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Feeling Subjects: Sensibility's Möbius Strip and the Public-Private Subject in
Later Eighteenth-Century British Fiction

by

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DEDICATION

In heartfelt memory of Professor Bruce Stovel

“He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much... who has always looked for the best in others and given them the best he had; whose life was an inspiration; whose memory a benediction.”

—Bessie Anderson Stanley,
“Success,” 1904.

ABSTRACT

Feeling Subjects investigates sensibility in relation to the production of subjectivity in the later eighteenth century. It creates a model of sensibility as a discursive space bringing together literary, philosophical, and medical understandings of feeling. It argues that sensibility's discursive space produces experiential subjects in an ongoing, dynamic project of negotiating between the internalization of public experiences and the projection of private feelings and thoughts. It invokes the three-dimensional image of the Möbius strip to envision inner/private and external/public expressions of feeling as inseparable, yet distinct elements that help to produce the feeling subject. This model of sensibility represents a new theory of subjectivity in the later eighteenth-century where the literary subject and the social community that surrounds him or her are both co-constitutive and co-destructive and where the traditional binaries are challenged in a model that sees every character as simultaneously a public and private subject. The aim of the project is to show that the legacies of rational men and emotional women which have occupied scholars of the eighteenth century for much of the last fifty years suggest a much more cohesive understanding of gender and its connection to subjectivity than is revealed in much of the fiction of sensibility in the period. *Feeling Subjects* offers a theory of sensibility that is not inherently gendered, and that focuses on how individuals experience themselves in relation to the world around them while simultaneously generating that world. The project is divided into two halves which enact the Möbius model of private and public feeling. The first half focuses on the personally and socially productive potential of sensibility in *The Adventures of David Simple*, *The History of Ophelia*, *The Vicar of*

Wakefield, and *The Fool of Quality*. The second half examines the increasingly negative expression of sensibility in *A Simple Story*, *Secresy*, *The Natural Daughter*, and *Zofloya*. Throughout *Feeling Subjects*, sensibility is not just a word denoting the expression of feeling, but a discursive space through which to experience the tensions and interrelations between public and private thought and feeling in theories of socialization in the later eighteenth-century novel.

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Feeling Subjects: Sensibility's Möbius Strip and the Public-Private Subject in Later Eighteenth-Century British Fiction

At its heart, this project is an investigation of feelings and the role they were understood to play in the emergence of a new kind of consciousness in the eighteenth century. The project suggests a re-visioning of the way that men and women turned experience—especially that of feeling, commonly termed sensibility—into an understanding of their subjectivity through a fluid process of internalizing (often unspoken) social expectations and projecting personal feelings and thoughts. By analyzing the experiences of male and female protagonists in the fiction of sensibility, I hope to show the ways in which sensational epistemology can help to produce a new kind of literary subject: a ‘feeling subject’ that can challenge several of the dichotomies that symbolize the tension and ideological conflict surrounding gender in the Age of Enlightenment in Britain.

In doing so, the aim of the project is to show that the legacies of rational men and emotional women which have occupied scholars of the eighteenth century for much of the last fifty years suggest a much more cohesive understanding of gender and its connection to subjectivity than is revealed in much of the fiction of sensibility in the period. The chapters that follow detail how some of the most pervasive literary motifs of rational and emotionally detached men and perpetually weeping women have mistakenly led modern critics to oversimplify the relationship between characters and their feelings and that, by extension, the discussion of gendered subjectivity in the period has been negatively affected by these literary assumptions. I argue that the novel of sensibility,

with its emphasis both on private feelings and shared social experiences, is the optimal discursive field through which to theorize a more heterogeneous model of gendered experiential subjectivity in the later eighteenth century.

The basis for the model of subjectivity I am formulating in this project is the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of the term as "Consciousness of one's perceived states" as well as "individuality, personality."¹ This is an idea about how individuals understood themselves, and their place in the social world around them, that was both new and highly contentious in the eighteenth century.² I am using this grounding for my discussion of subjectivity and gender because I want to examine the literature of sensibility and its contribution to discussions about gendered identity and experience from within the philosophical, medical, and literary discourses of the time. Although I am not approaching the topic from what has now become the more common anti-humanist and poststructuralist Foucauldian and Althusserian understandings of subjectivity as a

¹ Raymond Williams offers a useful explanation of the common definitions of "subject" and "object" and the different way that they were understood after the seventeenth century, but before our late-twentieth century meaning in *Keywords*: "The normal scholastic distinction between subjective and objective was: subjective – as things are in themselves (from the sense of subject as substance); objective – as things are presented to consciousness ('thrown before' the mind). These perfectly reasonable uses, however, were parts of a radically different world-view from that which, developing from [the late seventeenth century] and especially from Descartes, proposed the thinking self as the first substantial area of knowledge – the subject – from the operations of which the independent existence of all other things must be deduced – as objects thrown before this consciousness" (261). He offers further definitions of the subject as "the active mind or the thinking agent (in ironic contrast with the passive subject of political dominion)" and of the object as "that which is other than the active mind or the thinking agent (in the development of the argument this was classified into several categories of object)" (261-2).

² For more on the reception of the consciousness-model of subjectivity, and particularly the model posited by John Locke, see Christopher Fox's *Locke and the Scriblerians: Identity and Consciousness in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain* and Roy Porter's *Flesh in the Age of Reason: How the Enlightenment Transformed the Way we See Our Bodies and Souls*.

non-conscious tool of state subjection, Michel Foucault's social theories do still figure into my work.³

The Möbius strip model of subjectivity-through-sensibility which I am theorizing in this project is concerned with how individuals come to understand themselves through the interplay between conscious and non-conscious experience. It involves the passive internalization of social ideology as well as active internalization, learned through the process of mimesis, and the projection of a self-aware (and sometimes self-deluded) understanding of a character within a social community. Mimesis, or the "imitation of another person's words, mannerisms, actions, etc," is an important part of the experience of socialization in novels of sensibility (*OED*). This is particularly true in the first two chapters, where David Simple, Ophelia Lenox, and young Harry Clinton try to learn how to behave and where to belong in their social community by watching and copying the actions of others. Also, the failure of mimesis, or the rejection of imitating others, is part of what causes the social rejection and personal destabilization that Miss Milner, Victoria di Loredani, and Martha Morley experience in my discussions of destructive sensibility in the final two chapters of this dissertation.

³ One of the main concerns I have about relying upon the Foucauldian and Althusserian constructions of subjectivity is that they emerged from a period having a vastly different understanding of the composition of mind and body, of the unconscious, and of social constructedness. Using a modern, poststructuralist theory in a late-early modern period creates a risk of essentializing the socio-cultural experiences of that period, particularly with reference to gender, and of overlooking the importance of the newly-developed theories of individual consciousness that featured so significantly in the intellectual development of the eighteenth century in Britain. G.J. Barker-Benfield also expresses specific concerns about using Foucauldian theory to understand the historical intricacies of the age of sensibility. For Barker-Benfield, the focus of the eighteenth century is on an "increasingly self-conscious conflict" that is not attended to in Foucault's model (xxxiii).

Though my ultimate goal is to use experiential and sensational epistemology to understand how a subject might come to understand him or herself in a social context within the literature of sensibility, I also acknowledge that this process is inevitably influenced by the kinds of non-conscious, institutionalized, and ideological power which Foucault explores in much of his writings. Indeed, my construction of the external/public forces that influence subjectivity is inspired by Foucault's discussion of the institutionalization of sex in his section on *scientia sexualis* in Volume One of *The History of Sexuality* and the chapter on "Docile Bodies" in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

When personal experiences and feelings, and the development of consciousness that result from them, come into conflict with the social and ideological forces attempting to impose set characteristics on gender and sex, this invokes the discourses of power and repression of which Foucault is so fond. This intersection, which often happens without characters being able to articulate what is happening to them, is the moment when characters experience the tension between internal and external and public and private feelings and thoughts, and when subjectivity therefore becomes most tenuous in the novels of sensibility. What makes this genre such a valuable, though often frustrating, field of study is its resistance to a consistent resolution of this tension as part of its generic conventions. As chapters one and two of this dissertation show, sometimes the character's internal experiences and sense of subjectivity prevail over the ideological and social expectations of their conduct and the character may be able to effect a change in the wider community and thereby to modify the expectations placed upon him or herself, and others. In contrast, as chapters three and four detail, the character may be emotionally

or physically destroyed by the inability to reconcile his or her sense of self with the force exerted on them by the ideological pressure to conform; this is especially true in novels with a Gothic element.

To concretize my theory in the chapters that follow I have selected eight novels, published between 1744 and 1806, that negotiate and destabilize key binaries in the period in innovative and complex ways while engaging with their socio-cultural context and their contemporary literary counterparts: Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744, 1753), Sarah Fielding's *The History of Ophelia* (1760), Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1765-70), Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791), Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy* (1795), Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter* (1799), and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806). I have tried to choose a mix of novels considered canonical over the last forty years as well as non-canonical novels to reflect what I see as a much larger cultural field of inquiry about sensibility than strictly canonical texts tend to admit.

The project is divided into two parts, each comprised of two chapters, which enact the Möbius model of subjectivity-through-sensibility that I will explain in detail shortly. The first half explores the predominantly positive expression of sensibility, and its socially and individually productive potential in Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* and *The History of Ophelia*, Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality*. In this section, the subject develops a sense of his or her place in the world through experiences with, and attempts to mimic, public models of thought and behaviour—conveyed at social gatherings, and between individual characters—and then comparing those to his or her private feelings and desires. The

second half of the dissertation examines the increasingly negative expression of sensibility, and its socially and individually destructive potential, in Elizabeth's Inchbald's *A Simple Story*, Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy*, Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter*, and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*. In this section, the subject is destroyed by being unable, or unwilling, to balance or to subordinate his or her internal feelings to the pressure to conform to social and ideological models of thought and behaviour.

Absent from this project, perhaps conspicuously so, are novels by the "dream team of eighteenth-century fiction," Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Laurence Sterne (Warner 31). The majority of studies on sensibility rely heavily on these authors to the exclusion of others who nonetheless provide important contouring and nuance to the critical understanding of sensibility. Despite choosing a less conventional group of texts as the literary focus, in making an argument about the emergence of the experiential subject and its relation to fiction, I am following the well-established lead of scholars like Stephen Cox, Christopher Fox, G.J. Barker-Benfield, Roy Porter, and Nancy Armstrong.⁴ In particular, Armstrong's recent assertion in *How Novels Think* that "the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same" is also a starting point for my own project (3). I am also engaging with a definition of 'the modern subject' similar to the one that Armstrong offers. She argues that the subject "came into being as it took in sensations from the

⁴ It was Porter's enthusiastic scholarly engagement with eighteenth-century medicine and philosophy, his exhaustive work on Enlightenment intellectual culture, and his work on sexuality with G.S. Rousseau which first prompted this project. While my philosophical and medical discussions of the period are largely relegated to this introductory chapter, and to the introductory sections of the chapters that follow, Porter's lucid readings of many of the major authors, from Bacon, Descartes, and Locke to Mandeville, Cheyne, Shaftesbury, and Smith provide the underpinning to much of my work throughout the dissertation.

outside world and, of that material composed first the ideas and then the judgement and moral sense that gave it a self-enclosed and internally coherent identity” with which I primarily agree (1). I likewise concur with Armstrong that eighteenth-century fiction sought to articulate “a kind of subject that had not yet existed in writing” though I disagree that a “self-enclosed and internally coherent identity” is the ultimate aim of the discussions of subjectivity in the period (3).

Where I definitely part ways with Armstrong’s recent monograph, however, is with her assertion that the emergence of the conscious, self-aware subject led directly to the spread of individualism in Western culture in the eighteenth century and that the literature of sensibility opposed this development (16). Offering an alternative to Armstrong’s unwillingness, or inability, to envision the subject in novels of sensibility as possessing both an inner, sensually-perceiving component and an external, socially and ideologically sympathetic component is where, and how, my approach to eighteenth-century subjectivity responds to current critical discussions in the field. I do not see that critics must engage with the subject in binary terms: that is, to view him or her as either completely “self-enclosed” or fundamentally opposed to individualism, as Armstrong implies. The theory that I am proposing in this project is, instead, one that situates the subject as both an individual and part of a larger social community, a joint product of internal/private and external/public forces and experiences. To do this, my theory is grounded on an image that resists binaries and the hierarchies and essentialisms that tend to accompany them: the Möbius strip.

The Möbius Strip

When I first read Elizabeth Grosz's book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* I was struck by her brilliant use of the Möbius strip as a way of explaining embodiment—a 'lived' conscious experience of the gendered body—as a process of internalizing cultural mores while simultaneously expressing personal feelings and passions to the outside world. The idea of the Möbius strip is, of course, not new; Grosz herself borrowed the concept from Lacan, though not to use it in the way that he did (xii). The Möbius strip is the symbol of infinity, a way of representing the inseparability of inside and outside while recognizing the distinction between them. Grosz's idea to think of the body using this image provides her a way to move beyond binaries that have often been the focus of studies of subjectivity since the mid-seventeenth century. It allows Grosz to argue that "the body is neither—while also being both—the private or the public, self or other, natural or cultural, psychical or social, instinctive or learned, genetically or environmentally determined" (23). Using the Möbius strip to deny binaries, while still recognizing the distinction between traditionally opposed concepts, enables Grosz to provide a less hierarchical relationship between concepts without stripping them of their meaning.

By using the Möbius strip to talk about sensibility and subjectivity I am using it in the same sense as Grosz, arguing that "while there are disparate 'things' being related, they have the capacity to twist one into the other. This enables the mind/body relation to avoid the impasses of reductionism, of a narrow causal relation or the retention of the binary divide" (209-10). Grosz's discussion of the body as a site of inscription with a readable surface invokes a metaphor of the body-as-text that has immediate appeal for

literary scholars. Grosz, however, never used her theory of embodiment to analyze fiction. So, while my methodology is inspired by her theory, the vast majority of my treatment of the Möbius strip as well as the issues of constructing a theory that works for the study of literature, and within the historical context of the eighteenth century, are my own formulation.

In the Möbius model of subjectivity I am offering, the body is the vehicle through which personal experiences and public forces create a dynamic relationship of give and take. The emphasis on public and private feelings in the literature of sensibility works particularly well as a vehicle through which to experience this kind of embodiment: it features protagonists attempting to negotiate the constant internalization of public feelings and sentiments and projection of personal passions and emotions that happens through visible physical signs (tears, sighs, blushes) as well as invisible intellectual sentiments (thoughts of approval, disgust, confusion, acceptance or rejection). During this ongoing, dynamic internalization and projection the individual of sensibility is able to develop a sense of himself or herself as a feeling subject while also (re-) configuring the social environment influencing this same sense of subjectivity.

The Möbius model incorporates Paul Smith's proposal that the subject is created (and I argue, can also be destroyed) "by a continual and continuing series of overlapping subject-positions which may or may not be present to consciousness at any given moment, but which in any case constitute a person's history" (32). Like Smith, I reject Althusser's notion that "individuals are always-already subjects" because in the Möbius model of sensibility I am offering, the subject never completely achieves subjectivity in any definite or finished sense but is always a work in progress (Althusser 119). For

example, though Reverend Primrose has a clear understanding of himself and how he fits into his world in the opening pastoral scenes of *The Vicar of Wakefield* he loses this sense of himself during the many episodes of suffering that form the bulk of the short novel's contents and his sense of self is also tested when he has relationship struggles with his family and friends. These experiences cause Primrose to re-evaluate and subsequently redefine himself and then, when he is restored to grace and wealth at the end of the novel, this causes yet another redefinition of his subjectivity.

I want to stress that the Möbius model does not guarantee a positive experience of negotiating between, and understanding, the self and the outside world, and I am just as interested in what causes a breakdown of subjectivity as that which constructs it. For example, just as the internalization and mimetic projection of feelings and expectations help David Simple, Ophelia Lenox, Rev. Primrose, and Harry Clinton to better understand their roles in society and their personal responsibilities to that society, experiences of sensibility can also destroy the individual and the community with which he or she may feel in conflict. Chapters three and four of this project examine the destructiveness of sensibility and the interconnectedness of public and private feelings. As Mr. Dorriforth, Mr. Valmont, Martha Morley and Victoria di Loredani are overwhelmed by experiences of social failure, rejection, selfishness and misanthropy their worlds become darker and their subjectivity becomes more precarious. This leads Dorriforth, Valmont and Victoria to implement strict and restrictive rules governing the community around them in an attempt to regulate the experiences that might cause them to lose their sense of themselves and their place in an increasingly antagonistic public sphere.

The most important product of this model of subjectivity, cultivated through the interplay between public and private feelings, is the establishment of sensibility as not just a term denoting the capacity to feel, but as a discursive space that encompasses the traditionally gendered binary associations of male/reason/mind/strong/public and female/emotion/body/weak/private without privileging one half of the binary or necessarily setting them in opposition to each other. Because each of these terms is somehow related to the discourse of sensibility in the eighteenth century, the non-hierarchical structure implicit in the Möbius model allows each character the possibility of experiencing any or all of these ten terms in different combinations based on his or her emotional, physical, and intellectual experiences. In other words, within this understanding of the “discursive space” model of sensibility and subjectivity a character’s sex does not come with a natural set of characteristics that govern his or her gendered behaviour and expression of feeling.

A crucial element of explaining how the non-hierarchical nature of the Möbius model of subjectivity-through-sensibility can facilitate our understanding of the eighteenth century is to establish what Foucault defines in *The Order of Things* as the *episteme* of the period under consideration; that is, modern critics must account for “that which constituted man’s particular mode of being and the possibility of knowing him empirically” (385).⁵ In the section that follows, I will detail the *episteme* which informed discussions of conscious subjectivity in the later eighteenth century by showing how this knowledge developed in philosophical thought in the late-seventeenth and early-

⁵ The *OED* defines *episteme* as “the body of ideas which shape the perception of knowledge at a particular period.”

eighteenth century. The discussion that follows also establishes how the five major binary pairs I mentioned above first became entrenched in eighteenth-century thought. Showing the assumptions on which these binary pairs were created is a way of challenging their seemingly determinate status. This, in turn, makes it possible, in the sections that follow, to (re)-vision these pairs as non-oppositional within the discursive space of sensibility while remaining sensitive to their context of use in the period.

Medicine, Gender, and Sensibility

The medical theories of subjectivity, sex, and gendered characteristics help to construct the external/public side of the Möbius strip of subjectivity-through-sensibility. They do this, however, through naturalizing the socially constructed characteristics ascribed to men and women, offering a fine example of how easily external/public discourses can be internalized and made part of ideology. Throughout the eighteenth century, physicians made distinctions between mind and body, thought and feeling, and men and women, ascribing the greatest capacities for rational development and control to men and physical sensitivity and emotionality to women. They further perpetuated and naturalized these gendered distinctions, and thereby influenced theories of subjectivity, by creating another binary of strength as a male and weakness as a female characteristic. These medical models would become primarily responsible for the definition of sensibility as an inherently female characteristic—a conclusion that is not consistently reflected in either the philosophical discussions of sensibility or the fiction that developed in response to them. In this section I trace the multi-faceted external/public and internal/private elements of what Foucault describes as “that slowly developed discursive

practice which constitutes the *scientia sexualis*” which dictates much of our understanding of sex and sexuality in the period (*History* 68).

Thomas Laqueur has famously argued that “sometime in the eighteenth century, sex as we know it was invented” (149). According to Laqueur, the scientific discovery of the two-sex model of anatomy, whereby men and women were found to be biologically different, fundamentally changed the nature of how individuals talked, and thought, about gender. In what he calls the “one-flesh model”—in which women were physically considered to be underdeveloped and inferior, but essentially still biologically men—most of the “cultural work” of establishing sexual difference was “done by gender” (151). With the emergence of biological differences between the sexes, Laqueur posits that “all the complex ways in which resemblances among bodies, and between bodies and the cosmos, confirmed a hierarchic world order were reduced to a single plane: nature” so that “the cultural work that had in the one-flesh model been done by gender devolved now onto sex” (151).

Thus, the eighteenth century saw the rise of a kind of biological determinism and a naturalization of what were once considered gendered behaviours—that is, they were historically contingent, and determined by cultural forces—into universal material truths.⁶ This naturalization, along with a continued desire to confirm a “hierarchic world order,” made the creation of binaries related to the sexes a focus of medical discourse. What critics of the period must remember, though, is that these naturalized assumptions

⁶ There is, of course, an irony inherent in considering the ascendancy of the discourse of ‘nature’ in this period: as Terry Castle has explained in great detail, many of the developments in the period represent what she terms a “flight from the ‘natural’” and a shift in focus to the culturally constructed artifices of polite society (“Culture” 175).

were themselves historically contingent and determined by the cultural knowledge, the *episteme*, of their period. These assumptions affected how physicians thought about what men and women were capable of, but it did not actually change the physiological or intellectual characteristics of individuals of either sex.

