatigue, all assailing her at once, while all means of repelling them were denied her, the attack was too strong for her fears, feelings, and faculties, and her reasons suddenly, yet totally failing her, she madly called out, 'He will be gone! He will be gone! And I must follow him to Nice!'[101]

So often attributed to the romantic loss of Delvile, Cecilia's madness is caused clearly by an onslaught of external sensations and hindrance upon her movements, wherein what's within her and what's without her are entangled. This onslaught is characterized by the long, erratic sentences, sliced apart by semi-colons, the punctuation of halting and elongation, rather than simple stopping and starting. While her first 'mad' utterance can be read on the surface as showing fixated concern for Delvile and reconciling with him, the 'he' in 'he will be gone!' follows the scene of several men fighting over possession of her that it could also be read as a prophetic command. "He will be gone!" can be read, in other words, as either a panicked, urgent worry about Delvile's ever-growing distance from her, or as an authorial command to the man seizing her hand to *be gone.*

Agency is chaotically distributed among several actors within this scene. Burney's prose argues that pressures are coming from within and without for Cecilia. If read in the context of the patriarchy, then the novel here is suggesting that the patriarchy is not simply something that surrounds Cecilia like a Gothic castle. It is ubiquitous, swarming, invasive, the sprawling nature of it making appropriate sprawling sentences, semi-colons, and ambiguous referents. She has kept it at bay, external to her as much as possible, but this moment of so-called madness is when

[101] Ibid, 896.

the "he" in her speech can signify a man in particular or men in general. This grammatical and narratorial conflation and collapse of individual men operating within the patriarchy, violent towards her in multifarious ways, is another loaded moment of satire within the plot: not of Cecilia and her madness, but of the difficulty of keeping the harmful effects of the patriarchy outside of herself and contained. For it is not only Cecilia who is speaking in vague terms, but also the narrator whose grammar is affected by and representing the near-sublime horror of masculine violence and its consequences.

As Dr. Lyster says, it is heavily masculine-coded vice that has brought misfortune upon, indeed, the pair, but more particularly upon Cecilia. Addressing the young married couple, Cecilia now recovered, he says:

> 'The whole of this unfortunate business…has been the result of PRIDE and PREJUDICE.[102] You uncle, the Dean, began it, by his arbitrary will…Your father, Mr.. Mortimer, continued it with the same self-partiality…Yet this, however, remember; if to PRIDE and PREJUDICE you owe your miseries, so wonderfully is good and evil balanced, that to PRIDE and PREJUDICE. You will also owe their termination: for all that I could say to Mr.. Delvile, either of reasoning or entreaty…was totally thrown away, till I pointed out to him his *own* disgrace, in having a *daughter-in-law* immured in these mean lodgings!'[103]

Note that it is the two patriarchs who, in Dr. Lyster's authoritative speech, have been at the cause of their problems. Yet there is little comfort here; the "moral"[104] as he calls it is quite the bleak

[102] The connection to Jane Austen, another innovator of free indirect style, does not escape my attention! I examine Austen's work further in subsequent chapters; Austen names Burney's works in *Northanger Abbey* particularly in her defense of novels.
[103] *Cecilia,* 931.
[104] Ibid.

one. In a nuanced look at Burney's various modes of satire, Julian Fung calls *Cecilia* "grim, but it is not uncharacteristic of Burney,"[105] whose purpose is "to express pessimism about the possibility that her society can be reformed."[106] This is truer of *Cecilia* than of her first novel. In Lyster's account of the causes and solutions of the couple's ills, these causes and solutions are both the same: he employs a circular logic about pride, saying that it causes misery but is also what must be appealed to in order to save a woman from, in Cecilia's case, a mental institution and filial exile.

Burney's shift to third-person in this novel allows focalization through several perspectives, and troubles conclusive, masculine-coded readings of the protagonist. The novel, in effect, asks us not to fixate on the heroine, but to look once again at—to re-read—the characters dressed as if they have "no character."[107] Though Mortimer may feel the deleterious effects of a patriarchal power structure, it is Cecilia who has borne the brunt of it. Without men's self-betterment in a patriarchal system such as this, there is small hope for women and for the formation of community. The responsibility lies on men to learn from their experiences and be better, as there is a limit to what people who aren't in power can do in such a world—even with knowledge, experience, money, and intelligence.

What is so hard to judge as the human heart?[108]: *Camilla*'s Epistemologies That Go Nowhere

[105] Fung, 946.
[106] Ibid, 940.
[107] The gender reversal of Pope's line in "Epistle to a Lady" is striking; whereas Pope makes references to an adage, "Most Women have no Characters at all" (line 2), the narrator of *Cecilia* paints those dressed as dominoes—specifically, men like Delvile—as those without character. This line also has echoes in *Caleb Williams,* which ends with the eponymous character saying he has "no character" to absolve by the end of the trials.
[108] Frances Burney, *Camilla; or, a Picture of Youth,* ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom

The plot of *Camilla* is a happy union of love delayed because of patriarchal forces that privilege masculine experience and sexist suspicion of women over intuition and lived knowledge. The love interest Edgar's mistake—and it is no small one, as it prevents the couple from uniting until the very last five pages of the 900-page novel—is that he defers to the authority of Dr. Marchmont's jaded, misogynistic reading practices. In fact, the novel argues that Edgar's first instincts about the ingénue are the correct ones. At one point, he receives a cautioning letter from Dr. Marchmont, exhorting him to patiently wait and test Camilla's fidelity before marrying her. Edgar's response is to cry, "'Why…will he thus obtrude upon me these fastidious doubts and causeless difficulties? I begged but the restitution of my promise, and he gives it me in words that nearly annihilate my power of using it.'"[109] *Camilla* presents yet another kind of satire from that of Burney's other novels. The novel makes a more straightforward argument against the masculine-coded reading practices by featuring characters who read the ingénue incorrectly, and to painful ends.

Burney's third novel is not a readerly favorite. Scholars have tried to explain the tonal and qualitative difference in Burney's third novel by, as Emma Pink describes, "invoking a dichotomy which opposes aesthetic and commercial concerns, and which claims that a writer engaged with the material aspects of cultural production is not (and in fact, cannot be) concerned with aesthetic interests."[110] This argument is usually explained by biographical facts: fourteen years have passed since the publication of her last novel; Burney has gotten married to a French exile; and *Camilla* was published due to financial necessity, thus sacrificing novelistic quality for monetary gain. Elisabeth Rose Gunner even points out the parallels between Austen's Fanny

(1796; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 703. References are to this edition.
[109] Ibid, 180.
[110] Emma E. Pink, "Frances Burney's *Camilla:* 'to print my Grand Work…by subscription," *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* vol 40, no 1 (Fall 2006): 56.

Price and Camilla Tyrold, the latter of whom in particular has "little to recommend her but obedience and a remarkable devotion to the watchful and suspicious Edgar. She seems an innocent, and boring, daddy's girl."[111] Pink, by contrast, believes "that far from marking a decline in Burney's work, [this novel] is evidence of Burney's growing confidence in and commitment to her writing life." As in my readings of *Evelina* and *Cecilia,* I step away from such biographical readings, but I also do not share the disappointment at *Camilla* as a Burney novel that premises other scholarly work. Read in terms of protagonistic naïveté and its role in Burney's critique, *Camilla* confirms a transformation in Burney's satire, which waxes more Gothic and melancholic.

It is through Dr. Marchmont that the novel launches its critique against masculine-coded reading practices that privileges worldly experience over any other form of knowing, and men's experiences over women's experiences. He warns the young Edgar, Camilla's love interest, of being a fool in love and selecting wanton women as partners, and says: "Take warning, my dear young friend, by my experience."[112] The "by" could well be replaced by "of." *Camilla* is a treatise against sexist reading practices frequently levied by men against those who are less advantaged in society. Like *Evelina*, this novel is interested in the epistemological limitations of male characters who attempt to read the protagonist, and often misread her—or, as Kristen Pond writes, "the tension between empiricism's reliance on observable phenomenon and the hidden, imperceptible emotions of the heart."[113] Yet, as Hershinow shows, if this tension serves to generate complexity in any particular character it is not the protagonist but Dr. Marchmont, who

[111] Elisabeth Rose Gunner, "The Bullfinch and the Brother: Marriage and Family in Frances Burney's 'Camilla,'" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (January 1994) vol 93, no 1: 19.
[112] *Camilla,* 645.
[113] Kristen Pond, "'Fairest Observers' and 'Restless Watchers': Contested Sites of Epistemology in Frances Burney's *Camilla*," *Studies in the Novel* 50, no. 3 (2018): 316, https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2018.0023.

is subjected to a "developmental arc" that leads him, ironically, to the revelation that "experience is a poor basis for authority."[114]

For *Camilla,* it is the world around the ingénue that needs to change rather than the ingénue herself. Her naïveté is a kind of intuition that serves as a foil for the more jaded agents that read her incorrectly, but the critique doesn't come as much from her as it does from the more distanced third-person narrator. Although the novel is not apparently Gothic—there is no ancient castle and no singular villainous monster—the apparatus of the text surrounding the ingénue, illuminated by third person, provides the Gothic tone. Social machinations work—plot—against her. Like Mortimer, Edgar is a love interest who isn't entirely trustworthy. He doubts his own instincts and for a bulk of the novel consults the misogynistic Dr. Marchmont, more experienced in the woes of love, for advice on how to proceed with Camilla. Camilla, on the other hand, does right, Burney seems to suggest, to consult only her sisters on some occasions, but mostly herself.

Like Evelina, Camilla is both sheltered and intelligent, innocent and discerning. She is described as one with "graceful simplicity, a disengaged openness, and a guileless freedom from affectation," whose "eyes…sparkled with delight as she surveyed all around her the gay novelty of the scene"[115] at a ball. The narration makes it clear the internal worlds of the protagonists (especially the young women) in stark contrast the nameless, often faceless gazing men under whose scrutiny the women must endure. Ball scenes are described in passive voice:

> Camilla…passed not long unnoticed, though the splendor of Indiana's appearance cast her at first on the background…Eugenia, meanwhile, had not even the negative felicity to pass unobserved; impertinent witticisms upon her face, person,

[114] Hershinow, 121.
[115] *Camilla,* 61.

and walk, though not uttered so audibly as to be distinctly heard, ran around the room…[116]

The passive voice turns only to active when the subject is "witticisms"—the agency of men's judgments is emphasized, given human—even predatory—qualities. While Camilla may feel flashes of inferiority in the wake of being spurned for Indiana, her more conventionally attractive and materialistic sister, the narrative suggests that this is a result of the patriarchal judgments, not because of an inherent envious nature on her part. This passive voice description of the ball and the women therein is contrasted with a conversation between Camilla and Edgar soon after, in which Camilla critiques the men. When one of the men at that ball, Major Cerwood, proves detestable, she tells Edgar that "[the Major] has treated me like a country simpleton, and made me as many fine speeches, as if he had been talking to Indiana,"[117] and goes on to explain that indeed, Indiana would not have succumbed to such flattery, just that "the same things said to her would no longer have been so extravagant."[118] The text makes apparent that what the male gaze perceives is different from the internal experiences and perceptions of the protagonists—and that the male gaze is less discerning.

Rather remarkable is that these instances make even clearer Edgar's relative credulity in comparison with his female acquaintances. To invoke the passage with which this section began, Edgar at first sees Marchmont's words of caution aren't simply a nuisance to the young lover, but also "causeless": Dr. Marchmont's suspicions are not rational, reasonable, enlightened, or empiricist. Sadly, Edgar does not comport himself with the same fortitude after this, throwing away what he knows about Camilla from a whole life's worth of friendship with her and instead

[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid, 63.
[118] Ibid.

reading her as though testing her from on-high. Patriarchal pride is connected, in this way, to a kind of reading practice that anxiously searches for ulterior motive where there isn't any, something that Gothic novels in the next chapter of this dissertation will expand on.

Kristen Pond further argues that "the cautionary tale that emerges from Edgar's misinterpretations warns about the dangers of reading and the interpretive act more generally"[119] yet later theorizes that his bad reading is overly skeptical and empiricist, a paradigm that he learns from Marchmont: "the pursuit of certainty, the prejudice that results from personal experience, and the disregard for relevant contexts."[120] However, I think Burney is less issuing forth a generalized lamentation on how difficult it is to understand other "human heart"s and more cautioning readers to heed instincts and trust what they know affectively. In other words, her narratorial statement: "What so hard to judge as the human heart?" is ironic, poking fun at masculine reading practices.

While Julian Fung finds Burney's satire to be milder in *Camilla,* especially because both men and women are satirized in the novel, Burney nonetheless makes clear that men hold disproportionate amounts of power, their epistemologies wrong despite their social advantages. The consequences of their false assumptions cause remarkable amounts of pain and misunderstanding. Because both men and women are satirized, Fung suggests that the novel is making a general critique of misunderstanding other human beings, rather than a critique of patriarchal power.[121] Indeed, bad reading practices are attributed to several characters regardless of gender, but, importantly, not in equal measure: Sir Hugh, the patriarch of the family, is well-meaning but foolish in his decision-making; Edgar's distrust of his years-long knowledge of

[119] Pond, 319.
[120] Pond, 320.
[121] Fung, 947.

Camilla leads him astray; Marchmont remains cynical until the very last page of the novel; Mr. Tyrold is a relatively kind father, but is not as sensible as his daughters, remarking on the beauty of other women to his children just when Eugenia has realized her own disabilities, a kind of ignorant bullying unaware of emotional environs about him (one wants to scream at him: "Read the room!"); the greedy and vicious Clermont Lynmere expects he will be the heir to Sir Hugh's money; Lionel's frivolity and carelessness is the cause of the first trauma in the book: Eugenia's exposure to small pox.

In contrast to the bumbling indecision of Edgar, Camilla does not respond to his doubts with confusion. She knows exactly what he must think of her and instead feels righteous anger, side-stepping his demands that she explain herself. This is a change from Burney's second protagonist, Cecilia, who takes for it as a given that Delvile is entitled to an explanation of her actions, who desperately chases after reconciliation with him. In one of their many back-and-forth encounters when Edgar is unexpectedly cold to her after reading her kind behavior around other men suspiciously, Camilla cries, "Unless you knew all that had passed, and all my motives, you should judge nothing of these last few days, but think of me only, whether well or ill, as you thought of me a week ago.'"[122] Here, she not only critiques his inept reading practices but also his fickle nature, so easily swayed by one man's authority after years of intimate acquaintance pre-vetted by close friends and family.

Systemized Ignorance: The Dangers that Surround Eugenia

Eugenia, Camilla's sister, functions as a limit case for feminist rage against the male gaze and against masculine-coded reading practices. She is a young disabled woman who contracts

[122] *Camilla*, 236.

small pox as a child because of Sir Hugh's recklessness—he allows her to go to the fair, indulgently, even though he knows she is not yet inoculated against the virus. Now a young woman, she is in some ways what Evelina would have been had she not gone to the city: a limit case of feminine virtue, well read and virtuous, sheltered and protected. She is also, towards the end of the novel, what Evelina would be allowed to be had she had financial stability and a classical education: a proto-feminist philosopher openly critiquing the male gaze. Jason Farr writes of Eugenia that she "at long last, recognizes that the burden of not fitting in, of being perceived as a 'lame duck' in public, is not her fault. The source of the guilt, she proclaims, is the 'value' which men place 'upon external attractions,' which is another way of saying that she is not vain for being self-conscious."[123] Farr's overarching argument is that "Burney's unique writing style, with its emphasis on physicality and its allowance for interiority, allows for the development of Eugenia's keen intellect that eventually permits her to challenge long-standing assumptions about gender and the body."[124]

But the novel is not cut and dry (Burney rarely is). It is not a simple celebration of Eugenia's ascendancy to education and empowerment. At the same time as inexperience is an epistemology for women, it can of course be dangerous for them. One prominent way in which it can manifest is through a system of ignorance, keeping women innocent for modesty's sake. Out of love, the family keeps Eugenia ignorant about her status: as someone who will be judged for her looks, bearing the marks of smallpox, and as someone with a physical disability, "one leg shorter than the other,"[125] called at times "a little lame thing."[126] When she is in public and is

[123] Jason S. Farr, "Sharp Minds/Twisted Bodies: Intellect, Disability, and Female Education in Frances Burney's *Camilla," The Eighteenth Century* (Spring 2014), vol 55, no 1: 145.
[124] Ibid, 141-142.
[125] *Camilla,* 33.
[126] Ibid, 77.

made aware of her differences by cruel passersby, she responds with shock and anger. Camilla wonders what reproach she has merited, and Eugenia replies, "'The reproach…that, from me, all my family merit! The reproach of representing to me, that thousands resembled me! Of assuring me I had nothing peculiar to myself, though I was so unlike all my family—of deluding me into utter ignorance of my unhappy defects, and then casting me, all unconscious and unprepared, into the wide world to hear them!'"[127] Her grievances are many, compiled through anaphora, an outpouring of sudden realizations that have been systematically kept from her for her whole life.

Part of the tragedy for Eugenia is not only that she has been kept from this knowledge, but also that she, in the end, can only turn to her family—the same family that has served as her gatekeepers from society and even certain types of intellectual pursuits. Jason Farr lays out these dangers well: "If Eugenia were to have the chance to pursue the 'feminine' realm of novels, she would be able to correctly read Bellamy's iterations of love for exactly what they are: the proclamations of an emotionally unstable and violent gold digger. But because Eugenia views everything in sweeping, epic terms—a product of her focus on the classics—she cannot accurately perceive Bellamy's avaricious pursuit of her."[128] This is comparable to Charlotte Lennox's Arabella in *The Female Quixote,* who has a zealous education in the genre of romance and sees everything in those terms—men's sexual pursuit of women. However, written decades later, *Camilla* replaces romance with the classics and genders Eugenia's education as a masculine one: she *should,* in Sir Hugh's naïve logic, be protected from the world and be prepared as an heiress if she has a masculine education! Yet Eugenia's position as a woman and as a variable body cannot be ignored because the world refuses to ignore it; Sir Hugh deludes himself and by doing so, traps Eugenia in a kind of educated, conditioned naïveté. Her contact

[127] Ibid, 293.
[128] Farr, 11.

with the world has been mediated by her family her entire life, and this prepares her ill for her encounters with suitors. After being coerced into elopement with the insidious Bellamy who accidentally dies, Eugenia later finds that the educated and kind Melmond has fallen in love with her. She retreats, expecting disappointment, but the Tyrolds "when they perceived his ascendance, [seconded] his wishes. Approbation so sacred, joined to a prepossession so tender, soon conquered every timid difficulty in the ingenuous Eugenia."[129] The family as authority is painted in sweeping, abstract terms: the narration at this point zooms out into large philosophical truths, abstractions without agency or direction, "the family" replaced by concepts like "approbation" and "prepossession." What has heretofore been a rather longitudinal novel—covering large swaths of time in the characters' lives—that concerned the events, feelings, and actions of particular members of the family is rather blatantly now a wider look at systems of feeling and spectatorship. While it is a happy ending for Eugenia, it is with a grain of salt, not unmixed. Farr, who writes about how Eugenia becomes her own philosophical agent, criticizing "the male gaze to which she has been so harshly and unfairly subjected throughout the novel,"[130] in equal measure emphasizes the ultimate anxiety of the text about Eugenia's ultimate position as a disabled woman. Naïveté is a minoritarian condition, and the satire here is not energized by optimism as it once was in *Evelina;* even if Eugenia is afforded the same wealth and education as an able-bodied male counterpart, she, in her family's—and society's eyes—doesn't fit the bill. She is excluded from the kinds of knowledge that would've helped her.

Like *Cecilia,* this novel presents a rather bleak solution to the protagonist's problems: the hope that close family members might vouch for her innocence, the weight of epistemology and agency falling on a close-knit group of people. Although the young women in the family,

[129] *Camilla,* 912.
[130] Farr, 145.

particularly Camilla and Eugenia are sensitive to each other's needs and attempt to look out for each other, their efforts to effectively take action in solidarity with one another prove rather ineffectual—their safety is tenuous, each one of them exposed to abduction, masculine-coded misreading, their very physical wellbeing in the hands of powerful men. Their family is loving, capable of doing harm, and the arbiters of appropriate feeling all in one. The family unit, its dangers made evident, remains intact. Experience's folly may, then, be something less epic than mundane, something less heroic than subtly yet perniciously Gothic. As Burney begins her novel: "The experience which teaches the lesson of truth, and the blessings of tranquility, comes not in the shape of warning nor of wisdom; from such they turn aside, defying or disbelieving. 'Tis in the bitterness of personal proof alone, in suffering and in feeling, in erring and in repenting, that experience comes home with conviction, or impresses any use."[131] What is ironic about this truism is that Edgar actually *does* believe and accept Dr. Marchmont's seeming experiential wisdom. What is tragic about this phrase is that, though no agents are mentioned in these sentences—whose suffering and feeling? Whose erring and repenting?—the omission is loud. What is Gothic about this passage is that experience begins and ends in the "home."

In the novels of Burney, naïveté teeters between an epistemology with satirical, critical possibilities and a lamentation that can do nothing more. Over the course of Burney's first three novels, we see a growing anger about the systems that play against those who are kept young and innocent—usually women—and a simultaneously growing tone of defeat. Naïveté takes young protagonists far, but by the time *Camilla* is published, Burney seems to posit that as an epistemology, it alone cannot solve our problems or create community; the systems that oppress

[131] *Camilla,* 8.

are also the systems that we must turn to for recourse. Perhaps that is the most Gothic lesson of all.

Chapter 2: Naïveté as a Gothic Epistemology

Scholarly convention about Gothic convention is to remark upon its predictability. In *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions,* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick runs through a comprehensive catalog of the things one might expect from a Gothic novel:

> You know the important features of its *mise en scène:* an oppressive ruin, a wild landscape, a Catholic or feudal society. You know about the trembling sensibility of the heroine and the impetuosity of her lover. You know about the tyrannical older men with the piercing glance who is going to imprison and try to rape or murder them. You know something about the novel's form: it is likely to be discontinuous and involuted, perhaps incorporating tales within tales, changes of narrators, and such framing devices as found manuscripts or interpolated histories.[132]

The catalog goes on for longer, but I want to pause here to note a tension within the picture Sedgwick paints of the Gothic that I think needs to be brought to the foreground. The Gothic, in Sedgwick's account, is at once continuous in its conventions and tropes, and yet discontinuous in its form. It is at this hinge that I find my definition of the Gothic in this dissertation. As Burney's work has made apparent, one need not have crumbling castles or feudalistic moors in far-off lands to have the Gothic: in Burney's tales, male characters abduct ingénues under a guise of chivalry, a form they have learned and mastered well and can co-opt to nefarious means; they may foist upon their love interests manipulative and suspicious readings; they may even, with seeming good intent, keep a young woman in the dark about her physical differences. Gothic

[132] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen 1986): 9.

undertones can be achieved by means other than setting and place: Burney has made obvious that the patriarchy and its feudalistic ghostliness *haunts* just as much as any spectre; it is the manifestation of the Gothic's continuing tradition, as well as the root of formal discontinuity and collapse.

It is upon the definition of the Gothic as a genre whose horror elements are caused by feudalistic patriarchy (and the spectre of its violence) that I build my arguments about two Gothic novels in this chapter. And it is to this definition that I add that the Gothic by the 1790s bears a rather under-discussed hallmark: an epistemology defined by a naïve character's gut feeling, by sneaking suspicion, rather than by more masculine-coded modes of knowledge.[133] In her reading of *Northanger Abbey* and *Frankenstein,* Sarah Kareem writes that these novels critique "a discourse of admiration that turns wonder at the real into an uncritical veneration for genius" and "expose self-proclaimed arbiters of truth—most particularly, Henry Tilney and Victor—as promoters of a false realism that conceals its artifice."[134] This description of masculine-coded knowledge sounds eerily similar to the way in which the trope of the iron chest operates in other Gothic novels. As I argue in this chapter, the gut feeling that there is something being hidden from the naïf is itself a *form* of knowledge (even if it is not knowledge itself), and the very concealment of and obfuscation of that knowledge via the iron chest acts as a critique of how the powerful bar the marginalized from access to knowing.[135] Often by aligning readers

[133] I hesitate to characterize this as empiricism, because, as we will see, the oppressive patriarchs of the two novels here are not empiricists; they are paranoid readers, trusting other men's authority more than engaging in scientific method.
[134] Sarah Kareem, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014): 188.
[135] This epistemology is often demonstrated in response to and surrounding, plot-wise, the object of an iron chest. The trope of the iron chest is familiar enough as a Gothic device that it is used as a shortcut for guilt, violence, or crime. By the time *Zofloya, or the Moor* by Charlotte Dacre in 1806, the corrupted ingénue Victoria has a fever dream in which her poisoned husband Berenza lies in "a huge iron chest."[135] The dream is brief, but her sublime fear about the iron chest lingers with her as she wakes, serving as an

with these naïfs (because we tend to know just as much as the naïfs do about the fictional world), Gothic novels construe protagonists' ignorance as a form of knowledge while still highlighting the limits of this knowledge to enact material change.

The Gothic protagonist's way of knowing is related to but distinct from curiosity, which Barbara M. Benedict describes as "primarily empirical,"[136] connecting it directly to Enlightenment thinkers' emphasis on "sensual perception and rational thought."[137] I follow here Helen Thompson's lead on understanding Lockean empiricism and what he calls secondary qualities as troubling the seeming boundary between what is perceived and what is imperceptible: "perceptual ideas seem like they belong inside minds, but Locke goes so far as to insert them into objects,"[138] a claim which highlights relationality rather than separation between human subject and objects in the world. Curiosity blurs the line between subject and object by giving the object—of a Pandora's box, of an iron chest—a kind of agency, a pull. Curiosity drives a protagonist to want to know what is inside; it is a desire to know. While so many Gothic protagonists may not have worldly knowledge, they engage with the world with honed sensibility that allows them to see and feel things that are not fully, concretely there because they are systemically hidden by those in power. The Gothic protagonist makes visible the structures that they are embedded in and victimized by from their naïve epistemology. Yet, whereas curiosity is specific and bears transgressive potential, as I'll discuss later, the Gothic epistemology of naïveté

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expedited narrative technique to communicate her growing desperation and sense of culpability; it is indeed revealed later that she has murdered her husband. That is, the iron chest as a literary object generally opens the novel up to suspicious reading into a character and gives us glimpses into their affective state and more nefarious deeds.

[136] Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2001): 14.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Helen Thompson, *Fictional Matter: Empiricism, Corpuscles, and the Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017): 6.

I'm tracing here is bound up in that tug-of-war between subject and object; the naïve protagonist seems suspended at the moment of opening the iron chest, unable to reveal what is inside.

In this chapter, I argue that it is the epistemological practice of the naïve Gothic ingénu/e that allows them to toggle easily between material object to acts of the imagination, to see something like an iron chest and feel fear of the objects that may be hidden within it, to encounter an imperious man of authority and then be suspicious of him. This epistemological movement allows for revolutionary acts of discovery on the young, disadvantaged protagonist's part: they reveal systems of oppression that work to keep them ignorant, that work to conceal. What is important is not so much the incriminating evidence inside the chest, but rather the perpetuated ignorance about what is inside—for that is exactly the critique of those in power who get to know. The iron chest produces questions and epistemological problems that rehearse, synecdochally, the systems of oppression that keep those in power knowing and those not in power unknowing. For *Northanger Abbey,* I argue, the Japan cabinet and its hidden contents are less a symbol of Catherine Morland's folly and ignorance and more a symbol of General Tilney's egotism, which, although he does have patriarchal and financial power, counterintuitively keeps him ignorant, his surveillance limited. The cabinet is Austen's way of critiquing his attempt to surveil. For *Caleb Williams,* the iron chest works to highlight that though Caleb wishes to know the contents, he is consistently barred from knowledge. The grim upshot of these works is that they suggest that a Gothic epistemology of sneaking suspicions is not enough to dismantle the systems in place that keep the naïf naïve.

This chapter takes as its first case study Austen's early novel, *Northanger Abbey,* and complicates the reading that Catherine Morland is simply a naïve ingénue whose obsessive misreadings must be corrected by her love interest, Henry Tilney. I am indebted here to Claudia

Johnson's argument Henry Tileny sees no "mimetic provenance" in gothic fiction, and "by making the distrust of patriarchy, Austen obliges us first to see the import of conventions which we, like Henry perhaps, dismiss as merely formal, and then to acknowledge, as Henry never does, that the 'alarms of romance' are a canvas onto which the 'anxieties of life' can be projected in illuminating, rather than distorting, ways."[139] Indeed, "alarms concerning the central gothic *figure,* the tyrannical father, [Austen] concludes, are commensurate to the threat they actually pose."[140] Along this line, I argue, the narrative suggests that Catherine's ability to toggle between the world and the imagination allows for something like intuition to blossom—and this intuition about the General's tyranny proves true. Meanwhile, it is General Tilney who may be more naïve—in the less generous sense of the word.

I will then move to William Godwin's *Things as They Are; or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams,* published in 1794 in the wake of the Reign of Terror in France and Britain's panicked fear that they too would see a revolution domestically. It is sneaking suspicions that lead the eponymous Caleb Williams to the iron chest of his employer, Falkland, in which he encounters what he and Falkland assume is evidence of some sort of the employer's foul deeds or even crimes. The objects therein are never mentioned, however, contributing to the formal strangeness of the novel and suggesting both the powers and parameters of such an epistemology.

Although tonally different, *Northanger Abbey* and *Caleb Williams* are interesting to study together. Ronald Paulson investigates both in an article titled "Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution," stating that "Gothic and Jacobin novels had a similar ancestry in Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa;* both show the family as a compulsive force on the children, in particular

[139] Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: UChicago Press, 1988): 35.
[140] Ibid.

on the marriageable daughter or the young wife."[141] In *Northanger Abbey,* it is General Tilney who tyrannizes over his children and, it is heavily implied, revolutionary pamphleteers in his professional life, much in the same way as the landlord Tyrrel tyrannizes his tenants and Falkland, in turn, tyrannizes over his servants. Both the General and Falkland—a landlord—represent the power of the state. Both novels are told non-teleologically, the ending culminating in not some transformation but rather in the dreadful solidification of the same power structures. Both feature naïve protagonists who are socioeconomically disadvantaged who act as spies in a patriarchal home. Both novels lay bare the cyclicality of the Gothic found in the everyday, the way in which feudalistic patriarchy haunts and lingers in objects and in characters alike.

The Democratizing Epistemologies in *Northanger Abbey*

Reading and Re-reading: Catherine Morland's Satirical Power

It is not an iron chest, but rather a "Japan cabinet" (what eighteenth-century British writers called a lacquered cabinet, a design popular in Japan and China) that evokes in Jane Austen's young heroine, Catherine Morland, a sense of sneaking suspicion of the imperious General Tilney. Satirizing—that is, both engaging with and critiquing—conventional Gothic trappings, Austen does not have the cabinet hold murderous secrets. Instead, it is later revealed that the cabinet holds washing bills left over by a suitor of and eventual husband to Eleanor Tilney. Yet, as Laura Baudot aptly states, "With the hidden subterranean passageways and concealed interiors of cabinets—the deep places of the Gothic—Austen can plant evidence for the painful realities of marriage that the happy ending of courtship plots suppress."[142] A cabinet

[141] Ronald Paulson, "Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution," *ELH* vol 48 no 3 (Autumn 1981): 538.
[142] Laura Baudot, "Nothing Really in It': Gothic Interiors and the Externals of the Courtship Plot in *Northanger Abbey*" ECF, vol 24, no 2, winter 2011-12: 342.

is not simply Catherine Morland's silly mistake; it signifies the oppressive forces that are indeed there, the material evidence of a wealthy patriarch and his power and secrets that must be kept because of his watchful eye. In other words, it troubles the pretty exteriors of a marriage plot, which is always tied to and constricted by the weight of systemic oppression. To put it more simply, the patriarchy creates the conditions for Gothic horror (the spectre of violence and danger for the ingénue) at the same time that the Gothic genre levies a critique from the position of the naïf.

The patriarchy is not simply a man at the head of a household. Given the material histories of the Japan cabinet, it evokes imperial history as well. The object is a strange choice: its singularity in the text is impossible to ignore. The tall cabinet is described with an allure: "black and yellow Japan of the handsomest kind." "Japan" is in fact a lacquerware cabinet, a craft originating from China and a design that became exceedingly popular in France and England especially in the mid-eighteenth century. It is known for its ornate surface, often depicting scenes of reading and writing, or flower and phoenix designs.[143] This cabinet reminds her of the cabinet Henry Tilney mentions to her in the Gothic tale he spins. That this lies in the household of General Tilney speaks to his tastes in chinoiserie, outmoded by the 1790s. Northanger Abbey, by his design, is a museum of sorts. Shinobu Minma writes, that General Tilney is eccentric and "has transformed an ancient abbey into a place for exhibiting modern products and inventions. The General's love of improvement and novelty is indeed almost as obsessive as Catherine's yearning for ruins and antiquities."[144] Minma connects General Tilney's

[143] Christina Hagelskamp, Arlen Heginbotham, and Paul van Duin. "Bending Asian lacquer in eighteenth-century Paris: New discoveries." *Studies in Conservation,* vol 61 (2006), https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2016.1227054.
[144] Shinobu Minma, "General Tilney and Tyranny: *Northanger Abbey*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* vol 8, no 4 (July 1996): 503.

obsession with fashion to his despotism, his emphasis on appearances and status, but the Japan cabinet stands as a seeming contradiction, something that would've been not as modern but outmoded. The way in which I read General Tilney in this chapter places both things together, a kind of formative paradox: by having the East Asian-styled cabinet, popular in the mid-1700s, stand in for his tyranny, the novel depicts Tilney's worldview as outmoded but persistent, seemingly mundane but potentially violent, and his aesthetic hobby as imperialistic, acquisitive.

As I argued in Chapter 1, Burney's protagonistic naïveté is not a simple lack of worldly knowledge on the heroine's part, but rather a critical engagement with the world. Something interesting—indeed, novel-worthy—happens when the ingénue encounters a society set in its ways. It is her responses to it that we are invested in as readers, rather than society's jaded responses. As shown in the previous chapter, Jane Austen certainly read and drew inspiration from the works of Frances Burney. Much has been written about how the former's style, particularly her narratorial technique of free indirect discourse, was drawn from the works of the latter which infuse third-person perspective with satire. In her early novel—written in 1798 but not sold until 1803 to publishers and published even later, posthumously—*Northanger Abbey,* Austen names Burney's novels which serve as examples of literature usually derided as too feminine, too embarrassing. In Austen's famous digression, the narrator poses a hypothetical, "And what are you reading, Miss--? 'Oh! It is only a novel!' replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference or momentary shame. –It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda' or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humor are conveyed to the world in the best chosen

language."[145] The young lady is not wrong for enjoying novels, but for capitulating to the pressures of a society that think she is wrong for enjoying novels.

The critical history of *Northanger Abbey* is also an interesting one. More recently, scholarship has moved on from lamenting the strange formal qualities of the novel on the basis that its parts don't match the whole, to analyzing this formal strangeness, taking it for what it's worth. An upsurge in formalist approaches has opened up this text for a newer set of questions, beyond judgements of the book for being more juvenile because Austen was younger when writing it—beyond, as it were, statements about its aesthetic failures and into analysis. This reading practice is what Laura Baudot describes as New Formalism,[146] which resists reading a literary text solely for its historical context and also resists the push for a clean-cut formal unity.

The novel does not work to solely punish Catherine via shame or offer a corrective to her as Charlotte Lennox might have with Arabella, but does acknowledge that a small dose of it is instrumental in the transformation of her reading practices of other people. This line of argument is taken up by Laura Baudot, who suggests that *Northanger Abbey* is about the protagonist's training in re-reading. Baudot's analysis of the objects that draw us in to reflect upon our own readerly positionality I find particularly useful. In particular, there is the Japan cabinet: "As an object that Catherine reads, the Japan cabinet testifies to the link between the imaginative power of novels and the expectation of depth. This connection is built into its appearance: its outside offers a figurative scene behind which is a locked interior. It contains the key to novelistic construction in its combination of figures or images on the outside and hidden depths and

[145] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics 2003): 24. References are to this edition.
[146] Although I hesitate to reify New Formalism as an entirely new practice separate from formalism. It has always been my understanding that formalism can and should take into account both history and form.

possible secrets on the inside."[147] She continues: "Through a variety of media, Austen draws the reader's attention to the surface of texts in order to reveal how reading is a process of overlooking outsides—the material book—in an absorptive experience of insides—the imaginary world conjured by the words on the page. While Austen draws our attention to this ability to lose sight of the material book, it is not necessarily to destroy the power of reading to override an awareness of the material surface of books. Her aim is simply to draw the reader's attention to the ability to forget."[148] Catherine's ability to toggle between material object and the imagination is a critical reading practice. Ashly Bennett argues along the same lines, saying that "Austen introduces a heroine…who might negotiate the extremes of overwhelming absorption and 'affected indifference' through 'momentary shame,' and this negotiation of sensibility's extremes is vivified by Austen's formal experimentation with a structure of variously condemning and absolving voices that keep shame present but in play."[149] Moving beyond the discourse of sensibility, I want to hone in on what Bennett and Baudot observe, which is what could be called Catherine's cognitive mobility—her ability to move between instinct and observation. I argue that by chronicling Catherine's honed abilities to read and re-read, and in structuring *Northanger Abbey* the way she does, Austen suggests that the heroine's seemingly naïve reading practice—rather than suspicious reading practice—may be an ethical way to form sneaking suspicions and survive the Gothic trappings of a patriarchal society, and an alternative to jaded, empiricist thought that masquerades as rationality.

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[147] Laura Baudot, "Nothing Really in It': Gothic Interiors and the Externals of the Courtship Plot in *Northanger Abbey*" ECF, vol 24, no 2, winter 2011-12: 345.
[148] Ibid, 346.
[149] Ashly Bennet, "Shame and Sensibility: Jane Austen's Humiliated Heroines," *Studies in Romanticism,* Vol 54, No 3 (Fall 2015): 380.

Like Burney's Evelina, Catherine is young and without worldly experience; her sojourn to the scenes at Bath with Mrs. Allen is her entrance into the social world. Yet we see her innocence working in tandem with her critique of hyper-masculine affectation and conversational style, exemplified by the loud, rambunctious John Thorpe, her brother's university friend. When the men banter about various gigs and carriages, Thorpe solicits her opinion:

> "'I chanced to meet him on Magdalen Bridge as he was driving into Oxford, last term: 'Ah! Thorpe,' said he, 'do you happen to want such a little thing as this? It is a capital one of the kind, but I am cursed tired of it.' 'Oh! D--,' said I, 'I am your man; what do you ask?' And how much do you think he did, Miss Morland?'
>
> 'I am sure I cannot guess at all.'
>
> 'Curricle-hung you see….He asked fifty guineas; I closed with him directly, threw down the money, and the carriage was mine.'
>
> 'And I am sure,' said Catherine, 'I know so little of such things, that I cannot judge whether it was cheap or dear.'[150]

On one level, Catherine seems to be demurring, candid about her ignorance about carriages and the market value of such things. However, on another, her claims of little knowledge have the effect of cutting the conversation short, of stopping John Thorpe's long-winded stories. She does not prompt him with further questions, nor expresses interest in his proud ramblings.

Yet the narrator embeds a subtle, poignant detail here. "I am sure I cannot guess at all" is disembodied dialogue; we know it is uttered by Catherine but the narrator offers no speech tag

[150] *Northanger Abbey,* 30.

here for her. Her next utterance repeats much of the same structure, except now interrupted narratorially: "'And I am sure,' said Catherine, 'I know so little of such things.'" The repetition with variation begs not only John Thorpe to listen more closely to Catherine and perhaps read into her lack of interest in him more, but it also urges readers to re-read her.

The rest of the scene is banter between John, his sister Isabella Thorpe, and Catherine's brother. "Catherine, after listening and agreeing as long as she could, with all the civility and deference of the youthful female mind, fearful of hazarding an opinion of its own in opposition to that of a self-assured man, especially where the beauty of her own sex is concerned, ventured at length to vary the subject by a question which had been long uppermost in her thoughts; it was, 'Have you ever read Udolpho, Mr. Thorpe?'"[151] Although the narration points to how modest and demure she is, it also allows for her to take action by veering the conversation away from superficiality and towards a topic not only more comfortable for her but also more interesting. This direct question about readerly experience launched at Mr. Thorpe is powerful; it positions Catherine as the authority on an important Gothic text. Of course, his self-assured rejection of Udolpho embarrasses her but she successfully changes the topic.

In a later conversation with the same Mr. Thorpe, it is now Mr. Thorpe who must repeat his utterance.

> A silence of several minutes succeeded their first short dialogue;--it was broken by Thorpe's saying very abruptly, 'Old Allen is as rich as a Jew—is not he?' Catherine did not understand him—and he repeated his question, adding in explanation, 'Old Allen, the man you are with.'
> 'Oh! Mr. Allen, you mean. Yes, I believe, he is very rich.'[152]

[151] Ibid, 32.
[152] Ibid, 44.

Here, Catherine's lack of understanding and Mr. Thorpe's repetition of his antisemitic, presumptuous question about her family friend makes the reader pause, re-read and read into Thorpe's assumptions. The doubleness of her lack of understanding—whether it could signify an ingenuous confusion or be an incomprehension—is an example of Austen's narratorial understatement. And which way the meaning of her lack of understanding lies does not matter so much as it lays bare the leaps of logic that he has made: both that Mr. Allen is "rich" and "as rich as a Jew." These leaps of logic are not inconsequential: what seems like a small moment once more exemplifying John Thorpe's disgusting machismo and obsession with status endangers Catherine's physical safety later on and is shown to be symptomatic of wider masculine epistemologies. It is later revealed that Thorpe's assumptions are passed on to General Tilney and lead to General Tilney's misguided belief in Catherine's wealth and connections. It is, in effect, this seemingly small moment that leads to the climax of the novel wherein General Tilney cruelly exiles Catherine from Northanger Abbey without explanation, money, or chaperone.

There are other places in which it is even clearer that the narrator is recuperating Catherine's naïve Gothic epistemology, one that is characterized by fresh perspective and instinct. During another long conversation with the Tilneys, Catherine finds herself "quite lost. She knew nothing of drawing—nothing of taste:—and she listened to them with an attention which brought her little profit, for they talked in phrases which conveyed scarcely any idea to her. The little which she could understand however appeared to contradict the very few notions she had entertained on the matter before. It seemed as if a good view were no longer to be taken from the top of an high hill, and that a clear blue sky was no longer a proof of a fine day."[153] The narration, by way of focalizing through Catherine's befuddlement, reveals once more the

[153] Ibid, 80.

Tilneys' gaps in logic, even to the extent that they ignore seemingly educated and masculine-coded modes of knowing. Catherine outnumbered, the narrator continues: "She was heartily ashamed of her ignorance. A misplaced shame. Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind, is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can."[154] In this passage, the narrator says much at once: the first few sentences sarcastically uphold ignorance in its potential to form interpersonal attachment and be receptive to other people. "Well-informed" minds are less able to "admini[ster] to the vanity of others," which works in two ways: someone like Isabella Thorpe might privilege her own pursuits over the desires of others, perhaps to her advantage, but it makes her less emotionally aware, less sensible. The last quoted sentence zooms out into a sarcastic truism about feminine modesty, which dictates that women must conceal their knowledge, as being well-informed and sensible and sensitive to the needs of others cannot co-exist in the social order. Catherine knows little because society has kept her sheltered, but she knows more than she is allowed to display. Neither is her fault; both are symptoms of successful patriarchy.

It is important to note that Catherine's infamous mistake in assuming that the General has killed his wife comes not from her lone ventures through the not-so-Gothic halls of Northanger Abbey, but from the observations she has made about his character leading up to that moment. A key instance occurs when Catherine, unseen, witnesses the General ragefully berating his daughter:

[154] Ibid, 81.

> The General, coming forwards, called her hastily, and, as Catherine thought, rather angrily, back, demanding whither she were going?—And what was there more to be seen?—Had not Miss Morland already seen all that could be seen?—Had not Miss Morland already seen all that could be worth her notice?—And did she not suppose her friend might be glad of some refreshment after so much exercise? Miss Tilney drew back directly, and the heavy doors were closed upon the mortified Catherine, who, having seen, in a momentary glance beyond them, a narrower passage, more numerous openings, and symptoms of a winding stair-case, believed herself at last within the reach of something worth her notice; and felt, as she unwillingly paced back the gallery, that she would rather be allowed to examine that end of the house, than see all the finery of the rest.[155]

The General admonishes his daughter on the grounds that, in his eyes, she is not being a good hostess to—he presumes—their wealthy guest. It becomes clear retrospectively that the General is attempting to communicate to them his wish to stop touring and instead rest and take refreshment. However, in this moment, his angry tirade at his daughter—"Had not Miss Morland already seen all that could be worth her notice?"—is a strange melding of reported speech filtered through Catherine's hearing. Rather than quoted dialogue, which would highlight the words uttered by him, reported speech emphasizes the way in which the words are transduced, processed, and received. It becomes clear through this and the em dashes that Catherine is hearing what she is not supposed to hear; her eavesdropping is a transgression, but it is one that the narrator does not fault her for. This is not folly; she is hearing what Eleanor is hearing with

[155] *Northanger Abbey,* 136.

shock. “Had not Miss Morland already seen all that could be worth her notice?” Surely not, not until now.

Like a detective, Catherine combines her instincts, her knowledge base, and her observations. General Tilney’s rudeness and her Gothic suspicions coincide on the very next page. “Catherine’s blood ran cold with the horrid suggestions which naturally sprang from these words. Could it be possible? Could Henry’s father?—And yet how many were the examples to justify even the blackest suspicions!” (137) The omission of her precise suspicion demonstrates once more how Catherine believes it to be unthinkable. Robyn R. Warhol calls this narratorial phenomenon “unnarration,” “narrative refusal either by saying they cannot or will not tell what happened.”[156] This moment of unnarration, on a more obvious level, signifies Catherine’s critique of the possible crime: it is too horrible to name. It also functions to draw the reader in to fill in the blanks: by reading this, we must think what Catherine is also supposed to be thinking. We are epistemologically aligned. This echoes the rhetorical devices used around Isabella, too. “And yet how many were the examples to justify even the blackest suspicions” is narrated in full, because these *are* thinkable, observable—patriarchal misdeeds that are out there in the open, somehow socially more acceptable, but still horrific. The General raging at his daughter for being late; the General upholding Catherine as a guest who must be doted upon because of a false assumption of his; the relief that everyone feels when he is gone. These more mundane tyrannies are removed from the incomplete sentence in which Catherine suspects him of murder only by an em dash: a punctuation that functions not so much as a separation as a connection. The leap from domestic tyrannies to murder is not so big a leap after all.

[156] Robyn R. Warhol, “Narrative Refusals and Generic Transformation in Austen and James: What Doesn’t Happen in Northanger Abbey and the Spoils of Poynton,” *The Henry James Review,* Vol 28 No 3 (Fall 2007): 259.

Scholarly convention is to describe Henry as the educator, the one who knows more than Catherine and corrects her. If this were *Female Quixote,* Henry would be in the role of the knowledgeable doctor hammering out her logical fallacies. However, as Jodi L. Wyett argues, "Austen's fiction, in particular, shifts focus away from reforming the heroine. For Austen, quixotism models how engaged fiction reading initiates socialization and subsequently functions both to enable and emancipate the increasingly overdetermined and intertwined categories of women's reading and women's writing."[157] Austen's work frees the readerly female protagonist from expectations of reform, especially reform from a patriarchal figure; instead of a condemnation of her reading practice, the novel both explains it as a result of the patriarchal and educational confines under which she lives, and defends her naïveté as its own form of knowledge acquisition. Indeed, by the time Catherine can abscond into Henry's mother's room alone to see if it holds dark murderous secrets, she realizes her own mistake and feels shame *before* Henry enters the scene and can register what she's doing. Although the narration introduces her in the following terms—that "she never could learn or understand anything before she was taught; and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid"[158], coming seemingly from above in the tone of parental disappointment, the narrator gets on her level by the middle of the novel. She is discerning, able to judge for herself: she realizes before Henry Tilney enters the scene that she has misjudged what she would find in the late Mrs. Tilney's room. It is not, in fact, hidden by a Gothic veil, abandoned and teeming with secrets. It is mundane, carefully adorned, and well kept. Her observations of the room are candid, grounded, and her shame comes in independent of an instructor.

[157] Jodi L. Wyett, "Female Quixotism Refashioned: *Northanger Abbey,* the Engaged Reader, and the Woman Writer," *The Eighteenth Century,* vol 56, no 2 (Summer 2015): 262.
[158] Ibid, 5.

Catherine is an astute heroine. Elizabeth Veisz says about the protagonist's detective-like instincts: "She was trying to investigate the story of another woman's life, and she was willing, temporarily, to transgress the boundaries of doorways and decorum to dig up the dirt."[159] Susan Zlotnick takes this a step further, arguing that Henry "does not guess that Catherine has already become a spy in the house of Tilney, one of the earliest girl detectives in the literary canon, an eighteenth-century Nancy Drew snooping into drawers and ferreting out criminal behavior."[160] Her perceived naïveté makes her seem like a blank slate to others. Like Evelina, her mobility depends upon others, and characters as well as scholars tend to assume that, because she lacks experience, she is thus too trusting. But in the narration, the understatement about her suspicions once more leaves open the characters for re-reading. This extends not only to General Tilney, but also to her materialistic, overly-sentimental friend Isabella. When Isabella acts suspiciously unfaithful to Catherine's brother, to whom she is promised, at a ball, dancing and flirting with other men, she returns to a disapproving Catherine. She explains away her behavior, describing the other (wealthier) men and describes her experience in a long paragraph, ending with: "'Amusing enough, if my mind had been disengaged; but I would have given the world to sit still.'"[161] To this, Catherine simply quips, "'Then why did not you?'"[162] Catherine's response is frank and candid, and is interesting in its doubleness. It could come off as ignorant, a genuine question as to why Isabella has acted the way she has acted. It can also, relatedly, be incisively critical in its understatement and its brevity. Either way, it turns the critique to Isabella by

[159] Elizabeth Veisz, "Northanger Abbey, Gothic Parody, and the History of the Fictional Female Detective," *JASNA,* vol 40, no 1 (Winter 2019).
[160] Susan Zlotnick, "From Involuntary Object to Voluntary Spy: Female Agency, Novels, and the Marketplace in *Northanger Abbey,*" *Studies in the Novel,* Vol 41, no 3 (Fall 2019): 289.
[161] *Northanger Abbey,* 97.
[162] Ibid.

discerning a misalignment between words and action. Catherine is a pair of eyes, asking Isabella and us to re-read Isabella's words.

Catherine is also able to re-read, contextualizing, learning, and moving between imagination and reality, instinct and empiricism. Murderer or not, General Tilney's imperiousness is felt by Catherine early on, narrated once more in an Austenian moment of "disnarration," which Robyn R. Warhol describes as "where the narrator tells what did not happen in place of telling what did."[163] While unnarration is when a narrator refuses to tell the reader something, disnarration is narration framed in negations, which open up new avenues for interpretation, alternative realities and possibilities.

> In spite of their father's great civilities to her—in spite of his thanks, invitations, and compliments—it had been a release to get away from him. It puzzled her to account for all this. It could not be General Tilney's fault. That he was perfectly agreeable and good-natured, and altogether a very charming man, did not admit of a doubt, for he was tall and handsome, and Henry's father. *He* could not be accountable for his children's want of spirits, or for her want of enjoyment in his company.[164]

Previously, unnarration functioned to align readers epistemologically with Catherine in her suspicions that Tilney is a murderer. Here, disnarration—framing Catherine's feelings about him in the negative—again distances us epistemologically from Catherine, introducing a level of irony. This passage's disnarration displays her own doubts about Tilney, juxtaposing his domestic demeanor with his public reputation. It also presents to the reader Catherine's mixture of doubt and faith in the General. Her suspicions about Tilney, at this point nascent, stand a small

[163] Warhol, "Narrative Refusals," 260.
[164] *Northanger Abbey*, 93.

chance against the pantomimed public opinions—"That he was perfectly agreeable and good-natured, and altogether a very charming man, did not admit of a doubt, for he was tall and handsome, and Henry's father"—doled out easily like an indoctrination. Naïve and inexperienced as she may be, she is able to collect a variety of evidence and internal reactions to his character, such that, in the end, she is not off the mark about his character after all, even if she is about the crime.

General Tilney's Naïveté

General Tilney presents an alternative model of epistemology, one that puts too much trust in masculine authority, one that is invested in money and status, one that is credulous to the rumors of men. To recall an earlier quote, Minma describes Catherine's scenes with General Tilney as illustrating a contrast "to expose the naivety of a girl addicted to novels; it also highlights the peculiar inclinations of General Tilney…The General's love of improvement and novelty is indeed almost as obsessive as Catherine's yearning for ruins and antiquities."[165] Minma argues further that Austen critiques the General's superficiality and his tyrannical ways. Yet something in his argument that I want to bring to the forefront is that the General's epistemology can also be called naive in a more traditional sense.

One rumor about Catherine's wealth comes from the mouth of John Thorpe, a practical stranger to the General, and the General believes it, creating a fiction in his head that his son and she should wed. Told retrospectively by the narrator through Henry's focalized retelling to Catherine:

[165] Minma, "General Tilney and Tyranny," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* Vol 8, No 4 (July 1996): 503.

> John Thorpe had first misled [The General]. The General, perceiving his son one night at the theatre to be paying considerable attention to Miss Morland, had accidentally inquired of Thorpe, if he knew more of her than her name. Thorpe, most happy to be on speaking terms with a man of General Tilney's importance, had been joyfully and proudly communicative;--and being at that time not only in daily expectation of Morland's engaging Isabella, but likewise pretty well resolved upon marrying Catherine himself, his vanity induced him to represent the family as yet more wealthy than his vanity and his avarice had made him believe them. With whomsoever he was, or that theirs should be great, and as his intimacy with any acquaintance grew, so regularly grew their fortune.[166]

The novel seems to levy a critique against the General's lack of research as well. He has only one source for his information about Catherine, and relies solely on this for both belief-making and belief-breaking. Off to town, away from Northanger Abbey, the way in which the General finds out about Catherine's lack of status and wealth is described in notable retrospect: "The General had learnt from the very person who had suggested them, from Thorpe himself, whom he had chanced to meet again in town."[167] It is not even knowledge he seeks but knowledge that is given to him by chance. He is less detective and more naïve wanderer whose assumptions must be corrected.