Despite the legitimacy and empiricism implied by a biological argument, when eighteenth-century physicians spoke of sex, they were speaking of what modern critics would think of as gender. As Laqueur explains, “distinct sexual anatomy was adduced to support or deny all manner of claims in a variety of specific social, economic, political, cultural, or erotic contexts” thus making it a decidedly ambivalent and inconsistent ‘truth’ (152). But, as with all cases of ideology, the individuals within the *episteme* are rarely able to detect the arbitrariness and dynamism of the rules governing their supposedly natural biological materialism. The literature of sensibility, however, often comes close to exposing these natural ‘truths’ as little more than public fictions, as my discussion in the chapters that follow reveals.

And what were the qualities now ascribed to these ‘naturally’ sexed bodies? They consisted of physically and intellectually strong men and physically and intellectually weaker women, the latter of whom were under constant threat of being overwhelmed by their senses. The discourse of sense in the medical model foregrounded a discussion of the nerves, their fibres and sensitivity, and the diseases thought to result from an excessive receptivity to the physical senses. The first English treatises on the study of the nerves, and the establishment of the field of neurology in England, occurred in the 1660s when physician Thomas Willis published *Anatomy of the Brain* (1664) and *Pathology of the Brain* (1667). Both books were instrumental in defining the study of the nerves and

the medical discourse of sensibility. In 2004, G.S. Rousseau reified the significance of Willis's work on neurology by arguing that "in the early twenty-first century, no university course on the rise of sensibility can omit his name" (*Nervous* 158).⁷

Willis explained how the nerves were responsible for carrying "animal spirits" from the brain to the rest of the body, and how "the nerves alone can be held responsible for sensory impressions, and consequently for knowledge" (Rousseau *Nervous* 167). The more sensitive or receptive these nerve fibres are the greater the individual's sensibility, literally implying their ability to feel. This focus on the nerves became a fundamental element of the discourse of sensibility, and its gendering at the end of the seventeenth century and into the early decades of the eighteenth century. One of the key components of this discussion was the understanding that women's nerves were more sensitive than men's and that their bodies and minds were weakened because of this. The medical focus on hysteria, a version of the Greek word *hysterikos* meaning literally "suffering in the womb," reinforced women's connection to the material world while simultaneously supporting what Rousseau refers to as privileging of "male anatomy over the allegedly weak female genitalia from the earliest known pronouncements at the time of Hippocrates and Soranus of Ephesus" (*OED, Nervous* 220). Since most of the physicians in the period argued that women were physiologically predisposed to have greater sensibility the logical conclusion that most of them drew was that women were weak,

⁷ Willis is not only an important figure as a physician but also, as Rousseau explains, because he was the tutor of John Locke when the latter was a student at Oxford. He explains: "Locke is known to have sat at Willis' feet and enthusiastically copied into notebooks everything he (Locke) thought he might use later on" so that "it is no forcing of the known facts to say that Willis had a profound influence on Locke in his most formative years" (*Nervous* 166). Rousseau is quick to add, though, that "it would be nothing less than treacherous, however, to argue that it was Willis's theory of the brain that 'deflected' Locke into writing the *Essay*" (*Nervous* 166).

sensitive, and more prone to emotional rather than rational responses to their sensations and experiences.⁸

Integral to this medical model, then, is the binary of physically strong men and weak women and of the association between women and the body. These binaries were made clear in *The Search After Truth*, published in 1674, when Nicolas Malebranche proffered the idea that “women were intellectually inferior to men because of the greater sensibility of the nerve fibres in their brain” (Barker-Benfield 23). Bernard Mandeville’s *Treatise of the Hypochondriak and Hysterick Passions*, published in 1711, affirmed that women had a greater likelihood to develop nervous disorders because of the sensitivity of their bodies, which were weaker than men’s and thus less able to resist disorders of the body and mind. No physician, however, had a greater influence on the gendering of sensibility as feminine, and the association between male sensibility and effeminacy than Dr. George Cheyne, personal physician and friend to Samuel Richardson. In his introduction to the 1991 critical edition of Cheyne’s famous 1733 treatise *The English Malady*, Roy Porter summarizes one of the physician’s most important assertions:

nervous disorders were indeed associated with the fair sex, in that they were diseases of *effeminacy*—though of effeminate men as well as of women. Healthy nerves and muscles had masculine attributes: they were strong, hard, resilient; the weak nerves which were such danger sources were, by contrast,

⁸ For more on the relationship between gender, the nerves, and sensibility in the eighteenth-century see Anne Vila’s *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France*. Though her work focuses on sensibility in France, there are many parallels to the English understanding of the medicine of the nerves and the gendering of sensibility.

soft, languid, passive, or, in other words, feminine As polite culture increasingly fabricated the image of the fashionable lady as frail, yielding, and delicate, it is no wonder that nervous disorders such as the vapours and hysteria became increasingly their prerogative (xli).

For Cheyne, an individual who suffered from physical illnesses related to the receptivity of their nerves and the resulting emotional and intellectual influence of the sensations they received was inherently feminized, since the ability to feel was thought to be stronger in women than men. Any man, therefore, like the famous character of Matthew Bramble in Tobias Smollett's 1771 novel *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, whose mental or emotional health was negatively affected by his physical sensibility was a feminine character, regardless of the other characteristics he possessed.

To me, Cheyne's understanding of the relationship between women and illness represents the central elision between physiological sex and gender in the period, and it is an assumption that has over-simplified sensibility and has resulted in both some eighteenth-century and some modern critics considering any 'man of feeling' as somehow inherently feminized.⁹ I categorically reject the implication of sensibility as an

⁹ Cheyne's medical gendering of feeling is a pervasive element of critical discussions of sensibility to this day. For example, Conger argues that women were "acknowledged freely to be men's superiors in the exercise of feeling" (15). Spacks suggests that "women tended to demonstrate it [sensibility] to a higher degree than men because of their 'finer nerves'" ("Ambiguous" 151). Barker-Benfield agrees that "women dominated the writing and reading of this literature" and that "a gendered constituency for sentimental fiction accorded with the gendering of sensibility [as feminine]" while Todd argues that "the cult of sensibility stressed those qualities considered feminine in the sexual psychology of the time: intuitive sympathy, susceptibility, emotionalism and passivity" (xvii, 110). Harrison Steeves states: "no doubt eighteenth-century sentimentalism had deeper roots in feminine minds than in masculine, partly because of the general belief that feminine natures were tender and masculine natures rugged" (161). Mellor and Novak resist gendering the term themselves, but present it as a feminine concept nonetheless: "Insofar as sensibility was culturally encoded as female, the feminist writers of the late eighteenth century engaged in a fierce debate over whether sensibility was a positive or a negative attribute for women. Numerous theatrical and fictional depictions of weeping women had culturally identified the female body with a more delicate

expression of naturalized femininity, simply because the nerve fibres of women *tend* to be more responsive to sensation than those of men, according to the evidence presented to Cheyne, Mandeville, and Malebranche. If we are to remain committed to an empirical line of inquiry, as these physicians claimed to be, this should create at least some scepticism about whether a tendency in one sex to present a particular physical sensitivity should be translated to mean that *any* expression of this same sensitivity is ‘naturally’ a behaviour associated with the sex most prone to it. The medical discourse of the nerves I have been detailing essentializes the characteristics associated with feeling. The result is that women who are physically robust like *Zofloya*’s Victoria di Loredani, and who are able to control their emotions like *The Natural Daughter*’s Martha Morley and *Secresy*’s Caroline Ashburn seem just as anachronistically gendered as the often-emotionally overwhelmed male protagonists in *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *The Fool of Quality*.

Though it is important to see where this association between women and sensibility came from, it is equally important to recognize that it is predicated on a series of assumptions about men’s and women’s bodies and minds, and their respective abilities to exercise control over them. That authors as diverse as Sarah Fielding, Henry Brooke, Eliza Fenwick, and Charlotte Dacre should each attempt to subvert these assumptions suggests to me that while there may have been those who sought to support the medically institutionalized weakness of women, there was an equally articulate group denying its truthfulness.

nervous system and hence with a greater capacity for more refined feelings (whether emotional, aesthetic, or moral) and for spirituality” (15). In *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self*, Spacks briefly suggests that “[a]lthough its manifestations most readily associate themselves with women, men of sensibility might also be admired” (11). She does not elaborate on the conditions under which men of sensibility might be read as positive, rather than effeminate and pejorative, characters.

I hasten to point out that Cheyne's argument is not just one of gender, but also of class. He characterizes the 'English Malady' as a disease of excess, of too much sensibility, of too much physical sensation and luxury leading to diseases of the body and mind. He argues that the disease "happen[s] only to the Rich, the Lazy, the Luxurious, and the Inactive" (xxx). One of the reasons that I have chosen to investigate subjectivity and personal experience through the genre of the novel of sensibility is because of its interest in detailing the lives of the emerging middle class in Britain. In the medical model, the middle class offers a type of feeling meant to provide a healthier, because more balanced, alternative to the dissipated and dangerously excessive sensuality of the aristocracy.¹⁰ Cheyne specifically recommends to his patients the "Diet and Manner of Living of the middling Rank, who are but moderate and temperate" as a proper cure for the illnesses caused by the "inactivity and sedentary occupations of the better sort (among whom this Evil mostly rages)" (iv, ii).

Novels of sensibility often perpetuate Cheyne's medical understanding of class by trying to show how the characteristics of moderation, hard work, and study associated with this emerging middle class create greater opportunities for healthier individuals, both male and female, and thus for a stronger, healthier society. This means that novels focused on this "middling Rank" and their expressions of feeling are best situated to explore new ways of thinking about sensibility beyond the discourse of excess that has so often dominated modern criticism of the term.

¹⁰ Dutch physician Jerome Gaub makes a similarly classed argument in his 1747 and 1763 lectures titled *De Regimine Mentis*. Gaub argues: that "both men and women of this [upper] class (*les gens du monde*) are far more subject to emotional disturbances giving rise to harmful effects in the body than are peasants" (130). For more on the classed argument about illnesses of the senses, see also Roy Porter and G.S. Rousseau's study *Gout: The Patrician Malady*.

As medical theories about sensibility and gender were becoming increasingly popular vehicles for social restriction and reform, philosophers were also trying to build upon the foundations of consciousness and sensual perception that influenced these theories. The goal of these philosophers was not primarily to understand how an individual develops consciousness, as it was for Locke, but to create models of how these self-aware individuals used their capacity to feel, their sensibility, to interact with one another and to create public communities.

Theories of Personal Experience and Social Interaction

Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) was a catalyst for numerous philosophies considering the way individuals develop and how they relate to one another in society. Among the critically important and frequently cited philosophies of personal experience and social development are the third Earl of Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times* (1711), Francis Hutcheson's *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections and Illustrations Upon the Moral Sense* (1728), David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), and Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1756). These men were friends, students and colleagues of one another and there is necessary overlap between their theories.¹¹

These four texts take different approaches to the interaction between individuals and those around them. For Shaftesbury, individuals have an innate capacity to feel for others and to be socially connected to them. Hutcheson suggests a utilitarian theory that

¹¹ For more on the relationships between these philosophers see John Sheriff's *The Good-Natured Man* (6-16), Henry Grey Graham's *Scottish Men of Letters in the Eighteenth Century*, John Dwyer's *Virtuous Discourse*, and Barbara Benedict's *Framing Feeling* (2-3).

the ‘moral sense’ prompts individuals to act in ways that are most beneficial for the greatest number of people: “to engage Men to publickly [sic] useful Actions, is certainly the most necessary point in morals” (180). Hume suggests that people are motivated by their drives and passions though he does not completely discount benevolence. Smith offers perhaps the most balanced approach focusing on sympathy as an affective experience that draws individuals together through shared, though not pre-conscious or inherent, emotional experiences and identification with others.

One of the ways of distinguishing between the elements of each philosopher’s theory that refer to individually-developed consciousness and personal experience (the internal side of the Möbius strip) and publicly shared and/or enforced mores (the external side of the Möbius strip) is the vocabulary they use to demarcate private and public feelings. There are several of these terms, many of which become subsumed into the discourse of sensibility according to Janet Todd, but for my purposes the three most important of them are: sentiment, sympathy, and sociability (*Sensibility* 3-8).

Sentiment is by definition a private term. According to the *OED* it refers to “personal experience, one’s own feelings”, but also implies “intellectual or emotional perception.” Todd argues that sentiments can be interpreted as either thoughts or feelings in eighteenth-century writing: it is a “moral reflection, a rational opinion usually about the rights and wrongs of human conduct” as well as “a thought, often an elevated one, influenced by emotion, a combining of heart or head with an emotional impulse leading to an opinion or a principle” (7). For me, sentiment, which is often used interchangeably with sensibility, is more concerned with thought than with sensual perception, though it may also be influenced by emotional stimuli. Ann Jessie Van Sant asserts a similar

opinion when she writes that sentiment is associated “with the mind” and not the body, but that it is also “*heart-felt thought*” (4, 7). Reading sentiment as a rational and moral judgment or opinion influenced by refined feeling allows it to bridge the gaps between body and mind and reason and emotion, making it a particularly important term in the eighteenth century.

My use of the term sentiment in the chapters that follow focuses on its intellectual aspects: the term ‘passions’ constitutes the physical experiences that determine the emotions while sentiments are the moral and rational expressions of feeling prompted by those physical experiences. This is the criterion I use to distinguish between novels of sensibility and novels of sentiment in Chapter Two and which prompts me to argue that *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *The Fool of Quality*, with their heavy focus on the spiritual and moral necessities of putting private feeling into publicly beneficial practice, are novels of sentiment whereas Yorick’s and Harley’s emotional journeys of excessive and indulgent feeling in *A Sentimental Journey* and *The Man of Feeling* are more properly novels of sensibility. I consider the novel of sentiment to be a subgenre of the novel of sensibility though the boundaries between the two are remarkably permeable, as many critics have noted.¹²

Though sentiments are personal opinions and thoughts, these can be shared by others, leading to social consensus that is an important aspect of socialization; Harrison Steeves explains that “admirable sentiments were generally identified with the social

¹² For detailed explanations of the overlaps between these genres, see Volume 5 of Ernest Baker’s *The History of the English Novel*; Spacks’s *Desire and Truth*, “Ambiguous Practices,” and *Novel Beginnings*; Todd’s *Sensibility, an Introduction*; Barker-Benfield’s *Culture of Sensibility*; Isabel Rivers’s *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*.

feelings—those which were felt to draw human beings together” (160). In much the same way that Shaftesbury emphasizes *sensus communis*, a common or shared sense of what is morally right as a building block for strong communities and individuals, shared sentiments (though I do not consider them innate) can provide a sense of belonging and acceptance. David Simple’s quest for a ‘real friend’ who shares his values and beliefs is a search for someone to share his sentiments, and after many failed attempts he finds this in Camilla, Valentine, and Cynthia. Similarly, the close friendships between the Earl of Moreland and Mr. Meekly and between Mr. Fenton and Mr. Clement are based primarily on shared beliefs and ongoing discussions about morality and feeling.

Sentiments are not necessarily benevolent, nor do they implicitly lead to strengthening bonds of community. Divergent sentiments can have disastrous effects on family and social bonds and can lead to violence and destruction. The differing opinions about female behaviour cause tension throughout the first half of *A Simple Story* that nearly results in the destruction of both Miss Milner and Mr. Dorriforth and the tensions introduced into their relationship through the religious dogmatism of Mr. Sandford is an additionally destabilizing element in the text. Likewise, divergent thoughts about female education and worldly experience in *Secresy* set Caroline Ashburn and Mr. Valmont in opposition to each other, leaving the unfortunate Sibella Valmont in the untenable position of trying to negotiate between her uncle’s and her best friend’s opinions about her behaviour and her relationship with Clement Montgomery, to disastrous consequences. Needless to say, Victoria di Loredani’s sentiments and her calculating plan to seduce her husband’s brother and murder all those who get in the way of her plan for

sexual and emotional dominance are in conflict with virtually everyone around her, except the mysterious Zofloya, which ultimately leads to her eternal damnation.

In contrast, sympathy is a primarily public manifestation of feeling; it is intended to be shared between individuals of either sex as a way of creating community and widening the scope of personal experiences. The concept of fellow-feeling that is introduced in many of the humanist philosophies of the period, including those of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith is based on sympathy, which Johnson defined in 1756 as “mutual sensibility; the quality of being affected by the affection of another.” He also defined sympathy as “fellow-feeling.” Sympathy is one of the few terms connected to sensibility that receives almost unanimously positive treatment in the philosophical, didactic, and literary texts of the period regardless of the gender ascribed to it in specific discussions. Richetti describes Hume’s use of the word as “an empathy that even the worst humans have with their fellows by which they understand their own desires as they are embodied in others” (235).

In my reading, sympathy is the most mimetic of the expressions of feeling associated with sensibility.¹³ Adam Smith explains in 1759 that “whatever may be the cause of sympathy or however it may be excited, nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast; nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary” (I.II.I: 14). Sympathy facilitates social inclusion and subjectivity by providing individuals the opportunity to share their

¹³ When I discuss sympathy, it should be read to mean “conformity of feelings, inclinations, or temperament, which makes persons agreeable to each other; community of feeling; harmony of disposition” (OED 3.a.). This meaning of the word was in use as early as the sixteenth century, though not every eighteenth-century philosopher uses this connotation of the word.

experiences and feelings with others and to feel accepted. This leads Barbara Benedict to argue that sympathy is “one way to socialize private feeling” by giving characters in and readers of fiction the opportunity to meld private and public feeling through the “spectatorship” of watching others feel and responding to those feelings (10). Stephen Cox suggests that sympathy is “a major foundation of the social ethics and institutions that provide people with standards for evaluating their conduct” (29).

The quest for sympathy is at the heart of David Simple’s journey through London, as it is for Reverend Primrose’s and Harry Clinton’s primarily rural experiences of society. The desire to be accepted and to have one’s feelings acknowledged and shared is central to cultivating subjectivity and a social subject position as individuals are expected to share in the sentiments and feelings of their peers in order to become part of the social structure of polite upper- and middle-class society. The task that Ophelia Lenox undertakes throughout her integration into Lord Dorchester’s society is to sympathize with the feelings and sentiments of his peers and relatives without losing her own feelings and beliefs in the process. Sympathy, then, is a sharing and imitation of feelings and thoughts, a mimetic process governing social relations and individual subjectivity.

However, sympathy can lead to violence and destruction as well if an individual does not experience the security of the mimetic social reinforcement of his or her feelings and thoughts. The isolation that consumes Lord Elmwood and Mr. Valmont in *A Simple Story* and *Secresy* stems from Smith’s reference to the “shock” of not feeling their experiences being shared by the family members and extended community around them. Similarly, what marks Victoria’s actions in *Zofloya* as monstrous is the extent to which her feelings deviate from and distort the socially expected feelings and behaviour

embodied by her nemesis, Lilla. Readers sympathize with Lilla's sufferings, ostensibly because they can more easily picture themselves in her victimized yet moral position than in the aggressively selfish conduct of Victoria.

Sociability, though not a frequently used term in the period, is often used by modern scholars of sensibility to discuss sympathy as a foundational social practice. The *OED* defines the term as "the character or quality of being sociable; friendly disposition or intercourse" though this is a much narrower definition than that offered by the most recognized critic of sociability, John Mullan, who defines it as a "language of feeling for the purpose of representing necessary social bonds" and which was "dependent upon the communication of passions and sentiments" (2). Mullan also explains that "sociability depends upon the traffic not only of opinions, but of harmoniously organized feelings" (7). The ideas of harmony and social bonds are the most significant elements of Mullan's definition in my use of the term.

Sociability reinforces the necessity of social interaction through feeling with the aim of producing individuals who are dedicated to their shared experiences and to nurturing the health of social bonds through discussions of sentiment and sensibility. Sociability re-establishes a culture of social connectedness that is challenged by the increasing individualism and isolation suggested by the rigidly individualistic theories of personal experience in the philosophical writings of Thomas Hobbes, and Locke. Bordo has described this individualism as an "anxiety over the enclosedness of the individual self, the isolating uniqueness of each individual allotment in time and space" leading to a "cultural anxiety of disorientation" (100). Many of the philosophers of feeling I have mentioned in this section strive in their writing to overcome this anxiety of individual

isolation. Shaftesbury, for example, emphasizes the importance of a “PUBLICK [sic] spirit” which “can come only from a social Feeling or Sense of Partnership with Human Kind” in his *Characteristicks* (59-60). This need to re-establish social bonds between individuals is one reason why I do not think that the “self-enclosed identity” to which Armstrong refers is the ultimate aim of discussions of subjectivity in the period. There is a desire to articulate a model of individual thought and consciousness in the period, I agree, but there is also a firm commitment to theorizing ways that these new self-aware individuals can remain connected to those around them.