This narrative retrospective is focalized through Henry's supposed recounting to Catherine the truths that he's learned. In retelling and reflecting, he "was almost as pitiable as in

[166] *Northanger Abbey*, 181.
[167] Ibid, 182.

their first avowal to himself he blushed for the narrow-minded counsel which he was obliged to expose."[168] By the end of the novel, it is not simply Catherine who has been corrected; in fact, her seeming naivete has proven a rather apt epistemology for society—especially for masculine authority. By the end, it is Henry Tilney who has learned to re-read, to toggle too between sources, perspectives, real life and the world of imagination. James Lindemann Nelson points out that Henry's explanation for his father's innocence in Catherine's unspoken murder charge is "remarkable" in that "it is weighted toward context, not character. Henry says surprisingly little in direct defense of his father against the charge that he killed or shut away his wife."[169] It turns out that "To have 'secretly sinned' against a man's character in suspecting him of murder or an aggravated form of kidnap is to have understood him fairly well."[170] It is Henry who is shocked at the violence of his father—Catherine, ultimately, was correct about the extent to which General Tilney's imperial personality could go.

The Japan cabinet, both in Catherine's view and scholars' accounts, becomes a stand-in for her folly. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator relates: "There were still some subjects indeed, under which she believed they must always tremble;--the mention of a chest or a cabinet, for instance—and she did not love the sight of japan in any shape: but even she could allow, that an occasional memento of past folly, however, painful, might not be without use."[171] Eugenia Zuroski has read this passage as "convert[ing] the Chinese object into a 'memento of past folly' that marks the boundary between fact and fiction. The ornament of an earlier aesthetic regime has been appropriated to the prosaic world, redefined by its 'usefulness' as a point of self-

[168] Ibid, 183.
[169] James Lindemann Nelson, "How Catherine Does Go On: Northanger Abbey and Moral Thought," *Philosophy and Literature,* vol 34, no 1 (April 2010): 197.
[170] Ibid, 198.
[171] *Northanger Abbey,* 147.

discipline."[172] However, if we read the novel less as a *Bildungsroman* for Catherine, and the Japan cabinet more as a stand-in for the General—his Orientalist tastes, his materialism, his ego—we get a different picture. Seemingly ornate, "handsome," and grand, the Japan cabinet becomes a signifier of the General's tyrannical tastes; that its contents are hidden objects, evidence of a romantic relationship attempted to be hidden from *him* reveals his authoritarian surveillance and the limits of that surveillance. The Japan cabinet looks, on the surface, as though it commands attention and holds authority, but as an object owned proudly by the General, its power is limited: the General doesn't even know its contents. The manifestations of his patriarchal power are at once epic and mundane, in something as violent as exiling a young woman from his home without food or money, and in something as everyday as his lack of transparency with his children.

The sobering ending to the novel, however, is colored by the limits of Catherine's epistemology to set her free. Just because she can detect and suspect patriarchal tyranny where it indeed exists, doesn't mean she can escape from it. In the end, her marital fate relies on General Tilney's approval or disapproval. Marriage is both a solidification of and a freedom from tyranny. Eleanor can escape to an extent, as Catherine is imprisoned to an extent. Relief and hope can be found in the possibility that she can continue to have intellectual freedom and a rich internal life, moving freely between text, context, and character. Vivasvan Soni defines developing judgment in Austen books as the importance of reading again; in her work, "character is itself the judgment which binds the otherwise merely contiguous details into narrative, and gives the details intelligibility as and in narrative."[173] There is no character before-

[172] Eugenia Zuroski, "Disenchanting China: Orientalism and the Aesthetics of Reason in the English Novel," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* (Spring – Summer 2005), Vol 38, No 2/3: 265.
[173] Vivasvan Soni, "Committing Freedom: The Cultivation of Judgment in Rousseau's *Emile* and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice." The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* (Fall 2010): 139.

the-fact: character is constructed through acts of reading, through engagement and entanglement with another. By the end of *Northanger Abbey,* this is the silver lining for readers and for Catherine: she can at the very least read more comprehensively, laying bare the ways in which a feudalistic patriarchy works against her.

Knowledge Too Heavy to Bear: Caleb William's Sneaking Suspicions

The Question of the Iron Chest

In William Godwin's 1794 *Caleb Williams; or, Things as They Are,* the eponymous character begins to have sneaking suspicions about his employer, Falkland, and eventually finds the opportunity to open Falkland's mysterious iron chest. In the moment of unfastening the chest, Caleb says that "all that I sought was at once within my reach,"[174] but he is immediately discovered by Falkland, thus catapulting the cat-and-mouse chase that takes up the bulk of the rest of the novel. Strangely, Caleb later says: "The contents of that fatal chest from which originated all my misfortunes I have never been able to ascertain."[175] He wonders whether the contents were proof of Falkland's guilt or innocence. The text never reveals what lies inside, either—yet much depends on this iron chest. The entirety of the plot hinges on it, and on Caleb's Gothic epistemology, his sneaking suspicions that are based on little evidence, more of a hunch. The iron chest remains a question mark, a missing piece, of the novel.

The iron chest carries so much epistemological and metaphorical weight in William Godwin's 1794 novel that it became the title of the 1796 play adaptation by George Colman: *The Iron Chest.* Aside from the very basic plot that has an employee discovering that his employer is

[174] William Godwin, *Things As They Are; Or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009): 128. References are to this edition.
[175] Ibid, 293.

not the righteous man he says he is, but a murderer tormented by his past, the play bears virtually no similarities to the book. The play flopped during its first run, and a lamenting reviewer in *The Monthly Mirror* wrote about the production, comparing it to the source material: "Mr. Godwin says nothing about the *contents* of the chest. It was necessary to interest the reader in the early part of his novel, and this he does most powerfully, by raising his expectation to a pitch of extraordinary suspense. Why he forbore to gratify the curiosity he raised, it remains with him to say."[176] However, the interpretive impulse of the reviewer remains still strong, strong like Caleb's, so he goes on, surmising Godwin's authorial reasoning: "In our opinion, it is a master-stroke of the writer to fix the reader's attention more strongly to the character of Falkland."[177]

In his preface to the published version of the play, Colman once more feels the needs to call upon the chest, saying, "I have bestowed no small pains upon this *Iron Chest,* which I offer you. Inspect it; examine it; you see the maker's name is upon it…I trust, you will find that my *Iron Chest* will hold together, that it is tolerably sound, and fit for all the purposes for which it was intended."[178] The iron chest is not simply a diegetic symbol; it becomes the text itself, at the reader's disposal for interpretation. The iron chest exists powerfully at the core of the novel and spreads to future readers and adapters as an epistemological problem.

The iron chest is evocative to Caleb and to readers alike, particularly because its contents are not revealed. Robert W. Uphaus focuses on the iron chest as a clear example of how

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[176] *Remarks on Mr. Colman's Preface; Also A Summary Comparison of the Play of the Iron Chest with the Novel Caleb Williams* (Monthly Mirror 1796), 24. http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_100025324626.0x000001#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=11&xywh=252%2C367%2C2327%2C1534

[177] Ibid.

[178] *The Iron Chest; a play; in three acts (Based on William Godwin's novel Things as They Are, or the Adventures of Caleb Williams*), Cadell & Davies 1796, digital, 1-2. http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_00000002B0CE#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=157&xywh=1183%2C249%2C1969%2C1096

Godwin's novel is more about the epoch of the mind than about Britain's fear of revolution in particular. "The meaning of the novel is in the experience of Caleb's pursuit of meaning, rather than at the end of Caleb's rational inquiry. Each appearance of the trunk neither progressively refines on nor cancels the prior meaning attached to the trunk."[179] Although Uphaus takes on a more psychoanalytical approach, I agree that the accrual of projected meaning on the iron chest without any result, however, I argue, is the point. Caleb might symbolize a revolutionary with his curious spirit, but he is not a revolutionary, only because he runs around in endless circles—physically and mentally—about the iron chest, unable to perceive what is in it and unable to escape from Falkland and the justice system.

Objects of curiosity are often associated with the curious protagonist's folly, but in Godwin's novel the iron chest seems more metonymic of how Falkland's power operates. Even though Caleb could look into the chest and discern the contents therein, he does not do the latter, and is still punished for the audacity to look. In *The Art of Alibi,* Jonathan Grossman helpfully argues that the novel, with its plethora of tribunal scenes, traces the problem of narration itself: "Godwin uses Caleb's limited self-awareness to expose his engulfment in a larger, political and historical system of justice, while Caleb, though occasionally glimpsing this larger reality, continues to see his problem and his fate as individual and local."[180] Caleb's naïve narration pokes holes in itself, revealing him as suspended in a state of almost coming to a revelation but still with the veil over his eyes—a veil put over him by the justice system and Falkland's larger power. One example of this is Caleb's attempt to disguise himself while on the run and quickly

[179] Robert W. Uphaus, "'Caleb Williams': Godwin's Epoch of Mind," *Studies in the Novel,* vol. 9, no. 3 (fall 1977): 282.
[180] Jonathan Grossman, *The Art of Alibi: English Law Courts and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002): 41.

being mistaken for another criminal.[181] This happens again and again, and Caleb finds himself, as ever, caught at the scene of the uncorroborated crime, frozen before the iron chest.

Many have called the revised ending to the novel, "much less reformist,"[182] as Falkland and Caleb seemingly reconcile and forgive one another before Falkland dies, leaving Caleb repentant. Kenneth Graham goes on to summarize the ending as Caleb "[coming] to realize the passionate nature of his motives" and that "what changes the attitude of both Falkland and Caleb towards each other is openness and sincerity."[183] Anna Maria Jones takes this optimistic reading a step further, saying that the "resolution to *Caleb Williams* [is] an answer in the affirmative—there is, indeed, something to be gained from grieving. Caleb's self-loathing signals, finally, that he understands his responsibility for the physical life of another. He realizes that his 'self' has no tenable existence, no rights, separate from others—even those others who have the power to oppress and persecute him."[184] These interpretations seem to suggest that through conversation and empathy, Caleb and Falkland can reconcile. They take as their foundation Godwin's argument in *Political Justice* that "two features intrinsic to rational human motivation, benevolence and impartiality, will ultimately prove able to override considerations of power."[185] This is a departure from earlier models of sensibility creating shared human feeling and sympathy. In scholarly interpretation of *Caleb Williams* that links the book to Godwin's political *oeuvre,* there seems to be a reframing of empathy as rational, a result of more objective thought:

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[181] See Ibid 40 for Grossman's close reading of these scenes of attempted disguise.
[182] Kenneth W. Graham, "Narrative and Ideology in Godwin's *Caleb Williams," ECF* vol 2 no 3 (April 1990): 216.
[183] Ibid 223.
[184] Anna Maria Jones, "'What should make thee inaccessible to my fury?': Gothic Self-Possession, Revenge, and the Doctrine of Necessity in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams,*" *European Romantic Review* 22:2: 150.
[185] Gary Handwerk, "Of Caleb's Guilt and Godwin's Truth: Ideology and Ethics in *Caleb Williams," ELH* vol 60, no 4 (Winter 1993): 942.

because Caleb can finally see from a wider vantage point, step outside his own shoes, and view things more objectively, he can then empathize with Falkland. Yet, given the strange formal techniques of the novel, the last-minute inversion of Caleb's feelings, and the ultimate unknowability of the iron chest, I propose that this interpretation completely overlooks Falkland's abuse of Caleb, which he himself narrates and acknowledges before this sudden reversal. Godwin's novel is ultimately Gothic not because of the cat-and-mouse chase, but because of the deeper entrenchment of both characters at the end in the very same power structures that they sought to fight against.

Unequal Crimes, Unequal Epistemologies

On one level, it seems as though Caleb goes from spouting absolute hatred towards Falkland for ruining his prospects, imprisoning him, following his every move for years—to then forgiving him in a wave of sentiment all but ten pages later. As mentioned before, it seems that this postscript resolution is where Godwin's message may lie: after all, why revise an ending so drastically if he did not have some reason for it? Kristen Leaver argues along these lines, saying: "The much-discussed revision of the manuscript ending is perhaps the most conclusive evidence of a shift away from a typically eighteenth-century literary model which maintains a moral distinction between good and evil towards the more psychologically complex published ending. In the first version of the ending, Falkland triumphs over Caleb in a rather heavy-handed demonstration of the evils of 'things as they are'' however, Godwin rejected this conclusion almost immediately and published the novel with a second ending in which Caleb triumphs over Falkland only to discover that both he and his opponent have misunderstood each other. Unable to recognize his fatal mistake until the end of the text, Caleb confesses to the courtroom, 'if I had

told [Falkland] privately the tale I have now been telling, he could not have resisted my reasonable demand.'"[186] This line of argument takes, however, Caleb's narration too much for granted. It also oversimplifies the history of the novel (as we see with Burney's novels, for example, good and evil are not cleanly delineated; sociality is complicated). As we have seen with the formally strange novels in this dissertation, the ending may not be a telos. It may not be only the ending in which we can find some moral truth or message from the author. The novel, I argue, invites us to read the postscript more critically than scholars have tended to.

Caleb's epistemology is one of spectating and feeling hunches. Caleb has the ingénu's advantage of seeing with fresh eyes, the ability to re-read. His very job under Falkland is that of a secretary who must transcribe documents. Again and again he fashions and refers to himself as a spectator. For instance, later in the novel, having run away to a remote part of England, Caleb attempts "a paper in the style of Addison's Spectators"[187] which helps him to gain temporary economic stability. In his role as secretary, he copies documents that pass across Falkland's desk, positioned in such a way that he can *see* and interpret all of Falkland's correspondences, though he is not in a position to change anything. Unlike Addison's all-seeing eidolon, however, Caleb is not allowed, in his employment, to produce his own ideas. His narrative testament—the novel that we have in our hands—is a breaking away from this role, an attempt at resistance.

As much as he may aspire to that level of purveying power, however, and though Caleb's epistemology may lead him to suspect Falkland of murder, it is not equivalent to Falkland's suspicious readings of Caleb. Caleb's acquisition of knowledge may result in both of them mistrusting the other in a sort of deadlock, but the two are far from equally equipped. It is

[186] Kristen Leaver, "Pursuing Conversation: *Caleb Williams* and the Romantic Construction of the Reader," *Studies in Romanticism,* vol 33, no 4 (Winter 1994): 594.
[187] *Caleb Williams*, 249.

Falkland who can deploy spies across borders, Falkland who has mobility. Falkland becomes a synecdoche of the British government and its reach. In a moment of fear, Caleb narrates: "Ireland had to me the disadvantage of being a dependency of the British government, and therefore a place of less security than most other countries which are divided from it by the ocean. To judge from the diligence with which I seemed to be pursued in England, it was not improbable that the zeal of my persecutors might follow me to the other side of the channel."[188] Caleb here employs the passive voice to signify the extent of Falkland's powers beyond his individual body. Falkland is replaced by—becomes—"diligence" that "pursues" and "zeal." Falkland's suspicion of Caleb's knowledge of his deeds can lead to actual persecution; Caleb's suspicion of his employer's deeds can only lead to his victimization.

The novel is uneven in more ways than one: not only are the two main characters unevenly armed, the novel is also formally uneven. Caleb spends all of volume I and half of volume II contextualizing his hunches about Falkland, going into a nested narrative told by Falkland's administrative servant, Mr. Collins. It is halfway through volume II that we get the iron chest scene—hardly a revelation—and what happens is a complete unnarration of *the contents of the chest.*

> The idea was too powerful to be resisted. I forgot the business upon which I came, the employment of the servants and the urgency of general danger. I should have done the same, if the apartment round me had been in flames. I snatched a tool suitable for the purpose, threw myself upon the ground, and applied with eagerness to a magazine which inclosed all for which my heart panted. After two or three efforts, in which the energy of uncontrollable passion was added to my

[188] *Caleb Williams,* 231.

> bodily strength, the fastenings gave away, the chest opened, and all that I sought was at once within my reach. I was in the act of lifting up the lid, when Mr. Falkland entered, wild, breathless, distraction in his looks!...At the moment of his appearance the lid dropt down from my hand.[189]

Caleb's draw towards the object takes on more immediacy than the fire, than his obligations as a servant, so much so that the iron chest takes on an agency and animacy of its own.[190] "The fastenings gave away, the chest opened, all that I sought was at once within my reach" place the chest in the subject position. The next sentence does not progress temporarily but rewinds a bit back to the opening of the chest, with Caleb back in the subject position conducting an action in the past-continuous tense—but Mr. Falkland quickly overtakes the scene with active past tense verbs. "The lid" of the chest does the active work, and Caleb and his limbs are helpless. The contents of the chest are unnarrated, elided, eclipsed by the materiality and human-like agency of the chest, a stand-in for Falkland. Agential power switches between Falkland and his chest, and as a narrator, Caleb elides too whether he looked into the chest. This narrative omission creates a space for us to assume both what Caleb assumes—that Falkland has seen him discover something awful—and what Falkland assumes—that Caleb has discovered something awful—and to realize ultimately that both assumptions leave Caleb in a state of suspension. Yet we are epistemologically aligned with Caleb more than we think at this moment: it is not until much later, when Caleb admits he doesn't know what's in the chest, that we realize we might've assumed as Falkland did. The narrating Caleb delays this revelation, which sets up a space for

[189] Ibid, 128-129.
[190] The eroticism of this passage does not escape me; curiosity as a *desire* to know is definitely at play here, but that is beyond the scope of this chapter. I am more interested in what he doesn't know—what doesn't happen—here.

readers to rehearse Falkland's violent assumption of him, only for us to realize later that we don't know more than Caleb about the chest.

The rest of the novel details Caleb's suffering in prison, his desperate search for disguises and a new life, his ultimate apprehension by the police once more. The unnarration of the contents of the chest is not simply Caleb's refusal to lay bare proof of Falkland's guilt within this retrospective narrative; it is not simply, if we are to read him suspiciously, a way of protecting Falkland. It also operates to ironize Caleb's knowledge: he is limited in his perception by Falkland, stopped all too soon from ascertaining the contents, barred from it diegetically as we are barred from it extratextually. Like Austen's Catherine, he is barred from access to truth, to the chest, sent into a sort of exile. We can only suspect what is in the chest because of Falkland's rageful reaction; we can only suspect the deeds General Tilney has committed in his lifetime because of his fitful tirades to his children.

No matter Caleb's hunches, no matter his attempts to be mobile across borders, no matter his attempts to uncover the truth of an oppressive system, those with legal, sociopolitical power try to and succeed in keeping him in ignorance. He learns by collection, observation, and transcription, reflected in his very function at Falkland's estate: "It consisted partly of the transcribing and arranging certain papers, and partly of writing from my master's dictation letters of business, as well as sketches of literary composition…My station was part of the house which was appropriated for the reception of books, it being my duty to perform the function of librarian as well as secretary."[191] Though there are economic differences, his way of acquiring knowledge in the world is very similar to that of Catherine Morland: reading, observing in the face of new worldly experience, and asking questions candidly of trusted authority figures. The idea of

[191] *Caleb Williams*, 5.

collection and transcription once more appears when Caleb asks Mr. Collins to regale him with the tale of Falkland's mysterious past, which might give him the key to his employer's rageful fits. What is transcribed in this tale is, Caleb says, a sort of amalgamation of various sources: "I shall join to Mr. Collins's story various information which I afterwards received from other quarters, that I may give all possible perspicuity to the series of events."[192] This leads him to the conversation with Mr. Collins, in which the latter regales him with a tale of Falkland's mysterious past, and to the ultimate suspicion that propels the rest of the story: "Was it possible after all that Mr. Falkland should be the murderer? … It was but a passing thought; but it serves to mark the simplicity of my character…My thoughts fluctuated from conjecture to conjecture, but this was the centre about which they revolved. I determined to place myself as a watch upon my master."[193] In this way, both the chest and this question are conflated: an invisible, for a bulk of the novel uncorroborated question. Naïve, doe-eyed and awestruck, Caleb suspects a Gothic plot. It is through his naïve epistemology that he arrives at a dangerous truth of his master.

Yet , while Caleb's epistemology works through transcription, collection, and reproducing text, Falkland can produce documents for an eleventh-hour bribe. Blindfolded, gagged, Caleb is brought to Falkland before the trial. The latter says imperiously, "'I had my eye upon you in all your wanderings. You have taken no material step through their whole course with which I have not been acquainted.'"[194] Compared to the disembodied passive voice with which Caleb previously described Falkland's insidious surveillance, Falkland's speech is clear in its agency: Subjects, verbs, objects clearly delineated. He paints Caleb as a weaker, embodied individual with contained power. He continues: "'I insist then upon your signing a paper

[192] Ibid, 8-9.
[193] Ibid, 104.
[194] Ibid, 269.

declaring in the most solemn manner that I am innocent of murder, and that the charge you alleged at the office in Bow-Street is false, malicious and groundless. Perhaps you may scruple out of a regard to truth. Is truth then entitled to adoration for its own sake, and not for the sake of the happiness it is calculated to produce?'"[195] Throughout the novel, Falkland appeals to romantic, chivalric notions of fealty and of happiness tied to loyalty and gratitude, in order to subjugate Caleb and keep him obedient.

A Revolution Deferred

In the original ending, Caleb is imprisoned and Falkland remains victorious. In the revised postscript that Godwin published, Caleb gives his testimony to the justices and then undergoes a complete turnaround, awestruck once more by the chivalrous, romantic figure of Falkland. He ends his speech with, "I proclaim to all the world that Mr. Falkland is a man worthy of affection and kindness, and that I am myself the worst of villains! Never will I forgive myself the iniquity of this day. The memory will always haunt me, and embitter every hour of my existence. In thus acting I have been a murderer, a cool, deliberate, unfeeling murderer."[196] A lot is happening here: Caleb believes himself to be a murderer of Falkland's reputation, and, because Falkland perishes in prison, a more literal (albeit indirect) murderer. In an extreme version of sensibility, Caleb takes on the faults of Falkland as if by karmic exchange. Kenneth Graham explains this in sentimental terms, saying that "What changes the attitude of both Falkland and Caleb towards each other is openness and sincerity. For a brief moment at a real trial, truth emerges because a tribunal at least provides a forum that may permit truth to be

[195] Ibid, 270.
[196] Ibid, 301.

spoken… 'Things' remain 'as they are,' yet Falkland and Caleb are changed."[197] This line of logic follows Falkland's appeal to chivalry in his attempt to bribe Caleb; in effect, Graham might be falling into the very trap of chivalric romance that Falkland uses to keep Caleb under his sway. Graham's argument, understandably, seeks optimism in Caleb and Falkland's ultimate reconciliation, but in holding this brief, sentimental moment over the formal complexities of the entire novel is to ignore the nuances of Godwin's project.

Caleb's final reversal in opinion about his tyrannical master is exemplified by his penultimate apostrophe to the dying Falkland: "Thou settedst out in thy career with the purest and most laudable intentions. But thou imbibedst the poison of chivalry with thy earlier youth; and the base and low-minded envy that met thee on thy return to thy native seats, operated with this poison to hurry thee into madness."[198] Here, he laments Falkland for falling into the traps of passionate chivalry, and yet he is using the very "thee" and "thou" language of romance. Gary Handwerk points this irony out and notes that this novel may not be a direct application of *Political Justice:* "As Godwin moves into fiction and as he comes to be influenced by discussions with Mary Wollstonecraft, he takes increasing account of affective elements in his equation; benevolence becomes more and more a distinct problem of its own."[199] Forgiveness, justice, and compassion grow less and less straightforward. The ending reconciliation, its brevity, its abruptness fold in against and puncture the rest of the narrative, inviting us to read it with a grain of salt. Handwerk says aptly, "As readers, we have to weigh his justice towards Falkland against his injustice towards himself" in these self-accusations of so-called murder.[200] The

[197] Graham, "Narrative and Ideology in Godwin's *Caleb Williams,"* 223.
[198] *Caleb Williams,* 303.
[199] Handwerk, "Of Caleb's Guilt and Godwin's Truth: Ideology and Ethics in *Caleb Williams,"* 943.
[200] Ibid, 951.

"excess" of Caleb's guilt at the end serves as a "sign of the limits of his self-recognition,"[201] his vision obscured by chivalric ideology. He has not changed, but rather, regressed. When Falkland first confesses his murder to Caleb in Volume II, Caleb says: "No spark of malignity had harboured in my soul. I had always reverenced the sublime mind of Mr. Falkland; I reverenced it still. My offence had merely been a mistaken thirst of knowledge."[202] It seems he has reverted to this: regret about his only epistemological tool and a reverence for Mr. Falkland's "sublime" mind.

Caleb's idolization of Falkland as sublime and as more-than-human runs throughout, rendered as a romanticized reverence for his master and, on the other side of the very same coin, a threatening, Gothic force. Monika Fludernik discusses this double-edged sword of Falkland's sublime and says: "The system of romantic inequality…corrupts and ruins both the master and the servant, the oppressor and the slave. It forces the master to exercise his power to the hilt…and it forces the oppressed to become artful in their legitimate defence […] Like the sublime, sympathy is therefore a concept of threatening ambivalence…In present-day society, Things As They Are display a tarnished, adulterated reality of the sublime."[203] In the end, both Falkland and Caleb are ruined by the system of power at play. Even Mr. Collins, who once acted as liaison, is a hollow husk of what he once was, having been sent over to the West Indies to take over Falkland's affairs there.

That the character's name in the title is equated with *Things as They Are* seems to foreshadow that the eponymous Caleb is eventually subsumed by those very *things as they are.* The true revolutionary potential of Caleb's discovery is defanged by his ultimate reversion to

[201] Ibid, 954.
[202] *Caleb Williams,* 130.
[203] Monika Fludernik, "William Godwin's 'Caleb Williams': The Tarnishing of the Sublime," *ELH* vol 68 no 4 (Winter 2001): 887-888.

chivalric ideals and romantic loyalty to his master. “I have now no character which I wish to vindicate,” he says, emptied now and entangled in Falkland’s charisma as he was at the very start. This sentence works on multiple levels. On the first, “character” means “reputation,” social perceptions of the subject, which is another way in which Caleb is feminized and brought to ruin within the narrative. On a second level, to be emptied of character despite *being a fictional character* is to be entangled in normative scripts; one recalls Catherine Gallagher’s argument in *Nobody’s Story* that women authors of the eighteenth century turned to writing “nonreferential” female characters to avoid biographical interpretations and more serious real-world consequences. One also recalls Pope’s line “most women have no Characters at all”[204] in *Epistle to a Lady,* a poem that plays with generalization of the gender according to the patriarchal majority and the more charming particularities of the addressee. The feminization of Caleb in Godwin’s work asserts his position as a Gothic ingénu unveiling the corruption and violence of the patriarchy and state power (which work in tandem: the lower class is feminized in the narrative) but ultimately unable to change it; if he were more of an individual, more of a “character,” he might be able to, but he is part of a system, a cog in the machine, a transcriber barred from writing his own words. The iron chest looms large over the narrative, functioning metaphorically as the titular *things as they are*: protected from transparency, unchangeable because they are unknowable and tangled, inextricably linked to past, present, and future. The revolution, if any may happen at all, must lie beyond the text, in readers who can read the irony and tragedy in the postscript.

In her account of curiosity in the eighteenth-century novel, Barbara M. Benedict argues that “curiosity was represented as a rebellious impulse that could endanger the state and the

[204] Alexander Pope, *Epistle to a Lady Of the Characters of WOMEN,* line 2.

individual and that consequently required defusing through ridicule and reproof, spectacle and sententiousness…Curiosity appears as a tyrannical desire to control others that creates monsters."[205] For her, *Caleb Williams* "portray[s] curiosity as a cultural ambition that dangerously sexualizes identity and threatens the very integrity of the self,"[206] "depict[ing] inquiry as a desire that compromises not only society, but also the virtue and integrity of heroines and heroes themselves"[207]; by contrast, Austen's Catherine, written from a "postrevolutionary perspective," can "see the truth behind the veil" but "cannot remedy it."[208] In this chapter, I have argued that this kind of reading takes the asymmetrical narrative of Caleb Williams too much for granted, too much at face value. The transgression is not so much Caleb's curiosity as it is Falkland's assumption of transgression and his punitive pursuit. Both *Northanger Abbey* and *Caleb Williams* are more alike than it would seem; both end with the protagonists further subsumed in the power structures—patriarchal reading practices, the reading practices of the ruling class—from which the Gothic stems. Catherine Morland marries the son of her banisher, and while they live adjacent to the Abbey, not within the Abbey itself, she is closer than ever to the novel's surveyor. Caleb Williams not only forgives Falkland of his crimes, but he also, mistakenly, takes up those very crimes as his own, enchanted and entangled by the romance of chivalry. The revolutionary potential of these books folds in on itself, which ultimately serves as critique of feudalistic patriarchy and its Gothic ghosts for their very impossibility of escape. These books seem to suggest that, even if one can lift the veil off of these hierarchies, the hierarchies will prove such revelations ineffectual. As the nineteenth century dawns, Caleb's journey is taken a step further in the British Romantic novel: these later

[205] Benedict, 22.
[206] Ibid, 229.
[207] Ibid, 233.
[208] Ibid, 232.

novels suggest that patriarchal surveillance such as Tilney's and Falkland's are no longer Gothic, but good, as seemingly embedded in the everyday and benign as the surface of a lacquered cabinet.

Chapter 3: Naïveté and the National Tale

The Wild Irish Girl (1806), Waverley (1814), and Mansfield Park (1814)

The national tale got off to a strange start with Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* in 1800. Set "before the year 1782"—that is, before the year of a short-lived Irish legislative independence—and published in the year of the Act of Union, the tale is narrated by Thady, a steward to the Rackrent family who are neither completely native Irish nor completely Anglo-Irish. Bearing the name O'Shaughlin before an "act of Parliament" orders them to change it, the Rackrents are a profligate family whose estate Thady's more responsible and ambitious son eventually inherits.

Much like Evelina's narration, the position of Thady's narration has been an object of critical scrutiny for decades. Some have interpreted Thady's narration as Edgeworth's critique of passive acceptance of the ruling class through a period of historical transition[209]; others have interpreted it as a clever deceptiveness on his side, a mask for deeper knowledge and cunning[210]; and others still have argued that Thady's narration is Edgeworth's quaint way of domesticating political conflict and arguing pro-Union.[211] The scholarly non-consensus speaks to the power of Edgeworth's irony, and the ambiguities present in the text. First, it looks backward in time, pre-independence, as well as pre-Act of Union. Secondly, Thady's very position in the family and

[209] See Stanley Solomon, "Ironic Perspective in Maria Edgeworth's 'Castle Rackrent,'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique,* vol 2, no 1 (January 1972): 68-73 and Christina Morin, "Preferring Spinsterhood? Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent,* and Ireland," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland/Iris an Dá Chultúr,* vol 23 (2008), 36-54.
[210] John McDonagh, "'I Know Something Now of My Irish Subjects': Castle Rackrent and Maria Edgeworth's Imagined Communities," *studies: An Irish Quarterly Review,* vol 92, no 367 (Autumn 2003), 278-286.
[211] Haruko Takakuwa, "The Vulnerable Framework: Competing Discourses in 'Castle Rackrent,'" *Journal of Irish Studies,* vol 19 (2004), 93-104.

the occasion of his narration are ambiguous: the term "steward," John McDonagh explains,[212] bore multiple meanings during this period and in different places, and the very fact of Thady's episodic yet retrospective narration is strange. Is he speaking now from a position of power, having survived four heirs' tenures and witnessed his own son's rise? Thirdly, Thady's narration is supplemented by hefty editorial notes by a fictional editor.

The authority of Thady's narration—as well any absolute interpretation of him as innocent and honest—is constantly put into question by the English editor's notes as well as his own utterances: for instance, a violent marriage is downplayed as a mistress's cloistering up, and a patriarch's several lawsuits are chalked up to him being "a great lawyer,"[213] experience ironically equated to mastery. What some have read as a novel of "literary unionism," then, is in fact a more nuanced picture,[214] reflected biographically by the fact that Maria Edgeworth and her father were for the Union in principle, but her father ultimately voted against it. This ambivalence might make sense of how Edgeworth's novel's naïve and rather unreliable narrator is an unsolvable problem, poking holes in any absolute interpretation.

Thady's naïveté lays bare the complicated history between England and Ireland and reveals the consequences of a coerced Union: an ontologically ambiguous system—one that is neither fully Irish nor English, one that is neither fully historical nor fully anachronistic, one in which profligate landlords are outlived by servants—that keeps him in this ignorance. The decision to focalize this story through Thady also serves to debunk the idea that marriage—the union that keeps the landlords in power—is a guarantor of happiness and well-being. To this latter point, Edgeworth suggests that frequently the feminized subject in such a union—

[212] McDonagh, 280.
[213] Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (Macmillan and Co 1895), ch. 1.
[214] See Morin, "Preferring Spinsterhood? Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent,* and Ireland."

diegetically, the wives of Castle Rackrent, and analogously, Ireland in the Act of Union[215]—is vulnerable to violence and coercion, and bears the brunt of such a match. This aspect of *Castle Rackrent* is reminiscent of Toni Bowers's theorization of early eighteenth-century seduction narratives, wherein inexperienced ingénues are pursued by authoritative figures, reflecting the political urgency of resisting the power of the Whigs: "how (and how far) to resist the demands of authority figures…without forfeiting Christian virtue."[216] Yet of course, *Castle Rackrent* is formally complex and although there are scenes in which Thady hints at seduction narratives between the estate owners and their wives, this is not the focal point. As Bowers writes in her coda, "Increasingly over the century's last few decades, and especially during the 1790s, authors who focused directly on seduction and betrayal were more likely to be political radicals than traditionalists."[217] *Castle Rackrent* therefore remains ambiguous in political stance, the division between authority figures and naïve ingénu(e)s blurred.

The text's formal metalepsis, which Mary Mullen describes as "collisions between narrative levels,"[218] or what Daniel Hack has called its "supplementarity"[219] reveals how Union is necessarily an ongoing process to stave off anxieties about Irish duplicity *as well as* English coercion. That is, both Thady and the editor are necessary counterweights to one another in constructing such a tale of an Ireland suspended in history, hovering between ontological states

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[215] Mary Jean Corbett writes: "Locating the male protagonist on the side of the dominant national power, the marriage plot in these novels functions as an imperial family plot as well, constructing Ireland as a complementary but ever unequal partner in the family of Great Britain" (*Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 53).
[216] Toni Bowers, *Force or Fraud; British seduction stories and the problem of resistance, 1660-1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23.
[217] Ibid, 297.
[218] See Mary Mullen, "Anachronistic Aesthetics: Maria Edgeworth and the 'Uses' of History," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* vol 26, no 2 (Winter 2013-2014): 236.
[219] See Daniel Hack, "Inter-Nationalism: 'Castle Rackrent' and Anglo-Irish Union," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction,* vol 29, no 2 (Winter 1996):147.

of belonging. While Thady's naïveté poses a challenge to the editor's (and reader's) acts of interpretation, the editor's very presence simultaneously renders Thady's narrative a historical document and de-fangs it, placing it in the past as a seemingly harmless record.

Edgeworth's choice of Thady as a narrator, then, carries echoes of Godwin's Caleb Williams, both narrators holding up a critical mirror to systems that make possible such a subject: the servant whose social position hinges on their obliviousness to the misdeeds of their employers. At the same time, each finds himself in a complex relationship with his employer, a relationship that disempowers these narrators of full revolutionary possibility: in the revised version of *Caleb Williams,* the narrator forgives Falkland and feels guilty for his employer's fate; in *Castle Rackrent,* Thady's narration demonstrates a gap between his utterances of allegiance to the Rackrents and the upshot of the narrative: his son's inheritance of the estate. Both novels fold in on themselves. For Edgeworth to have published this collapsing tale in 1800 looking back pre-Irish independence and pre-Union is to lay bare the contingencies of history in the making; having one such as Thady narrate from a position of historical suspension, ambiguous allegiance, and dubious knowledge only drives this point further. This is not a history of direct or clear causation, but of a network of dependencies and a plethora of timelines coinciding to bring about history-as-process.

I begin this chapter with a reading of *Castle Rackrent* because it marks a transition point between the naïve narrators of the previous chapter and those of this chapter: a transition point between naïveté that critiques systems of power and naïveté that functions to sustain systems of power or further solidify them through obfuscation, accumulation, and deflection of individual agency. The novels covered in this chapter are all formally strange. Dorothy Van Ghent writes that "the procedure of the novel is to individualize…History, on the other hand, proceeds by

generalization."[220] Yet by gesturing to history in their formal apparatuses to varying degrees, the novels here vacillate between the individual and the general, laying bare ambivalences about history-in-making. Featuring naïve protagonists and in most part narrated by these naïve protagonists, they reject clear historical causation and complicate a narrative of progress. In these novels, protagonistic naïveté challenges the bildungsroman form and rejects a clear-cut narrative of historical progress for the nation. Instead of telos, the narrative form of the novels rather resembles something like accumulation: protagonists collect experiences without these experiences amounting to any significant knowledge, without them signifying character growth or epistemological change. For these national tales, this tends to mean warped time: a temporality and epistemology characterized by delay and deflection of knowledge and therefore of culpability and agency.

This chapter will cover Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), and end with a cogitation on Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814). All three of these novels make and undo the problems they present, placing conflict in a bottle and letting it float away as if the respective English imperial projects were always meant to be. In examining the first two novels, I ask of the national tale: What happens when it is not a servant such as Thady but a historically powerful agent who moves through the world naively, when it is not one such as Thady but one such as Sir Murtagh who holds this epistemological position? How does this change the political stakes and the logic of narrative progress of these texts? If Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* reveals that history is always in the making and that the "Union [is] a continuing or reiterable…process of assimilation,"[221] how do these later novels think about

[220] Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1953), 4.
[221] Hack, 147.

England's acts of colonization on the British Isles? While the first two chapters of this dissertation argued that characterological naïveté is an epistemology—though with limited revolutionary ends—and a vehicle of satire and critique, this chapter argues that for the early nineteenth-century novel, naïveté acts formally to delay knowledge of historical agency and to exculpate England's acts of colonization in Ireland and Scotland. While *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Waverley* chronicle acts of English settlement on other lands, *Mansfield Park* chronicles a *settling into* and a solidification of what has already been. This chapter traces this shift, this solidification of an English subjectivity that anticipates later, more overt imperial mindsets of nineteenth-century British literature. Protagonistic naïveté contributes to a novel form characterized by accumulation rather than progress, by contingencies and inescapable associations rather than by clear hierarchies or paths forward.

"I Should Yet Know All!"[222]: Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and Knowledges Off-Page

Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) is often summarized as a novel told from the epistolary perspective of Horatio, a disgraced son of an English aristocrat, petulant and exiled to his father's estate in Ireland in the 1700s. In spending time and eventually falling in love with the Irish princess Glorvina—whose ancestral land has been occupied by Horatio's forefathers since Cromwell—Horatio learns to cast off his anti-Irish prejudices and appreciate Irish culture. Critics describe the novel, published six years after the Act of Union but for the most part taking place before this historic event, as one of reconciliation through the marital union of Horatio and

[222] Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl; A National Tale* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics 1999), 228. References are to this edition.

the Irish princess Glorvina. The extent to which this reconciliation is a peaceful and unproblematic one has long been debated. On the one side, scholars such as Katarzyna Bartoszyńska argue that "a gothic undertone"[223] to the novel, especially to the novel's theory of sentiment, troubles the happy ending and casts a dubious eye towards Glorvina; in such readings, the novel bears vestiges of fear of "Irish violence and barbarism—one that a reader of 1806, for whom the violence of the 1798 rebellion was still a fresh memory, could not fail to register."[224] On the other, scholars such as Thomas Tracy argue that the novel imagines a peaceful union possible with "the egalitarian marriage of the English hero and the Gaelic Irish heroine,"[225] reading Glorvina as the more knowledgeable and authoritative of the two. For Tracy, the progressive gender politics of this specific union and the novel's own training of the reader in Irish history and culture make reconciliation possible.

What these readings make clear is that Glorvina is a kind of iron chest of this novel. Horatio's reading of her has a strange doubleness to it: his uneasiness about her is captured by his nightmare in which she is a monstrous gorgon under a veil, and his exuberant love for her is repeated in his frequent crooning of her "air of exquisite naïveté."[226] What we will never know is which of Horatio's interpretations of her character is correct, as the narrative is focalized through—perhaps skewed by—his kaleidoscopic and myopic vision, as well as—something most scholars seem to omit—the letters of the Earl of M--. In leaving out the fact that Horatio's narration is bookended by letters from his father, scholars have also left out the climax of the novel: the remarkably deferred revelation that Glorvina is engaged to the Earl. Although Aileen

[223] Katarzyna Bartoszyńska, "Adam Smith's Problems: Sympathy in Owenson's 'Wild Irish Girl' and Edgeworth's 'Ennui,'" *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua,* vol 17 no 3 (Autumn 2013), 134.
[224] Ibid, 136.
[225] Thomas Tracy, "The Mild Irish Girl: Domesticating the National Tale," *Éire-Ireland,* vol 39: 1&2; Earrach/Samhradh/Spring/Summer 2004: 83.
[226] Owenson, 80.

Douglas claims that "to a degree…Owenson herself encouraged the firm subordination of her work's formal qualities to a consideration of what it revealed of Irish life and manners,"[227] the sheer gap in scholarship on father-son marital rivalry is astonishing. Brief moments of examination have ranged from Melissa Fegan's claim that "The incestuousness of the love plot…is enhanced by the constant references to Hamlet throughout the novel"[228] and illuminates how much of a stranger to us Horatio and his father both are to readers, to Tracy's subtextual acknowledgement of the ease of the resolution to the "Oedipal conflict between Horatio and his father…[pointing] toward a restoration of the inheritance."[229] Tracy further argues that the marriage is an equitable one as the couple is blessed both by the Prince and the colonizer. While discourse about the allegory of reconciliation through marriage has been invaluable in Owenson scholarship, I will be focusing more on this bizarre deferral of the revelation at the altar and how the novel's formal aspects complicate this conversation about Owenson's political message and about Glorvina's position. There is more to be said of the parallels to Oedipus, a tale of not knowing, of delayed revelation, of the cyclicality of tragedy. A crucial difference is that *The Wild Irish Girl* side-steps the tragedy without side-stepping the form of deferred knowledge; it ultimately endorses naïveté as a political tool.

In this section of the dissertation chapter, I argue that *The Wild Irish Girl* is characterized by epistemological delay: the novel keeps Horatio and its readers naïve for most of it, and by delaying Horatio and Glorvina's knowledges, as well as the reader's, the novel hinges the possibility of reconciliation on the naïveté of a younger, less directly culpable generation.

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[227] Aileen Douglas, "'Whom Gentler Stars Unite': Fiction and Union in the Irish Novel," *Irish University Review,* vol 41, no 1, Irish Fiction 1660-1830 (Spring/Summer 2011): 188.
[228] Melissa Fegan, "'Isn't it your own country?': The Stranger in Nineteenth-Century Irish Literature," *The Yearbook of English Studies,* vol 34, Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing (2004): 40.
[229] Tracy, 86.

Owenson can conceive of reconciliation only by imagining delayed epistemologies; the young Englishman Horatio is exculpated, in other words, by not knowing for the entirety of his narration either about Glorvina's attachment to his father or about his father's (the more culpable English aristocrats) connection to the Irish royal family.

Treatments of the novel's form have focused on the genre of the national tale, describing the defense of Irish culture, language, and history in Owenson's novel and the lengthy footnotes that supplement the letters. Katie Trumpener, pulling from Bakhtin's adventure-time chronotope, theorizes the national tale as one whose movement is "geographical, rather than historical," while the historical novel is temporal.[230] However, *The Wild Irish Girl* challenges Trumpener's theory because of how much Horatio does change over the course of his stay in Ireland, as well as the novel's temporal pivots and epistemological deferrals. In another famous treatment of the novel as a national tale, Ina Ferris writes that Owenson counters dominant London-based narratives of Ireland with an "elaborate subtext of footnotes in which a personal, authorial voice criticizes, revises, commends, and otherwise engages a plethora of texts on Ireland written from different points of view."[231] Responding to Terry Eagleton's reading of Irish fiction "holding the prejudices of its implicit [English] addressee steadily in mind,"[232] Ferris asserts: "Morgan overrides the inhibiting possibility by making the context of response the explicit condition of her narrative rather than its paralyzing shadow."[233] Indeed, like Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent, The Wild Irish Girl* has a complicated relationship to narration and creates dialogue representative and highly aware of differing national perspectives, full of real-world references

[230] Katie Trumpener, "National Character, National Plots: National Tale and Historical Novel in the Age of Waverley, 1806-1830), *ELH* vol 60, no 3 (Autumn 1993), 697.
[231] Ina Ferris, "Narrating Cultural Encounter: Lady Morgan and the Irish National Tale," *Nineteenth-Century Literature,* vol 51 no 3 (December 1996): 291.
[232] Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso 1995), 201.
[233] Ibid.

and footnotes laying out research and editorial descriptions. Even though these are fictional narratives, they are in direct conversation with real-world history. Horatio himself is a narrator who changes his mind about Ireland over the course of the novel.

Besides the critical discussion of the footnotes abutting Horatio's letters, strikingly little attention been paid to the novel's other rather strange formal elements: the introductory letter exchange between the Earl and Horatio; the epistolary narration of Horatio, cut abruptly off before the climactic encounter between father and son at the altar can transpire; the sudden turn to third-person narrator; and the ending that returns to the father's non-dated (read: non-historical) epistolary voice. These elements contribute to the effect that Anahid Nersessian notes, when she describes that the novel "comes across as ultimately pro-imperial, [and] seems to figure progress as an egress from history, an escape made manifest by the novel's own nonchalant erosion of linear time by narrative space."[234] The novel's sense of warped time takes out causation and washes Horatio's hands of complicity in his own English history.

Susan M. Kroeg argues helpfully that the novel parallels Irish colonization and slavery in the West Indies, and presents education about Irish culture and landlord presence in Ireland (rather than absenteeism) as the solution to the violence of slavery. In her reading, Horatio's active involvement with Irish natives contrasts with the steward Clendenning's lack of attachment to the people.[235] Horatio's growing fluency with the culture is also importantly compared to the absenteeism of his father the Earl from his Irish estate.[236] I agree that Horatio's epistemological experience is privileged by the text, but want to build on Kroeg's reading by

[234] Anahid Nersessian, *Utopia, Limited: Romanticism and Adjustment* (Harvard: Harvard University Press 2015): 122.
[235] Susan M. Kroeg, "'The Transmigrated Soul of Some West Indian Planter': Absenteeism, Slavery, and the Irish National Tale," *The Irish in the Atlantic World,* ed. David T. Gleeson (University of South Carolina Press, 2010): 117.
[236] Ibid.

arguing that the novel suggests that peaceful Union can only happen with a disappearance of forefathers—not a disappearance of Irish history or of English history, but the elimination of those who would remember historical atrocities better. Glorvina's father passes at the site of double-betrayal, and Horatio's father, the Earl of M--- must return to his position off the page, away from the scenes of historical violence and marital union, in order for reconciliation to even be possible. Harmonious integration can only happen through the fresh naïveté of the younger generation. Horatio's own deception of Glorvina and her family is eclipsed by his father's, which precedes his in temporality and exceeds it in severity. Given the Earl's title and position of power compared to Horatio's position as the second son, the novel hauls responsibility onto the Earl and exculpates Horatio.

Horatio's experience of Ireland is one of delayed revelation, both about Irish history and his own. Before he narrates meeting the Irish royal family at Inismore, he exclaims in a letter to his friend:

> The descendant of a murderer! The very scoundrel steward of my father reveling in the property of a man, who shelters his aged head beneath the ruins of those walls where his ancestors bled under the uplifted sword of mine. Why this, you will say, is the romance of a novel-read school boy. Are we not all, the little and the great, descended from assassins; was not the first born man a fratricide? And still, on the field of unappeased contention, does not 'man the murderer, meet the murderer, man?' Yes, yes, 'tis all true; humanity acknowledges it and shudders. But still I wish *my* family had never possessed an acre of ground in this country, or possessed it on other terms. I always knew the estate fell into our family in the

civil wars of Cromwell, and in the world's language, was the well-earned meed of my progenitor's valour; but I seemed to hear it now for the first time.[237]

Horatio's affect is reminiscent of a Gothic ingénue's, shocked to discover a horrific truth. What is interesting about this passage is that Horatio acknowledges how educated he is in his family's history. He has already learned the sordid details of the Cromwellian civil wars, and knows even the discourse around it like a true academic, anticipating counterarguments with ease: "you will say," "yes, yes, 'tis all true," and rebutting with fervor. His assertion of the English reaction to his feelings of horror at his complicity is a universalizing and thus absolving notion that each individual on earth is connected to some wrongdoing, and he privileges his own personal experience over this universalization. He is not the steward Thady here, but still he appropriates the stance that he realizes his family's culpability as if "for the first time."

Reading Horatio as an ingénu helps to place this novel—even though it is one that wants to exit from history and historical causation—within a novelistic history that masculinizes sensibility. As I have tried to demonstrate in previous chapters, when young women protagonists and young male servants are naïve, novels tend to take on a satirical and Gothic mode. A female protagonist's naïveté might turn the satire towards other characters at the same time that it highlights her vulnerability in patriarchal society, the looming spectre of violence ever present. When a young male protagonist in a position of political, economic, and colonial power is naïve, however, the result is a novelistic neutralization of the protagonist's power. At the same time that the novels acknowledge these naïfs hand in power and colonialism, the satirical pattern is at the expense of male naïfs, which produces the effect of rendering them laughable, somewhat pathetic, and almost, in the narration, harmless. This in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* happens

[237] Owenson, *Wild Irish Girl,* 42.

towards satirical ends—Gulliver is meant to be laughed at for his inability to recognize the humanity of his family and, separately, his own after his time with the Houyhnhnms. For naïveté is less a way to turn the critique inwards at his own ideology—although Owenson does critique his anti-Irish prejudice—and more the novel's vehicle for exculpating its own young protagonists. His epistemological position as ingénu, then, complicates the straightforward parallels of the heterosexual-marriage-as-political-reconciliation argument.[238] Indeed, when Glorvina asks which of the men (Horatio or his father) is responsible for the death of the Prince, Horatio and his father are both placed in the same category as masculine imperial force. However, this alignment does not stay consistent, as the novel consistently hammers the point of Horatio's naïveté about Ireland and about his own English heritage. As Aileen Douglas points out, "The allusiveness of Horatio's narration exposes him to irony and intimates that his self-knowledge is no more secure than his mistaken views of Ireland."[239] Both feminized in turn, Horatio and Glorvina are ultimately politically absolved by the narrative.

When Horatio awakens after his fall in the household of the Irish royals, he seems to realize his position again: "Good God! I, the son of Lord M----, the hereditary object of hereditary detestation, beneath the roof of my implacable enemy! Supported in his arms; relieved from anguish by his charitable attention; honored by the solicitude of his lovely daughter…What a series of emotions did this conviction awaken in my heart! Emotions of a character, an energy, long unknown to my apathized feelings."[240] His acknowledgement of his historical complicity, with notable repetitions of "hereditary," leads him to deceive the family by assuming a fake

[238] See Corbett, *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 53.
[239] Aileen Douglas, "'Whom Gentler Stars Unite': Fiction and Union in the Irish Novel," *Irish University Review,* vol 41 no 1, Irish Fiction 1660-1830 (Spring/Summer 2011): 188.
[240] Owenson, *Wild Irish Girl,* 54.

identity: Henry Mortimer, a traveling artist. He again acknowledges how others may read his situation, and renders himself again an unknowing ingénu who is feeling and realizing this as if for the first time. In the beginning portion of the novel, while Horatio refutes the English notion of universal culpability (the references to Cromwell and a history so generalized that there is no individual blame) with an assertion of empathy and responsibility, the third-person conclusion has his father echoing that same English notion. At the altar, in an attempt to explain to the Irish prince the relationship between father and son and the reason for his initial deception, the Earl says, "My first overtures of amity were treated with scorn; my first offers of service rejected with disdain; and my crime was, that in a distant age an ancestor of mine, by the fortune of war, had possessed himself of those domains, which, in a more distant age, a remoter ancestor of your's [*sic*] won by similar means."[241] Although with the tone of apology and the possessive "my," these sentences do not convey the Earl taking responsibility. Passive voice abounds. His rhetorical strategy here is to increase the scale of history to such a degree that everyone and no one is to blame: if both victim and perpetrator have ancestors who have been both victims and perpetrators, then each individual's actions are but drops of water in torrent they cannot help. While Horatio in previous letters counters this historical scale with his active engagement with Irish natives and his own sense of individual responsibility, the novel as a whole leans more towards the Earl's version of blame in hoisting the culpability onto the Earl rather than on the protagonists at the eleventh hour and then having him exit from the tale.

The ultimate revelation is that even though Horatio has been deceiving Glorvina and her father the prince, they all have been, as a collective, deceived by his father. The novel frames this as a worse deception because the Earl has already been—for the entirety of narrative time—

[241] Ibid, 240.

acquainted with Ireland and has already been long deceiving the Irish. Horatio is exculpated, the wrongdoings of his forefathers upstaging his. The novel seems to posit this when Glorvina, her father now dead from the shock of double-deception, shrieks to the two Englishmen: "'Which of you murdered my father?' Then looking tenderly on the younger M. (whose eyes not less wild than her own had followed her every motion), she softly added, 'It was not you, my love!'"[242] Horatio is in this parenthetical epistemologically and sentimentally aligned with Glorvina, while Horatio's father is tacitly labeled the murderer of the Irish prince.

However much knowledge Horatio and Glorvina can accumulate and store about Ireland, however much empathy they learn to show to each other, they move through narrative time without knowing, on Horatio's part, the Earl's dealings in Ireland and his engagement to Glorvina, and on Glorvina's part, the Earl's true identity and connection to the man with whom she is in love. The novel seems to suggest that union can happen peaceably through knowledge acquisition so long as certain knowledges are not physically present, as long as certain bearers of knowledges are defanged. The text enacts this kind of exculpation of Horatio with its abrupt turn to third-person narration before the scene of double-culpability transpires. The everydayness of epistolarity is abruptly turned into a distanced, third-person historical account. This is a formal manifestation of the historical increase of scale for which the Earl advocates. It is as if having Horatio speak about this ultimate revelation would be too much for the tale to handle, too much for reconciliation to be possible.