Sociability, therefore, represents the ‘sense of partnership’ whereby individuals share their feelings as a way of solidifying social bonds and counteracting the isolating effects of a new kind of experiential epistemology rooted in the self. Socialization, a related term, refers to the process of learning about the importance and value of sociability and teaching individuals how to share their feelings and thoughts in socially replicable ways. Socialization is the primary goal of novels of social initiation, like those I discuss in Chapter One. Both David and Ophelia have to learn how to express their feelings in socially acceptable ways in order to establish their place in the world of polite social interactions in which they find themselves. The process is often difficult and humbling and frequently involves learning to conceal feelings as much as to express them—as Spacks argues, “to hide sensibility makes part of its crucial drama” since “the movement from innocence to experience involves also a shift from openness to self-concealment” (*Privacy* 84, 70). Socialization is designed to subordinate selfish feelings that are not supported by the social structure and to foreground those passions and sentiments that cultivate the greatest sympathy. Doing so strengthens the mimetic

relationship between self and other, thus creating strong bonds of sociability and bringing unity to private and public feeling. Though socialization strives to offer a way of bringing together the individual and society, the relation between self and other and internal/private and external/public is, as I suggested in the opening of this section, a fraught topic in the period and in modern criticism thereof.

Confusion about whether individuals, their feelings, and experiences are primarily self-driven as in Hume's theory or publicly-interested as in Shaftesbury's and Hutcheson's writings is a frequent source of ambiguity surrounding modern discussions of sensibility just as it pervades the theories in which the concepts of sentiment, sympathy, and sociability appear. Patricia Meyer Spacks, one of the most-dedicated scholars on novels of sentiment and sensibility expresses this ambiguity by saying that "the disturbing discrepancy between disinterested concern and complete forgetting [of any experience outside of the self], between turning outward and inward, creates a gap not readily bridgeable" for eighteenth-century writers and modern critics alike (152). Unlike many critics before me—including Spacks, John Mullan, and Janet Todd—I do not see that the tension between private and public feelings implies that they are fundamentally different discussions or that their difference means that they are necessarily opposed to one another.

To the extent that both Shaftesbury's and Hutcheson's external/public as well as Hume's and Smith's internal/private approaches to sensibility are concerned with how the expression of feeling influences a person's understanding of him or herself in a social context, they are not that dissimilar. That both models agree that feelings are somehow responsible for the ways that people negotiate the interaction between their inner/private

experiences and external/public reactions to them, is likewise a tenet they share. The difference between them is which of the experiences, internal/private or external/public, is the first to act on an individual. But, because the Möbius strip is a constantly twisting shape with no beginning and no ending, in this model of subjectivity-through-sensibility, the aim is not to determine where the feeling originated, but what influence the joint experience of internal/private and external/public feelings has on the feeling subject. There need not be the “disturbing” problem of an “unbridgeable gap” between public/external and private/internal motivations for feeling if they can be read as mutually constitutive expressions of each other. In other words, the problem disappears if we can agree, as I think we should, with anthropologist and linguist Susan Gal that “public and private are co-constitutive cultural categories [. . .] dependent for part of their referential meaning on the interactional context in which they are used” (80).

The Public-Private Subject of Feeling

By following this non-hierarchical approach, what the experience of sensibility produces is neither Armstrong’s notion of a “self-enclosed and internally coherent” subject nor the concept that “the self, then, acquires moral significance primarily through its social impulses” which Stephen Cox details (1, 19). Instead, we create the possibility of a new subject-position that is simultaneously public and private, an epistemological hybrid that values both an individual’s thoughts and feelings, and social judgements of what those thoughts and feelings should be in the construction of subjectivity-through-sensibility. This public-private subject position is available to both men and women, and involves understanding each person as both mimetic subject and mimetic object at

different moments. Further, this model allows that the feeling subject may experience both strength and weakness, may be dominated sometimes by feelings and other times by rational thoughts depending on the situation, that the feeling subject will take part in both public and private discourses and will be physically present in both kinds of spaces, and that because of these allowances the feeling subject, whether male or female, will likely exhibit a wider variety of characteristics than those that eighteenth-century physicians have essentialized as either masculine or feminine.

The Public-Private Bourgeois Family

There is already a relevant precedent for thinking about public and private experiences as co-existent instead of opposed to each other. Susan Gal insists that “far from being incompatible, the principles associated with public and private coexist in complex combinations in the ordinary routines of everyday life” (78). Where public and private have most continually coexisted in daily life is in the family, at once a space of both individuals and of community, of privacy and intrusiveness. In Jürgen Habermas’s highly influential theory of space, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he theorizes:

To be sure, before the public sphere explicitly assumed political functions in the tension-charged field of state-society relations, the subjectivity originating in the intimate sphere of the conjugal family created, so to speak, its own public [. . .] It provided the training ground for a critical public reflection still preoccupied with itself—a process of self-clarification of private people focusing on the genuine experiences of their novel privateness (29).

The family, then, is both a public and private space, simultaneously a metaphor for public state relations and central to the increasing focus on privacy and individuality that fundamentally changed the dynamics of families and the cultural landscape of eighteenth-century Britain according to Lawrence Stone.

The family unit that I am describing here is a middle class construction. For Habermas, the influential family model becomes the bourgeois, middle-class, family in the mid-eighteenth century. He suggests that “around 1750” this class began to dominate the demand for literature, particularly through their interest in the “domestic drama and the psychological novel,” in a style that represented their own personal and familial realities (43). David Blewett argues that the middle class is most frequently represented through the relationships and experiences within the eighteenth-century novel because “the individuals who produced and presented texts and about whose reading of texts we have knowledge were mostly members of the middling sort” and since “much of the debate over the novel takes place among members of this single social group” (284). Especially after Richardson’s criticism of Mr. B as an aristocratic man who terrorizes and repeatedly tries to seduce and rape his servant Pamela before being reformed by her in 1740, aristocratic characters in domestic fiction were, in keeping with the medical rhetoric of the period, routinely portrayed as the epitome of excess, vice, and decadence that the rising merchant class and its emphasis on gaining wealth through hard work was attempting to displace. This class tension is most explicitly present in my discussion of Henry Brooke’s *The Fool of Quality*.

The relationship between class and the public and private spheres in sociological and literary theory is a sub-field of its own, and I could easily dedicate my entire analysis

of sensibility to this aspect of public-private tension and its influence on subjectivity. I have chosen, however, to foreground gendered experience in the professional and middle classes in my discussion of personal and social dynamics of feeling, in keeping with the bourgeois demand for literature of this kind from the 1750s onward. While I mention those elements of class that are most salient to my discussions of the experiences of the literary feeling subject, at home and in the wider society throughout the chapters that follow, it is not the intent of this project to engage with the larger debates surrounding class in the social and philosophical literature of the period. I acknowledge that the style of family and individual subjectivity I am investigating in the novel is one of privilege. It represents a majority of readers demanding and reading novels of sensibility and sentiment in the mid- to late-eighteenth century, but is in no way meant to suggest an epistemological theory of subjectivity that crosses classes or denies the importance of class in the construction of subjectivity.

Enacting the Möbius Strip

My discussion thus far has been intended to introduce the ways in which the meanings and values surrounding the experiences of sensibility are dynamic and how subjectivity and socialization are therefore more complex and interconnected, for both men and women, than has traditionally been recognized in studies of the eighteenth-century literary subject. The chapters that follow substantially expand on the ways that sensibility can both facilitate and destroy the individual and his or her society through the experiential discourse of feeling. Each chapter explores how the relationships within families, or small communities, create a discursive space that allows for the mimetic

projection and internalization of feelings and thoughts that negotiate between inner/private and external/public sensibility in the creation and destruction of the public-private experiential subject.

The organizational structure of the chapters is intended to enact the Möbius strip metaphor in a tangible way to model how sensibility can be personally and publicly productive and then how it can be personally and publicly destructive. Chapter One has an internal/private focus, as it analyzes how a young person's first experiences in society and their reactions to the often unsettling, shameful, and frightening encounters with others in public spaces helps them to cultivate a sense of themselves as subjects. Chapter Two explores the inversion of this argument with a focus on the external/public effects of sensibility in order to reveal how individuals are able to positively affect the cohesion and morality of their societies through dedicated commitment to turning their own feelings into publicly visible action. Chapter Three again returns the focus to internal/private understanding and feeling to show how public stereotypes and expectations can challenge a person's sense of belonging in a community and can thereby destroy social bonds and lead to a loss of self. Chapter Four completes the cycle by focusing on the external/public aspect of feeling and subjectivity once more, specifically detailing the ways that an individual's feelings and passions when projected through acts of physical and emotional violence can undermine and ultimately disintegrate family ties and social stability leading not only to social disarray but also the destruction of individuals reliant upon social recognition for their sense of self.

Chapter One, "A Young Person's Entrance Into the World," examines two social initiation narratives written by Sarah Fielding, *The Adventures of David Simple* and *The*

History of Ophelia. This chapter first outlines how the external/public side of the Möbius strip can twist into the private side, and details how subjectivity is the process of both private feeling and public response. The chapter specifically focuses on two novels by the same author to show how male and female sensibility and socialization are represented by the same author in different contexts. In this chapter I argue that the “first encounter” experiences of David and Ophelia reveal similar processes of social integration—the internalization of the public gaze and feelings of shame after embarrassing mistakes and the projection of emotions and thoughts intended to be in sympathy with others—which means that there is not fundamentally a difference between the way a young man and a young woman are educated to become part of society or the struggles they have to find an identity for themselves according to Fielding’s view of society. The similarity between their personal feelings of fear, isolation, desire for acceptance, shame, and naïveté along with similar public experiences of being an object of general conversation and observation suggest an affinity between gendered experiences of socialization at home and abroad.

Chapter Two, “Learning to Feel Useful,” focuses on the popular archetype of the “man of feeling” in the 1760s and 1770s and the way that the emotional sensitivity of this character has led to its mistaken identification with effeminacy and public passivity. This chapter investigates how the internal/private side of the Möbius strip can twist to allow private feelings to have public influence. I investigate the construction of public and private masculinity in Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Henry Brooke’s *The Fool of Quality* and contrast it to the traditional models for the man of feeling in *A Sentimental Journey* and *The Man of Feeling* to show how the Christian model of

benevolence and utilitarianism put forth in the two former novels is an idealized model of sociability that is active and rational, and shows the inextricable reflexive connection between personal feelings and public action. My discussion of these two men of feeling as both public and private figures is a partner to chapter four which explores three women of feeling as public and private figures at the end of the century.

Chapter Three, “The More Routine Horrors of Families Out of Joint,” examines the destructive effects of public pressures and external forces on the subjectivity of male and female characters in Elizabeth Inchbald’s *A Simple Story* and Eliza Fenwick’s *Secresy*. This chapter explores what happens when the external/public side of the Möbius strip dominates the internal/private side, and where the feeling subject feels a conflict between who he or she thinks and feels s/he is and who others say s/he is. As in Chapter One, the experiences of both the male and female protagonists in the novels are similar with respect to the ways that they are affected by their experiences and internalizations of public expectations about their behaviour. My analysis of *A Simple Story* examines how the social pressures placed on the behaviour of Miss Milner and Mr. Dorriforth combined with their mutual dependence on one another in the first half of the novel overwhelms both characters and causes them to lose themselves within the tempest of emotions and rules that govern their relationship, ultimately leading to Miss Milner’s death and Mr. Dorriforth’s misanthropic tyranny as Lord Elmwood in the second half of the novel.

In my discussion of *Secresy*, I expand on the misanthropy of Lord Elmwood through a focus on Mr. Valmont and the disastrous effects that his refusal to participate in the social world has on his young ward and niece, Sibella. The eventual destruction of Sibella is made more painful by the tension between Valmont and Sibella’s close friend

Caroline Ashburn, who encourages both Sibella and her uncle to recognize the need for socialization and rational education to ensure the safety and stability of the family. By depriving Sibella of the tools for social and personal agency, Valmont condemns her to a life of physical and emotional excess that Caroline's influence is unable to temper, and virtually everyone in the novel, both male and female, suffer or die at the end. *Secresy's* conclusion reinforces that, as in *A Simple Story*, regardless of gender the inability to balance private feeling and thought with external forces can be socially and personally devastating.

Chapter Four, "Violating the Self and the Family," features the most dystopic of all the novels in the project, Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter* and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*. In this chapter, I investigate how sensibility and a selfish adherence to passion lead to the destruction not only of the individual but also to the wider community of their families and the society as a whole when the mimetic relationship between them becomes one of violence instead of support and sympathy. This chapter, then, explores what happens when the tension between the internal/private and external/public sides of the Möbius strip of sensibility becomes untenable for the feeling subject. My discussions focus primarily on three women of feeling, Martha (Bradford) Morley and her sister Julia and Victoria di Loredani, and how their feelings and actions within their families and the wider community lead to public and private destruction. This chapter, like chapter two, looks at stereotypical gender representation. I examine the idea of "virtue in distress" as well as that of the sexually predatory female who has lost control over her passions to reveal that women served as both victims and perpetrators of physical and emotional violence in literature, as private paragons of virtue and as threats to the social order. In

doing so, I am offering yet another example of the diversity of gendered experiences of sensibility of the literary subject.

The continual exchange of feeling and experience in these four chapters conclusively shows the co-constitutive, mimetic interdependence between public and private sensibility and that male and female experiential subjects are much more than just cultural constructions of gender within rigidly separate spheres. What emerges is a dynamic, and often exciting, negotiation between self and other, male and female, public and private, and reason and feeling. This makes the discursive space of literary sensibility one of ambiguity, yes, but also of tremendous potential for a non-hierarchical experiential epistemology that moves beyond essentialisms and sees subjectivity as a fluid process through which traditionally antagonistic terms mutually influence the creation and/or destruction of the self and the social world.

Chapter One

A Young Person's Entrance into the World: Social Sensibility and Gender in Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* and *The History of Ophelia*

This chapter focuses on socialization and its influence on the subjectivity of those being instructed. That is, it explores the ways that young men and women are variously taught to cultivate their private sensibility by internalizing expressions of social sentiment that will allow them to function as active subjects in the public sphere and at home. Central to this discussion is an examination of the role that gender plays in the construction of private and public subjects and the expression of sensibility. If, as so many writers of the period anxiously assert, the sexes are fundamentally different, and are biologically (and socially) destined for different spheres and purposes, there should be little similarity in their social education.¹ This “truth”, one of many dubious assumptions about gender that pervades eighteenth-century literature and criticism, is not supported by a critical reading of two mid-century novels written by Sarah Fielding: *The Adventures of David Simple* and *The History of Ophelia*.²

¹ In an article on the novels of Henry Fielding and John Cleland, Patricia Myer Spacks refers to this conundrum when she writes that a “denial of likeness between the sexes, then, lies at the heart of the matter. Everywhere in eighteenth-century texts one sees traces of the widespread conviction that men and women differ utterly” (“Female” 282). Later, in *Novel Beginnings*, she again argues for the difference between narratives of male and female experience: “Given the actualities of eighteenth-century British life, a novel dealing with the contemporary scene and focused on a woman would, as we have seen already, have to differ in conspicuous ways from one with a man at its center” (144).

² In order to treat the narrative of David's life and experience of sensibility as a whole, I have chosen to follow the editorial and critical position of Linda Bree, arguably Sarah Fielding's most dedicated and thoughtful critic, by discussing *The Adventures of David Simple* and *Volume the Last* as a complete text; hereafter referred to as *David Simple*. For the purposes of clarity, I will follow the lead of other critics, among them Janet Todd and Gerard Barker, by referring to the 1744 text (Vol. 1- Books 1-4) as Part I and the 1753 text (Vol. the last- Books 5-7) as Part II of *David Simple*.

In these novels, Fielding offers up two characters, one male and one female, relating their first exposure to British society. Most striking is the similarity that their stories bear to one another with respect to their basic experiences and the hostility of the public and private spheres into which they are introduced. The shared experiences of the characters undermines the argument that gender, and the education of socially gendered beings, is a discrete process for men and women in the early- to mid-eighteenth century. I have three central assertions in the discussions that follow: first, that the qualities of feeling, naïveté, and sympathy that Ophelia and David express are not inherently gendered; second, that the socialization and subjectivity of both characters necessarily involves the internalization and projection of private and public feeling—and the negotiation of both kinds of spaces—that are enacted by the Möbius model of sensibility; third, that while David may have greater access to public spaces because he is able to move through them unaccompanied he is not inherently more qualified because of his gender to be a public subject than is Ophelia. The associations between the public sphere and masculinity and the private sphere and femininity had yet to be reified when Fielding was writing. In fact, Fielding's narratives undermine this spatial association, since in both novels the protagonist's capability to navigate social interactions has more to do with his or her ability to react to external social forces than with any gendered predisposition to one type of space (public or private) or relationship (domestic or social).

Both *David Simple* and *The History of Ophelia* represent Fielding's innovations as a writer who combines a deep interest in the psychological development and experience of individual characters with a keen ability to represent social interactions in a realistic context while employing a narrative tone that is at once didactic and sardonic.

More than most of the other writers producing novels during the mid-century, Sarah Fielding manages to intertwine the discourses of public and private feeling and experience in her texts which is why I have chosen to begin my literary analysis of sensibility in the period with her works. One of the elements I find particularly striking about Fielding's writing is the way that she represents the necessity of being part of the public life of society in order to fully develop a sense of subjectivity while at the same time being explicit about the fact that the public world into which she is sending her characters is often not designed in their best interests. By offering a model of socialization and subjectivity that recognizes that social engagement is both a positive and negative experience, Fielding offers the most realistic model of male and female social feeling of any of the texts I discuss in this project.

In Fielding's novels, social life is not simple or idealistic; in *David Simple* it is predominantly a negative experience.³ Despite this, it is still important for her characters to go beyond the confines of their own lives and homes in order to have a full range of experiences in public and private and therefore to develop a more realistic subjectivity. Fielding's emphasis on realism, and the suffering that is often part of balancing individual thoughts and feelings with social expectations and rules, is a more revolutionary achievement than the highly melodramatic fantasies of subjectivity presented by the utopic writing of Henry Brooke in the 1760s and the dystopic writings

³ The same negative focus on social life is played out in painful detail in Frances Sheridan's novel, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, published in 1761. Sidney suffers even more than David, largely because of the oppressive influence of her mother and Sidney's compulsion to obey all of her mother's commands no matter how negatively they affect her own happiness. Sidney's frequently precarious social positions share with *Ophelia* an articulation of the dangers of female subjectivity in the public world, though they foreshadow the dystopic social melodrama dominating the narrative of Martha Morley in *The Natural Daughter* more than they share *Ophelia's* ultimately positive social outcome.

of Charlotte Dacre and Mary Robinson at the end of the century.⁴ And while *The Adventures of David Simple* might feature the first ‘man of feeling’ in the eighteenth century, few of the novels that use that archetype after Fielding manage to offer such an in-depth exploration of the character’s private feelings and thoughts within the context of a discourse of moral and social sensibility.

Sarah Fielding’s life and writing also intersect with the two most popular novelists writing in the 1740s and 1750s: her brother Henry Fielding and her printer and mentor, Samuel Richardson. Peter Sabor argues that “the mediating role of Sarah Fielding is a crucially complicating factor” between the relationship and writings of Henry Fielding and Richardson, which I think is important for situating Sarah Fielding in her literary context (“Richardson” 139). Most criticism of Sarah Fielding, and there is little compared to the critical interest in her brother and her mentor, focuses on the way that her writing was influenced and edited by these two men.⁵ While it is important to understand the writing of Henry Fielding and Richardson insofar as they represent Sarah Fielding’s literary colleagues and define her writing within the narrative trends of the 1740s and 50s, it is a mistake to value her work only as a reflection of their influence. What I find most exceptional about Sarah Fielding’s narrative productions is the way that

⁴ When talking about realism I do not mean the plausibility of the protagonists’ behaviour in the novels, which are so innocent and virtuous as to be exceptional, but the degree to which the novels reflect the daily lifestyles and social and material conditions of upper and middle-class experiences in English society as Fielding saw them.

⁵ Bree recounts her difficulties with undertaking her monograph-length study of Sarah Fielding, saying it was often easiest to explain to “librarians, academics, students, friends, and relatives” that Sarah Fielding was “the sister of Henry Fielding” (vii). She adds that Henry Fielding’s “ever-growing reputation has inevitably obscured Sarah’s achievements, to the extent that her first—and highly successful—novel, *The Adventures of David Simple*, was for a long time chiefly sought out because Henry provided a Preface to the second edition” (vii).

she brings together the public and masculine focus of Henry Fielding's writing style with the private and female focus of Richardson's, creating a third style of hybrid novel that challenges the binaries usually associated with the styles of novels popularized by Henry Fielding and Richardson. What Sarah Fielding is doing, then, is inspired by but also substantially more multifaceted than the writings of either Henry Fielding or Richardson.

Henry Fielding's comic abilities and his penchant for the picaresque writing style gained him tremendous popularity as a novelist in the 1740s, following on the heels of his popularity as a dramatist in the 1730s. Fielding's ability as a satirist, first demonstrated in his theatrical writings, gained him great acclaim when he published *Shamela*, a parody of Samuel Richardson's first novel, *Pamela*. This conflict sparked the rivalry between the comic and caustic Fielding and the morally didactic Richardson and set the two men's writings in opposition to each other, at least in public opinion. Fielding's most popular novels, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* are playful and energetic narratives of male adventures and travels written in the picaresque style. Fielding even claims on the title page of the 1742 London edition of *Joseph Andrews* that it is "written in imitation of the style of Cervantes, author of *Don Quixote*," one of the best known comic episodic novelists of the seventeenth century.⁶ He routinely preferred social explorations and satire to the careful probing of the human mind that is so central to the writing style of Richardson. Fielding's novels are essentially concerned with the public world, usually a male space, where characters represent the stock stereotypes embodied by their names: Squire Allworthy, Mr. Square, and Mr. Thwackum in *Tom Jones* are prime examples.

⁶ This was a popular style in eighteenth-century writing, and is repeated again by Charlotte Lennox in her 1752 novel, *The Female Quixote*. Henry also describes David as "mad as Quixotte [sic] himself could be with Knight Errantry" in his revisions to the second edition of *David Simple* (36).

Despite the humour that pervades much of Fielding's writing, his satire is politically and socially aware, and class criticism features prominently in his writings as in Squire Western's rejection of Tom Jones as a suitor for his daughter because he is a foundling.

In his final novel, *Amelia*, Fielding deviates from his standard narrative style by focusing on the domestic life of the heroine Amelia Booth and her struggles with her husband William. Gary Gautier suggests that the difference between *Amelia* and Fielding's other novels has to do with the cultural shifts in England during the mid-century: "Whereas *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* had playfully lingered over the landed versus bourgeois cultural wars, *Amelia* attempts to face more directly the dynamics of an increasingly urban and capitalist world of social relations" (195). This again reinforces the public and social focus of his writing but suggests an interest in the private lives of English citizens as well. Sabor points out that while *Amelia* reads more like a Richardsonian domestic novel, Richardson's final novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* is ironically more like a novel by Fielding. While this indicates that there was cross-pollination between their works and styles, for the most part the style of Richardson's novels differs substantially from Fielding's comic prowess and focus on male public adventures (147).⁷

Richardson's two most popular novels, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* and *Clarissa, Or the History of a Young Lady* are domestic novels that focus on the life of a young woman within the confines of her family and immediate community of associates. Unlike

⁷ Despite the well-known rivalry between the literary giants, Peter Sabor explains that "any picture of unwavering polarization between Henry Fielding and Richardson" is not "entirely accurate" ("Richardson" 139).

Fielding's roving social adventures narrated by a third person, Richardson popularized the epistolary form of the novel, of which both *Pamela* and *Clarissa* are examples. The intimate writing styles of letters between close friends and family and journals and the relatively restricted settings of the novels allow Richardson to focus on the individual psychological experiences of his female protagonists and their antagonists, who are primarily male.⁸ Richardson's novels are heavily didactic and moralizing, chastising the rakish seducers bent on sensual pleasure rather than socially sanctioned relationships and marriage and praising the unwavering rectitude of Pamela and Clarissa. His heroines are paragons of virtue, despite Clarissa's one crucial error of leaving her family home with her eventual rapist, Robert Lovelace. Richardson institutionalizes the theme of "virtue in distress" about which R.F. Brissenden has comprehensively written and which has the consequence of reifying the associations between femininity, vulnerability, and exquisite expressions of emotion that I am trying to rethink in this chapter and throughout the project.

Richardson's writing, more than any other, has been used by critics of sensibility to reinforce the fundamental femininity of feeling and morality in the mid-eighteenth century. In *Sensibility, an Introduction*, Todd argues that "Richardson is clearly the most important figure in early sentimental fiction" because "he made the sentimental construction of women a dominant motif and the minute recordings of emotional and physical states a central purpose" (66). She goes on to argue that sensibility was

⁸ For Watt, the epistolary mode is what sets Richardson's work apart from Henry Fielding's and it marks a new interest in the individual in the eighteenth century: "Richardson's narrative mode, therefore, may also be regarded as a reflection of a much larger change in outlook—the transition from the objective, social and public orientation of the classical world to the subjective, individualist and private orientation of the life and literature of the last two hundred years" (176).

intrinsically gendered as feminine “clearly [because of] the physical weakness assumed for women” although she briefly acknowledges that “men may be susceptible” (78). There is, however, a leap in reasoning that Todd’s work reflects, and it is one that I do not see evidenced in Sarah Fielding’s writing: to suggest that the interest in female sensibility within the novel, especially Richardson’s novels, thereby makes the discussion of sensibility and sentiment an inherently feminized topic simply because women were ‘assumed’ to be more receptive to the effects of feeling is to elide positions that suggest it is central to both male and female socialization and subjectivity.⁹ I do not see how Fielding’s novels fit easily into that gendering of sensibility that Todd, Bree, G.J. Barker-Benfield, and occasionally Patricia Meyer Spacks employ in their analyses of the term.

Writing amidst the bifurcated and gendered literary productions of Henry Fielding and Richardson, Sarah Fielding emerges as an author in her own right, creating her own style of a novel of public and private feeling and morality where both male and female characters can possess virtue and vice and innocence and scheming. Sabor suggests that “in the 1740s Sarah’s literary career was enmeshed with that of her famous brother” and that her first attempts at writing appear as letters in his works *Joseph Andrews* and *A Journey from This World to the Next* (149).¹⁰ He goes on to argue that even *David Simple*, published anonymously, was often attributed to Henry which he denies in his preface to the second edition of the novel, published later in 1744. Yet despite the

⁹ Sensibility features prominently in the Christian rhetoric of the period, as it does in the writings of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson whose philosophies were intended to be read, and responded to, by men. See John Mullan’s *Sentiment and Sociability* and John Sheriff’s *The Good Natured Man* for more on the importance of sensibility for men. For more on the gendering of sensibility as feminine, see my discussion of eighteenth-century medicine in the introduction to this dissertation (18-22).

¹⁰ Bree agrees that “Henry’s active encouragement of her talents, and his knowledge of the publishing and reading world of 1740s and 1750s England clearly benefited her literary career” (*Sarah* vii).

obvious influence that Henry had on his sister, including substantial edits to the second edition of *David Simple*, he acknowledges his sister's stylistic differences throughout his famous, but arrogant, preface.¹¹

David Simple, like Henry's most famous works, is an episodic novel using the picaresque mode to explore a man's travels in the public world. But unlike *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones*, the tone of the novel is much more serious, and has a more explicitly moral and didactic message. Sarah Fielding refers to *David Simple* as a "moral romance" offering what Bree describes as "a sympathetic narrative of an ordinary young man facing realistic challenges in a contemporary world and an inquiry into the ethical and philosophical issues faced by her hero and those he encountered" in her introduction to the novel (xx). Fielding repeats this narrative focus in *The History of Ophelia* sixteen years later, focusing her attentions this time on the narrative of a young woman also facing challenges in her social world and exploring the issues she encounters in her trials. Though the tone of *Ophelia* is much lighter, it nonetheless maintains its commitment to realistically portraying life and subjectivity in society and to conveying a moral message to young women. Bree argues that the main character of *Ophelia* "exist[s] as part of a realistically depicted, recognizably contemporary social world—an urban society based

¹¹ Fielding mocks those who attributed the text to him, stating that "my readers will do well to examine their own Talents very strictly, before they are too thoroughly convinced of their Abilities to distinguish an Author's Style so accurately, as from that only to pronounce an anonymous Work to be his" (v). He points out the novel's "vast penetration into human Nature, a deep and profound Discernment of all the Mazes, Windings and Labyrinths, which perplex the heart of Man to such a degree that he is himself often incapable of seeing through them" but disdains to claim responsibility for the novel because of the "Grammatical and other Errors in Style in the first Impression, which my Absence from Town prevented my correcting" (viii, vii). He claims that these errors "which want of Habit in writing chiefly occasioned" are such that "no Man of Learning would think worth his Censure in a Romance; nor any Gentleman in the writings of a young Woman (vii). Clearly, Henry Fielding does not see this work as something that should have been ascribed to him.

on materialism and personal indulgence, with a very real capacity to corrupt innocent young women who stray unwarily into its orbit” (*Sarah* 123).

Sarah Fielding’s abilities to represent and re-think gendered experiences in society, and the social pressures placed on young women as she does in *Ophelia*, share an affinity with another important writer of the period, Eliza Haywood. Haywood began writing novels in the 1720s, considered amatory fiction, in which she plays with expectations of female desire and agency. Her novel *Love in Excess* and short story *Fantomina, or Love in a Maze* both feature strong-willed male and female characters who not only recognize the social expectations placed upon them, but also are consistently willing and able to subvert these external forces in order to satisfy their private desires and passions. The personal and sexual freedom that the characters in her early fiction experience bears little resemblance to the innocence and social harmony espoused in Fielding’s novel, but Haywood’s later fiction, especially her most famous novel *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, shows the same focus on personal growth and social responsibility for which Fielding is known.

Published in 1751—after *David Simple* but before *Ophelia*—*Betsy Thoughtless* provides a model for the intelligent, but naïve, young girl forced to learn her place in society without proper guardianship and who learns about herself and her society through a series of embarrassing and often dangerous mistakes. If *David Simple* represents the first ‘man of feeling’ narrative in the eighteenth century, then *Betsy Thoughtless* represents one of the first female Bildungsromans that no doubt inspired Sarah Fielding in her development of *Ophelia*, as well as late-eighteenth-century authors like Frances

Burney and Jane Austen in their representations of female social initiation and the dangers of innocence and infatuation.

Like Richardson, Haywood's most famous narratives are predominantly focused on the experiences of women in society, though she gives them a much larger social world of public and private spaces to experience than he does. But even in *The Fortunate Foundlings*, a novel that attempts to compare the social education and experience of a young boy and his sister, Haywood reinforces the differences between the characters based on their gender.¹² Sarah Fielding remains a remarkable figure for her attempts to bring together male and female experience and to reinforce the mimetic interdependence of her characters in each of her novels.

In both *David Simple* and *Ophelia* Fielding centres her narrative action on the social initiation of a naïve, but genuinely kind and moral, character with a clear sense of right and wrong behaviour and feeling. Both protagonists are characters possessing sensibility which they have developed outside of the social rules governing appropriate feeling and expressions thereof. While Fielding praises the 'natural' feelings of David and Ophelia she nonetheless shows that this sensibility, cultivated in isolation, is not adequate to allow them to function in the constructed world of polite English society. She insists that both characters have a desire to be part of a larger society, to increase their community of friends, and to share in the affective ties of society that Shaftesbury,

¹² For more on this text, see Jerry Beasley's biography of Eliza Haywood in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 39 Part I and Mary Ann Schofield's chapter "The Later Novels: 1741-56" in her monograph *Eliza Haywood* (85-7). There is very little criticism on this novel. Two of the few articles I found looked at the French translation of the novel made by Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon in 1754: see Helen Sard Hughes's article "Notes on Eighteenth-Century Fictional Translations" and Antoinette Sol's chapter "Lost in Translation: Crébillon fils' *Les Heureux Orphelins* and Haywood's *The Fortunate Foundlings*."

Hutcheson, and Hume laud in their respective social philosophies. But she reminds readers that being part of a society means ceding some degree of autonomy over one's feelings and expressions of passion and desire in order to be an accepted member. The cost of freedom of personal expression is counterbalanced by the gain in sympathetic ties—like those David finds with Cynthia, Camilla, and Valentine—and the opportunity to love and be loved—as Ophelia finds with Dorchester.

David and Ophelia learn how to balance between the external social pressures acting on them through the people they meet and their internal desire to remain true to their sentiments by watching others and trying to find ways that their thoughts and behaviours match up with those around them. The mimetic aspect of socialization is foregrounded in both novels, though Ophelia is arguably more successful at making the process work for her because she has a greater impetus to find a safe social position due to the sexually precarious position she is in when she arrives in London. Fielding offers public, social role models for both David and Ophelia, suggesting that the process of socialization requires public engagement for both men and women. This is evidence that the rigid separation of the spheres that becomes socially institutionalized by the end of the eighteenth century has yet to be reified for Fielding.¹³

In addition to arguing that young men and women require both public and private experiences in order to develop subjectivity, Fielding also challenges the assumption that male socialization is more associated with reason and public life and that female

¹³ Gautier suggests that one reason for this is because Fielding was writing during the “center of that liminal period” in which “everything was negotiable” with respect to the form and content of the novel (195).

socialization is more associated with feeling and private life. Perhaps her clearest argument in both novels is that sensibility, both natural and social, is necessary for subjectivity but that rationality is too.¹⁴ David and Ophelia need to learn from their mistakes of misjudging people and placing too much faith in appearances and to cultivate the scepticism that comes from increased knowledge and experience; neither character is able to succeed in assimilating into society while relying solely on instinct and feeling. The analyses of *The Adventures of David Simple* and *The History of Ophelia* that follow challenge the assumption that characters of sensibility and feeling are *always already* feminized through which I assert, as George Haggerty does in his discussion of gender and subjectivity in later eighteenth-century novels by women, that “sensibility suggests more about subjectivity than it does about sexuality” (5).

David Simple and the Adventures of Social Sensibility

Sarah Fielding’s first and by far most famous novel, *The Adventures of David Simple* (Part I), along with its sequel *Volume the Last* (Part II), is by no means as simple a novel of sensibility as the main character’s name suggests.¹⁵ It is a penetrating investigation of the external social forces acting on the individual and his emotional

¹⁴ In his discussion of Sarah and Henry Fielding’s writings, Gary Gautier argues that the characterization of David Simple is proof against the argument that “sensibility is a necessary *and sufficient* constituent of the good man” (204). He argues that Lennox’s *The Female Quixote* suggests the other side of the equation as well: that sensibility is “necessary but not sufficient” to good women (204). I think Ophelia does as much as *The Female Quixote* to prove that sensibility is important but not the only quality necessary for living a good life in society; it proves that feeling must be balanced by reason and judgment.

¹⁵ I am not the first to point out the irony of the novel’s title; Bree makes a similar point when comparing David’s character to the definitions of the term offered in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (Sarah 31). Her focus, however, is on how David primarily represents the “plain, undesigning, sincere” meaning of the word.

reaction to them. Fielding puts the theories of moral sympathy and *sensus communis* into practice in the novel to interrogate the ways that social expectations and stereotypes influence the understanding of the protagonist's sense of self and belonging in the mid-eighteenth-century English society that forms the novel's setting. The often pessimistic and always heavily-didactic tone of the narrator signals to readers that the society being represented is not the idealized version envisioned by Shaftesbury or Hutcheson. Into this society, a young and innocent character of sincere feeling is introduced and expected to make his way into a community that will accept and value him. David Simple's social education and cultivation of subjectivity, a mimetic project, is grounded in the tension between the potentially destructive force of society and his drive for community and acceptance.

I argue that the novel explores experiential manifestations of public and private sensibility to show how David Simple's subjectivity is produced by a dynamic negotiation of internal and external feelings that belies the traditional distinctions between female private feeling and male social feeling often drawn in studies of the Enlightenment. Further, it is my assertion that David's strong emotional expressions are evidence of subjectivity in crisis not evidence of his effeminacy; they are the product of the disjunction between his internal expectations for a moral and benevolent society and the visual attestations of selfishness and artifice he experiences. This crisis demonstrates my central argument that David's subjectivity is not just a process of his private experiences, as Locke would argue, nor is it based solely on the social interaction so important to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, but rather that it is the product of both processes occurring simultaneously. As such, David's ineffectuality in the novel is caused not by

the weakness of too much sensibility, usually ascribed to women, but by the failure of mimesis as he constantly struggles to balance public and private feelings by internalizing the external realities of the social behaviour with which he is presented.¹⁶ His feelings prevent him from easily assimilating into a world he perceives as hostile and insincere, and he suffers physically and emotionally from the constant disappointments he experiences when he fails to find a real friend.

The story focuses on the social initiation of the naïve protagonist, David Simple, and follows his struggles as a young man searching for acceptance and sympathy in an often hostile social environment. David's entrance into society is fuelled by a desire to find "a real friend" suggesting that he recognizes the importance of shared experiences and feelings for building community. From the outset of the novel, David's actions and thoughts are set in opposition to those of his selfish brother Daniel whose "conversation with his Companions had never any other View, but in some shape or other to promote his own Interest" (9). The enterprising and financially savvy self-centredness of Daniel comes to represent the standard model of male behaviour in the novel and David's inability to understand, or respond to, the emotional and economic threats posed by his

¹⁶ For more on weakness and sensibility as female qualities in eighteenth-century writing see: the Marquis of Halifax's *The Lady's New Year's Gift* (31), Bernard Mandeville's *Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions* (171-5), John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (26-7), and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (78). Twentieth-century critics of sensibility like G.S. Rousseau in *Nervous Acts* (25-68), Jean Hagstrum in *Sex and Sensibility* (163-65), and G.J. Barker-Benfield in *The Culture of Sensibility* (1-36) also discuss the issue in detail. The qualities of tenderness and physical susceptibility to emotion are often inherently gendered as female in much of the medical discussions of sex in the eighteenth century, allowing critics like Bree and Todd to unproblematically argue that characters possessing these traits are effeminized despite Laqueur's assertion that "sexuality as a singular and all-important human attribute with a specific object—the *opposite* sex—is the product of the late eighteenth century. There is nothing natural about it" (13).

brother and others is one factor leading some modern critics to consider David as “a very ‘unmasculine’ 18th-century hero” (Bree *Sarah* 32).¹⁷

David’s journey is intended to “assist all those, who had been thrown into Misfortunes by the ill Usage of others” like David’s experience of being robbed of his father’s inheritance by his younger brother Daniel (24). His goal for entering society is two-fold then: to find a friend and make himself happy and to assist others who have been taken advantage of in their lives.¹⁸ But in seeking to alleviate the sufferings of others, David must first hear their stories of suffering and sympathize with the afflicted persons. His emotional reaction to the stories he hears in Fielding’s episodic narrative marks him as one who, in Bree’s terms, “consistently favour[s] the emotional over the logical” thus again distancing him from the stereotypical man of reason commonly identified with the public sphere (*Sarah* 33). David’s emotionality frequently manifests itself through tears and sighs, and in visible signs of physical suffering, which Bree details in her introduction to the novel (xxv). Bree argues that “just as sensibility is associated with the expressive body, in this novel emotional sensitivity goes along with physical weakness” (Introduction xxv). Given the weakness generally ascribed to women’s bodies in the eighteenth century, Janet Todd has made the conceptual leap to

¹⁷ Todd describes David—along with the protagonists of *The Fool of Quality*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *A Sentimental Journey*, *Tristram Shandy*, and *The Man of Feeling*—as “the man of feeling who has, in an unfeeling world, avoided manly power and assumed the womanly qualities of tenderness and susceptibility but who cannot be raped and abandoned” (*Sensibility* 89).

¹⁸ His motivations are much like the Christian goals that Hugh Blair espouses in his sermon on sensibility which I discuss in chapter two. Though David’s Christianity is not foregrounded the way it is in the novels by Goldsmith and Brooke in the 1760s, his behaviour is equally motivated by the two-fold desire to be privately happy and publicly useful.

assume that David's susceptibility to feeling means that he is a "man of 'female' feeling" like Mackenzie's Harley, Sterne's Yorick, and Goldsmith's Primrose (107).¹⁹

There is a double standard in Bree's and Todd's evaluation of David's gender. While on the one hand they claim that David is feminized and rendered socially impotent by his highly emotional reaction to the scenes of suffering he witnesses while on his travels in London, Bree nevertheless insists that David must be a male character because he has access to unaccompanied adventures in a public world.²⁰ She highlights this aspect of the narrative in her introduction: "in order to show a broad range of London life through the experience of the protagonist, it was of course essential that David be male. As a young man David can visit hotels and coffee shops, wander along at will; he has access both to public and to private spaces, and a general autonomy of action that would be impossible for a woman of the time" (xxiv). Because it relies on an individual's ability to move freely between public and private spaces unaccompanied, the picaresque is used as a framework for novels of male sensibility by Laurence Sterne and Henry Mackenzie but is rare in female-centered novels of sensibility, and especially in those focusing on social initiation.²¹

¹⁹ Like Bree and Todd, others have suggested that David's emotional reactions to the stories he hears of those he encounters marks him as more feminine than masculine. See especially Spacks's comments on gender in *David Simple* in *Novel Beginnings* (144-5).