The last letter from the Earl is a strange hybrid of intimate epistolarity and distanced third-person narration, painting each individual as a mere speck flowing along the current of history. The letter also signifies his ultimate physical distance from his son, upon whose

[242] Ibid, 242.

shoulders, the novel asserts, the responsibility of achieving true reconciliation between England and Ireland rests. The Earl's advice to him is to "be more anxious to remove *causes* than to punish *effects,*"[243] is importantly reflected by the novel as a whole, in which fathers are removed so that the younger generation can forgive violent histories and deceptions. Eamonn Dunne reads the Earl's letter as ironic, as he explains to his son "how he…was only interested in Glorvina as a matter of duty in an attempt to restore her to her rightful place as Princess of Inismore; but, as already suggested, such a course of action…would not so much as restore Glorvina's 'proper' place, but displace her rights as a landowner outright."[244] Dunne's larger argument is that the novel casts doubt on the interpretation that the novel presents a happy marriage. Indeed, any absolute interpretation of the novel as happy fails to take into account the more gothic elements and various focalizations of the text. By privileging Horatio's letters over the asymmetrical framework of the tale, readers run the risk of falling into Horatio's myopia.

The earl's final letter is without a date and full of generalized maxims that dissolve history and causation. Nersessian describes this vacuuming-out of history: "When we lose the train of Horatio's thought, we lose the eighteenth century with it…It is as if the break in Horatio's point of view provides an intermediate space in which the personal history of the letter gives way to the anonymous history of an untimed future."[245] She goes on to describe the result of the Earl's letter: "The letter avoids assigning grammatical agency either to empire or to its representatives. Like a bad frost or a rough wind, the English have nipped Ireland's development in the bud but only by accident."[246] This is a direct continuation of the Earl's speech of

[243] Ibid, 251.
[244] Eamonn Dunne, "'She Sang Beyond the Genius of the Sea': Sydney Owenson's Topographical Ethics," *Nordic Irish Studies* vol 8 (2009): 15.
[245] Nersessian, 125.
[246] Ibid, 126.

absolution at the altar, a kind of zooming-out of historical culpability to the point where all men are merely players, rather than agents. To a certain extent, the heft of the novel's footnotes, its investment in Ireland literature and culture, and Horatio's own personalized narration put pressure on the earl's conception of anti-history. However, this only goes so far. The off-pageness of the earl's deception, the *post hoc* realizations of the narrator, and the turn to third-person in the eleventh hour of the novel serve the Earl's purpose, expelling historical causation and forgiving the young protagonists. Now both in Ireland for the foreseeable future, Horatio and Glorvina can act as Owenson's Irish do: putting their hearts above material concerns, forgiving past deceptions, and putting historical violence out of sight and out of mind.

By keeping Horatio, Glorvina, and the reader in naïveté about the Earl's deception, Owenson keeps these actors politically innocent, able to move forward by erasing problems of estate inheritance, keeping the drama off the page, accumulating knowledge about Irish culture without propelling imperial plots forward. Gorgons can remain in the past, elsewhere, off-the-page, and in dreams. The novel breaks the curse by moving it elsewhere, locking it into a distant past.

The Delayed Knowledges of *Waverley* (1814)

"'She loves you, and I believe you love her, though, perhaps, you have not found it out, for you are not celebrated for knowing your own mind very pointedly.'"—Fergus to Waverley[247]

[247] Walter Scott, *Waverley; or Tis Sixty Years Since* (Oxford World Classics 2015), 304.

Sir Walter Scott's novel *Waverley* is ultimately pro-imperialist, applauding Edward for his (very) eventual alignment with his Englishness. If we are to read the ending alone, privileging it as the political message of the novel, Edward Waverley chooses being a Good English Subject over his adventures and mishaps in the Highlands and over his romantic feelings for the Jacobite Flora. Yet the novel runs us through an extremely long journey before this, chronicling Edward's repeated instances of naïveté about politics, romance, and the rebellion that he is actively taking part in, despite his active part in it, his class privilege, and his education.

In this section, I am interested in how long it takes before Edward arrives at his pro-British realizations and the pro-British conclusion. I am interested in everything that comes before his rather abrupt change of mind, in the *waverly* path he takes to get there. I argue that *Waverley* presents a model for a masculine, pro-imperialist character who can be naïve just as he is traipsing through lands that his people are colonizing, and that the historical novel framework set markedly "sixty years since" functions to absolve both his English naïveté and tame the dangers of his naïveté and of the Scottish Highlands in an aestheticized past. That is, Waverley's naïveté is not in contradiction to his British-approved knowledge at the end of the novel, but part and parcel of being a Good British Subject. Although we could argue that all is neat and tidy at the end, with Edward marrying the morally pure English Rose (an extremely on-the-nose name) and realizing which side he should be on, that does not erase the long, rather winding journey he takes to get there. In this way, the novel seems to rehearse the growing pains of the Romantic novel and of a British writing and reading public thinking through their own history.

The novel begins with the literary maneuver of isolating the past in its subtitle, *Tis Sixty Years Since.* As several have noted, however, therein lies a small falsehood. Published in 1814, this novel relates the Jacobite Rising that took place closer to seventy years prior, and if one

counts the novel's exposition of the characters who help raise Edward Waverley, even more than that. The novel frequently hailed as the first historical novel, then, begins with a historical vagueness. Marilyn Orr describes this as Scott's way of "writing into his narrative the evanescence of the 'now' that will inevitably be written into it by time" and asserts that "this tactic of withholding the crucial date of the action and playing with the date of the writing and reading present has the effect of demythologizing history and drawing the reader into an unusually intimate relationship with the past."[248] She goes on to argue that the novel tells the story of Waverley transforming from an individual who privileges private time to an individual who sees himself as engaging in the process of history, of becoming increasingly aware of public, historical time. Readers' experience of narrative time in the novel, then, mirrors Waverley's, as we are initially "deprived of the crucial names, dates, places, and circumstances that would provide the historical context and significance of events."[249]

For Orr, and for several scholars who have observed this readerly identification with the novel's protagonist, the stakes of this identification with such a protagonist are hermeneutic.[250] That is, identification with Waverley helps to illuminate something about Waverley's own *bildungsroman* journey or readers' own historical positioning. Along these lines, Georg Lukács argues that the effect produced by the historical novel, starting with *Waverley* in 1814, is a particular kind of readerly awareness: "Hence the concrete possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see in history something

[248] Marilyn Orr, "Real and Narrative Time: Waverley and the Education of Memory," *Studies in English Literature,* vol 31 no 4 (Nineteenth Century, Autumn 1991), 729.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Isabelle Bour, for example, likens Caleb Williams to Waverley: "a fit hero for romance…the magnetic sympathy is akin to a reader's idenfiication with the fictional characters of his reading." "Sensibility as Epistemology in *Caleb Williams, Waverley,* and *Frankenstein,*" *SEL 1500-1900,* vol 45 no 4 (Autumn 2005), 816.

which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them."[251] But as Saree Makdisi persuasively argues, the progressive possibilities of this hermeneutics are limited in Scott's novel itself: "The Jacobite rebellion ends as it had begun—in the novel's background. The news from faraway Culloden enters the narrative and reaches Edward only as disembodied information."[252] When the story is over, Makdisi continues, the door closes on the Highlands, which remain "blank not only because they are neither scene nor seen, but because they have been cleansed, drained of significance and signification."[253] The privileging of the English hero's journey is one that sweeps the Highlands offstage.

For various reasons, scholars have often claimed that *Waverley* is a *bildungsroman*: because it chronicles Edward's transformation from a quixotic individual to one who is cognizant of his role in historical time[254]; because Edward grows from youthful, unthinking Jacobitism to a more mature Hanoverian moderate politics[255]; or because the protagonist must go through adventure-romance before settling down contently[256]. In this section, I hope to trouble the claim that this novel is a *bildungsroman.* In fact, Edward's naïveté functions to help Edward survive through—and at times, away from—the vicissitudes of history and plot, delaying his epistemological growth, awareness, and transformation. It functions to occasion events, the consequences of which he is excused from because of this very naïveté. If my sentences read as circular here, it is perhaps because of the formal circularity of the protagonist's central trait,

[251] Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 24.
[252] Saree Makdisi, "Colonial Space and the Colonization of Time in Scott's 'Waverley,'" *Studies in Romanticism,* vol 34 no 2 (Summer 2015): 166.
[253] Ibid, 175.
[254] See Orr.
[255] See Makdisi, "Colonial Space and the Colonization of Time."
[256] Chris Ann Matteo, "'Le Grand Jeu' and the Great Game: The Politics of Play in Walter Scott's 'Waverley' and Rudyard Kipling's 'Kim,'" *Journal of Narrative Theory,* vol 30 no 2 (Summer 2000), 165.

towards which the entire novel is pulled as if by gravity. The plot therefore piles up but without any force upon Waverley, a force himself.

In the same vein, and furthering Chris Ann Matteo's claim that Waverley is a "synecdoche," "the Englishman for England,"[257] I argue that Waverley's naïveté serves as a formal vector, the very foundation upon which he can careen through his life with little to no consequence, leaving him untouched by history even as he realizes he is an agent in historical time. I have compared this mobility enabled by naïveté to that of Forrest Gump: while a vastly different context, medium, and time period, the Gumpian naïveté which absolves his part in American imperialism and war is strikingly similar. Whereas Horatio's revelations transpire off-page, Waverley's realizations about how his allegiances and associations are being read politically occur *post hoc.* This temporal and epistemological delay is not simply a demonstration of the youth realizing his mistakes and in effect growing up; this delay reveals that Waverley as an Englishman is in a position at all to not think historically, to not be aware of his agency in historical time. Waverley is, against all odds and his social position, naïve and it is okay that he is naïve. Even though this seems to be corrected at the very, very end of the novel, it takes him a grueling, long time to get there, going through several repeated scenes of unchecked, uncorrected naïveté—in the realms of war, politics, and love. In so arguing, my reading of this novel in effect troubles its common categorizations as a *bildungsroman* as well as, separately, a historical novel as per Lukacs's definition.

In the introductory chapter, Scott explains his character-naming process: "I must modestly admit I am too diffident of my own merit to place it in unnecessary opposition to preconceived associations: I have therefore, like a maiden knight with his white shield, assumed

[257] Matteo, "'Le Grand Jeu,'" 166.

for my hero, Waverley, an uncontaminated name, bearing with its sound little of good or evil, excepting what the reader shall be hereafter pleased to affix to it."[258] Jerome Mitchell interprets this sentence to mean that Scott is "liken[ing] his hero…to a medieval knight."[259] But grammatically, the sentence likens Scott to the maiden knight and Waverley to his shield. Much has been said of the name's evocation of the protagonist's "unwavering and unsettled habit of mind which is most averse to study"[260] and his therefore *wavering* politics, but not much has been said of Scott's rendering of Waverley as a *tabula rasa* in name, placing interpretive onus on the reader rather than on Scott himself, the author and narrator persona. Making his protagonist an as-yet uncontaminated "white" shield, both deflective and absorbent of interpretive attempts, is a telling authorial move that simultaneously protects the author, invites readerly identification with Edward, evokes images of war while romanticizing it, and proleptically exculpates Edward's actions. For a shield is not a weapon, but it is also not *not* a weapon: its nominal function is only to defend and react, but it has a force of its own and can be used offensively in battle, much like Edward's naïveté.

In framing the novel as a whole in the same introductory chapter, Scott continues this formal exculpation, this attempt to tame this historical moment by framing it in several negatives:

> By fixing then the date of my story Sixty Years before this present 1st November, 1805, I would have my readers understand that they will meet in the following pages neither a romance of chivalry, nor a tale of modern manners; that my hero will neither have iron on his shoulders, as of yore, nor on the heels of his boots, as

[258] *Waverley,* 3.
[259] Jerome Mitchell, *Scott, Chaucer, and Medieval Romance: A Study in Sir Walter Scott's Indebtedness to the Literature of the Middle Ages* (The University Press of Kentucky), 86.
[260] *Waverley,* 35.

> is the present fashion of Bond Street; and that my damsels will neither be clothed 'in purple and in pall,' like the Lady Alice of an old ballad, nor reduced to the primitive nakedness of a modern fashionable at a route.[261]

This lengthy description of the tale in negative terms at the same time generalizes and specifies the project. The "neither…nor…" logical structure sets up binaries at the same time that it extirpates them. About this phenomenon, Silke Stroh argues against the assertion that the lack of clear dichotomies in the novel is a symptom of the heterogeneity of Scotland.[262] Indeed, neither the Scottish nor the Irish case is clean-cut in history, nor, as I hope to show in this chapter, in novels of this period. Simultaneous disavowal and absorption are how British unification in *Waverley* seem to work.

This is, in fact, also how Waverley's own naïveté works. His naïveté, his ability to be easily swayed unthinkingly by feeling, is the inciting incident of his journey, for example. His aunt is the one who catalyzes his enlistment in the army after observing that he is in danger of falling in love with the local Miss Sissly, who, unlike him, has powers of perception. In the several sentences detailing his turn of attentions towards women, he is not the subject of a single one of them: "Female forms of exquisite grace and beauty began to mingle in his mental adventures…The list of beauties who displaced their hebdomadal finery at the parish church of Waverley, was neither numerous nor select. By far the most passable was Miss Sissly."[263] His

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[261] *Waverley,* 4.
[262] Silke Stroh, "From Flirtations with Romantic Otherness to a More Integrated National Synthesis: 'Gentleman Savages' in Walter Scott's Novel Waverley," *Gaelic Scotland in the Colonial Imagination: Anglophone Writing from 1600-1900* (Northwestern University Press 2017), 145. For Stroh, the novel constructs cultural boundaries: "Ambivalence can also have a specific function in internal colonialism, since the deconstruction of internal boundaries can be motivated by a wish for the ideological unification of Britain's national community." I do not agree with Stroh's use of the term "internal colonialism" but I do find the framing of ambivalence helpful.
[263] *Waverley,* 21.

interests happen to him without anything done on his part. By contrast, Miss Sissly, the narrator suggests, has the capacity for machinations and schemes ("I know not whether it was by the 'merest accident in the world,'…or whether it was from a conformity of taste, that Miss Caecilia more than once crossed Edward in his favourite walks through Waverley Chase."[264]) Aunt Rachael has comparable senses of perception in regards to this blossoming romance, about which the narrator says: "Even the most simple and unsuspicious of the female sex have (God bless them!) an instinctive sharpness of perception in such matters, which sometimes goes the length of observing partialities that never existed, but rarely misses to detect such as pass actually under observation."[265] The dichotomy here between the unthinking Englishman and more aware and cunning characters—frequently, women—is a recurring motif throughout. The Jacobite Highlander Flora MacIvor and the more politically moderate Rose Bradwardine know their own hearts—political and personal—before he can know his; Fergus and Talbot know where they stand politically before he even has an inkling of his own political standing. Waverley's lack of observation in this way is excused and deemed natural for his gender and his youth, even if his foibles such as a lack of focus are expounded upon.

Waverley's naïveté is, therefore, a formal element in the novel, one that Scott borrows from an eighteenth-century tradition of novels written by women. Jacqueline Pearson writes that "Sir Walter Scott is a central figure in the male writer's reappropriation of the novel" and "the preface of *Waverley* (1814) constitutes 'an elaborate suppression of prior'—and largely female—'narrative models.'"[266] For Pearson, Scott's reappropriation functions as erasure as he "distances himself from female novelists and their work in quite specific terms: *Waverley,* we are told, has

[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Jacqueline Pearson, "Masculinizing the Novel: Women Writers and Intertextuality in Charles Robert Maturin's 'The Wild Irish Boy,'" *Studies in Romanticism* vol 36 no 4 (Winter 1997): 636.

no sentimental heroine."[267] However, nuancing this notion that Scott masculinizes and "repoliticize[s]" the Regency novel, Trumpener claims that "Scott actually derives many of his strategies for dramatizing political struggles from his female contemporaries, and it can be argued that much of the impetus for the novel's renewed alignment with political issues of the day…comes from women writers."[268] She continues to postulate that "from the interconnection of the genres, is a dialectical relation between the spheres of male and female authorship,"[269] a direct line drawn from the national tales of Edgeworth and Owenson to the historical novel. Scott himself, Ina Ferris points out, makes this connection in his postscript, wherein he "credits Edgeworth with showing him how to undercut the debasing national stereotypes that literary fictions tended to propagate. She is thus allied with the serious cultural project of Waverley and dissociated from the trivial fantasies of the common novel."[270] But in so doing, Scott's project is one that asserts its own political and philosophical importance, "marking a return to the novel of responsibility, rational, public concerns—in short, of centrality."[271] In her review of the canon and its return to asserting the seriousness of the novelistic form, Ferris writes that Romantic writers' privileging of Fielding, Richardson, Smollett, and Sterne "allows reappropriation of the novel as a genuinely male form that has become feminized."[272] That these authors are placed in a canon marked by "centrality," and all feature rather naïve protagonists (Joseph Andrews, Pamela, Clarissa, Roderick Random, and Tristram Shandy) is rather telling, and I would like to extend Ferris's meaning of "centrality" to its political valence.

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[267] Ibid.
[268] Trumpener, 689.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Ina Ferris, "Re-Positioning the Novel: 'Waverley' and the Gender of the Fiction," *Studies in Romanticism* vol 28 no 2 (Summer 1989), 295.
[271] Ibid 298-299.
[272] Ibid 298.

Waverley ultimately deflects and disavows its own politics, trying to delay that conclusion for as long as possible and attempting to contain the transgressive potential of the main character's naïveté in the past. Waverley's naïveté is both the reason for what the novel sees as his political mistakes, and the reason for his survival despite the appearance of treason. Even before Waverley unthinkingly pledges his loyalty to Charles Stuart, he is questioned by the Englishmen Major Melville and Mr. Morton on charges of treasonable practices. Edward looks at the warrant they produce and has what seems to be an important revelation: "for although Edward's mind acquitted him of the crimes with which he was charged, yet a hasty review of his own conduct convinced him he might have great difficulty in establishing his innocence to the satisfaction of others."[273] It takes an act of reading and the possibility of imprisonment for Edward to see himself through the eyes of others, to realize that he is read in his context. For a brief moment, it seems that his naïveté is gone, and we expect him in Bildungsroman fashion to have learned his lesson, to not allow history to sweep his agency away and to take responsibility for his actions now that he has a knowledge of how he is being read suspiciously. This is, crucially, however, not a huge turning point for his character, as he carries on for chapters after this committing treason against his native country, deflecting suspicious reading from both diegetic and real-world readers.

Debating Edward's intellect, Melville and Morton have a lengthy conversation about this odd young man and have the following exchange:

> "Good God! Is the man a coward, a traitor, or an idiot?"
>
> "None of the three, I believe. He has the common-place courage of a common soldier, is honest enough, does what he is commanded, and understands what is told

[273] *Waverley,* 173.

> him, but is as fit to act for himself, in circumstances of importance, as I, my dear parson, to occupy your pulpit."[274]

This is reminiscent of the debates around Burney's Evelina: what are Waverley's intentions? Is he stupid or sly? Again, naïveté presents a problem of interpretation for diegetic characters. Here, however, as evident in Melville's rejoinder, the stakes of this debate are placed on a larger national scale. Naïveté, Melville asserts, manifests as an average militaristic trait of obedience, something "common-place" and thus, he implies, innocuous. The two eventually decide, after speaking with Waverley, that he is harmless and that his foibles are all symptoms of youthful inexperience. And so these Englishmen, as well as the novel as a whole, excuse him of his actions.

Edward Waverley's realizations are also rather circular. Although he changes politically and begins to be aware of a public, historical time, the upshot of these realizations is simply to return to what he has left behind, to appreciate what he has always already had. This is evident in his ensuing involvement in the Battle of Prestonpans:

> It was at that instant, that looking around him, he saw the wild dress and appearance of his Highland associates, heard their whispers in an uncouth and unknown language, looked upon his own dress, so unlike that which he had worn from his infancy, and wished to awake from what seemed at the moment a dream, strange, horrible, and unnatural. 'Good God,' he thought, 'am I then a traitor to my country a renegade to my standard, and a foe, as that poor dying wretch expressed himself, to my native England!'[275]

[274] *Waverley,* 182.
[275] *Waverley,* 245.

Here only on the eve of battle does he learn to see himself and the scenes around him not only as an adult with historical cognizance, but also as an Englishman. This is no child's game; this is war with consequences. He learns to look upon his fellow soldiers as Highlanders, as Others. Crucially, his realization is that he is clad in an outfit "unlike that which had had worn from his infancy," his pledged allegiance a betrayal not just to his country but also to what is *natural* in him. In addition to gaining personal and historical memory both, he in this moment is able to again read himself as others would read him.

Yet the warrant he receives from Morton and Melville, and his realization before Prestonpans both accumulate without consequence. His quoted thoughts are abruptly cut off and the narration turns to the din around him. The novel positions him once more as a non-agent in the current of history, swept up by time. As Fergus says right after this to the Jacobite army, "You must only think of your sword, and by whom it was given. All other reflections are now TOO LATE."[276] The narrator describes how Waverley can't help but agree and quell his feelings. When he saves the English officer Talbot, it is not a moment of asserting any kind of allegiance, but rather one of "confusion and terror."[277] His naïveté results in him being a soldier motivated by others' more impassioned, self-aware, and explicit political feeling, and a vessel for his own feelings when he has them, not anything more, the novel says. Even more than halfway through the novel, his founding trait of having no explicit, legible motive remains the same.

But of course, in saving the Englishman Talbot, Waverley has inadvertently put himself in close proximity to someone who will be instrumental in his re-conversion into proper English Hanoverianism—that is, instrumental in his survival throughout the Rising. While he stays with the Talbot family in London, Culloden transpires off the page. He learns about it again *post hoc:*

[276] Ibid, 247.
[277] Ibid, 249.

"Waverley riding post, as was the usual fashion of the period, without any adventure, save one or two queries, which the talisman of his passport sufficiently answered, reached the borders of Scotland. Here he heard the tidings of the decisive battle of Culloden."[278] It is important that the revelation comes to him while he is in disguise as Francis Stanley, Talbot's nephew with a rather common English name. This guise allows him the mobility through politically fraught territory. It is also important that he learns this news on the English side of the border—which is evocative not necessarily of his own political leanings but of how he is now being read by others. The change doesn't come from within, but from without and by happenstance. He is both agent and non-agent in his historical moment, in the quelling of the Jacobites and Highlander culture. He is both player and pawn, each allegiance easily undone by an alternative interpretation of his naïveté.

The postscript, "which should have been a Preface,"[279] only serves to further this circularity, this defanging of the novel and its potential dangers as something safely in the past. It is perfectly framed by preface and postscript. It paints history as not just something that has already happened, locked away in an untouchable past, accessible only to non-Highlanders. It also paints this particular history of the defeat of the Jacobites as out of the present-day Englishman's control, as something always meant to occur, absolving the Englishman both of naïveté and of violence—of political agency. "Our journey is now finished," the postscript announces. "There is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland […] But the change, though steadily and rapidly progressive, has nevertheless, been gradual; and, like those who drift down the stream of a deep and smooth river, we are not aware of the progress we have made

[278] Ibid, 323.
[279] Ibid, 375.

until we fix our eye on the now-distant point from which we set out."[280] Once more, Lukacs's framing of Scott's historical novel as creating a readerly awareness of how history links linearly to the present proves limited. Scott's narrator ends with a likening of the experience of history to a river, the "this," "we," and "our" notably vague. Who is this "we"? How can the movement of history be both rapid and gradual? In answer, he seems to say that it doesn't matter, that these answers are unknowable except in retrospect. Edward Waverley's naïveté functions formally to reflect and produce this very characterization of history. Proper British readers can all be naïve, caught in the currents of time and plot, passive receivers of history, absolved.

The Novel of Accumulation

It may seem strange to end this chapter about the national tale with a novel that has a heroine whose world is insular and conflicts relatively domestic, a novel which features movements are not from country to country but a small circuit from Portsmouth to Mansfield. However, in her choice of heroine, Jane Austen seems to look back to the novels at the turn of the century and reflect on the connection between the domestic, feminine individual and history. While the previous two novels in this chapter are stories of historical expansion, this novel is about a settling into what has already been. Although these seem like starkly different movements, the result is similar: a solidification of English history and the status quo.

The central narrative tension of the novel lies in the encounters between Fanny's silenced interiority and the loud and oppressive voices that surround her and demand fealty and transparency. This can be seen as a continuation of novels that cogitate on feminine modesty, a continuation of Burney's *Evelina* (a connection Claudia L. Johnson also makes) wherein a young

[280] Ibid.

female protagonist must navigate problems of association diplomatically, now put in conversation with a wider sociopolitical world. *Mansfield Park* navigates and solves the issues of association not by characterological correction of any singular party, and not by character growth, but by externalizing issues and their solutions alike, compartmentalizing them off the page, any possible source of narrative tension solved and narrated *post hoc*.

Mansfield Park seems to be a thorn in the Austen scholar's side for several reasons, not least of which is the protagonist herself. In her famous reading of the novel, Marilyn Butler writes with a tone of lamentation: "To some extent Fanny's is a negation of what is commonly meant by character. Jane Austen seems aware of the difficulty, for she makes clear efforts to give her a double set of traits."[281] Butler goes on to explain: "The fault lies in the incongruity of subjective, heroine-centered writing to the theme in hand; or perhaps it is more proper to say that it lies in the incongruity of the old absolutes to the novel, a form which historically is individualistic and morally relative."[282] In Butler's reading, *Mansfield Park* is increasingly didactic and conservative, incongruous to the rather diffident and interior-facing heroine, who seems to hide from the narration. Whereas Butler reads failure in this gap, Claudia Johnson sees possibility for parody: "The novel is not so placid. The highly conventionalized moral oppositions touted in the conclusion…will not bear the scrutiny Austen's own style is always inviting."[283] A prime example of this for her is the parody of the Bertram family's conservatism, where "the family is not a corridor to wider social affection,"[284] but rather an increased isolation and insulation. In partial agreement with Johnson, Makdisi writes that "the ending is a tightening

[281] Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1987), 247.
[282] Ibid, 248.
[283] Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1990), 119-120.
[284] Ibid, 119.

of family relations," "the emphasis of the novel's end…not so much on Sir Thomas's contrition as it is on the positive role that Fanny plays in securing a happy ending."[285] In having such a heroine, Makdisi suggests, *Mansfield Park* "anticipates the new role of the British empire as a machine for the production of a new form of subjectivity,"[286] one that is able to peaceably, even if unequally, integrate "the imperial and the domestic."[287] Building on Makdisi's reading, I read the novel not in terms of failure or success, but instead as affected formally and importantly by the problem of Fanny Price's character. I argue in this section that because of Fanny Price's naïveté, the novel is one that integrates and accumulates without necessitating compromise.

Fanny is not naïve in the same way that Waverley and Horatio are. She is not a bumbling soldier or scholar-bachelor who is thrust to and fro by the currents of war or major historical event, realizing her complicity all too late. In comparison with these other two protagonists, her world is a more insular, more localized one. Because of the circumstances brought about by her class and gender, she is at the mercy of the Bertrams and has considerably less agency than Edward and Horatio. However, also because of these circumstances, she is rendered something of an iron chest in the narrative, holding considerable narrative force if not historical, her silence and interior-facing responses allowing questions about her knowledge and intellect. This kind of naïveté, much like that of the other novelistic protagonists in this chapter, functions to challenge the bildungsroman form as well as narratives of progress. Fanny is a collector of experiences, materializing the more masculine ways of collecting experiences à la Waverley and Horatio. By accruing items in her East Room, momentums of precious people, and jewelry from various associations, Fanny collects pieces of memory without changing, much like the Empire would.