²⁰ This experience is largely inaccessible to women of virtue in the mid-eighteenth century. Female characters like Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, earlier in the century, can have episodic experiences because their sexuality changes their access to public spaces, at the same time that it restricts their access to private spaces of "polite" and/or "respectable" femininity. See Spacks's comments on restrictions to female "wandering" in *Novel Beginnings* (145).

²¹ The two most famous female picaresque novels were published earlier in the eighteenth century by Daniel Defoe. *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress*, published in 1722 and 1724. Both featured first-person narration of the title characters' episodic experiences in the public world. Both *Moll* and *Roxana* use their sexuality to gain wider access to the public and private spaces of society. Neither of

While the narrative frame's fluid movement between public and private spaces may require a male protagonist, readers have to think beyond David's biological sex in order to see that the tension between the novel's form and his behaviour represents a deliberate hermeneutic challenge to social constructions of gender and space. David's sex may allow him greater access to the world, but it does not make him any more capable of understanding it or the people around him, nor does his sex "naturally" predispose him to socializing in the (masculine) public sphere. That David can be read as a "gormless hero" casts doubt on the "truth" of gender constructions associating man with reason/mind/strength and woman with passion/body/weakness. For how can a hero be motivated by the feelings, emotions, and impulses said to be "natural" to women and lack the sense and judgment "natural" to men but still be considered male?²² Fielding suggests that combining moral philosophies of sensibility with the Enlightenment's emphasis on discernment and rationality cultivated through physical experience is an effective way to re-think gender construction, subjectivity, and socialization in the eighteenth century. Gautier explains that the novel rejects "a cold, neo-Stoicism" at the same time that it "warns bourgeois proponents of sensibility against making any clean break from Augustan principles of rationality and clear judgment" (204). In so doing, Fielding presents a model of social and personal experience that succeeds only when, and if, individuals recognize the need for *both* feeling and rationality as motives for action.

these texts should properly be considered novels of sensibility either, as they are closer to rogue narratives than moral investigations of feeling.

²² Terry Castle calls David "gormless" in her scathing review of Broadview Press's publication of Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy*. In the article Castle also takes aim at other novels of sentiment in the eighteenth century, among them *David Simple*, challenging the feminist trend of reclaiming novels by women which lack the literary merit Castle feels they should have to warrant contemporary editions ("Sublimely" 18).

The novel is an investigation of social initiation grounded in the principles of fellow-feeling, sympathy, benevolence, and sensation-experience so central to the moral philosophies of the early- to mid-eighteenth century. However, rather than simply fictionalizing one approach to socialization and education, Fielding brings together Shaftesbury's concept of *sensus communis* with David Hume's emphasis on the passions and feeling and chastises those models of sensibility and subjectivity that are exclusively personal or communal, suggesting instead the need for a model fusing both approaches. The dualities of content and form, feeling and reason, and private and public that give the novel its enigmatic quality are also why it is so important for contemporary scholars to continue reading it. *David Simple* models the necessity of balancing sensibility and sentiment in the cultivation of subjectivity in a way that continues to be relevant in understanding the "fictional negotiation of individual isolation and social engagement" and its implications for wider notions of subjectivity (Benedict 6).

Like any "public debut" novel, David is innocent and naïve when he leaves the seclusion of his family home and ventures into society. Before he can find a real friend he must learn how to judge who would make a good friend and in what kind of space he can find belonging. Though Gerard Barker is right to suggest that "it would be misleading to characterize the original novel as depicting David's education" in any formal sense, it does foreground David learning about the world and people through sensibility: he feels sympathy and pain for those who are suffering, and he takes joy in what he sees as sincere expressions of family and community (Barker 76). David also soon begins to learn that his personal experiences of feeling offer him a perspective on the world that frequently does not match how others around him are reacting, so he must start observing

the behaviours of others and compare them to his own feelings if he is to find a “real friend” and a place to belong in his society.

This necessity of looking both inward and outward to understand social interactions is central to David’s experiences of feeling and Fielding’s philosophical approach to sensibility and subjectivity. David’s continual interplay between external experiences of sympathy and the internal quest for right judgment (which he only gains at the time of his death) performs a sophisticated and articulate exploration of male sensibility, most easily envisioned through the metaphorical Möbius strip, that problematizes the strict distinction between the socialization of “masculine” reason and “feminine” emotion that Enlightenment scholars have, for so many years, insisted was a cultural imperative.

David has no sense of himself as a social subject or of his role within society at the outset of his journey, a situation that makes him one of the few male versions of a *tabula rasa* character in eighteenth-century fiction, especially within the novels of sentiment and sensibility.²³ He is a picture of artless sincerity and feeling; he uses no deception when interacting with others; he has a socially benevolent outlook; he has no preconceived notions and takes everyone he meets at face value. Bree continues to insist that these qualities mark David as not-quite-male according to traditional gender characteristics: “David’s goodness and simplicity marginalize him from the workaday world of eighteenth-century London and align his position much more closely with that

²³ While there are many well-studied examples of the socially inexperienced and un-socialized female character in novels of sentiment, of which *Evelina* is undoubtedly the most famous, there are few examples of this innocence and inexperience in a male character.

of women, who are also marginalized to that world” (*Sarah* 35). To distil this argument to its simplest form, Bree suggests that David is too good and kind to be a “real” man.

She argues that David’s roguish brother, Daniel, is actually much more of a “man” because he is aggressive, selfish, and astute (*Sarah* 33). Roy Porter further clarifies the idealized definition of masculinity in the eighteenth century, suggesting that “the model enlightened person was the educated adult, presumed affluent, independent – and male: a ‘Mr Spectator’, a man of sense or feeling” but not both (339). Rather than reifying it, I see Fielding challenging this stereotypical model of masculinity. To do so, she provides a number of male role models to teach David about masculinity and sensibility in society, some men of feeling, some of rationality, and some of the same selfish ilk as Daniel. That all of the men in the novel ultimately fail to influence David’s sense of himself suggests that Fielding does not see a type of public man in London society that David should emulate, and through which he can learn to be an autonomous and moral subject in his world. There is no character, like *Evelina*’s Lord Orville, to teach David how to develop his sentiments and judgment and moderate his excessive emotional sensitivity, and no one to model the theory that “mental cultivation, though an individual matter, [is] best accomplished through collective, public endeavour” (Brewer 511).

Fielding juxtaposes David to three male archetypes in Part I: Mr. Spatter, Mr. Varnish, and Mr. Orgueil. These teachers represent important types of social interaction and sensibility, which David has the option of following to further the friendship and develop his own subjectivity. Orgueil represents the man of right reason and rectitude, and is a possible role model for the ideal described by Porter; Mr. Spatter is the social man of the upper-class whist table and the rout, who exemplifies class-climbing and

vanity; Mr. Varnish plays the role of a man of “good nature” without fellow-feeling. Each of these men acts as a teacher who offers to instruct David in the “real” world of social interactions in London, and each presents him with public and private spaces in which to experience this society. Finding a social identity through a “real friend” who reflects David’s character and feelings is key to the cultivation of social sensibility: only when a man is able to see himself reflected in another is he able to understand how he is similar to and different from that Other, and begin to understand himself as an active Subject in society. Thus, the body and its action and responses—the most basic definitional elements of sensibility—are both public and private expressions of social realities. Barbara Duden has persuasively argued this position by asserting that “the body is a mirror of reality as well as the source of the mirror” supporting not only the mimetic function of sensibility, but also that subjectivity is a product of reflection and internalization (46).²⁴

Because their physical and emotional expressions are not authentic, what the male guides teach David is to be suspicious of outward appearances and what they have to say about the person’s real feelings: before his final conversation with Spatter, the narrator

²⁴ I want to distinguish my use of the mirror metaphor here from Jacques Lacan’s famous theorization of the mirror stage of infant development. Despite the naïveté of David and later Ophelia, the characters experiencing their subjectivity through the presence of external visual objects in my discussion are not, as in Lacan’s, children who are incapable of physically responding to the wholeness represented by the mirror image of themselves. Lacan describes this stage of infant development happening “before it [the child] is objectified in the dialectic identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject” (72). Though the process of cultivating subjectivity through the “mimicry” to which Lacan refers is central to my discussion of the socialization of David and Ophelia the subjects which form the basis of my analysis are both physically and verbally developed beyond the “little man” subject featured in Lacan. This means that their interaction with the object-world outside of them is far more complex than his model takes into accounts. I also resist offering a Lacanian usage of the mirror metaphor in my analysis since the development of the ego and the unconscious to which his theory responds is an early twentieth-century Freudian development in psychoanalysis that does not reflect the knowledge of human socialization and psychology in the time when Sarah Fielding was writing.

explains that David was “afraid lest he should be too credulous in his good Opinion, as he had often been already, and in the end discover, that all this Appearance of Good-nature was not founded on any real Merit” (86). Though David never understands the social reality of duplicity they are teaching him, the reader is expected to. The success of novels of sentiment and sensibility depends on readers sympathizing with the thoughts and feelings of the good/moral/social characters and rejecting those of the bad/immoral/selfish characters, regardless of their gender.

Mr. Orgueil, the first man that David encounters and who returns to play a pivotal role in the plot of Part II, serves as a practical example of reason without sensibility. Orgueil upsets the balance between thought and feeling, and undermines the fellow-feeling model of socialization that Fielding supports throughout the novel. David is astonished at Orgueil’s rejection of compassion and sympathy as driving forces of human interaction. Orgueil tells his young friend, “I look upon Compassion, Sir, to be a very great Weakness . . . if I could be moved by a compassion in my Temper to relieve another, the merit of it would be entirely lost, because it would be done chiefly to please myself” (65). While offering a “real Character” of Mr. Orgueil, his friend Mr. Spatter explains to David that “there are a set of Men in the World, who pass through Life with very good Reputations, whose Actions are in the general justly to be applauded, and yet upon a near Examination of their Principles are all bad, and their Hearts hardened to all tender Sensations” (65).

Mr. Orgueil enacts the Hobbesian model of human nature whereby individuals are driven by selfishness.²⁵ Orgueil is driven to act by pride which prevents him from developing sympathy in himself or valuing it in others (66). He does this because he has a sense of superiority that by suppressing his emotions in favour of his reason he is doing what he thinks many others cannot. In so doing, he is asserting his masculinity according to the traditional stereotype. Spatter tries to teach David, by making reference to Orgueil, that there is no common sense, no shared “sense” or sentiment of right and wrong action, no *sensus communis*; he tries to show David that individuals are motivated by their own desires and feelings that are always clouded by “Inclination” (66). Fielding’s rejection of this character as a role model for David is indicative of her criticism of the social world view Orgueil represents and in particular its construction of masculinity that is unaffected by feeling.

The fundamental personal flaw of Orgueil, and the reason he is not a good model of subjectivity for David, is that he is in a “continual war with [his] passions” (67). As such, Orgueil’s body and mind are in conflict meaning he cannot develop an embodied experience of himself as a feeling and thinking subject. He therefore has only a limited ability to identify with others and for them to identify with him in return. David senses a flaw in Orgueil’s character and promptly leaves in search of better support. This departure ends the first book of volume one, and the first unsuccessful stage in David’s social initiation: he has not learned to be a man of pure reason and “wisdom.” This stage is especially significant because it shows that the educational process of developing male

²⁵ This model of behaviour leads to the misanthropic form of sensibility so common in the Gothic novels that gain popularity in the later part of the century. This model of behaviour is explored in depth in my discussions of *Secresy* in Chapter Three and *The Natural Daughter* and *Zofloya* in Chapter Four.

subjectivity through public sociability is not simply a matter of rationality, *sensus communis*, or sensibility but rather an intentional balance between them. Orgueil's return in Part II emphasizes that he has not been influenced by David to balance his reason with feeling any more than David has been influenced by Orgueil to balance his feeling with reason: the body-as-mirror of Subject/Other has failed.

David leaves Orgueil to "view another Scene of Life" with Mr. Spatter (69). In the episode that follows, he is exposed to the upper class "high life" with an aim to "try if their Minds were as refined, as the Education and Opportunities they had of improving themselves, gave him hopes of" (70). Once again, David's expectations are deflated. The society he encounters at the routs, assemblies and whist-tables is where he is most clearly exposed to the disconnection between external appearances and internal feelings and motivations that make learning social sensibility so difficult for both young men and women.²⁶ Spatter tells David that these quasi-public spaces are fascinating because through them the mask of external similarity (*sensus communis*) is revealed as a chimera: "in Conversation, real thoughts are often Disguised; but when passions are actuated, the mask is thrown off and Nature appears as she is" (71).

David is overwhelmed and confused by the external appearance of calm and "delightful Harmony" that is quickly dropped in favour of a passion to win a game or to see an opponent shamed. What strikes him most, though, is that all the people, both male and female, at the routs are the same. Spatter shows David the effects that class concern

²⁶ This section of the novel offers Fielding's most explicitly classed argument: in it she makes it clear that those parts of society that are most privileged are least sensitive to the rules of sensibility and reason proposed by their philosophical supporters (like Shaftesbury). Fielding is arguing in favour of a society built on the foundations of rationality and fellow-feeling, qualities that she sees in the working and middle-classes.

and social climbing have on subjectivity and sensibility: none of the people in the scene have any sense of themselves as autonomous subjects, nor do they have feelings for anyone else. They reflect each other, but lack the depth of character to internalize the significance of the image, and David is unable to see himself reflected in them at all. These people who are universally criticized by Fielding's narrator for being "so extremely barren of Matter" despite being part of "one of the *chief Scenes* to be viewed at present in this great Town" expose the similarities between male and female experiences in polite society and the homogeneity enforced by social rules of polite behaviour (74). This in turn destabilizes the assumption that the lives, education, and social roles are fundamentally different for men and women. Because this group is brought together by superficiality and a lack of reason and feeling, Fielding quickly discounts them as friends for David.

Spatter then takes David to meet people who are interested in conversation instead of gaming, with the hope that he will see a more pleasant kind of sociability. What he finds amidst the company of women is a quagmire of reason, feeling, and spite. The women he meets poke fun at the affectation of other women, like Lady Know-all and Lady Tru-wit, while themselves revealing affectation and false learning. The artificiality of their feelings and thoughts, which the narrator equates to "the Cackling of Geese, or the Gobbling of Turkeys" forces David (and Spatter) to retreat from this semi-private female space in "the Condition of Men just escaped from a Shipwreck" (77). David feels no more comfortable here than he does in the public male space of the tavern where he ventures with Spatter the following night; this challenges arguments that see David being

drawn to female spaces and expressions of emotion. He is only drawn to sincere expressions of moral emotion and sympathy, not affectation and excess.

At the tavern, David encounters the same kind of rhetorical posturing and artifice from the men that he found in the large company of ladies. There is no traditionally gendered space in which David can find comfort and a chance to develop his sense of self so he is again denied the opportunity to learn either rationality or genuine feeling in this scene of life, as any young person would be in the same situation. After another failed initiation into polite society, David leaves Mr. Spatter and he agrees to lodge with Mr. Varnish, whose pleasantness he hopes will give him some respite from the ridicule, scorn, and superficiality of his previous adventure. Varnish is the least significant of the three social archetypes but he introduces David to Cynthia, the most important female character in the novel.²⁷ Up to this point, David has been exposed to a number of forces that influence his sense of self: pride, jealousy, class and social climbing, vanity, rhetorical posturing and the appearance of knowledge. David sees these negative forces as working outside of him and his experiences so while there is external pressure on him to follow the social models of reality and masculinity that Orgueil and Spatter represent, David feels no internal impetus to identify with them. None of the other characters has spoken to David's sensibility and fellow-feeling in a way that he internalized.

The episode with Cynthia, however, allows David to become the agent of feeling and sensibility, instead of the passive receptor of external forces. He acts upon the

²⁷ Although David ultimately marries Camilla, Cynthia has much more depth as a character, and models a character of feeling and rationality. Cynthia is the only character in the novel that has the necessary sensibility and sentiment to help David moderate his feelings and develop his mind. Cynthia, however, is not interested in David and makes a resolution to leave his protection rather than be subjected to his advances, honourable as they were.

doctrine of sympathy when he tells her: “that he saw by her Look and Manner she was very unhappy, and begg’d, if it was any way in his power to serve her, she would let him know it; for nothing in this World was capable of giving his so much Pleasure, as relieving the Distress’d” (92). He has finally found another person in whom he can see his own suffering and kindness reflected, and he seizes the opportunity of reaching out to this reflection of himself. Cynthia is initially dubious about David’s motivations, having already become a victim to social insincerity, but she responds to his request by reading his body-as-text for the same signs that he detected in her and is convinced that his sincerity reflects her own: “at last, by the Innocence of *David’s* Looks, and the Sincerity which was visible in his Manner of expressing himself, she was prevail’d on to relate the history of her Life” (92).

In this episode, which spans six chapters, both Cynthia and David engage in the reflexive cultivation of sympathy (I. ii. 4-10). While telling him her life story, Cynthia articulates her inward responses to external forces acting on her and watches his response to her expressions of feeling. David, in return, internalizes her reactions in the narrative in order to “comprehend the Reasonableness of what Cynthia said” (96). Both characters take pleasure in the recitation of her life story: Cynthia has a cathartic release of her pain and receives comfort from his sympathy, while David enjoys her manner of expressing feelings and thoughts and is moved and educated by her story. David is frequently seen asking Cynthia to explain certain social elements of her story to him, which gives him a further understanding of the society in which he and she are struggling for a place (96, 103, 104).

Cynthia again takes on the role of social educator as a woman of rational feeling in Book Four of the first volume. Through her experiences in the world, she explains to David, Camilla, and Valentine the basic arguments of sense and feeling that Fielding makes through Orgueil, Spatter, and Varnish: “For as People who really have Sense, employ their Time in lowering all Sensations which they find give them Pain; so Persons who are so wise, as to think all Happiness depends on the reputation of having and Understanding, often pay even the Price of continual Fretting, in order to obtain this their imaginary Good” (234). The balance between thought and feeling is essential to right action and embodiment, an argument that Fielding makes both directly and indirectly through the characters and scenes that influence David during Part I. Her project serves the same purpose of “demolish[ing] the false opposition between reason and passion” that Isabel Rivers argues is central to David Hume’s position in the *Treatise of Human Nature* (294). Readers should be cautious not to read too much significance into the fact that Cynthia is the person conveying Fielding’s moral philosophy because her gender, like David’s, is less significant in her expression of subjectivity and sensibility than her experiences and her ability to balance thought and feeling.

One way that readers may conflate the significance of Cynthia’s gender is to suggest that David’s affinity with her is another way that he is feminized. In his article, “David Simple and the Fallacy of Friendship,” Richard Terry suggests that David gives up searching for a “male” friend, since none of the men he meets matches his own expressions of feeling, sympathy, and masculinity. But in an interesting interpretation of the “feminized” argument, Terry suggests that what David decides to look for instead of a male friend is a female equivalent of himself with whom he can have a romantic

relationship (528). Rather than seeing *Cynthia* as the friend who is most useful to David, as I see her, Terry foregrounds *Camilla* as “the realization of his [David’s] wish for a perfect reciprocal union with another person” that is based on shared beliefs, emotions, and morals (528).²⁸ The emphasis on interpersonal compatibility and shared moral principles is what unites the “little Society” that provides David his only solace in the novel. Terry writes that the “utopia” suggested by David, Camilla, Valentine, and Cynthia is “a perfect mutuality of interest, a dissolution of self into community” (528). What is most important about the community, and David’s choice of people he wants around him, is not their biological sex or their traditionally gendered behaviours but the qualities of personal integrity, honesty, and sympathy that they share. The “mutuality” of the society’s moral sentiments and feelings allows David to foreground the importance of community and downplay the pursuit of Enlightenment individualism that he has seen as selfish and socially destructive.

But Fielding explains to readers that the private domestic happiness and fellow-feeling of this “little Society” is attainable on a public, national scale without calling for an end to individualism: “as story a Picture as this is of real Happiness, it is in the power of every Community to attain it, if every Member of it would perform the Part allotted him by *Nature*, or his *Station* in Life, with a sincere Regard to the Interest and Pleasure of the whole” (280). Yet, despite Fielding’s enticing theorization of a sympathy-driven

²⁸ Bree suggests in her introduction that Cynthia is “in many ways a more traditional hero than David” because of her “high degree of independent thought and resourcefulness” (xxvii). Bree has again conflated intelligence with masculinity. She implies that David’s relationship with Cynthia inverts the traditional gender roles each is expected to perform: if Cynthia is the hero, the implication is that David takes on the role of vulnerable heroine. This kind of thinking may be what prompts Terry to suggest that David is so perfectly matched with the vulnerable and naive Camilla. If we take away the focus on Cynthia’s gender, she becomes an ideal role model of rational and moral feeling who I think is best equipped to teach David how to be a social subject without sacrificing his internal values.

model of sociability open to men and women, the de-emphasis on rationality in this community (Cynthia is the only one with any real dedication to discernment and mental improvement) makes it less realistic as a potential model for British society.

Although the novel details David's emotional and physical experiences of fellow-feeling and his understanding of community it does not chart his moral, romantic, or rational development as most novels of its kind do. In fact, as some critics have pointed out, David does not change much during the course of the novel.²⁹ David is shown models of the man of reason through Mr. Orgueil, the man and woman of polite society and rhetoric through Mr. Spatter and his friends, and the man and woman of feigned fellow-feeling through Mr. Varnish and his friends. He ultimately rejects both the "masculine" and "feminine" spaces, and the stereotypically-gendered archetypal citizens of London they contain, in favour of the mixed-gendered space of his "little society" where sharing and sympathy hold the group together.

David emerges as a character as quixotic in nature as his quest for a real friend: he is the epitome of what Kevin Sharp and Stephen Zwicker refer to as an "almost hermaphrodite composite of masculine form and feminine sensibility" (qtd. in Carter 157). I have sought to destabilize the distinction between a male body and female feeling throughout the previous discussion by showing ways in which David's entrance into the world resists simplistic constructions of gendered behaviour. While David's sex may give him greater access to the public and private spaces of London society, it does not predispose him to manoeuvre successfully through the 'masculine' world of public

²⁹ See Gautier's "Henry and Sarah Fielding on Romance and Sensibility" (209) and Gerard Barker's "*David Simple*: The Novel of Sensibility in Embryo" (77).

houses and rationality. However, his inability to fit into this “masculine” role does not necessarily imply to me that he is “feminine”. Further, I contest that the gendering of sensibility, sympathy, and subjectivity in the novel has more to do with obtaining a balance between rationality and feeling—sentiment and sensibility—than it does with the traditional binaries of male/reason and female/feeling that marginalize David’s epistemological journey as “quintessentially female” and thus as a failure of male subjectivity (Todd *Sign* 165). He does fail to develop an embodied subjectivity because his feelings never obtain moderation by thought in the way that Cynthia’s do, for example, but this is not a gendered failure. David has failed to enact the necessary internalization and projection of sentiment and sensibility necessary for his social inclusion which signals a failure of the mimetic process of socialization not a flaw associated with, or defined, by his sex.

The Adventures of David Simple teaches readers, if not David himself, the role that sensibility plays in the construction of (public) sociability and (private) subjectivity and the necessary interconnection between the two. That the main character experiencing the external forces and internal confusions is male is largely incidental to the argument that grounds Fielding’s narrative. I challenge those who, like Sharp and Zwicker, might consider David a hermaphrodite because it implies that he is somehow pathological and it undermines the significance of a model of sensibility that refuses the facile gendering usually associated with the term. What Fielding accomplishes in the novel, and what I find so intriguing about this work, is shifting the emphasis in her discussion of sensibility from gender to embodiment: David is not just a “*man of feeling*”, he is a man whose *excess of feeling* and inability to balance this with thought in private or public spaces

denies him subjectivity. His sex is ultimately less significant than his inability to internalize and reflect the social realities around him in a rational way.

Noble Savage to Nobleman's Wife: Ophelia's Epistemological Journey of Socialization

While *The Adventures of David Simple* has received critical attention in studies of the eighteenth century novel and sensibility, Fielding's last novel, *The History of Ophelia*, has been largely ignored by critics. *Ophelia* is a less demanding read than *David Simple* because it lacks the episodic dynamism of part one and the heavy tone and social critique of part two of Fielding's earlier novel.³⁰ *Ophelia* has a relatively straightforward courtship-driven narrative which brings the process of the heroine's development more to the foreground. The cast of characters is also significantly reduced from those who appeared in 1744. However, Fielding's invocation of the theme of social initiation is fundamentally similar for the main characters in both novels: like David, Ophelia is inexperienced, entering the world from an un-socialized place of natural innocence and feeling, waiting to be educated by her experiences. She also encounters a variety of social archetypes and struggles to understand the seeming disconnect between their appearances and their actions and thoughts. And like David before her, Ophelia has experiences in public and private that teach her, often painfully, that her natural sensibility is both a blessing and a curse to her sense of herself as a social subject.

³⁰ Peter Sabor describes it as "in some ways a simpler work than its predecessors" in his introduction to the Broadview edition of the text (15). Reviews from 1760, included as appended material in Sabor's edition of the text describe the novel as "harmless recreation" and "tolerably entertaining" but do not praise its moral and psychological insight as they did for *David Simple* (280).

In *The History of Ophelia* Fielding explores the “shared intimacies” of interpersonal experience in city by creating a panoptic model of socialization where people’s appearances and behaviours are rigidly evaluated, in both public and ostensibly private spaces, and where their roles in society are defined through this evaluation (Watt 186).³¹ As readers follow Ophelia’s experiential developments they learn that although socialization and urban politeness require a sacrifice of some autonomy—willingness to subordinate personal passions and thoughts to those of the larger community—the process also offers individuals of both sexes an opportunity to develop social bonds and a sense of inclusion in society, as Watt suggests (185-6). Ophelia’s narrative emphasizes that her commitment to becoming part of London society is greater than the sacrifices of emotional freedom and feelings of shame that such a process requires; it also shows that *both* the positive and negative experiences of Ophelia’s socialization are necessary elements in her development of subjectivity just as they were for David Simple.

Again I assert that Ophelia’s natural feelings and thoughts are not inherently gendered, and that, like David, her development of subjectivity depends upon the internalization and projection of experiences of feeling in private and public. Ophelia must also be exposed to the routs, drums, private assemblies, and plays that David attends in order to learn appropriate social reactions and to cultivate a taste for experiences that will facilitate her assimilation into polite society. The difference between their experiences, then, is not a pre-social condition of their gender nor is it grounded in the restriction of their experiences to either the public or the private sphere. The variations in

³¹ Michel Foucault’s discussion of the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979) offers a particularly apt explanation of surveillance as a tool of social power and socialization.

David's and Ophelia's socialization are the product of the external social forces acting on them and are not based on any "truth" about the innate differences between young men and women in society.

I see that the principal distinction between David and Ophelia's social initiation is the ever-present physical threat with which Ophelia has to deal. Ophelia's status as a naïve young woman without family guidance or protection and whose noble patrilineage is concealed means that her negative experiences of life in society often involve exploitation where her sexuality and virtue are being threatened. Her physical body is frequently on display as she becomes the object of the gaze, both at home and abroad. David's negative experiences in society, however, usually concern the exploitation of his financial generosity and rarely pose any physical danger to him. And while David often gets confused or frustrated when he encounters obstacles to his plan for sincere moral friendship and sympathy, signalling the failure of mimetic socialization, Ophelia has to contend with the powerful emotion of shame that is produced by her continued objectification by others.

This emphasis on shame in Ophelia's narrative, as in the story of Evelina's *Young Woman's Entrance into the World* eighteen years later, is central to her experience of socialization and her sense of herself as a social subject. Shame prompts Ophelia's desire to assimilate more effectively into society with the aim of minimizing both her exceptionality and the often very real physical dangers that come from always being looked at. Ruth Yeazell insists that shame is central to female socialization in the eighteenth century as she invokes an argument first made in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*: "Indeed, if shame is, in Sartre's formula, 'the recognition of the fact that I

am...that object which the Other is looking at and judging,' it is only appropriate that the story of a young woman's coming 'out,' as the idiom also has it, reads like an extended case history of the phenomenon" (130). So, while the natural sensibility that David and Ophelia express throughout their novels is not *always already* gendered, there is more flexibility (and less danger) for David to function in the social world while marked as "other" because of those feelings than there is for Ophelia. This flexibility for David to exist outside of a socially recognized subject position without physical danger is really the only gendered difference between their experiences and it is an entirely external construction.

The only other notable distinction between the novels is the narrative voice they employ: whereas *David Simple* is narrated by a heavily didactic third-person narrator, *The History of Ophelia* is narrated by the heroine herself. As I argued earlier, despite being offered multiple models of socialization, David never learns to be an active subject in his own world, because he only internalizes at the end of his life the reality of the social world of which he is a part. This requires him to have a narrator to describe the internalization and projection of his emotions and social confusion. Ophelia, on the other hand, learns from her experiences how to become a subject capable of telling her own story complete with the moral judgments so central to social sensibility, *sensus communus*, in mid-eighteenth-century moral philosophy. Ophelia offers a retrospective view of her life, told to an unnamed lady in one long letter, with the benefit of a lifetime of socialization and experiences to contextualize her entrance into the world.³² Ophelia-

³² Whereas she used the picaresque form more associated with Henry Fielding in *David Simple*, in *Ophelia* Fielding has chosen to use the epistolary form most identified with Richardson. By the time she

as-narrator is self-critical, self-aware, and deeply engaging; and as she re-tells the story the danger caused by her innocence and natural sensibility—which she repeatedly refers to as ignorance—is palpable.

The novel focuses on the experiences of Ophelia Lenox, a young woman of Scottish noble descent, raised by a misanthropic aunt in the Welsh wilderness. After being “discovered” by a travelling British nobleman, Lord Dorchester, who is fascinated by her artless beauty and simplicity of manner, Ophelia is abducted from her life of domestic happiness and “natural” and moral sensibility. Like any other colonial discovery she is traumatically displaced from all she knows and is brought to England where Dorchester exercises absolute control over her daily life. While Dorchester limits Ophelia’s exposure to polite company in order to more easily seduce her, she is nonetheless allowed access to key scenes of experience and socialization in public: theatre, opera, an assembly at Lady Palestine’s, a masquerade, a trip to Bedlam, and a country dance. Dorchester struggles with his affections for Ophelia and his jealousy that she has become the object of Sir Charles Lisdale’s affections; every time Ophelia praises the goodness of the latter it reinforces Dorchester’s belief that she is a fickle coquette who is no longer sincere in her affections to him.³³ Dorchester abandons Ophelia, convinced that she no longer loves him, and she becomes immediately ill with a life-threatening fever. When Ophelia recovers she refuses the marriage proposal of Sir

published *Ophelia* in 1760 Henry Fielding was dead, and Richardson had become Sarah’s printer and a good friend. Whether her choice of narrative form was influenced by these changes in her personal relationships is something we cannot know.

³³ Dorchester assumes that Ophelia is behaving like the coquette that Betsy Thoughtless represents in the first part of Haywood’s novel.

Charles and commits to return to her aunt's in Wales, but when Lord Dorchester is told about this by his cousin, Lady Palestine, he rushes to be reunited with Ophelia.

Being convinced of the sincerity of their mutual affection, Dorchester and Ophelia are reunited, but soon after she is abducted by a rival for Dorchester's affections, the Marchioness of Trente, and secreted in a Gothic-style castle in the country with a miserable spinster chaperone, Mrs. Herner. She eventually escapes with the help of a kind parson, Mr. South, and is reunited (again) with Dorchester. After another series of public and social experiences—including a faux-pas at a dance that is almost exactly the same as a scene in *Evelina*—Ophelia learns of Dorchester's now-abandoned plans to seduce her through Lord Larborough, another of Ophelia's admirers, and she leaves Dorchester. She is then forced to resist Larborough's attempts to seduce her but Mr. South conveniently returns to help Ophelia escape from him. Then South helps Lord Dorchester find Olivia again. The couple are finally united in marriage after Lord Dorchester finds Ophelia's aunt, makes peace with her, and gets her to convince her niece that Dorchester really is a good man.

This repeated narrative structure of pleasure and suffering and union and separation affirms that Ophelia's growth and subjectivity is a product of both positive and negative experiences in public and private. Ultimately even her 'happy ending' promises a continued tension between these forces in her life as she gives up much of her self-determined actions and natural feeling in order to have the respectability and public security that comes from being Ophelia Dorchester. But I want to stress that the decision to give up the natural feeling is Ophelia's and is a product of her rational consideration of her best interests and desires and is not forced on her by patriarchal authority. How

Ophelia learns to develop the subjectivity that enables her to make this decision is the focus of the narrative.

Though it is not a typical novel of education, in *The History of Ophelia* Fielding is fundamentally concerned with Ophelia's epistemological journey. Throughout the text, Ophelia remarks on her ignorance, and the ways in which she is influenced and affected by emotions and experiences that she does not immediately understand. This fascination with ignorance—the term appears roughly 50 times in the 1760 London edition of the text—focuses the reader's attention on Ophelia's learning and the dangers to which she is exposed while internalizing the rules of social engagement. The acuteness of Ophelia's feelings of shame and embarrassment at being classified a “noble savage” drive her desire to change and assimilate into the spaces occupied by Dorchester, his friends, and family. But this is not a simple narrative of education and “civilization,” and Ophelia is not merely a passive object of surveillance as traditional gender constructions suggest; she is also a watcher, carefully detailing her responses to and observations of the spaces she occupies and the people she finds there. Rather than being overwhelmed and incapacitated by the variety of social types represented to her, Ophelia learns by watching and being watched in private and in public, whom to emulate and how to be socially aware.³⁴

³⁴ For example, *David Simple* features a protagonist who is unable to cope with the social diversity and artifice he encounters during his first experiences in London. Charlotte Lennox's *Arabella*, the title character of *The Female Quixote* is repeatedly flummoxed when presented with the realities of social encounters in polite, albeit rural, British society. *Evelina* is another ingénue character, whose narrative shares many affinities with Ophelia's struggle to enter British society. *Evelina* is, however, much less self-reliant than Ophelia.

The discourses of surveillance and space are drawn together throughout the novel by Fielding's focus on Ophelia's sensibility. During her time in Wales, Ophelia's aunt never taught her to restrain her feelings, and her genuineness causes her innumerable embarrassments when she is trying to learn how to behave in London.³⁵ The transition from genuine feeling to self-restraint is typical of the experience of socialization regardless of gender in middle-class, eighteenth-century society.³⁶ Young men and women alike learn to control their emotions primarily through watching the way that others around them express their feelings in public. This mimetic process draws together the ideas of sensibility, space, and surveillance, and thus reinforces Spacks's assertion that "sensibility requires watchers" (*Privacy* 83). Sensibility, then, is the gateway through which Ophelia learns both to internalize (a private act) and to project (a public act) her sense of self and her connection to society. This is the same process offered to David Simple in his narrative, but he is unable to compromise any of his internal beliefs and feelings in order to enact the Möbius model of sensibility that Ophelia achieves. Ophelia's need to protect herself from the shame-causing gaze prompted by her visible "otherness," compounded by her sincere desire to become Dorchester's socially sanctioned wife, makes her recognize the need for compromise between her private feelings and public expectations. Ophelia, then, is more committed to the process of socialization than is David because of the danger she is in, but this says more about the

³⁵ Ophelia explains her aunt's educational plan to her unknown correspondent: "But desirous not to lessen my Innocence and Simplicity while she dispelled my Ignorance, she gave me no account of the Manners and Customs of a People [polite Britons] with whom she hoped I should never have any Intercourse" (44).

³⁶ Bree agrees that Ophelia "becomes less open in her own behaviour, for fear of misinterpretation or censure, and less confident of the good intentions of others as she learns from experience not to trust the people among whom she lives" (139).

socially limited options for female subject positions than it does about any intrinsic, gendered capabilities she possesses.

When Ophelia first meets Dorchester, she is living a life of social isolation and domestic bliss with her aunt in the wilds of Wales. Dorchester happens upon the secluded pair, intruding into a hitherto private space, on his travels to experience the “wild and natural beauties” of the Welsh countryside (46).³⁷ Her presence and her beauty—as uncultivated as the landscape around her—pique Lord Dorchester’s interest. Ophelia, on the other hand, is amazed to see someone new in her space, having never “seen any of my own Species but my Aunt, and a few Times an old Man who had been at our House, on Occasions necessary to our rural Life” (45). Although Ophelia perceives Dorchester’s admiration through “his Eyes, which spoke Nature’s Language, an universal Dialect wherein even the Savage can want no instruction,” she does not understand his flattery of her beauty in this awkward meeting (46).

Since she lacks the vocabulary to decipher his social niceties, Ophelia, as “Nature’s Scholar,” is reliant upon the physical and emotional clues to Dorchester’s feelings, the signs of sensibility with which she grew up (46). This first-encounter narrative is an important epistemological experience for Ophelia as she explains that she has never before had the “opportunity of comparing myself with any Thing but my Aunt’s faded Charms, worn with Age, and blasted by Misfortunes” (45). What her

³⁷ Moira Dearnley’s book *Distant Fields* examines the ways that Wales serves as a setting in eighteenth-century English novels. She describes the setting of *The History of Ophelia* as being “rooted in the idea of Wales as a place of virtue, demonstrating the moral superiority of the natural over the artificial (wo)man by establishing the adamant innocence of the heroine after an upbringing in a remote and hidden location near the Welsh border” (68).

comment reveals is that Ophelia recognizes the importance of, and is interested in having, a mimetic interaction with others (45).

Dorchester's exploration of Wales and its inhabitants also invokes a travel narrative trope which reinforces the role of the gaze in the construction of subjectivity. With his traditionally "imperial eyes," Dorchester is unable to stop gazing on Ophelia; he sees the potential to exploit her naïveté, and thus decides to abduct and seduce the noble savage who will not recognize, until it is too late, the sinister motives behind the flattery and attentive behaviour she finds so attractive.³⁸ Dorchester's fixed gaze reinforces Matthew Edney's argument that "in an imperial setting . . . the gaze, or concerted observation, is always appropriative, domineering, and empowered" against an object having little social strength to resist (63). Dorchester consumes Ophelia with his eyes, and she struggles throughout the rest of the text to resist losing herself in his representation of her.³⁹

Despite her protestations, Dorchester abducts Ophelia from the safety of her worldly and wise aunt and drags her unprepared from the private space of her uncultivated home into the carnival of fashionable London (60). Ophelia is both terrified and intrigued by being forced away from the only life she has ever known. She explains:

In reflecting on these Subjects I passed my Night, and had some

³⁸ "Imperial eyes" is a reference to Mary Louise Pratt's well-known book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). Peter Sabor refers to Ophelia as a "Welsh noble savage" in his introduction to the novel, and cites Malcolm Kelsall's interpretation of her as an "eighteenth-century Miranda" (20, 18).

³⁹ This danger is more pronounced for Ophelia than it would be for a character like David Simple, who has the freedom to choose his companions and influences suggesting that Ophelia's gender is an element of her socialization; I don't see that this means that all of the feelings she expresses in response to her gendered social representation are therefore inherently "feminine."

Moments of Pleasure mixed with my Grief, but they bore little Proportion with each other; my Sorrow seemed deeply rooted, though its Violence was abated, while the contrary Sensation appeared only a sudden Flutter, which played round my head but came not near my Heart, and would not admit of Reflection: However, I found it so comfortable a Resource, that I endeavoured to encourage it, and prompted by Curiosity, at Break of Day, I arose to examine more minutely the Things which had so charmed me the Night before (60).

Though saddened and frightened by her new surroundings and the loss of her aunt's guidance, Ophelia nonetheless possesses a lively curiosity which prompts her to look beyond her fear and grief to the exciting new opportunities for experience that London, and the material comfort that Dorchester offers, will afford her.

In the early stages of Ophelia's entrance into the world of English society, she is the exoticized Other, an object of "excessive gazing" who feels great pain at being distinguished for a way of dressing she hitherto considered natural (58).⁴⁰ In this case, Ophelia's sensibility leads her to strive for sameness, thus initiating her socialization. Ophelia therefore begins a transformation, asking Lord Dorchester to provide her with the necessary changes in dress and accessory so that she can make a "decent and common Appearance" (58).

⁴⁰ The role of clothing in defining alterity is explained by Terry Castle in her book *Masquerade and Civilization* where she argues that "the fascination with exotic peoples was often indistinguishable from a fascination with their clothes" (60).

This physical change symbolizes the larger project of observing, reacting, and self-policing that represents Ophelia's learning.⁴¹ In *Framing Feeling*, Benedict refers to the "spectatorial" nature of sympathy and socialization according to eighteenth-century moral philosophy, and Ophelia's history is rife with examples of the role that spectatorship plays in the construction of subjectivity because Ophelia is both constantly surveilled by others and is a surveillant herself (3).⁴² Her subjectivity hinges upon her understanding, as Foucault has so ominously phrased it, that "inspection functions ceaselessly" and that "[t]he gaze is alert everywhere" (195).