[285] Saree Makdisi, *Making England Western* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2014), 161-162.
[286] Ibid, 167-168.
[287] Ibid, 158.

Several iron chests, in fact—that is, unanswered questions reminiscent of the iron chest in *Caleb Williams*—proliferate in *Mansfield Park*: the question of where Sir Thomas Bertram acquires his money; the silence in response to Fanny's question about slavery; and when exactly the novel takes place. Much like my discussion of Burney's *Evelina,* I am not interested in the debate as to how conscious or unconscious Fanny is in each social situation. I ask instead: what narrative force does her character have? How does her naïveté affect the novel as a whole? What political weight do the answers to these questions have?

Although it is neither a historical novel nor an epistolary one, *Mansfield Park* begins thirty years before the main plot commences, providing exposition for the previous generation of characters and describing how Fanny's arrival at Mansfield comes about, using history to explain the present. That said, a subfield of Austen scholarship has been dedicated to the examination of *when* this novel takes place. Sarah Marsh writes, "Austen achieves [a] nuanced critique of British slavery's semi-legal status after 1807 by moving her characters from place to place, inside and outside the empire."[288] The narrative thus takes place in the years after 1807 in this interpretation. Yet J.A. Downie performs a thorough tracing of chronology and writes, "If the ball takes place on December 22, 1808, then Sir Thomas would have been in the West Indies throughout the period when abolition became a burning issue after the unexpected death of Prime Minister William Pitt, on January 23, 1806. As John Wiltshire puts it with admirable clarity in the Cambridge edition, according to Chapman's dating 'Sir Thomas and Tom go to Antigua in 1806; Thom returns in September 1807, after about a year, and his father in October 1808."[289] This interpretation places the novel in even more direct conversation with the political discourse

[288] Sarah Marsh, "Changes of Air: The Somerset Case and *Mansfield Park*'s Imperial Plots," *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* vol 53, no 2 (Winter 2020), 212.
[289] J.A. Downie, "The Chronology of Mansfield Park," *Modern Philology,* vol 112 no 2 (November 2014), 431.

around the British slave trade, namely with the Slave Trade Act 1807, officially ending slave trade in the British Empire, though not slavery itself (or, of course, imperialism and empire). The sheer amount of research necessary for the discernment of these dates, however, signals how nebulous time is in the narration of *Mansfield Park.* The sidestepping of history, the obliquely narrated time jumps, and even Fanny's cousins' silence in response to her question about slavery all contribute to the novel's accumulative form.

A subplot that demonstrates this formal principle of accumulation is Fanny's dilemma over which chain to wear with her brother's gift of an amber cross pendant. Mary Crawford offers her a chain that Fanny tries on before Mary reveals that it was a gift from Henry Crawford. Fanny panics at the implications of wearing a gift from a man whose moral compass she does not trust and knows how she might be read if she wears something that is indirectly—so she is told—from him. Mary insists, however, and Fanny assents. She comes back to the East Room after this scene and encounters Edmund who gifts her with his own chain to wear. The dilemma then multiplies: Whose chain does she wear? How does she navigate this problem of association with various men—the problem of being *read* as associated with various men—without offending anyone, for her social survival depends so much on such a seemingly trivial decision? The result is a non-solution:

> All went well—she did not dislike her own looks; and when she came to the necklaces again, her good fortune seemed complete, for upon trial the one given her by Miss Crawford would by no means go through the ring of the cross. She had, to oblige Edmund, resolved to wear it—but it was too large for the purpose. His therefore must be worn; and having with delightful feelings joined the chain and the cross, those memorials of the two most beloved of her heart, those dearest

> tokens so formed for each other by every thing real and imaginary—and put them round her neck, and seen and felt how full of William and Edmund they were, she was able without an effort to resolve on wearing Miss Crawford's necklace too.[290]

She can benignly wear the gifts from all three men, no compromise or sacrifice needed, all the dilemmas of association side-stepped by chance. The acquisition of objects that could cause harm becomes harmless, this acquisition defanged and neutralized.

Such a non-solution reverberates and propagates throughout the text. None of the problems in the novel escalate to crisis, at least not explicitly narrated; none of the dilemmas reach climactic moment of revelation or course correction. Fanny's East Room is another synecdoche of this plot stasis: "Her plants, her books—of which she had been a collector, from the first hour of her commanding a shilling—her writing desk, and her works of charity and ingenuity, were all within her reach;---or if indisposed for employment, if nothing but musing would do, she could scarcely see an object in that room which had not an interesting remembrance connected with it.—Every thing was a friend, or bore her thoughts to a friend."[291] The room is one of recollections, a place to store memories. This, too, is not shorn of its colonial implications. Emma Peacocke argues, "On the grandest scale, Fanny's collections in the East Room act as a microcosm of the British Museum, not only in its libraries, antiquities, and botanical specimens, but also in its imbrication in Britain's intellectual and colonial history."[292] The objects within the room, Peacocke elaborates, include "collections enabled by colonial enterprise."[293] The room also acts as a laying bare of Fanny's iron chest of characterological

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[290] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London: Penguin Classics, 2014): 250.
[291] *Mansfield Park,* 140.
[292] Emma Peacocke, "The British Museum and Fanny Price's East Room," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900,* vol 59, no 4 (Autumn 2019), 735.
[293] Ibid, 719.

mystery; after Sir Thomas cogitates its reflection of her thoughtful and self-reflective personality, he deems her fit as a daughter, comparing her to his own daughters who "must have been wanting *within*" and for whom "principle, active, principle, had been wanting."[294] The East Room as manifesting Fanny's memory and interiority—whereas Sir Thomas's daughters have no such manifestation—solves Fanny's final narrative problem for her, granting her permission to marry her cousin. Fanny herself does not change throughout the novel; other characters learn to be grateful for her when she is exiled to Portsmouth to learn to be grateful for them—something she already knows. This mutual gratitude only results in the consolidation of ties that already were, rather than opening up for other connections, as Claudia L. Johnson has so helpfully framed: "In *Mansfield Park,* the family is not a corridor to wider social affection, as promised in Burkean social thought…*Mansfield Park* is marked by an isolation unmatched in Austen's novels."[295] Although experiences and events might accumulate, affections solidify and contract. Accumulation therefore supplants causation and blurs agency and responsibility.

Accumulation as form is acutely political. Edward Said, in his reading of *Mansfield Park,* argues that Austen "synchronizes domestic with international authority, making it plain that the values associated with such higher things as ordination, law, and propriety must be grounded firmly in actual rule over and possession of territory. She sees clearly that to hold and rule Mansfield Park is to hold and rule an imperial estate in close, not to say inevitable association with it."[296] He continues to say that in order to bring this connection about peacefully on the level of plot, "Fanny must become more actively involved in the unfolding action,"[297] increasingly settled into the world of Mansfield. As a result, the novel according to Said

[294] *Mansfield Park,* 430.
[295] Johnson, *Jane Austen*, 119.
[296] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books 1993), 87.
[297] Ibid.

"steadily…opens up a broad expanse of domestic imperialist culture without which Britain's subsequent acquisition of territory would not have been possible."[298] Indeed, while the novel does chronicle Fanny's increasing feeling that Mansfield is her home, my reading highlights the circularity of the plot. The novel begins, after all, with Fanny moving in with her cousins, and ends with Fanny settling in even further to this small community of extended family through marriage to a cousin. It ends with characters having realizations that all that has been for the last decade (note the repeated pluperfect in these last passages) as it should be. The plot's progression, if anything, is one of *settling into,* where everyone is grateful for how everything has been and acts to continue this exact situation. Even when Fanny's cousin is ousted with the reprehensible Mrs. Norris, the narrator declares this as of natural consequence. Like Said, I see this as the very logic of what would be the expanding British Empire later in the nineteenth century, but I acknowledge the gap between Austen and Fanny and want to focus more on the form of accumulation and how that mirrors imperialistic logics.

Many of the dilemmas that Fanny faces are externalized. Henry Crawford, for example, is gotten rid of as a plot problem by his own off-page actions, running away with Maria Rushworth (née Bertram). This elopement is something Fanny only finds out through the papers while she is away in Portsmouth, and after her initial shock, she turns the conflict outward to her family members, away from herself. "What would be the consequence? Whom would it not injure? Whose views might it not affect? Whose peace would it not cut up for ever? Miss Crawford herself—Edmund; but it was dangerous, perhaps, to tread such ground. She confined herself, or tried to confine herself to the simple, indubitable family-misery which must envelope all, if it were indeed a matter of certified guilt and public exposure."[299] Although tempted to think about

[298] Ibid, 95.
[299] *Mansfield Park,* 410.

herself and her own romantic interest in Edmund, she musters the mental power to turn her concerns elsewhere, increasing the scale of worry to the family as a whole and refusing subjectivity for herself. While the damage done affects more people on this scale, it is, the narration suggests, less acute pain, framed in negative terms and by way of questions. Even when an action might cause her personal pain, both Fanny and the narrator, by way of free indirect discourse, turn the consequences outwards and upwards such that the pain is more generalized, vaguer, a series of questions about scale and causation rather than interior, individualized feeling. The narrator and Fanny are not one and the same, but in this moment, they are quite aligned in how they are thinking about cause and effect. This moment is one of several examples of the novel bringing up contentions, only to have them extinguished off-the-page, obliquely. Fanny compartmentalizes such problems, stowing them away in her East Room until they are a problem no longer.

Austen is aware of this pattern in her novel, the neatness with which interpersonal conflicts are solved. In the concluding chapter, her narrator says:

> I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachment, must vary much as time in different people. –I only intreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire.[300]

[300] *Mansfield Park,* 436.

She satirizes readerly scrutiny by allowing readers to determine the length of time between Edmund relinquishing feelings for Mary Crawford and considering Fanny as a potential wife. Allowing chronology to be up to readers is also poignant given the nebulousness of time established as characteristic of the novel. The upshot is a relinquishing of sentimental, social, as well as historical causation, the acceptance of a variety of perspectives without acknowledging what those perspectives may be, the assimilation of sociopolitical worlds as if such an assimilation is only "quite natural."

That Fanny can navigate her social problems unscathed—that she can simply resolve a dilemma of allegiance by wearing all three baubles around her neck—that she can escape as socially naïve even though she exhibits a keen awareness of goings-on and a stable moral code—is at the crux of the novel's form. This produces a form marked by a *settling into,* rather than by discovery, course correction, growth, or narrative progress. Perhaps the only lesson that Fanny substantially learns is at Portsmouth: "When she had been coming to Portsmouth, she had loved to call it her home, had been fond of saying that she was going home; the word had been very dear to her; and so it still was, but it must be applied to Mansfield. *That* was now the home. Portsmouth was Portsmouth; Mansfield was home."[301] It is telling that her realization here is circular, too: she has been at Mansfield for about a decade. The rather diluted transformation she undergoes is simply to realize that she wants to return to the place at which she has already been living. When one considers what *settling into* means for a novel of this time period, for a novel for which the critical discourse has so much been about slavery and imperialism, about Britain's history in the making, *settling into* takes on a grander and perhaps darkly prophetic meaning that extends outwards from the text. Although Austen and her narrator seem to have qualms about

[301] Ibid, 400.

this formal upshot of the novel, they nevertheless ultimately slip into that which they at times satirize: a neat, conservative ending in which the English family keeps their wealth to themselves, expanding their profits only as far as cousins; in which the English family's only realization is that they should be grateful towards one another in order to continue their way of life; in which a heroine can accumulate knowledge and memory, learning that the way things have been is the way they ought to be.

The darkly prophetic meanings that I have lain out here are what Makdisi has called the anticipation of later forms of British imperialism that "tie masters and slaves, colonizers and colonized, all the more thoroughly…together, not just geopolitically but in terms of the logic of an unfolding civilizing mission."[302] As I have argued, *Mansfield Park* does so formally and through characters' circular epistemologies, although Austen demonstrates an unease about this towards the end of the novel, the parody vacillating between critique of conservatism and an enactment of it. While Claudia Johnson argues that the novel "parodies the structures of conservative fiction most subversively…in its presentation of family itself," enacting a tightening of social relations to an extent unmatched in other Austen novels, she also admits that this happens "obliquely."[303] Indeed, *Mansfield Park* is not so neat in its politics, demonstrated by the narrative tensions that it produces and can only extinguish off-the-page or with reassurances that there was never a tension at all. However, this uneasiness, this unsteadiness of politics and form are significant, as it reveals an unsettledness on the part of the narrator at the circular course of the narrative. In 1814, when Scott was looking backwards in time, Austen was looking into the fractures of history and time, beginning thirty years prior and ending, uneasily, where the

[302] Makdisi, *Making England Western,* 158.
[303] Johnson, *Jane Austen,* 116.

characters already have been. The Romantic novelists' relationship to time, progress, history, and causation was a troubled one.

What *Mansfield Park* begins to cogitate, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* formalizes even more starkly, prophecies and anticipation about unsolvable conflicts with others—near and abroad—brought to the fore.

Chapter 4: Undoing and Re-Doing Naïveté in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*

In the last chapter, I examined instances of delayed knowledge across three novels of the Romantic period. I argued that naïve protagonists' delayed revelations about their relationship to colonial acts function to distance them from and absolve them of colonial violence. In *Waverley* and *The Wild Irish Girl,* the male protagonists naively traipse through colonial sites, claiming to not understand their agency and position. In *Mansfield Park,* Fanny's accumulative knowledge and method of collection somehow skirts acknowledgement, at least on the page, of her family's complicity in slave trade and imperialism. What we have is a sort of stasis as a result, a tenuous affirmation of English power and political innocence.

In this chapter, I am interested in the inverse of delayed knowledge: prophecy. Prophecy precedes event, rupturing the present with a glimpse into a decontextualized future. If the Gothic is the past infiltrating and haunting the present,[304] then the apocalyptic novel is one in which the future infiltrates the present. Mary Shelley's third novel, *The Last Man,* published towards the end of the Romantic period in 1826, prophecy works also as incomplete knowledge, rupturing through the present and resulting still in a lack of agency. However, this lack of agency is not the same as Waverley's, Horatio's, or even Fanny's. The lack of agency that comes from apocalyptic prophecy in *The Last Man* paints the English subject as ultimately powerless, rather than powerful. Prophetic knowledge does not, in fact, make the English subject more knowing; it only ends up emphasizing his limited perception and helplessness in the face of global disaster.

[304] See *Tropical Gothic in Literature and Culture: The Americas,* ed. Justin D. Edwards, Sandra G.T. Vasconcelos (Routledge 2016). In the seventh chapter on "Environmental Apocalypse and Uncanny Technology," Inés Ordiz Alonso-Collada writes: "The dystopian imagination of science fiction adds a future dimension to [the] scheme, as the prospective scenarios are nothing but a distorted image of present concerns."

In seeking to interpret Shelley's rather long and dense third book, readers have tended to resort to biographical facts of the author's life. The cave in Naples in the Introduction, described by a nameless narrator (whose gender isn't alluded to), is often conflated with Mary Shelley's 1818 trip to Naples with Clare Clairmont and Percy Shelley. Epidemiology of the novel's plague gestures back, some argue, to what Shelley knew of contemporary quarantine laws. And the diegetic first-person narrator, the sole survivor of an apocalypse writing in the year 2100, is likened to Shelley being the last woman of a generation of Romantic writers.

While I understand this critical impulse to search for a "key" to the text in Mary Shelley's life, and while I recognize that there are echoes between fact and fiction in this case, these interpretations tend to forget elements of the text that run counter to such a clean-cut reading. For example, the Shelley party did not, in fact, find the cave of the Sibyl as the narrator does. In other words, such an interpretation forgets the fictional apparatus of the novel. It thus risks forgetting the queerer, non-teleological elements of the text that may not fit into a neat narrative and may lead to different avenues of thought, avenues that, I believe, the novel point the way to already.[305] Reading Shelley's fiction as solely autobiography, too, is an interpretative leap

[305] My usage of "queer" here draws from many sources, such as Kathryn Bond Stockton's theory of the queer child growing "sideways" rather than "up," and bell hooks's definition of queerness as including sexuality but also as alternative ways of living. Queer in terms of non-teleological, in terms of otherness, in terms of alternative to the scripted norms. While of course Mary Shelley and her contemporaries would not have used "queer" in the same way, my usage of "queer" sheds light on the non-teleological temporalities—and there are indeed multiple—at work in Shelley's novel. I am borrowing too from Carolyn Dinshaw's queer historicist work in *How Soon is Now?* which argues that queer time can also help trouble the perceived distinction between professional (academic) and amateur medievalists—and show that there is no clear distinction at all. "I suspect that amateurs have something to teach the experts: namely, that the present moment is more temporally heterogeneous than academically disciplined, historically minded scholars tend to let on, and that some kind of desire for the past motivates all our work, regardless of how sharp-edged our researches eventually become: love and knowledge are as inextricable as the links in chain mail" (*How Soon is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Duke University Press 2012): xiv). Especially in *The Last Man,* time is not linear and the present narrative time is an "expansive *now*" (Dinshaw xv), a multiple now. The usage of the word "queer" helps to highlight that important aspect of the novel for me.

disproportionately levied against women and marginalized authors, an interpretative leap that ultimately dismisses her art and seeks to anchor her tokenized "genius" literary craft in a clear, digestible narrative.[306]

I am not against historicist readings of Mary Shelley writ large. Thinkers like Barbara Johnson have done the autobiographical reading in interesting ways that help highlight nuances of the text. In "My Monster/My Self," Johnson argues that *Frankenstein* is a working through of what it means to be a female author and is navigating the question of autobiography as "a revelation and a coverup," which "would appear to constitute itself as in some way a repression of autobiography."[307] She does so by examining resemblances between teller and addressee as a formal mode of storytelling in *Frankenstein,* referencing Frankenstein and Walton's similarities, as well as Frankenstein and the creature's. "The desire for resemblance" is reinforced throughout the narrative but "the desire for [it]—the desire to create a being like oneself—which is the autobiographical desire par excellence—is also the *central* transgression in Mary Shelley's novel."[308] In this instance of argumentation, Johnson uses autobiography to illuminate aspects of the text, rather than the other way around which would reduce the book to pure autobiography: Shelley is interested in the monstrosity of parenthood and creation but only through the medium of male characters, only obliquely. However, even Johnson perhaps goes too far at moments in her argument when she leaves these vexed contradictions for psychoanalysis, which in this case

[306] I have been to several talks where scholars call her, affectionately and much too personally, by "Mary" while Mary Shelley's husband is given the respect of a full name or last name signifier. I agree that Mary Shelley is a literary "genius" but oftentimes this "genius" is reified and turns into yet another way to tokenize her. Scholars of a more conservative bent seek to find the "key" of her genius, especially where *Frankenstein* is concerned, citing her maternal grief at the loss of her child. I find this reading to be particularly extractive. There must be a way in which we can acknowledge the real hardships Shelley underwent without romanticizing them and reducing her to them. There must also be a way to read a woman's literary work as *not* a metaphor for her biological children.
[307] Barbara Johnson, "My Monster/My Self," *Diacritics* no 12 (Summer 1992): 4.
[308] Ibid.

reduces art to a guessing of Mary Shelley's interiority and intent. In a passage about Shelley feeling in the shadow of her parents' writerly success, Johnson writes that she "paradoxically enough must thus usurp the parental role and succeed in giving birth to herself on paper. Her declaration of existence as a writer must therefore figuratively repeat the matricide that her physical birth all too literally entailed." Johnson cites Frankenstein's dreams of his mother, the murder of his bride on the wedding night which cuts off the reproductive possibility, and parallels this to Mary "herself" as "the unwitting murderous intruder present on her own parents' wedding night."[309] While interesting as autobiographical parallels, *The Last Man* doesn't lend itself to autobiographical interpretation the same way that *Frankenstein* does: while aspects of Verney's life and the frame narrator's trip to Naples can be traced back to Shelley's life, the overlapping media and palimpsest of fiction and autobiography resist a direct autobiographical reading. Where Johnson's analysis shines is not when she points back to autobiography for explanation of narrative peculiarity but rather when it sustains attention on the contradiction and difficulty of female authorship and how *Frankenstein* works through these issues.

In what follows, I hope to keep sustained attention on the strangeness of Mary Shelley's formal choices. I do not eschew autobiographical fact entirely but where I do bring facts of Shelley's life up, I hope to do so only to emphasize echoes and divergences. *The Last Man* is a temporally, formally complex novel, its ruptures and prophecies dismantling readings that essentialize or reduce Shelley's work to a work of sheer allegory of her life. The frame narrator reminisces about finding the cave of the Sibyl in 1818 with a beloved companion, where they discover and collect the Sibyl's leaves scattered about. The narrator says that they have applied themself—and here I use the gender-neutral third-person singular pronoun—in the past few years

[309] Ibid, 8-9.

to deciphering and transcribing the leaves. And, in the past few years, they have lost their companion and friends. What we get in the novel proper, then, is a supposed transcription of the Sibyl's prophecies, stitched together to result in the first-person tale of an English gentleman named Lionel Verney reminiscing upon *his* life in the 2070s through 2090s. He is the eponymous last man.

The novel is thus comprised of three co-existing, though not co-temporary strands of time: the 1820s of the frame narrator, the Cumaean Sibyl's leaves, which speaks forward to the frame narrator from ancient times, and the last man Lionel Verney, who speaks backwards through the Sibyl to the frame narrator and the novel's readers. The materiality of the texts matter as well: the leaves are "scattered and unconnected," while Verney's book—mysteriously, inexplicably communicated to the Sibyl—is a message to no one, if he is the last indeed. Shelley's reminders of the ephemerality of the story run in juxtaposition to the novels of the preceding chapter in this dissertation, which fashion themselves as "national tales" and "histories." The book, instead, was advertised as a "new Romance, or, rather Prophetic Tale."[310] What a strange way to advertise, drawing similarities and distinctions between two seemingly disparate genres, without quite defining either or, perhaps, assuming that the audience knows what each means. "Romance" seems to indicate something outside of history, and "new Romance" is, I would think, a way to describe a revival of the genre for Romantics. "Prophetic Tale" on the other hand seems to suggest a speculation into the future of events that seem probable, a convergence of fiction and reality until a point of divergence at the present moment (of Shelley's writing).

[310] See Jean de Palacio, "Mary Shelley and the Last Man," *Revue de la literature compare,* XLIV (1968): 40.

The novel's form has often been talked about in terms of critiquing empire: the gradual but definitive breakdown of English power, the falls of empires farther away (Ottoman Empire) and nearer (London's eventual susceptibility to the plague.) Most of these readings have taken for their evidence the encounter between Verney and the black man towards the end of the book, as well as Verney's gradual realization that London is no paradise separate from the world. Famously, for instance, Alan Bewell argues through the encounter between Verney and the black man, "the biological diversity—the 'foreignness'—that caused so much pain and suffering in the colonial world might also hold within it something that will preserve at least some of us somewhere from the coming plague that Shelley prophesies."[311] Encounters with racial difference, according to Bewell, immunize Verney. More formalist readings of the novel tend to frame the novel's structure in terms of reader response and sympathy. Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor, for example, writes that the open-endedness of the frame "functions to re-present the narrator's mediated version of the story, insisting that this tale of a dead-end history be opened back up to reader responsiveness, back to that most important of human feelings, sympathy."[312] While this may be true, I find it hard to prove whether readers actually become more sympathetic, both in the eighteenth century and in contemporary sense. What I find a more viable avenue of inquiry is that the open-endedness of the structure denies readers an answer key to the text and we are thus forced to linger in a position of unsettled naïveté that echoes Verney's. Shelley and her narrators refuse to explain several key points: why the plague happens, how it spreads, where it originates, how immunity occurs, why or how Verney is immune, and what will happen from here. Through this narratorial refusal, Shelley demands that we question

[311] Alan Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1999): 314.
[312] Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor, "Performing History, Performing Humanity in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man,"* SEL 1500-1900, vol 42, no. 4 (Autumn 2002): 769.

the ideologies that underpin empire, class hierarchy, and even genre. She privileges naïveté—an unknowing, an impossibility of knowing everything and the impossibility of being complacent in fixed states of reading—as a characterological and readerly practice.

In this final dissertation chapter, I argue that *The Last Man*'s critique of empire occurs also on the formal and epistemological levels, particularly demonstrated through Verney in the construction and undoing of his English naïveté. I build on Anne K. Mellor's important analysis that "in political and philosophical terms, *The Last Man* first undercuts the dominant systems of government of the early nineteenth century and then shows that all cultural ideologies are but meaningless fictions."[313] I argue also that the novel trains readers, reflected in Verney's storytelling arc, in a process of multi-modal re-reading. The circuit of uncertainty in Shelley's *The Last Man* productively destabilizes normative modes of reading and teleological epistemology, proposing ultimately that a different kind of naïveté, one that is assiduous in relating subject to world, rather than those that either escape to the world of imagination i.e. romance or hide in imperialistic thought à la Waverley, may be the only ethical option. In such a way, *The Last Man* runs counter to Walter Scott's *Waverley.* Deidre Lynch argues along similar lines: Shelley's novel is "challeng[ing]…the closure" one finds in *Waverley*'s concept of history "by running the tape of history backward"; "the convention that diagrams time's linear, progressive advance as a westward migration of civilization from Greece to Rome to England to America" is put "into reverse" when in the novel "the plague arrives in England on a ship that has voyaged east across the Atlantic from Philadelphia."[314] Just as *The Last Man* undoes the historical, imperialist Scott novel, so too does it undo the imperial epistemological arc, which is

[313] Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Routledge 1988): 144.
[314] Deidre Lynch, "Historical Novelist," *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley,* ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2003): 139-140.

characterized by telos. In the end, Verney, once an heir to English nobility, wanders aimlessly through the ruins of empire. After a long and arduous journey, he has no more explanations of the historical event than anyone else. His position as the last man on earth is not one of triumphant survival but of humility and tragedy. He knows even less than what he started out knowing.

Sibylline Leaves Scattered Across Time

Popularized in Virgil's third book of the *Aeneid,* the Cumaean Sibyl sings prophecies and writes them upon leaves in her cave, leaving them by the entrance, but if a "blast of wind" should scatter them about, she lets them be. Already in this version, the prophecy is mediated and multi-medial: the Sibyl sings in "frantic Fits," and then transcribes these songs. According to Marianne Brooker and Luisa Calè in the introduction to their *Studies in Romanticism* special issue on Sibyl's leaves, Virgil's Sibyl is "recalcitrant[t],"[315] resisting her role in state power, as, traditionally, the Sibyl was used as a counselor to Rome. Thus described, the leaves are "alternative paper trails—a dynamic, reversible, and diverse corpus, whose textual condition challenges the stability of the codex."[316] Dante's later Sibyl is less willfully resistant and more overwhelmed, having a form of "memory impairment caused by excess of vision,"[317] in Calè's analysis. Closer to Shelley's time are Edward Young's mention of the Sibyl in *Night Thoughts*

[315] Marianne Brooker and Luisa Calè, "Introduction: Sibylline Leaves," *Studies in Romanticism* (Spring 2020), vol 59, no 1: 2.
[316] Ibid.
[317] Luisa Calè, "Modern Sibyls and Sibylline Media," *Studies in Romanticism* (Spring 2020), vol 59, no 1: 61.

(1742-1745) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry collection of the very name, *Sibylline Leaves* (1817).