While men and women of sensibility may serve as both watching subjects and watched objects, the latter role has largely been considered a female perspective because it is the more passive of the two roles and thus reflects the passivity assumed of women in the period.⁴³ In fact, Ophelia's frequently astute observations about her surroundings and the behaviours of those she watches indicates that this passivity may not reflect the reality of women's experiences with surveillance in the mid-eighteenth century. In her discussion of the role of spectatorship in Eliza Haywood's writing, Juliette Merritt explains the double bind that the gaze poses for women particularly well: "on a broader social level, a self-censoring, internalized patriarchal gaze is essential to the regulation of

⁴¹ I find it amusing that Ophelia only adopts the most visible elements of "fashionable" dress, as she tells her correspondent that she "immediately threw away the stiff Stays which seemed to me invented in perverse Opposition to Nature, and one of the Proof with which I thought this Country abounded that Man in his Folly had declared open War with her, and by pretending to improve, had so spoiled her Work, that scarcely any Traces of the Divine Artificer remained" (61-2). Ophelia wants to fit in but tries not to sacrifice too many of her "natural" charms or her artless projection of herself (not to mention her comfort) in doing so.

⁴² See 46, 56-8, 63-4, 71-2, 80-1, 89, 97, 100, 103-7, 112, 117, 118, 130, 133-42, 157 in volume one.

⁴³ This passivity is epitomized by a statement appearing in Nicolas Venette's *The Pleasures of Conjugal Love Explain'd* in 1740: "a Woman only suffers the impressions a man puts upon her" (26).

female conduct [But] the position of the spectator might be appropriated to enhance female agency to acquire and maintain a voice within public discourse” (8). So while being watched is a form of external social pressure limiting Ophelia’s behaviours and subjectivity it may also be a way for her to exert her authority over those judging her by returning their gazes with one of her own. I also want to point out that the gazes Ophelia internalizes and is influenced by are not entirely patriarchal either. She is just as affected by the gazes of Lady Palestine and her friends, and the perceptive watching of Miss Baden as she is by Dorchester, Sir Charles Lisdale, and Lord Larborough. This again suggests that while the gaze is important to Ophelia’s socialization it is not functioning solely within the traditional male/subject and female/object dichotomy of the gaze which Merritt discusses and challenges.

Within the space of constant surveillance created by sensibility Ophelia is made both a subject and an object, suggesting that her socialization is in reality far less passive than it may initially appear. One of the reasons that Ophelia’s subjectivity seems to be so much directed by external forces is because of the influence that Lord Dorchester exercises over her for much of the first volume of the novel. With his roles as an abductor, would-be seducer, guardian, teacher, and eventual husband, Dorchester takes on a number of social personae throughout the course of the novel, all of which put him in a position of authority over Ophelia. As such, he is not only responsible for her entrance into London society, but also for the kind of gendered socialization that she experiences.

Dorchester exploits his control over Ophelia by continually playing on her fears of being observed and judged. In doing so, he hopes to keep her ignorant of the socially

precarious position she is in while under his protection. He tries to train Ophelia to be submissive and dependent on him for her idea of self. After her first embarrassing experience as an outsider whose alterity was all too visible, she describes his following warning to her: “He then represented to me, How disagreeable I should find it, to have all Eyes upon me wherever I appeared; everyone if I spoke, listening to hear what the fair Savage would say, and calling natural Reason and Sense, because little known to them, ridiculous Ignorance” (81). He too thinks of Ophelia as a character of ridiculous Ignorance, and she explains to her correspondent that she would have responded with “Anger so justly due” to his representation of her had he not couched the insult with “Love and Flattery, and the Vexation I had received at my first Appearance, from being gazed at” (82).⁴⁴ By repeatedly telling Ophelia that the rest of society is “ill-natured” and “ill-judging” of social ignorance, he prevents her from confessing the simplicity of her education and seeking support from others (107). In an article on sensibility and conversation in the novel, Leland Warren argues that according to conduct books of the period, engaging in conversation that allowed for social advice was particularly necessary for young women (27). Dorchester’s reaffirmation of Ophelia’s dependence on him—he offers only public visibility and shaming as alternatives—serves as her first experience of socialization as a form of self-discipline while simultaneously denying her access to the conversational circles that should have been responsible for guiding her social

⁴⁴ In the revelatory scene near the end of the novel when Lord Larborough tricks Dorchester into confessing his plan of seducing Ophelia while she is in earshot, he again returns to the power he gained from Ophelia’s ignorance and fear of being observed: “Miss Lenox’s great Unhappiness at being observed and looked at, which was the necessary Consequence of her appearing in publick [sic], was of excellent Service to us” (236).

development.⁴⁵ But by preventing her from receiving the typically socially gendered advice that Warren suggests emerges in these conversational circles, Dorchester has actually distanced Ophelia from the traditionally passive, female education she would otherwise have received, so his plan may unintentionally have helped Ophelia in the long run.

Also significant in this scene is Ophelia's description of herself as a "fair Savage." In the discourse of imperialism, the uneducated Welsh girl is a "savage," though notably she is still a lady of quality, and the granddaughter of a nobleman (46). Presenting Ophelia as a noble savage, completely unaware of the world outside of her Welsh home, allows Fielding to reject the notion that there is innate social knowledge.⁴⁶ In keeping with the epistemological focus on experience in the novel, Ophelia is a *tabula rasa*, allowing Dorchester to manipulate her into the image/object he most wants to see.⁴⁷ However, while Dorchester is socializing her to become his mistress by trying to regulate Ophelia's exposure to the people and places that would threaten his sexual conquest, she takes the responsibility for her own development by learning to perform the expressions of subjectivity she sees in others. When Ophelia explains to Dorchester that she "know[s] not your Pleasures, nor your Customs," this is not only an expression of frustration but

⁴⁵ He particularly tries to prevent Ophelia's friendship with Miss Baden who is described as being "well acquainted with the world, [she] was sensible, polite, modest, and gentle" (137). Looking back, Ophelia realizes that "[t]he reason of my Lord's objecting to her will be obvious to your Ladyship, to whom I need not say that he feared her Discernment and Frankness of her Nature, which must together enable her to see the Arts used to impose on me, as well as the end designed by them, and induce her to discover the whole..." (138).

⁴⁶ It also allows Fielding the opportunity to criticize London society from the less-threatening position of an outsider.

⁴⁷ Dorchester's gazing on Ophelia and his desire to control her experiences and to create her as his ideal mistress reflects Nancy Armstrong's concern about the function of the gaze within eighteenth-century novels. She writes: "as an object of display, she always loses value as a subject" (77).

also an educational goal (53). She soon learns the pleasures, pains, and customs of her new society, bringing her behaviour and appearance in line with what she sees around her.

Despite her curiosity and desire to learn for herself the customs of polite London, Ophelia's dependence on Dorchester and his worldly experience is evident at almost every turn throughout the first volume, though she is initially sceptical (with good reason as it turns out) about the sincerity of his intentions towards her (63). One of their first public outings to a church reveals to the reader Dorchester's deception as well as his influence over her. Ophelia remarks to herself that the building is beautiful, but "appeared to me too much calculated to please the Eye, and to fix the thoughts on the Arts of Men's Hands, to be a Proper place for divine Worship" which reflects the simplicity of her tastes and the moderation of her passion for sensual pleasure (64). The tension between her love of simplicity and morality and her desire to fit into Dorchester's world of decoration characterizes Ophelia's struggle to articulate a sense of self that upholds her personal and moral integrity and reflects the social realities that Dorchester's wife must possess. While she examines the ornate characters engraved around the church her heart is filled with admiration and she prays for the pious "god-like men" to influence her and shape her behaviour. Dorchester interrupts her at this moment to point out that she "gave too easy Faith to the words of Man" (64). He plants doubt in Ophelia's mind as to her ability to judge and trust people, which ironically makes her more dependent on the man most responsible for trying to exploit the naïveté of her judgment.

Her dependence on Dorchester and her willingness to keep primarily to the private spaces of her home do not, however, make Ophelia any less an object of

surveillance since he and the servants are always watching to make sure she behaves as he has asked. This reinforces Spacks's contention that privacy was often as difficult, and occasionally more, to achieve in private spaces as it was in public: "Within the private life—the life of people operating in the family, or in relatively small communities of friends—many forces impinge on the privacy of individuals, their capacity to protect themselves from other people's desire to know about them or to insist on their participation in social activity" (*Privacy* 4). In fact there are virtually no private spaces where characters can evade the watchful eye of others and give vent to their sincere feelings with impunity.

Concomitant with her experiences of watching and being watched by Dorchester at home, Ophelia's most formative experiences in public society happen during her visits to his relative, Lady Palestine. Dorchester chooses Palestine as Ophelia's primary female influence, a juxtaposition to her wise and sceptical aunt, because she is so practiced in deception and is willing to betray innocence if it benefits her financially. Thus, Lady Palestine becomes the second most important socializing influence, and a necessary evil. For although she teaches and guides Ophelia through her first semi-private meetings and drums, as well as a play, an opera, and a public masquerade, all of which are instrumental in socialization, she is also responsible for keeping Ophelia from finding out the moral truth of her dependant situation and the challenge to her virtue that Dorchester is planning.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ophelia explains that parties not large enough to be called drums are referred to as "a private Party of a few friends", thus marking it as both a public and private event. There are twenty people at the "private" event to which Ophelia is invited by Lady Palestine (113). The other important socializing events involving Lady Palestine listed above take place on pages 111, 114, 116, 133.

When Ophelia first meets Lady Palestine during a small assembly at the latter's house, her fear of conspicuousness makes her want to flee the scene (105). Realizing that she must remain at the party, Ophelia tries to learn how to behave by watching the many people meeting around her. Observing conversations allows Ophelia to define the "others" around her, for, as Warren posits, "conversation embodies the other, the social context that restrains the individual, making his or her energy and discrimination available to all. . . . [it] can be grasped and used as a tool to function in the social world" (28). She sees women fawning over each other one moment, protesting the greatest assertions of kindness and friendship, and then lamenting the time wasted with that same woman when another comes along. The insincerity of polite interaction shocks Ophelia's sensibility and causes her to question her inclusion in the society. By experiencing this feeling of disgust, Ophelia implicitly defines herself as *not-artificial*, and by rejecting the affectation in the words and bodies of others she marks herself as a not-yet fully-disciplined member of the society:

I could not possibly allow, that the Obligation of joining in Society required any more of us, than to bury our Dislikes in Silence; to conceal a Truth, which, if known, may hurt, and can be of no Service, may be a Duty; but to pretend an affection we do not feel, I esteemed criminal; and to express what we know will not, and what we did not intend should be believed, appeared to me an excessive Folly. The Disgust this little incident gave me, made me attend less to the Conversation and consequently more to the persons of the company; a change that was not at all to my ease; for I now found I had every one's eyes

upon me; where-ever I placed myself I was the principal Object (106).

While observing these scenes with a critical eye, Ophelia becomes aware that, in fact, she too is being observed by the same people she is watching and thus she has once again become the object of observation. This scene is a remarkable example of the two-way functioning of the gaze as both an internalizing and projecting engagement of social experience. This scene is one among many of its kind in Ophelia's long process of socialization that replay this gazed/gazer dialectic. And it also reinforces the agential function of the gaze as Ophelia's observations allow her to critique and articulate her own subject position in opposition to what she sees.

Part of the insincerity that Ophelia finds so objectionable about these private-public interactions between the characters at Lady Palestine's is the affectation of emotion they perform. For, despite her desire not to look foolish, Ophelia has still not learned that in order to be accepted she has to control the public expression of her personal feelings in keeping with the responses of those around her. For example, when Dorchester and Lady Palestine take her to see *Macbeth*, she is overwhelmed with emotion, believing that she is watching a "real Tragedy" (112). Her sympathy is so acute that each emotion shown on stage is mirrored on Ophelia's face. Anticipating the difficulty Ophelia might have in concealing her emotions at the play, Dorchester procured tickets for a private box so that she "might not confine the Emotions so new a Sight would raise" (111). Again a private-public space, like the assembly at Lady Palestine's, is the setting for a revelatory experience of sensibility and subjectivity: her companions are more taken by watching her reactions than those of the actors, ironically because of the same sincerity of feeling that continues to mark her difference from them.

She explains: “they were sufficiently taken up in observing the Passions imprest [sic] on my Countenance. They told me, I might more properly be said to act the Play, than some of the Persons on the Stage” (112). Lady Palestine and Lord Dorchester have, through long exposure to the artifice of polite society, become inured to catharsis or have at least learned to repress their emotional responses to theatre.⁴⁹ Ophelia is exhausted by her expressions of feelings, mimicking those of the actors, and learns that to control and sometimes to hide her emotions can have positive effects, among which is the diminishment of attention drawn to herself. In an “age of disguise” participants in society, regardless of gender, must learn to dissemble their real feelings in polite company if they wish to be accepted as peers (*Castle Masquerade* 5).

Ophelia eventually internalizes the dangers of expressing too much feeling through observing, and misinterpreting, Dorchester’s responses to her sensibility in their private times together which again manipulates the traditional male/subject and female/object dichotomy.⁵⁰ Ophelia’s beauty and visible innocence makes her a frequent object of admiration in the circles of Lady Palestine’s friends, much to the chagrin of Lord Dorchester, who would rather keep her to himself. While at an assembly at Lady Palestine’s, Ophelia meets Sir Charles Lisdale, a man of great gentility, who is drawn to

⁴⁹ The perfect example of the artifice and excessive feeling to which they have become immune is shown a few pages after this scene, when Ophelia encounters the woman suffering the “Extacy [sic] of Pleasure.” This is a behaviour Ophelia describes as “foolish Affectation” while her reaction to it was “only the Effect of reasonable Compassion” (118). Ophelia’s sincere reaction to Macbeth could easily be misinterpreted as the affected sensibility of the opera patron, thus reinforcing the suspicion of catharsis within polite society.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Grosz refers to the body as a text of social understanding (191). As she initially did in Wales, Ophelia reads Dorchester’s face and body language for proof of his feelings, but his ability to hide his emotions leads her to mis-read his body-as-text at the same time that he is mis-reading her emotional reactions to him. Their reflexive observations are mistaken, showing the potentially destructive effects of constant surveillance.

her: Ophelia's innocent praise of Sir Charles causes Dorchester to become quiet and melancholy (116). She feels so badly about his melancholy that she attempts to "hide the Effect" it has on her, and to put on a contented air (118); this only further convinces Dorchester that Ophelia has become insensible to his feelings, thus justifying the jealousy causing his quietness. Dorchester, forgetting Ophelia's innocence, treats her as a stereotypically dissembling woman, and assumes she is only playing with his affections.⁵¹

The misunderstanding created by these gaps between innocence and experience, sincerity and artifice, feeling and reason, reaches its climax when Ophelia receives a sharp letter from Dorchester telling her that she is deceitful and has driven him from her; he tells her that he is seeking refuge from her in the countryside. He accuses her of repaying his social education and care by succumbing to the "levity" of her sex though her crimes exist in his mind and not in actuality. His repressed emotions and hidden reactions drive a wedge between Ophelia and Dorchester, both feeling too strongly the effects of their relationship not to be devastated by this distance.

The traditionally male disciplinarian/watcher has become blinded by his feelings and passions suggesting that the gaze can cause painful and shameful realizations for men as well as women. Dorchester is ashamed that he has let his feelings for Ophelia cloud his judgment and is pained that he cannot read the signs of her love for him through watching her behaviour and physical actions. If the letter Ophelia receives represents Dorchester's emotional pain and need for physical distance from the site/sight of it, Ophelia's response

⁵¹ Interestingly, however, he does not easily recognize the real dissembling woman in his life: the ever-jealous Marchioness of Trente, who abducts Ophelia and sends her to a Gothic castle, in order to eliminate her rival and falsely gain Dorchester's affections (154, 169-97).

to it shows how interconnected his vision of her is to her own sense of subjectivity. This conflict between the two has a palpable effect on her mental and physical health. Ophelia is so disordered about the letter that she cries out against Dorchester in the presence of her servants, and has to be restrained by her maid from running wildly to Lady Palestine's; in her passion she has forgotten the rules of propriety (123). Ophelia's excessive sensibility soon leads to a serious physical illness, and she almost gives up the will to live under the pain of Dorchester's desertion. The medical treatments she receives do little to remedy Ophelia's illness of sensibility, and in retrospect she explains that "To cure a distemper by Medicine, which proceeds from Anxiety of Mind, is a vain attempt" (124). Ironically, her mental anguish is ultimately also responsible for her physical improvement: "I grew, at last, so bad, that I was light-headed; to which I may attribute my recovery. Want of Reflexion [sic] did what Reason could not Effect; it quieted my Mind, and my constitution received Benefit from it, for as grief was the cause of my illness, the loss of the sense of my affliction, left me to Youth and natural Strength, and my Fever abated" (124). This painful episode teaches Ophelia of the physical and mental anxieties created from constant surveillance and the dangers of being overly reliant on an external verification of her sense of self and happiness. This is the same lesson that Dorchester learned and that prompted his abandonment of her. Both characters are affected by a failure in the mimetic representation of their affection for one another.

Once she is out of danger, and as soon as her health will allow her, Ophelia resolves to return to the solitude of the Welsh countryside with her aunt. She has no desire to continue in polite society if her relationship to Dorchester is at an end since it was only for and through him that she entered it. She tells Lady Palestine of her

resolution, who in turn tells Dorchester of his mistaken judgment of her, thus speedily bringing about Dorchester's and Ophelia's reconciliation (128-9). Dorchester arrives at Ophelia's to plead forgiveness, and this time their bodies and emotions are reflected in each other: he remarks that "the Paleness of your Cheeks, and the Langour in your Eyes, are Reproaches that rend my Heart" and she explains that he "appeared so very wretched" that she could not criticize his behaviour (129-30). The reflection of misery in each other is the moment when both Ophelia and Dorchester recognize their interdependence, and when Fielding offers her fundamental argument about socialization and watching in the novel: that an individual's sense of well-being is dependent upon other people as external—watching, talking, judging—forces who can have *both* productive and destructive influences, and that those others are equally reliant upon similar influences from the object of their gaze.⁵²

In an ironic twist, after learning this key epistemological lesson on the importance of careful emotional and physical self-monitoring and the dangers of jealousy, concealment and suspicion, Ophelia is immediately taken from her scene of private happiness into a space that teaches her that artifice and concealment are the driving forces of public society: the masquerade. This is a space where Ophelia learns that she can express her feelings and passions without fear of becoming a spectacle and where she can (temporarily) evade the gaze. The centrality of the masquerade in novels that explore the self and socialization has been admirably explained by Castle, who sees these scenes as stock elements of the "classic theme of initiation—the hero or heroine's introduction to

⁵² I find that it works well to use the Möbius strip metaphor to imagine the internalization of the other's gaze and the projection of the self's gaze as distinct, yet inseparable processes of subjectivity.

the ‘Town’” (*Masquerade* 117). It is worth noting here that Castle considers masquerade as central to the initiation of both men and women into society. She further points out at the beginning of her study that “the masked assemblies of the eighteenth century were in the deepest sense a kind of collective meditation on self and other, and an exploration of their mysterious dialectic” (4). It stands to reason, then, that this scene is the final part of my discussion of Ophelia’s education, socialization, and the gaze.

The masquerade is a new experience for Ophelia because it is a public space that allows men and women to express their true private feelings without social censure. She describes her first observations of the masquerade saying: “The variety of shocking Forms terrified me, till use had a little familiarized them; and I found that this Assembly, in the Opinion of most people, received its Terrors, not from masking the Faces, but unmasking the Mind” (138). The masquerade is Ophelia’s first real-world encounter that has not been constructed by Dorchester; and not unintentionally by the author, it is also here, the most undisciplined sight/site of social reality in the novel, where she most experiences being the gazing subject. After carefully watching the events of the evening for some time, Ophelia opines that “the *English* were such great enemies to Sincerity that none dared practice it bare-faced” and that she can “acquire more Knowledge of the true Dispositions of Mankind at three of these Assemblies, than by living three Months in the Polite World; for it was the first Time I saw People in their Natural Characters” (139-40). Through the masquerade, she internalizes that surveillance is not only about physical appearance, but also about thought, expression, sincerity, and recognizing concealment. Only by recognizing how reliant the culture is on “Dissimulation and Flattery” and “excess” does Ophelia learn that what she sees in her constant surveillance, and what

others see when watching her, is at best a superficial representation of subjectivity. Perhaps more cynically, it is also where she learns that these superficialities form the base of social subject positions (138-9).