Sibylline leaves as an intertextual reference and symbol, especially in poetry, may symbolize ephemerality but, as a symbol, they proved to have staying power. Both Young and Coleridge's poetry collections meditate on the ephemerality of printed media and bodily presence in the world. Young is particularly interested in the ephemerality of books, which he likens to Sibylline leaves, compared to that of a more Christian "divine wisdom" issued from a higher and more knowing authority figure.[318] If not divine wisdom, then Sibylline leaves, perhaps, are more secular forms of knowledge, fleeting and difficult to make sense of. Coleridge's collection has a section titled "Poems Occasioned by Political events or Feelings Connected With Them," gesturing back to a tradition of occasional poetry ranging from Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift to someone as contemporary as Anna Letitia Barbauld, and framing his poems as situational, conjured by the undulations of current events. Yet the Sibyl does not have a speaking or communicative part in either work; the speaking agents of the poems are more, to borrow Coleridge's word, "connected," less fragmented, seemingly brought together in a poetic persona of Coleridge's. Unlike Shelley's novel, these collections do invite more of a personalized reading, as Coleridge's *Sibylline Leaves* contains his older poems; the collection is self-fashioned as a collection of Coleridge's hits. In his preface, he announces that the book "contains the whole of the author's poetical compositions, from 1793 to the present date, with the exception of a few works not yet finished, and those published in the first edition of his juvenile poems, over which he has no controul [*sic*]."[319] Coleridge *is* the Sibyl in and of his own work, having created and collected his own poetical histories and titling his collection such.

[318] Ibid, 3.
[319] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Sibylline Leaves* ii.

In *The Last Man,* the Sibyl is instead a confusing interlocutor, a medium through which the unnamed narrator and Verney speak across a gap of two-hundred years. The communication does not come without significant effort; just as Verney spends months penning his memoir, the transcriber spends months poring over the scattered leaves in a project that, despite the sorrow of its contents, brings them comfort. Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor is right when she says that the "frame functions to re-present the narrator's mediated version of the story, insisting that this tale of a dead-end history be opened back up to reader responsiveness"[320]—but that responsiveness is not entirely about "sympathy" as she posits. The frame does not function to solely make readers feel alongside the characters. It might be something more nuanced and instructive, something that requires even more persistent work. Outside the text, Shelley toils away at a three-volume novel that reviewers gripe is far too long. The Sibyl stands as one star in a rather complex constellation of literary personas, and Anne Mellor characterizes her as an authority but also as an outdated relic: "Even as [Shelley] constructs a female literary tradition, from the Sibyl through her own editorship, she terminates that tradition. Her novel posits the end of writing as such…Shelley implies, the female writer—like Lionel Verney—will not be read, her voice will not be heard…Moreover, Shelley suggests that the products of the creative imagination so glorified by the Romantic poets may be worthless."[321] While I agree that textual authorities are all put into question in the novel, I don't share Mellor's interpretation that Shelley is tossing all texts out the window. I believe something more intermedial and productive, rather than destructive, may be happening.

If Shelley's Sibyl—invisible but a powerful literary force that must be reckoned with within the text—reappears in nineteenth-century literature, it might be in Gerard Manley

[320] Wagner-Lawlor, 769.
[321] Mellor, *Mary Shelley,* 159.

Hopkins's "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves." The speaker summons the "oracle," and in an apostrophe describes life "all on two spools," seemingly laying out a binary, but ending with "thoughts against thoughts in groans grind."[322]

> Now her all in two flocks, two folds – black, white; 'right, wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind
> But these two; ware of a world where but these two tell, each off the other; of a rack
> Where, selfwrung, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, thoughts against thoughts in groans grind.[323]

The heavy alliteration creates a slowing down, an effect that mirrors the grueling work of the Sibyl's weaving. The grinding produces a third possibility, a sound, a spark from friction. Even if there is no conclusion described, no product described here coming from the labor, the point of it is its pointlessness, the two "tell[ing] each off the other." The poem ends there, poignantly: Hopkins is interested in tension, in disparate words and media put in contact with one another, new sounds and affects produced. Likewise, as Konstantinos Pozoukidis claims, Shelley's novel "portrays…the radical potential that useless labour bears both for human survival and for world-making," and that "human survival may depend not on figuring out what is fundamentally useful in our exertions, but instead on relinquishing usefulness as the measure of what deserves to survive."[324] In producing a novel with crisscrossing media that speak to each other but in non-linear, rather opaque ways, with a Sibyl who is mediated twice-over, Shelley is interested in this interplay rather than straightforward answers about individual human survival, knowledge, and nation.

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[322] Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Spelt from Sybil's Leaves," lines 11-14. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/55688/spelt-from-sibyls-leaves
[323] Ibid, lines 12-14.
[324] Konstantinos (Kos) Pozoukidis, "The Survival of Non-Productive Labour in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man," Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* Vol 33, no 3 (Spring 2021): 395.

This emphasis on the interplay of knowledge sources rather than knowledge itself can be found in the frame narrative (which is not so much a frame as it is an opening, for we never return to this first narrator). "I present the public with my latest discoveries in the slight Sibylline pages. Scattered and unconnected as they were, I have been obliged to add links, and model the work into a consistent form."[325] The narrator, in transcribing the leaves of the Sibyl which are also, apparently, Verney's autobiographical apocalypse story, reveals that they are also filling in the blanks between plot points. There are no annotations within Verney's narrative to mark where the frame narrator has done editorial work. The text thus presents Verney's story as a kind of palimpsest where his words, the Sibyl's, and the frame narrator who's found the Sibylline leaves in Naples are all enmeshed. The frame narrator continues: "The main substance rests on the truths contained in these poetic rhapsodies, and the divine intuition which the Cumaean damsel obtained from heaven."[326] This line further complicates how we are to read Verney's story: it is transcribed to us by the frame narrator from leaves that are not only fragmented but also in another medium altogether—poetry. Verney's prose story that is half Bildungsroman, half apocalyptic tale is thus originally a Sibylline prophecy told in poetry that has been fragmented and materially broken over time, transcribed and translated into prose for us to read.

Because genres and media—the pastoral, the poetic, the prosaic, the prophetic, the bildungsroman, the speculative and dystopian, the political drama—crisscross and layer over each other, *The Last Man* has a strange temporality that is non-linear. Theresa M. Kelley talks about Mary Shelley's idea of romantic temporality as one characterized by contingency, which "names what happens when chance, rather than a prescribed order or continuity, is recognized as

[325] Shelley, *The Last Man,* 6.
[326] Ibid.

having a role in the course of events."[327] Instead of a chronological sequence, Shelley is interested in history as "competing narrative possibilities that exceed a single historical trajectory."[328] With the frame narrator speaking forward and Verney narrating backwards in time, the novel not so much charts as chronicles co-existing and two mutually viable ways of knowing that have their limits: partial prophecy, and naïveté. The English subject might feel as though he has masterful knowledge over the world, might feel he has access to prophecy, but in the end, the prophecy only acts to reveal the limitations of his knowledge. He has no place to resort to except his own unknowing.

Entangled Epistemology

In the novel proper, Lionel Verney tells his story, mostly in past tense. He sets up expectations for a pastoral romance and *bildungsroman,* beginning as an uncouth orphan in a pastoral setting—"my wild thoughts were unchecked by moral considerations."[329] The beginning of the story bears a lot of connections with Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, a tale with tragic undercurrents, whose plot is driven by masculine-coded suspicion, a woman falsely accused of infidelity: Verney recounts that he spent most of his childhood as a shepherd, orphaned and alone with his sister, Perdita (a name shared by a character in Shakespeare's play), romping through the fields, bitter about the knowledge that his parents were once nobles degraded by the current king. He is about to take a wayward moral path, with revenge on his mind, but slowly, he is changed by the civilizing friendship of Adrian (the Percy Bysshe Shelley character, many have

[327] Theresa M. Kelley, "romantic Temporality, Contingency, and Mary Shelley," *ELH* vol 75, no 3 (Fall 2008): 626.
[328] Ibid 627.
[329] Mary Shelley, *The Last Man,* 19.

said), the son of the last kind of England, who denounces the monarchy in favor of republican ideals. Of this time period of growth, Lionel writes: "I now began to be human."[330] For the rest of Book I, Lionel and his doe-eyed sister Perdita form intimate friendships with Adrian and the aristocratic cohort of Idris, Adrian's sister and Lionel's eventual wife; Lord Raymond (often likened to Byron, as they are both seen as heroes of Greece in their fight against the Turks) and Perdita's eventual husband; and Evadne, a princess of Greece with whom Adrian at first falls in love but who feels more strongly for Lord Raymond. As he becomes further acquainted with culture, philosophy, poetry, and politics, Lionel starts to feel like "the sailor, who from the topmast first discovered the shore of America; and like him I hastened to tell my companions of my discoveries in unknown regions."[331] One might compare this moment to the frame narrative of *Frankenstein,* which chronicles an ambitious poet-turned-sailor, Robert Walton, and his ultimate, anti-colonial decision to turn back and care for the people in his vicinity instead of chasing glory. Here is where readers' postcolonial critique might come in; Lionel, as he loses his pastoral innocence, gains English-coded knowledge of new worlds, and makes connections with the aristocracy, positions himself as an explorer of the Empire. If this book were closer to *Waverley,* Lionel would continue to have revelations about his Englishness and the enlightened power of the mind that pours forth from that identity.

However, Shelley does not allow that to happen. Lionel falls short of being an imperialist himself. If anything, this novel is a story of that failure. Whenever Lionel gains knowledge, and seems to grow epistemological roots, these roots are plucked out. The very next sentence demonstrates this narrative technique:

[330] Mary Shelley, *The Last Man,* 29.
[331] *The Last Man,* 31.

> But I was unable to excite in any breast the same craving appetite for knowledge that existed in mine. Even Perdita was unable to understand me. I had lived in what is generally called the world of reality, and it was awakening to a new country to find that there was a deeper meaning in all I saw, besides that which my eyes conveyed me.[332]

The sailor may discover new lands and write excitedly about it, but these passionate effusions seem neither interesting nor intelligible to his companions, even intimate ones from childhood. Perdita's lack of understanding might be seen as a sexist portrayal on Lionel's part of his sister, who is in most instances a sensible, sweet paragon of feminine modesty, but this reading is challenged by Lionel's own limits. Although he fashions himself the discoverer of America, this discovery is not privileged knowledge but a new set of mysteries. Unlike a traditional *bildungsroman,* Lionel is not offered a corrective to his naïveté, but rather he finds that each new piece of knowledge comes with a set of fresh, unexpected unknowables. This moment in particularly evinces a trait of Lionel's that is vulnerable to satire: the usefulness of his knowledge is, already in the tale, put into question.

If we are to read him against another one of Shelley's narrating poet-explorers, Robert Walton, the frame narrator of *Frankenstein,* we can already see the differences. Walton, for all his foolishness, decides to turn his ship around after hearing Frankenstein's tale and seeing the creature for himself: to a disappointed Frankenstein who has not learned his lesson, Walton says, "I cannot withstand their demands. I cannot lead them unwillingly to danger, and I must return.'"[333] He chooses the safety of his community over his imperial ambitions. Walton's arc is from naïveté to knowledge, a foil to both Frankenstein and the creature who do not ultimately

[332] *The Last Man,* 31.
[333] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein,* 156.

better themselves. In some ways, Walton benefits from the story of Frankenstein and the creature, able to take in their experience secondhand and learn from them; knowledge acquisition through the sharing of stories is where hope for change lies. Eighteen years later, *The Last Man* has a more complicated arc: we open this book to find not a set of concentric narrative circles, with a creature at the center reappearing in the outermost narrative frame to our readerly avatar and frame narrator, Walton. Instead, we find a web of media that speak to one another in unconfirmed, unexplained ways.

Lionel's arc is not so much an arc as a wave that reaches for substantial knowledge, only to recede back. As soon as Lionel seems to have a foothold in London society through his friendship with Adrian, this society begins to crumble. It is not Adrian who becomes the ruler of England, but Lord Raymond. The latter at first has the desire to become "King," his first act, he says, "'to unite with the Greeks, take Constantinople, and subdue all of Asia. I intend to be a warrior, a conqueror,'"[334] an allusion to Alexander the Great as well as the real-life Byron who wanted to free the Greeks from Ottoman rule and died of a fever leading a campaign during the Greek War of Independence. It is strange that Lord Raymond has a desire both to free the Greeks and to subdue entire nations of people; in his character are united two kinds of ambition that are not necessarily equated but certainly intertwined. Lord Raymond eventually becomes Lord Protectorate and commands a troop to Constantinople as declared. Importantly, it is Perdita who first hears of the word, "plague": "One word, in truth, had alarmed her more than battles or sieges, during which she trusted Raymond's high command would exempt him from danger. That word, as yet it was no more to her, was PLAGUE."[335] This is the first mention of the word in the novel, and it comes from no clear source, either rhetorically or diegetically. Although

[334] *The Last Man,* 57.
[335] Ibid, 175.

Lionel says that it was simply a word to Perdita, undercutting her intellect, he also, perhaps contradictorily, points out that she felt "alarm." Lionel continues: "This enemy of the human race had begun early in June to raise its serpent-head on the shores of the Nile; parts of Asia, not usually subject to this evil, were infected. It was in Constantinople; but as each year that city experienced a like visitation, small attention was paid to those accounts…"[336] The narration here becomes distant, gesturing to the past tense narration and to a future Lionel who is looking back on this retrospectively. Readers of the novel thus are toggled back and forth between diegesis and extradiegesis; Lionel is both the Lionel of the 2070s and 2100. We must read with both in mind.

This becomes clearer as the novel goes on and the narration switches notably from past to present in key scenes. For a while, England is under the notion that they are "secure": "Our vessels truly were the sport of winds and waves, even as Gulliver was the toy of the Brobdignagians; but we on our stable abode could not be hurt in life or limb by these eruptions of nature. We could not fear—we did not."[337] The English, at this point, are confident that their borders are secure but should they have to leave, their ships will carry them safely and quickly to other lands. These lines, which convey a bitter irony in retrospect, are quickly overturned a few pages later when "The plague was in London! Fools that we were not long ago to have foreseen this […] But we are awake now. The plague is in London; the air of England is tainted, and her sons and daughters strew the unwholesome earth. And now, the sea, late our defence, seems our prison bound."[338] The use of present tense widens the gulf between a younger Lionel and the 2100 Lionel who laments the hubris—the pretense to more knowledge and power—that he and

[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid, 231-232.
[338] Ibid, 248.

the English once flaunted. The present tense also seems to shift in this passage: "The plague is in London" seems a gnomic, almost narrated monologue of a faceless collective, not so much a prophecy as a declaration from a town-crier. "The air in England is tainted" then moves into a more continuous present tense: it is a truth that might still hold in 2100 when Lionel is seemingly the sole person left on earth. And finally, "the sea, late our defence, seems our prison bound" drops us back into 2094, the year that this section of the book covers. Zooming in and out, flitting temporally even when the grammatical tense is stable enough here, the narration destabilizes readerly epistemology as well as Lionel's own. He does not know significantly more as a narrating subject; the very point is that he knows less.

Lionel meets his limitations again and again, and this is no clearer than when he encounters the only overtly racialized Other in the text, a "negro half clad." Although this encounter takes up all but six lines of the novel, a bulk of scholarship has been committed to the analysis of this rather outlying scene. I reproduce it here for ease:

> 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.[339]

[339] Ibid, 335-336.

There is a vast range of interpretation of this scene, some scholars arguing that it is demonstrative of Lionel's embrace (literal and figurative) of the Other, which eventually inoculates him against the disease and allows him to be the sole survivor; others argue that it is an overtly racist scene that exoticizes the body of the black man who carries the very same disease Lionel's son, in this same chapter, has; others still characterize this as ambivalent, straddling sympathy and revulsion towards the racialized Other.[340] If I were to place myself in any one of these categories, I would be closest to the latter: Lionel's reaction to the black man is overtly racist (he is disgusted by this diseased body, but not by the several stray white bodies he has just encountered in his journey through London back to his family), but Verney is hardly the English aristocrat sauntering by into a foreign space. What most readings forget is that this black man is inside the Verney household, co-existing and living with them; they have voluntarily let people into their estate as an act of community service. By this point in the novel, no country is free from the disease and Verney, very close to political leaders, has invited foreigners in. He should be aware that there may be close encounters with the disease. This seems to be a hiccup in his knowledge: his revulsion towards the black man has no founding for more reasons than one!

Alan Bewell's postcolonial reading of *The Last Man* posits that the novel's plague is both a danger that comes with colonial contact and a democratizing force. Foreigners begin to flood into the country (a sort of reversal of imperial movement) and Adrian creates a policy that allows for communal living. "However," Bewell argues, "both populations are in a state of decline" so

[340] See Jennifer Deren, "Revolting Sympathies in Mary Shelley's The Last Man," *Nineteenth-Century Literature (September 2017)* vol 72, no 2, 135-160. Deren discusses this scene in terms of Humeaen sympathy, contagious and unruly: "'The episode of the 'negro half clad'…not only exemplifies involuntary disgust emerging as the differences between self and other collapse, but it also shows how sympathetic encounters help spread the plague—and how the plague spreads like sympathy—as Lionel contracts the black man's illness immediately following the encounter." (144)

"the consequences of this policy, in its insistence on the higher importance of human allegiances over national ones, are diminished."[341] For Bewell, these attempts at peace and co-existing are all for naught because, teleologically, there are barely any people left to with whom to *make* peace. While I agree that the novel presents all efforts as ultimately futile, the novel does not seem to suggest that Adrian should therefore not have done what he did. For a period of some years, the policy does work; that it does not ultimately stop death seems beside the point. Bewell also writes that "Shelley's understanding of the epidemic as a product of both colonial contact with the East and the breakdown of boundaries is paralleled in Raymond's affair with Evadne Zaimi."[342] Drawing connections between Evadne and Safie of *Frankenstein,* he says that Shelley "associates her with a dangerous moral contagion that is undermining British society."[343] I find that this reading of Evadne's role in the novel ignores the nuances of her character and of the novel's racial politics overall. Borrowing from methods such as Cristobal Silva's, which he terms an epidemiology of narrative, meant to "[trouble] traditional monolithic accounts of New World epidemics, such as the so-called virgin soil hypothesis that represents the transfer of pathogens as relatively monolithic and unidirectional,"[344] I read the Shelley's plague as multidirectional and complex: its origins are neither "eastern" nor "western"—its origins are uncorroborated—and plague does not discriminate. Although Silva is speaking specifically about the early American context, I find his framework helpful in thinking about the novel's lack of explanation about the plague's source and method of transmission. It is not that the plague comes from "the East" and is therefore representative of moral depravity. The novel does not posit

[341] Alan Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 306.
[342] Ibid, 299.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Cristobal Silva, *Miraculous Plagues: An Epidemiology of Early New England Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011): 13.

where it comes from. In addition, no one is insusceptible to the plague except Verney—and perhaps, Evadne herself.

While the depiction of Evadne as ethnically ambiguous and mysterious, serendipitously appearing in random places, is most certainly in the Orientalist tradition, Bewell's reading erases the inexplicable psychic connection and similarities that she bears with the protagonists. She shows up as if by magical coincidence wherever the protagonists are, and she herself foretells a prophecy, which I will elaborate on in the following section. Fuson Wang, for example, points out that Evadne and Verney are the only two in the story who are seemingly immune from the disease (she dies of wounds from the war before the plague can come to her). Instead of being a separate Other, Turkey as the East "suggests," Wang argues, "that international travel, cultural exchange, and cosmopolitan understanding can render even disease 'harmless.'"[345] Wang traces a literary genealogy of immunity from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's writings on Turkey and inoculation to Shelley. Although I do think that Shelley presents community and encounter across racial and geopolitical lines as not only hopeful but also inevitable, I wouldn't go so far as Wang as to say that international travel and cross-cultural encounter has an immunizing quality in the novel.

While he doesn't apply this reading to the character of Evadne, Bewell sees Lionel's encounter with Otherness as a kind of inoculation in the case of the black man, described as a "negro half clad."[346] Bewell argues: "Perhaps Shelley wanted this embrace, which functions as inoculation rather than contagion, to serve as an allegory of the fearful embrace of colonial encounters."[347] Yet this is too neat a reading and suggests, too, that the disease enters Lionel's

[345] Fuson Wang, "We Must Live Elsewhere: The Social Construction of Natural Immunity in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man,"* European Romantic Review (2011): 247.
[346] *The Last Man,* 336.
[347] Bewell, 313.

body here (whether through contagion or inoculation) and also assumes that the black man is from another part of the world when he could very well be from London. An aspect of this passage I want to highlight is the messiness, the clumsiness of the encounter. The Englishman is just as unruly a body, just as without control, as the racialized Others against whom he is usually juxtaposed in novels of this era: "I strove to disengage myself, and fell on the sufferer."[348] Thereafter in the passage, Lionel lets go of the active voice and is beset by sensations, penetrated, as it were, by his surroundings. Like England as a whole, he must dismantle his belief that he is impervious to the outside world, including non-white English subjects in London, and learn and remember that borders and nation-states are constructed. There is not much that separates Lionel from this suffering man, and there is not much separating a white English family from the other inhabitants of the house—one gets the sense that the staircase is not a long one. A staircase is not a wall, but a connection.

While many scholars cite this scene as the one in which Lionel contracts the disease—and becomes the only one to overcome it—there is no evidence in the novel that it is. Anne McWhir characterizes the epidemiology of the novel's plague as "anti-contagionist," which "frees one from fear of the contaminating touch" and is a "less judgmental and stigmatizing explanation than contagionism from the transmission of literal and figurative illness. For better or worse, it can also be more democratic."[349] Anti-contagionism in McWhir's account is a method of disease transmission by miasma or the quality of air, rather than from person to person. Contagionism, on the other hand, understands a disease as something that passes from person to another, and in many scholarly interpretations of the novel that take up this approach to

[348] *The Last Man,* 336.
[349] Anne McWhir, "Mary Shelley's Anti-Contagionism: The Last Man as 'Fatal Narrative,'" *Mosaic: The Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* (June 2002) vol 35, no 2: 31.

the plague, it is likened to sympathy and to the dangers of over-sympathizing with others.[350] Yet the novel's plague has no specified origin nor etiology; it seems to move by miasma but even this is not confirmed. It is just as rampant in Europe and the Americas as it is in Asia and Africa. As Peter Melville helpfully claims, "To dismiss entirely Lionel's many testimonies to the plague's noncommunicative epidemiology is to overlook the novel's indebtedness to Shelley's anticontagionism…perhaps the one body of knowledge that enabled her to recognize the apocalyptic potential of a noncontagious disease."[351] The unknowable, undiscriminating nature of the plague challenges Lionel's English hubris and his illusions of control over his (white, English, seemingly autonomous and self-disciplined) body. The lessons he learned to civilize himself he is forced to unlearn. The plague does not even have a name, colloquial or scientific. It is not conquerable.

McWhir goes on to argue that the word "plague" becomes a "metaphor made of flesh,"[352] borrowing from analogies of revolution of the Romantic period, spreading like pamphlets and rumors spread. The upshot is a text "proliferating the destruction it describes,"[353] another way in which the novel, in scholarly commonplace, upends revolutionary ideals. Yet this, too, is extremely clean, suggesting a unified message of destruction or revolution that spreads

[350] Jennifer Deren reads *The Last Man* as a warning about the dangers of sympathy. "Shelley reminds readers that the phenomenon they credit for binding people and nations is also capable of spreading suffering and discontent. Demonstrated best by Lionel's encounter with the only explicitly black man in the novel, sympathy proves revolting when the boundaries between self and other are dissolved…The episode of the 'negro half clad' not only exemplifies involuntary disgust emerging as the difference between self and other collapse, but it also shows how sympathetic encounters help spread the plague…as Lionel contracts the black man's illness immediately following the encounter." (Deren, "Revolting Sympathies in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man," Nineteenth-Century Literature,* vol 72, no 2 (September 2017): 144.)
[351] Peter Melville, "The Problem of Immunity in The Last Man," *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (Autumn 2007) vol 47, no 4: 854.
[352] McWhir 34.
[353] Ibid 24.

throughout, limitless. As I have argued so far in this chapter, *The Last Man* builds Verney up as a *bildungsroman* hero only to dismantle the genre; his realizations come to no fruition; his knowledge becomes awash with doubt. Perhaps the greatest testament to this is, once more, form: his opus, this very account of his life, he says is written "with silly flourish (what so capricious and childish as despair?)," a dedication to "the illustrious dead. Shadows, arise, and read your fall!"[354] It is not to no one—at least, no one living—that he writes, and so McWhir's argument is perhaps too extreme. But it is with difficulty, through mediated objects, through the Sibyl through the unnamed narrator, that his book reaches any audience.

Rupture in Prophecy: Prophecy as a Naïf's Way of Knowing

If traditional epistemologies are taken off their pedestals time and again in the novel, what ways of knowing are privileged? Perhaps prophecy: The Sibyl is not the only prophesizing agent. Prophetic visions and speeches are doled out among several characters in the novel, usually in scenes of heightened emotion, but sometimes, too, in scenes of peace and meditation. Among the Seers are Evadne, Perdita, Raymond, and Lionel himself. Notable are the names particularly of the women, both bearing a long-standing literary tradition of women who have been wronged by the patriarchy. Evadne becomes pregnant with Apollo's baby, which causes fury and disbelief among men who then consult oracles who ultimately affirm the baby is of godly lineage and will grow to become a prophet himself. In another tale, Evadne is a woman who kills herself after her husband is killed by a lightning bolt in war. Perdita, meaning "the lost one" in Latin, is a character in *The Winter's Tale,* born in prison because her mother is falsely

[354] *The Last Man*, 466.

accused of being unfaithful to her father. The suspicions of men—the partial knowledges they bear—drive accusation and violent plot. In an apocalyptic novel like *The Last Man,* these women's names seem suggest that even though the world is harsh for all characters, it is particularly harsh on women. And even though men in the novel may have political power, they do not have knowledge that can be useful against global crisis.

As an epistemology, prophecy is not a learned or learnable skill. It is characterized by rupture, one of the lightning bolts cutting across the steadier terrain of the *bildungsroman*. It is also a kind of rupture that troubles the idea of a unified, coherent self. Knowledge coming from some other source not the individual's own challenges white, male, English subjectivity and agency. Like Lionel narrating in 2100 using present tense at various moments, prophecy interrupts the flow of time and democratizes agency—not to a point of anarchy, but to the point of confusion. Abroad and ready for war with the Turks, Lionel comes upon a dying Evadne, who has mysteriously, almost magically, appeared here (the last time she was seen was in England, years ago, languishing in a cottage and in need of Raymond's assistance). She utters a prophecy, calling out to a Raymond who isn't physically before her: "'Fire, and war, and plague, unite for thy destruction—O my Raymond, there is no safety for thee!'"[355] When Lionel recounts this strange encounter to Raymond, he "treated [Evadne's words] as the ravings of a manic," but Raymond believes them. "'Do not deceive yourself,--me you cannot. She has said nothing but what I knew before—though this is confirmation. Fire, the sword, and plague!'"[356] Raymond's hunch about his own coming death is never explained, nor is the transmission of this knowledge: how can two individuals in disparate parts of the world receive the same message from the future?

[355] *The Last Man,* 181.
[356] Ibid, 185.

Although many of Lionel's revelations and much of his learned knowledge is undone throughout the novel, his prophecies prove true. Wandering around Windsor, still under the notion that England might be safe, he leans against a tree and watches a happy scene: young people dancing, a band playing music. "At first the tripping measure lifted my spirit with it, and for a moment my eyes gladly followed the mazes of the dance. The revulsion of thought passed like keen steel to my heart. Ye are all going to die, I thought; already your tomb is built up around you."[357] Lionel is immediately panicked by this thought, calling it "insanity" and springing "forward to throw it off."[358] We can link this moment with the moment of encounter with the black man: there are truths in the universe—prophecy or the reality of another, ethnically different body in close proximity to him—that counter English stories about themselves. Mortality levels the playing field, even if the English subject tells himself differently. These instances say less about the things and people with whom Lionel comes in contact, and more about Lionel's limitations as an English subject. Lionel treats this prophecy as "insanity" because he cannot comprehend something that exists outside of logic coded as white, male, and English.

He also cannot accept what lives outside of English-coded sensibility. Prophecy does not move the same way that either Smithian or Humean theories of feeling—and knowledge about feeling—move: it is neither a leap of imagination writ large nor a contagion.[359] A prophecy has no known source, yet can somehow be transmitted to multiple people across national borders and cultures. In such a way, prophecy and plague—although not the same—bear a similar method of

[357] Ibid, 240.
[358] Ibid.
[359] Here I am referencing Adam Smith's 1759 *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* in which he defines sympathy as occurring through mirroring and imagining oneself in another's shoes, as well as David Hume's theory of passions, which he frames as "contagious" (*Treatise,* Book II, "Of Morals," https://davidhume.org/texts/t/3/full).

transmission and etiology: mysterious in cause and origin, carrying little hope in terms of ways forward. It is here where my argument departs from Timothy Ruppert: while Ruppert's intervention on time in the novel is important to the development of my reading—he helpfully describes the novel's collapse of time—he presents too optimistic a reading. "Her focus on the life-affirming power of the imagination permits Shelley to advance the idea that history, the sum of human choices, always opens new and better courses to those daring enough to seek them out…Lionel Verney's nightmare chronicle serves less to encode imperial destiny than to dramatize the imagination's transformative power, how creative thought can redefine the self and the other for the better."[360] There are several formal elements of the novel that resist this line of argument that I hope to have already lain out. I find also Ruppert's separation of "imperial destiny" and "imagination's transformative power" to be especially striking and problematic. As well as militaristic power and global capitalism, the imperial project *is* one of imagination.

As Said argued, one cannot think about English imagination in the nineteenth century without also thinking about imperialism.[361] Shelley knows this when she chronicles Lionel's changing thoughts about England. Even after Lionel's intrusive prophetic vision, he admits: "At a distance from facts one draws conclusions which appear infallible, which yet when put to the test of reality, vanish like unreal dreams. I had ridiculed the fears of my countrymen, when they related others; now that they came home to myself, I paused […] I spread the whole earth out as a map before me. On no one spot of its surface could I put my finger and say, here is safety."[362] Like the colonizing sailor set out to discover and conquer new worlds, he once more spreads a map before him, but now, at last, finds that he is no purveyor or panoptic surveyor. He has no

[360] Timothy Ruppert, "Time and the Sibyl in Mary Shelley's The Last Man," *Studies in the Novel* (Summer 2009), vol 41, no 2: 154. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24027145
[361] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1993): 12-13.
[362] *The Last Man,* 260.

control over the terrain, the people, the things that travel from people to people. In writing such a protagonist's journey, Shelley endorses naïveté as the ultimate—the last, the corrective, the aspirational—epistemology of the proud English subject—not the dangerous naïveté of Waverley or Horatio, bumbling and forgetful, but the kind of naïveté that can admit limitations of knowledge, a humble admission of the vast possibilities of what one does not know. The kind of naïveté that enables someone to say they do not know anymore, to call forth: "What are we, the inhabitants of this globe, least among the many that people infinite space? Our minds embrace infinity; the visible mechanism of our being is subject to merest accident."[363][364] It is this kind of naïveté that can encounter prophecy, plague, things that are incomprehensible and frightening, and acknowledge them as so, instead of falling prey to hubris and denial.

Re-reading

Where, then, is hope?

In another present-tense passage, Lionel reflects upon his lastness: "He is solitary; like our first parents expelled from Paradise, he looks back towards the scene he has quitted. The high walls of the tomb, and the flaming sword of plague, lie between it and him. Like our first parents, the whole earth is before him, a wide desart [*sic*]."[365] Lastness is likened to firstness. Lionel is seemingly in a time loop, brought back to square one of humanity. We are back to the very beginning, the slate wiped clean.

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[363] Ibid, 230.
[364] This line is reminiscent of Pope's "Essay on Man" and we might think about Shelley's intertextuality throughout *The Last Man,* not just diegetically in the form of prophecies and frame narration but also in terms of real-world textual references, a kind of archive of Romantic knowledge without being conclusive.
[365] *The Last Man*, 322.

Yet the slate is not wiped clean, not entirely. Lionel is left with the shards of all of human history around him; he is surrounded by monuments, buildings, and, crucially, texts. The epigraph on the title page is a quote from Milton's *Paradise Lost:* "Let no man seek/henceforth to be foretold what shall befall/him or his children."[366] This is Adam's lament when Michael shows him visions of humanity's future. Clearly, however, several texts resist Adam's wish. In telling the very story of Adam, Milton stands in defiance of these lines from the epigraph. In *The Last Man,* Shelley shows knowledge of Adam's wish as told by Milton and still goes on to tell the tale. The text is laden deep with intertextuality, knowledge, references that are scattered throughout Lionel's tale like their own Sibylline leaves, haunting yet too ephemeral to haunt. The existence of the text is a challenge to Adam's warning and vice versa, and so Adam's warning only creates an eerie shadow across the story, a disruption itself. Epistemology, particularly white, male, pro-imperialist English epistemology, must always be counterbalanced with doubt. Knowledge never rests on certain grounds in this novel.

Perhaps direction can be taken from the novel's warnings on what not to do. A foremost example of this is the faulty astronomer within the text, Merrival, who spends all his time looking thousands of years into the future. "He proceeded to assure [Idris] that the joyful prospect of an earthly paradise after an hundred thousand years, was clouded to him by the knowledge that in a certain period of time after, an earthly hell or purgatory, would occur."[367] Such a prophecy does not interest anyone in the party; everyone moves on quickly from the conversation, it is not a useful prophecy, as it takes place an inconceivable amount of time in the future. Much later, Merrival is in a poor state, "too long sighted in his view of humanity to heed

[366] Ibid, 1.
[367] Ibid, 220.

the casualties of the day, and lived in the midst of contagion unconscious of its existence."[368] The similarity between Merrival and the astronomer in *Rasselas* is too remarkable to ignore. Studies done in fixated solitude, away from community, do not equate to authority and mastery. Total resignation and detachment from society is critiqued throughout, just as an ideology that privileges heroism over prophecy and plague (à la Raymond) is lamented.

A balance might be found, Shelley seems to formally suggest, in a reading practice that can toggle between modes: between Sibylline leaves, memoir, autobiographical fact, and fiction. Intertextuality and crisscrossing timelines encourage this very multi-modal, counterbalanced reading practice that can weigh doubt and knowledge on either hand. Hope—or, if indeed, this is not possible, then a kind of consolation—can be found in the very task of balancing these sentiments and readerly orientations. The frame narrator finds themself consoled, after all, by the years-long act of transcription; so, too, does Lionel find comfort in his narratorial task. He, like his half-shepherd's dog, half-water dog companion, must "nevertheless [continue] fulfilling his duties in expectation of…return."[369] The dog does not know less than Lionel; it knows equally as little.

And this is where Shelley's novel ends. *Frankenstein* ends with Walton watching the creature disappear into oblivion, and although the creature is hurdling towards his own demise, the speaker is an intact, coherent subject that carries readers' hope forward into an anti-imperialist future. We assume Walton returns to England even if Frankenstein and the creature do not. Our readerly imagination is anchored in the literary persona of Walton, safely pulled to shore. Something has been learned and gained. *The Last Man,* however, ends with the positionality of the eponymous last man—the emblematic human creature—hurdling into the

[368] Ibid, 289.
[369] Ibid, 367.

unknown: “Thus around the shores of deserted earth, while the sun is high, and the moon waxes or wanes, angels, the spirits of the dead, and the ever-open eye of the Supreme, will behold the tiny bark, freighted with Verney—the Last Man.”[370] This is no colonizing sailor about to discover the Americas to regale the tale to the masses. This is a speck upon a once-large, sprawling, and knowable map, foreseen by a Sibyl hundreds of years ago and trickling through in fragments to a narrator that has disappeared from the novel. Lionel’s arc has been one of undoing subjecthood and traditional modes of knowledge, revealing his inherent objecthood, the limits of his epistemology, his naïveté.

[370] Ibid, 470.

Coda: Naïveté Now, Three Case Studies

We're so young
But we're on the road to ruin
We play dumb but we know exactly what we're doin'

[…]

Baby, we're the new romantics
Come on, come along with me
Heartbreak is the national anthem
We sing it proudly

[…]

Please leave me stranded
It's so romantic

--Taylor Swift, "New Romantics," *1989* album (2014)

Taylor Swift's 2016 music video for her 2014 deluxe single, "New Romantics," is what people call a stage mix, a montage of several performances of the song from various stadiums across the world cut together. In this visualization of the song, the New Romantics are Swift and her fans, shown in the video to be mostly young white femmes, the "endless ocean of crowd that was everything," as she describes them at the end of the video in a voice-over commemorating her album tour. "I don't want to forget anything that happened on this tour. It was one of those remarkable moments in time when everything felt exciting," she continues.

For Swift, who boasts more than 88 million followers on Twitter and 11 Grammy Awards, the New Romantics seem to be defined by an identification with youth, a simultaneous desire for connection and isolation (that lyrical movement between "We" and "Please leave me stranded"), an embrace of the sublime ("endless ocean of crowd") and sensibility ("we sing [heartbreak] proudly"), as well as a feigned naïveté ("we play dumb"). I have always thought this

music video strange within the Swift oeuvre, not the least because her music videos are usually contained stories in which she is playing a character that, with plausible deniability, may or may not be a version of herself. In this music video, however, she is emphasizing the parasocial relationship—a phrase used to describe a mediated relationship between a celebrity and an audience—between her fans and herself, unified in a community called the New Romantics.

Why this visual with these lyrics? What effect does it create? On the one hand, it makes the viewer want to be a part of this movement, swept up in what is, truthfully, a beautiful image of a sea of lights in a crowd, moving to music. *I* have certainly felt that. On the other, it leaves a sour taste in my mouth. Her recall of Romanticism, her gesture towards naïveté as a way of being in the world, coupled with the video montage of her world tour, I posit, result in an example of contemporary white feminism that 1) rightfully critiques the violence of the patriarchy, especially and sometimes exclusively violence against cis white women and 2) uses unknowing as a way to move through the world. The first is a descendant of Burney's proto-feminism: indeed, Taylor Swift is nothing if not intelligent, gesturing at naïveté as a way to have fun and live lightly in the face of hardship. The second, however, in the present-day US American context, is a white feminism inseparable from geopolitics and ongoing settler-colonialism, and lays bare the very contours of what Cathy Park Hong calls white innocence. Taylor Swift can gain followers, go on multiple world tours, dominate the (very racist) radio stations, and still fashion herself as an underdog.

I should say here that white women are not the only ones with a double relationship to naïveté. Contemporary white male politicians absolutely position themselves as bumbling or ignorant, but the effect is different.[371] Rather than wondering whether they are sexually innocent

[371] I am thinking here of Trump and Boris Johnson in particular. The latter says in a viral interview, "I certainly think that as a general tactic in life—if that's what you are driving at—it is often useful to give

or cunning, the public's question towards them is more: Is he this ignorant or is he pretending? His power does not come under question, however, and he by and large does not act from a position of powerlessness, rhetorically or in actuality.

Taylor Swift as a popular cultural phenomenon has long been a site for debates about feminism: how to read works written by a woman and how to read the woman herself. The public has switched their opinion on her time and time again. In many ways, she re-presents the Evelina problem: because she is a conventionally beautiful, relatively young white woman who debuted her first album as a teenager, she was subject to public scrutiny about how pure she was, who she was dating, who her songs were about. Each song was seen as a roman à clef. Her lyrics were often read for autobiographical information, and, playing to this, she wrote her lyrics in a way that invited suspicious reading as fan engagement. In her first five albums, if you bought a physical copy of the CDs, her lyric books contained hidden messages in capitalized letters scattered throughout the verses. Placed in sequential order, these letters would spell out messages about the songs. (Her song "Back to December," for example, contained the message "Tay," widely speculated to be a reference to her previous relationship with actor Taylor Lautner, whom she dated quite publicly over the course of a winter. In a more incontrovertible example, her song "The Best Day," which is about her mom, contains the hidden message, "God bless Andrea Swift.") In her four more recent albums, she has stopped this tradition and has been more private about her relationships.

Because I am hyperaware of the Evelina problem, I have gone back and forth many times on how to read Taylor Swift. After more than a decade of listening to her music and worrying if

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the slight impression that you are deliberately pretending not to know what is going on. Because the reality may be that you don't know what is going on, but people won't be able to tell the difference" (BBC interview with Michael Cockerell 2013).

my unsettled reaction to her music and public messaging is some sort of internalized misogyny, I have decided that, just as I can read the works of authors and scrutinize them without making personal or autobiographical judgments, so too can I analyze Swift's music and her use of naïveté without making a one-to-one connection between those and her as a person. In her usage of naïveté, I have found that she encapsulates the problematic of naïveté covered in this dissertation.

To illustrate my two-fold point, I turn to Swift's 2020 documentary called *Miss Americana.*[372] Again, in the name, we see a recall to nationalism tied with youth and naïveté. In the second half of the documentary, Swift talks about being sexually assaulted on the red carpet. On stage, playing the piano and speaking into the mic to the audience, she talks candidly and movingly about how she used her voice in court against the man who assaulted her and a year ago to the date, won the case. The documentary then cuts to a clip of Fox News during the 2018 midterm elections in Tennessee. We see that a Republican candidate is gaining in the polls. Another jump cut to Swift in transport doing her makeup and saying to the cameraman, "My team is really not happy with me right now. All I've talked about in the last couple of months is the election in Tennessee. It's not that I want to step into this. It's just—I can't *not* at this point. Something is different in my life, completely and unchangeably different since the sexual assault trial last year." Another cut to her dressing room, in which a man says, "For twelve years, we've

[372] The recent Taylor Swift has been very keen on this phrase and the idea of a nostalgic americana. She has a 2019 song called "Miss Americana & the Heartbreak Prince." In 2020, "The Last Great American Dynasty" is a song that features on her album, *Folklore,* and the lyrics dream up an east coast heterosexual romance between a woman named Rebekah and a man named Bill, who "was the heir to the Standard Oil name and money." The song seems to critique people in the town for making rumors about Rebekah, her tendency to drink alcohol and party. The chorus ventriloquizes these rumors "She had a marvelous time ruinin' everything"—and in the last verse, the "she" turns to "I." The singer proudly (Taylor Swift or her persona, or a mixture of both) positions herself as Rebekah, claiming that she has rocked the boat of the social order.

not got involved with politics or religion." A last cut to her saying, "Yeah, but this is on the home front…I need to be on the right side of history."

There is a lot to unpack in this. It is clear that as a young female celebrity, she is pressured constantly by the misogynistic industry to be silent and obediently fit the script that is written for her as a good girl country-singer-turned-pop-star. Especially in the wake of the #MeToo movement, her trial—and how public it was—is painful, heart-wrenching, and there is an ever-present awareness that it could go either way. At the same time, it is surprising (or perhaps not, since she can afford to take the risk with her enormous platform) that it is only *now,* several years into her illustrious career, that she—perfectly positioned with her country music fanbase—is finally speaking up about politics, *realizing* that she has the ability to, and discovering the inequities at her "home front," another loaded term historically used in the US and Britain during the World Wars to talk about women's labor. It becomes clear that the genealogy for her feminism is a white one.

This is more than just Taylor Swift, more than just her oeuvre, which draws upon nostalgia for British colonialism (the "Wildest Dreams" music video presents her as an Elizabeth Taylor-like actress on the set of an African safari drama) just as it perpetually evokes American imperialism (the song "gold rush" is an extended analogy for romantic desire). Lana Del Rey, for example, the stage name of another white woman singer named Elizabeth Grant, has built a career and aesthetic around americana and nostalgia. Her dedication to white femininity in her artistry is undercut by the stage name she has chosen, which is pulled from Cuban culture and which she explains reminds her of the "glamour of the seaside."[373] In 2020, she lamented in an Instagram post about the popularity of the work of Beyoncé, Cardi B, Doja Cat, Nicki Minaj,

[373] Interview with Lana Del Rey, Vogue UK, 2011. https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/lana-del-rey-interview

Kehlani, Ariana Grande, and Camila Cabello, the majority of whom are women of color. She compared her work "about being embodied, feeling beautiful, being in love" to theirs, which she describes as being about "being sexy, wearing no clothes, fucking, cheating etc,"—in essence, her work is more seemingly innocent and more feminine. She aligns herself with an idea of womanhood that is more "authentic" and "delicate,"[374] grouping sexiness or sexuality with indelicacy and a kind of performativity or posturing that is seemingly not earnest. When she received backlash on social media for it, she defended herself saying that she heralds a "new wave/3rd wave of feminism" even though "Let this be clear, I'm not a feminist."[375] The ability to speak for women while disavowing the idea of being political is fascinating and a double-ness that white feminism often displays. If Walter Scott co-opted naïveté from white British women writers before him, then white American women song-writers have taken it back.

It seemed, widely speaking, that popular white women singers like Swift and Del Rey—if not the individuals then certainly the public personas—are at once out of touch and presenting themselves as innocent in their work. The result is a brand of white feminism that capitalizes on naïveté (and its associations with purity, white nostalgia, and unknowing) and uses it to explain away their purported apolitical stances, or else their belated or outdated political stances.

Taylor Swift positions herself as naïve, gains power, and then realizes that power, which in turn comes across as rather naïve. The non-linearity of naïveté—the delayed knowledge reminiscent of Horatio and Waverley which gets absolved at the end—is self-sufficient, functioning rather successfully to uphold itself. Taylor Swift does not need to grow or correct herself. In some ways, thinking about her and writing about her makes the scholar run through the entire length of this dissertation: we see her naïveté as feminist, then we see it as operating

[374] Lana Del Rey's Instagram post, May 21, 2020.
[375] Ibid.

within and critical of the Gothic realm of the patriarchy, then we see how it functions to uphold systems of oppression by delaying knowledge and absolving the white subject in question. The Verney in question here, however, would not be Swift, but rather, her critics. Something that comes with thinking about Taylor Swift's oeuvre and her positionality in white feminism is mind-numbing and exhausting. She is caught up in so many circuitous problematics of epistemology: on the one hand, empathetic because she is a woman in a predatory industry; on the other, frustrating and enraging because she positions herself as naïve in a way that deflects productive thought and critique.

For Swift, political realizations never come too late; they come and go just on time, as breezily as heartbreak and new romance.

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In October of 2020, a Netflix show called *Emily in Paris* premiered. Reviews have called it "painful,"[376] filled with "faux pas,"[377] and capturing "the worst of American white girls abroad."[378] Yet only a month after its premiere, the show was renewed for a second season.

Emily in Paris stars Lily Collins (the actress known for playing Snow White in *Mirror Mirror* (2012) and the daughter of musician Phil Collins) as the eponymous character, a mid-twenties woman from Chicago who moves to Paris when her pregnant boss is no longer able to take the job. She is hired to offer "an American point of view" to a French marketing firm that advertises for high-end fashion and beauty products. Emily, it is revealed, has a Master's degree

[376] Melanie Hamlett, "It's Even More Painful to Watch *Emily in Paris* in France," *Slate* (October 20, 2020).
[377] Sarah Moroz, "*Emily in Paris'*s Biggest *Faux Pas* is Emily Herself," *Vulture* (October 7, 2020).
[378] Alex Zaragoza, "*Emily in Paris* Captures the Worst of American White Girls Abroad," *Vice* (October 14, 2020).

but experience solely in pharmaceutical marketing, and has no French. In the first half of episodes, before the show becomes more about her love triangle, each episode features Emily bumbling through a new work conflict and somehow, miraculously, managing to keep her job—even though she posts on social media about their competitor, which would absolutely be a conflict of interest, and angers clients with her culturally ignorant ways. Her only asset, it seems, is her Instagram prowess, but in all areas required for her job—French, knowledge of brands, knowledge of fashion—she continually shows a lack.

Like the eighteenth-century novices in Stephanie Hershinow's wonderful monograph, Emily does not change. She remains stubbornly static and ignorant throughout. But—and this is a clear departure from the eighteenth-century ingénu(e)s—she also does not change those around her. Her French co-workers may learn to tolerate her, but their worldview isn't rocked by her. What is so narratively strange about the show is that Emily and the French characters around her exist constantly in tension with one another, which could be ripe for plot to happen, but this is not what the show does or wants to do! They narratively brush shoulders and then Emily is on her merry way. It is this that is perhaps the show's most horrifying point of realism: a white American girl can go to France without any French, infiltrate the world of high fashion and beauty with no expertise in it and very little willingness to learn, take actions that threaten the reputation of her company, and still at the end of the day be lauded for a job well done. The show wants us to celebrate her or be charmed by her, at the very least; the apparatus of the show offers no critique of or corrective to her behavior.

In a telling scene, her co-worker catches her moping during break. "You came to Paris, and you don't speak French—that is arrogant."

In response, she says, "More ignorant than arrogant."

His rejoinder is: “Let’s call it the arrogance of ignorance.”

What I find interesting here is that the writers seem cognizant that ignorance and arrogance are not mutually exclusive! American ignorance can be—and is, in many cases—arrogant. As laid out in the introduction of this dissertation, ignorance is the rhetorical claim of not knowing something specific, be it a language or an idea, but naïveté is what happens when that unknowing connects with notions of agency and responsibility. In some ways, Emily’s ignorance of the French language could be a mere fact of character and narrative, but once French characters point out that it is mixed with arrogance and her position as an American abroad, what they are speaking about is naïveté. And what happens narratively is that her white feminist American self’s naïveté is absolved and endorsed, checked but never corrected. The show could’ve used this moment to push plot and character work forward, but it doesn’t. This scene is swatted away as if it never happened and the story does not give us hints about whose side it’s on (its continuous focalization on Emily seems to say: Emily.)

This scene could have been levied to catalyze some change in Emily. It could’ve opened up rich discussion about how whiteness operates in France and in America. I expected there to be a montage following immediately after of Emily learning French, dressing more stylishly, adopting customs. *Putting in some effort.*

None of these things happen.

We are left with Emily’s American naïveté and her easy mobility through her world.

*

On Christmas of 2020, Netflix premiered a new series called *Bridgerton,* based on a book series of the same name. The story takes place in Regency London's *ton,* the wealthiest parts of the city, and follows a close-knit white family. The series, in an attempt to explain their race-conscious[379] casting, has a throwaway line about how the black and white "kingdoms" live together in harmony now that they have a black queen. In this alt-historical romance, we periodically see this black queen frowning at anything pertaining to her husband, George III. The main character of season one, Daphne Bridgerton, is a sweet ingénue who doesn't know anything about sex, makes a deal to with the Duke of Hastings, a black man, to pretend to be engaged in order to get out of other connections, and ends up falling in love with him.

The two eventually marry and confess their feelings to one another. The show is lauded across prominent venues as "a delicious, raunchy tale,"[380] "a sparkly period piece with a difference,"[381] and "a confectionary treat of a romance."[382] It has also brought more mainstream attention to the genre of romance. As of September 2021, it is Netflix's most popular TV show in the app's history in terms of sheer number of views.[383] Yet few reviewers know what to do about one of the main plot events: a rape that happens in episode 6. Daphne, having learned nothing about sex from her family and friends, assumes that the Duke's pull-out method is the way everyone has sex. She is vocal about wanting to have children, but the Duke has said in previous

[379] I have opted for this term over "color-blind" because the story acknowledges racial difference diegetically and makes this part of the plot, albeit awkwardly.
[380] Holmes, Linda. "Bridgerton' is a Delicious, Raunchy Tale of One Very Hot Family." *NPR*, December 28, 2020. https://www.npr.org/2020/12/28/949236178/bridgerton-is-a-delicious-raunchy-tale-of-1-very-hot-family.
[381] Poniewozik, James. "Review: 'Bridgerton' is a Sparkly Period Piece with a Difference." *New York Times.* April 2, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/23/arts/television/bridgerton-review.html.
[382] Caroline Framke, "'Bridgerton,' Shondaland's Frist Scripted Netflix Show, is a Confectionary Treat of a Romance: TV Review," *Variety,* December 21, 2020.
[383] Alex Sherman, "'Bridgerton' tops Netflix's most watched TV shows ever, while 'Extraction' leads among movies," *NBC News,* September 28, 2021.

episodes to her that he "cannot provide" her with children. What he means to say is that he has decided he will never be a father and doesn't want to be. Her misunderstanding lies in assuming that he is physically incapable of having children—not that he doesn't want them.

When she discovers that in order to have children, he must finish while inside her, she grows angry that this secret about sex and reproduction has been kept from her, and she rapes him with the hopes of getting pregnant. In a disturbing scene, she stays on top of him while they have sex. She is angry and defiant, but the scene is shot in a way that suggests the show wants us to cheer her on. This, the show seems to say, is an act of feminist rage against the patriarchy for keeping a basic biological fact away from her.

Writer Aja Romano expresses shock and disappointment at this scene. "The show doesn't dwell on Daphne's choices, or on any long-term aftermath from that moment. The incident doesn't seem to impact Simon's ability to trust Daphne in bed. Instead, the show turns toward Daphne's distrust of him for lying to her, dwelling on Simon's need to win her forgiveness and give up his vow [to never be a father] for the sake of their happiness."[384] Indeed, this arc is focalized through Daphne, more interested in her woundedness than in the Duke's feelings. ("Heartbreak is the national anthem," Taylor Swift sings.) In the eyes of the show, she has done nothing wrong.

The show privileges Daphne's naïveté as something shaped by the patriarchy, placing her feelings above everything else. This focus on her sexual innocence—maintained even as she is engaging in rather explicit sex shown onscreen—absolves her of rape even as she is committing the act. Whiteness is centered once more, even as it deflects agency and responsibility.

[384] Aja Romano, "Bridgerton has a rape scene, but it's not treated like one," *Vox,* December 26, 2020.

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As *Bridgerton, Emily in Paris,* and Taylor Swift continue to accrue commercial success, we continue to be haunted by naïveté. It is part and parcel of the cishet patriarchy, which demands that women do not know their own bodies, do not know about sex, do not know about politics, do not know their own potential or power. It is also, at the same time, a position from which white women—and, absolutely, white men, especially in politics—move about the world to spread cultural power and perpetuate the status quo with the ability to say, "Oops, I didn't know." It is the arrogance of innocence.

A New Romanticism defined by naïveté, a naïveté as a national anthem, is a powerful, Gothic thing, enfolding us in concentric circles of unawareness and the belief that we can do nothing about it. What to do when this movement beckons us to "come on, come along" with it?

Perhaps the answer lies in being able to straddle third-person and first-person, awake to the ways in which this romanticism is not new, and willing to dismantle our systems of knowing—and to unlearn the ways we have been taught not to know.

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