Implicitly, I think, this is also where Fielding suggests that the gendered cultural expectations of sensibility and subjectivity that Ophelia encounters are also therefore superficial and potentially a dissimulation of the truth. The gazes of both male and female characters are responsible for creating this artificial construction but ultimately the social representation of gender is not ‘real’ as Ophelia finally learns at the Masquerade. The importance is that the surface represents a unified reality to the rest of the company regardless of what the individual really feels and thinks. Since there are no truly private spaces, except within the costume at the masquerade, individuals are eventually conditioned to accept the surface reality as their primary subject position and to sublimate their internal sensibilities. This does not make these surface assumptions about gender “real” even though the characters have come to normalize them. This is Fielding’s rather dystopic exploration of the “mysterious dialectic” between self and other to which Castle refers. After this social and personal epiphany, the masquerade no longer holds her in thrall, and since both the experience and the hours necessary for partaking in it go against her understanding of nature and reason, she soon desires to go home.

By watching, being watched, being shamed, and casting judgments, Ophelia has, in the first volume, successfully internalized and somewhat successfully projected the social reality of her surroundings, thus gaining a sense of herself as a subject and her role in society as a result. Though in volume two she ultimately succeeds in becoming an accepted member of polite society by marrying Dorchester, the conclusion to the novel is

ambivalent: in order to be “rewarded” by a marriage to Dorchester, she has had to choose to give up much of the natural sensibility and ignorance that make her such a compelling character throughout the novel (275). The socialized Ophelia disappears into the spaces of polite society where she was once so exceptional, and hence I argue, that for Fielding, the ironic cost of social inclusion learned through constant surveillance is invisibility.

In both *David Simple* and *The History of Ophelia* Fielding takes a rather bleak view of polite society and yet it is still important for her characters to be part of it. The diversity of experiences that David and Ophelia have is intended to show the complexities of realistic socialization for both genders. Through this realism Fielding argues that a fully-developed moral and psychic subjectivity requires a wide array of experiences that rely on mimetic interactions between individuals in the intimate spaces of their homes and in the larger assemblies that represent the social dynamics of their culture at large. To choose not to become part of society, even a society as flawed as the vision of polite London that Fielding describes, is to choose not to fully develop as a subject.

That there are so many similarities within the socializations of David and Ophelia throughout their narratives shows that the clear distinctions between the gendered binaries of public and private space, gazing-subject and gazed-on-object, rationality and feeling, and strength and weakness had yet to be institutionalized during the 1740s and 1750s. In fact, it shows that these concepts were still very much in flux. What Fielding’s novels of socialization reveal to me about sensibility is that taking an essentialized view of the gendering of feeling, so common in studies of the eighteenth-century novel,

renders the experiences and subjectivity of men and women far more “simple” than their daily lives might actually have been.

Chapter Two

Learning to Feel Useful: Exploring the Connections between Private Feeling and Public Action in *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *The Fool of Quality*

In the previous chapter I argued that public society and the expressions of social sentiment and sensibility were internalized by the title characters in *The Adventures of David Simple* and *The History of Ophelia* to help them develop a sense of themselves as social subjects. In this chapter I explore the other side of this public/private Möbius strip of sensibility by analyzing how an individual's thoughts and feelings, and the external representations thereof, can influence social interaction and a community's sense of its cohesion and health. The negotiation between private and public, self and other, as expressed through feeling reflects what many consider the most significant debate about sensibility and sentiment in the mid-eighteenth century literary imagination: whether refined and sensitive feeling is predominantly selfish and indulgent and therefore socially destructive or whether it increases the capacity for sympathy and fellow-feeling making it socially beneficial.¹ For Barbara Benedict, this “fictional negotiation of individual isolation and social engagement is central” to the development of the novel of sentiment in the 1760s and 1770s (6).

The use of the rural community as a public space based on private values, represents the social, religious, and philosophical tensions which provide the temporal context for the novels. Brissenden particularly describes this era as a ‘period of transition’ politically and socially (244). The feelings of instability and anxiety, brought about by

¹ See Barker-Benfield, Brissenden, Benedict, Conger, and Spacks (*Novel Beginnings*).

economic changes like the rise in the mercantile middle class, political tensions from the Seven Years' War during which time George III succeeded to the throne as King, and cultural developments like increasing secularism, and growing criticism of aristocratic excesses are played out through the narratives of travel and suffering that are foregrounded in the majority of the canonical texts in that period.

The literature in these two decades in the middle of the century has long been of interest to scholars of the novel and of gender. During this time the archetype of the “man of feeling” emerges as a prominent character in literature and with it comes a preoccupation with the nature of feeling and its moral implications for public and private behaviour. The man of feeling appears in two connected, but distinct, genres: the novel of sentiment and the novel of sensibility. Though the terms are frequently used interchangeably in criticism of the eighteenth-century novel there is nevertheless a distinction to be made, which Van Sant explains as follows: “sensibility is associated with the body, sentiment with the mind” (4). Todd, who details the need for recognizing the difference between sensibility and sentiment in the opening pages of *Sensibility, An Introduction*, suggests that sentiments are thoughts as well as moral reflections meaning that novels of sentiment are therefore more explicitly concerned with thoughts and morals than they are with the refined experiences of feeling that characterize novels of sensibility, though scenes of sensibility frequently appear in the novel of sentiment as well.

In the broadest sense, Goldsmith, Brooke, and Smollett all wrote novels of sentiment, which grapple with issues of class, religion, and social inequality through their discussions of individual feeling, while those of Sterne and Mackenzie should more

properly be considered novels of sensibility, since they are more fundamentally concerned with the experience and refinement of feeling rather than its connections to moral and intellectual issues of the day. Baker points out that “it was pre-eminently a sentimental age” so the concepts of sentiment and sensibility “blend into each other and it would be safer not to draw a strict dividing line” between the two styles of novel (97). That being said, my focus in this chapter is on novels with a greater interest in public and social issues as expressed through personal feeling rather than with novels detailing the refinement of personal feeling as an end in itself; I consider these, like Goldsmith’s and Brooke’s, novels of sentiment. The novel of sentiment is the most appropriate venue to discuss the interaction of public and private feeling, since as Mullan argues, it “makes its predictable drama out of the limitations as well as the powers of fellow-feeling” (146). While Sterne, Mackenzie, Goldsmith, Brooke, and Smollett undoubtedly influenced each other, and together focused social interest on men and their feelings in public and private, I want to turn my attention now to the novel of sentiment and its methods and goals.

In Smollett, the man of feeling is satirized through the gouty and super-sensitive Matthew Bramble, a man whose excessive sensibility makes him tour around England seeking medicinal refuge for what readers know to be an emotional illness. The physical illness and petulance of Bramble’s spirit, which appears again in the character of Peregrine Bradford in Mary Robinson’s *The Natural Daughter*, is ‘cured’ when he realizes the importance of balancing his own sensual desires with the needs of his family and community. In Goldsmith too, the man of feeling is satirized for relying so heavily on his elevated sentiments that he forgets the need to act on his own behalf to improve the quality of his life and that of his family. Brooke satirizes the idea that the man of

feeling is by necessity a fool, a naïve and impotent character who is unable to influence his society by showing that sensitivity can be a call to action as much as an invitation to sensual indulgence and that wisdom can not be judged by outward appearance or social station. These novels all share a commitment to the value of sympathy over selfishness; this leads Benedict to argue that they “advocate the channelling of feeling to conventionally moral ends that identify individual virtue with social benefit” (68).

Of particular importance to the moral, intellectual, and philosophical thought of this period was Christian theology and the way that feeling and sympathy serve as expressions of faith and as a guiding principle for the organization and interaction of public society. The Christian emphasis in novels of sentiment is another way of bringing the discussion of public and private feelings to bear on the social concerns of the period I mentioned above. Raymond Hilliard explains:

the biblical paradigm as used by eighteenth-century writers mirrors a tension characteristic of the literary genre that is usually said to be a product of the rise of individualism in the period, a tension between, on the one hand, a traditional Christian view of human existence based on such ideals as self-restraint, temperance, and quiescence, and on the other, a modern, secular view based on the principles of individualistic self-assertion and an active restless ‘pursuit of happiness’ (478).

This emphasis on active benevolence in the Christian message is also one of the key elements of sensibility in a secular context. In a 1796 editorial entitled, “Ought Sensibility to be Cherished or Repressed” the author, whose name is never given,

suggests that benevolence and social involvement are among the most important reasons to value the concept of sensibility:

To stimulate benevolence—to render social intercourse interesting
 And delightful—to soften asperities of temper—to promote gentleness
 of manners—to excite horror and indignation against savage and
 ferocious practices—to inspire a noble energy, and generous ardour,
 in the prosecution of philanthropic designs; such are the legitimate offices,
 the happy fruits of sensibility (709).

The aim of the man of feeling is to be a public and private character. He must be free, like David Simple in the previous chapter, to move between spaces in the home and in the wider community. This will allow him to interpret both the familial and political influence of feeling as well as to promote the “noble energy” and “philanthropic designs” it elicits.

Though certainly novels by and about women were published during this twenty year span—Frances Sheridan’s *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), Charlotte Lennox’s *Sophia* (1762), and Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) are among those most well known—the overwhelming literary focus was on the development and experience of male feeling in a social context, especially between 1759 and 1771. This twelve-year period saw the publication of Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767), Henry Brooke’s *The Fool of Quality* (1765-1770), Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768), Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771), and Tobias Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771), which are some of the

most well-known novels published in the eighteenth-century. Sterne and Mackenzie were most responsible for creating the man of feeling archetype as he is currently recognized: in *Tristram*, *Yorick*, and *Harley* readers encounter men of exquisite feeling and sensitivity, who are committed to sensual experience and whose desire to feel for others is eclipsed only by the pleasure they personally take in these vicarious cathartic experiences. In Sterne and Mackenzie, the man of feeling is almost never compelled to act on his feelings by striving to alleviate the suffering of those around them; it is pleasurable enough to share in the suffering.

This kind of exquisite sensibility repeatedly leads critics to effeminize *Yorick* and *Harley*, and their predecessor *David Simple*, so that the man of feeling is frequently read as a socially inactive and often derogatory stereotype: a man who can't stop crying for sake of crying. By exploring other characterizations of the man of feeling in *Brooke* and *Goldsmith*, my intention is to provide greater depth to the potential usefulness of the man of feeling character within the discourse of eighteenth-century sensibility and socialization and to suggest an alternative to the association between feeling, weakness, and femininity.

My aim is to show that, as Ernest Baker says of *The Fool of Quality*, “in spite of the flood of tears, this is not an effeminate but a manly book. Harry's mentor plays upon his sensibilities to keep him at the right heroic pitch . . . Brooke is providing an object lesson in education through the emotions” (116). The Christian man of feeling in the novel of sentiment is still a man ruled by his emotions but one who is also compelled to act on his feelings, ideally in socially productive ways. This is a much more positive

mode of masculine public and private behaviour that provides valuable balance to the fecklessness of the other model.

In this chapter I argue that in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* a clear message emerges about the interconnectedness between public and private feeling: that the benefit of sensibility is directly related to the extent that the feeling individual is motivated to act on his feelings, and further, to the extent that the action is intended to benefit someone other than the agent himself. In his highly influential study *Virtue in Distress*, Brissenden suggests that a common theme in the novels of sentiment "grew out of an awareness of the distance which separated moral idealism and the world of practical action" (77). Accordingly, in both novels, written during the height of popularity for the novel of sentiment, the merit of the protagonist is measured by his ability to use his thoughts and feelings to effect social harmony and to be an active agent of benevolence and sympathy.² That the vicar repeatedly fails to turn his emotions into productive action is the primary source of satire in Goldsmith's novel and suggests that the impotence associated with self-directed sensibility is what makes an otherwise moral character appear foolish.

To reinforce their argument on the importance of active sensibility, the texts share a mutual dedication to Christian doctrine, especially the gospels in the New Testament, and to Jesus as a quintessential man of feeling who was motivated to act by sympathy and a willingness to both suffer and rejoice with the people around Him. This position was clearly articulated by the Reverend Hugh Blair in his sermon *On Sensibility* in 1790,

² Brissenden suggests that the tradition of the novel of sentiment was set between 1766 and 1777; he uses *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *The Sorrows of Young Werther* as end points for the establishment of this canon.

when he argued that sensibility was both a private and public experience of feeling and that it was the means by which individuals learned to balance their own desires with the Christian project of continuing Jesus's ministry through action and sympathy.³ He writes:

Still however it was requisite that in each individual the quantity of self-love should remain in a large proportion, on account of its importance to the preservation of his life and well-being. But as the quantity requisite for this purpose is apt both to ingross [sic] his attention, and carry him into criminal excesses, the perfection of his nature is measured by the due counterpoise of those social principles which, tempering the force of the selfish affection, render man equally useful to himself, and to those with whom he is joined in society. Hence the use and the value of that sensibility of which we now treat (25).

Both novels reiterate that the characters are strongly influenced by scripture and a Christian approach to morality and behaviour but they also insist that this is a complicated position to assert in an increasingly secular and commercial society that places little value on collective experiences and much on personal achievements. John Zomchick argues that the mid-century novel presents “the individual in her or his heroic phase of development, at a time when sentiments, thoughts—the whole ensemble of consciousness—seem to owe a debt to society only in the negative sense that society makes it so difficult for the individual to differentiate him or herself” (12).

³ Blair's sermons were published between 1774 and 1801. The text I am using is from the third volume of the Edinburgh and London publication of the *Sermons*, published between 1771 and 1801. Volume three was published in 1790.

Herein lies the central tension and source of satire (and confusion) in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, as in *David Simple* and *Memoirs of Sidney Bidulph* before it: while the novel offers a didactic message on the importance of Christian benevolence and shared experiences and sympathy it also propounds that a life of feeling is often a life of suffering, social isolation, and ineffectuality where earthly relief, if it happens at all, is brief. While Parson Primrose has admirable intentions, he is generally made to appear foolish in the novel because of his ineptness in combining morality with a practical engagement in the world. But while most of Goldsmith's novel shows clear anxiety about whether feeling and action can efficiently co-exist, it concludes with the hope that the personal can positively affect the public.

In many ways, *The Fool of Quality* offers a more optimistic portrayal of the ability of personal sensibility to influence the public than *The Vicar of Wakefield*, because Harry Clinton is actively engaged in learning about sensibility in order to help others. Harry has a number of teachers, male role models of feeling, who teach the young boy to respect that sympathy and keen sensation are of most benefit when accompanied by action and reason. Unlike Harry, Mr. Fenton, and Mr. Clement in *The Fool of Quality*, who are always out in their immediate community and who frequently travel to more public sites of need to offer financial and emotional assistance, in *The Vicar of Wakefield* the protagonist Parson Primrose, never takes many steps beyond his own family, and is consistently unwilling to be the agent of his own salvation, suggesting that Goldsmith places little value on waiting to be saved and agrees with Brooke that action is a necessary component of feeling and sensibility.

Both novels share the belief that while in principle family and domestic life are central to being publicly effective, as it is seen in most of the domestic novels in the eighteenth century, this is only true if, as in much of *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, the family is an active space where priorities shift between what concerns those in the immediate social circle and what is needed in the wider community. The Fenton household in *The Fool of Quality* also presents a family where all of the individual members are committed to using their shared resources to help those outside of this family while realizing that in the process of doing so they are in fact strengthening themselves as individuals and their affective ties as a family. The Primrose family in *The Vicar of Wakefield* is less able to help those around them since there are constantly competing agendas within the family which frequently divert their attention from the outside world: Deborah Primrose, the vicar's wife, is always concerned with public reputation and appearance, while the vicar seems lost in his pursuit of being the perfect spiritual martyr.

The two novels also suggest that small, rural communities offer the best site for the expression of benevolent feeling, because these communities are built and strengthened by feeling in a way that they can not be in the city. Rural public spaces, then, grounded in personal relationships, provide the best location for exercising the most positive values of sensibility, but *The Fool of Quality*, like *Sentimental Journey* and *The Man of Feeling*, suggests that feeling and sensibility are also important to life in the city. It is perhaps easier, though, to be a man of feeling in the country, where the rules of social engagement are based less on polite manners and highly schematized rules of conduct than on "natural" codes of behaviour and community. Harry's foolishness in *The*

Fool of Quality is much more remarkable when he is at court and in London than when he is in his village at home, just as the Primrose family looks most foolish when they are trying to impress the London society ladies in their rural surroundings.

So, while Brooke and Goldsmith are fundamentally concerned with the archetype of the man of feeling and his expressions of emotion like the other writers in the period, they also reflect the anxieties and optimism of their age by combining discourses of class, religion, political structure, the tension between urban and rural in an attempt to situate the man of feeling within his spatial and temporal context. They provide an engagement with the individual and his society in a more textured way than the novel of sensibility generally offers, and this makes them exceptionally important, and innovative, in their representation of the male literary subject.

“At once pleasing and instructive”: Balancing Public and Private Feeling and Action in *The Vicar of Wakefield*

Long considered to be one of the most popular novels of sentiment in the eighteenth century, *The Vicar of Wakefield* is by far the most canonical novel in this study. According to Robert Mack in his introduction to the 2006 Oxford edition of the novel, it is “to this day one of only a small handful of English novels that can honestly lay a claim never to have passed out of print” (xii). Yet despite being held up as an exemplar of British domestic life and refined feeling, Goldsmith’s representation of life in society is a decidedly ambivalent one: on the one hand it represents, ever so briefly, the ideal harmony of the domestic family space which John Zomchick refers to as “the private solution to public problems” (11); on the other it focuses on the suffering that this

idealized family experiences when forced from their idyllic rural privacy and into the deceptive and mercenary world at large. And while it praises the spiritual rectitude of Reverend Primrose it also represents him as a naïve and impotent patriarchal figure who is as incapable of navigating the public and commercial world as his young sons.

R.F. Brissenden argues that the novel proves that Primrose is “too good for this wicked world,” which he suggests is a general truism for heroes and heroines of sensibility like Yorick and Clarissa because “being virtuous, they are somehow *necessarily weak*” (253, 91). While Primrose is set in opposition to the society for most of the novel because of his feelings, I disagree that the text is unproblematically associating virtue with weakness and that the public world is “wicked” throughout the novel. My argument in this section is that while Goldsmith’s novel is a satire of both the “man of feeling” archetype and the inhospitable world of which he is a part, the satire is tempered by a sincere belief in the socially and personally beneficial potential of Christian theology with which the novel’s characters continually wrestle.

Ultimately I see that Goldsmith’s argument in *The Vicar of Wakefield* has three parts: first, that individual sensibility that is self-involved, and that does not result in actions to benefit the private individual *and* his society is weak and the individual foolish, as the first half of the novel shows; second, that as the man of feeling succumbs to his emotions and is weakened by them, so too is the society weakened and made ineffectual, because personal inactivity can have as palpable an influence on the society as activity; third, that in accordance with Christian theology, individuals have the power and responsibility to reform public society by balancing their private feelings (sensibility) and thoughts (sentiments) with actions designed to improve their community. The

interconnectedness between the individual and his society is of paramount concern to Goldsmith, who sees the wider community suffering or thriving in direct proportion to the agency and sensibility of the individual.⁴

Despite the positivity inherent in the third of Goldsmith's points of argument and the sincere faith in Christian benevolence it espouses, the novel is not nearly as optimistic a text as one might expect—it is certainly less optimistic than Brooke's *Fool of Quality*, which offers a similar message about Christian sensibility. Robert Hopkins calls *The Vicar of Wakefield* “a satire on complacent optimism” and a “burlesque of the shallow, optimistic, inferior romances and possibly of the ‘weeping comedy’ of Goldsmith's day” (200).⁵ One element that lessens the optimism of the novel, according to Peter Dixon, is that “Goldsmith distrusts sensibility even when it is healthy, since it can give rise to a debilitating sorrow for the woes of others that does neither the sufferer nor the person of sensibility any good” (95). The idea of complacency that Hopkins mentions, combined with the distrust of sensibility that Dixon details signal what Syndy McMillen Conger argues is the “single most important cause of the eventual reaction against the literature of sensibility: its increasing moral complacency” (13). In particular, the “proximity between . . . sensibility and pathetic ineffectuality” is the source of much anxiety in the mid-eighteenth century about the personal and public values of heightened sensation and sensibility (Conger 13). Accordingly, *The Vicar of Wakefield* must be read within the

⁴ This focus is typical of novels of sentiment during the mid-century. As Spacks explains in *Novel Beginnings*, “sentimental novels assumed the individual and social importance of sensitivity to the troubles of others. . . they also commented on social institutions” (127).

⁵ Battestin insists that Goldsmith was not writing a romance in the conventional use of the term, nor was he expressly satirizing the genre. According to him, Goldsmith believed “that fiction should be neither an escapist entertainment nor an exercise in the ‘realistic’ depiction of actuality” (213).

context of these concerns about sensibility, its morality, and the agency and activity of men and women of feeling.

Although it has been variously described as a “fairy-tale” and a “fable” with wonderfully comedic scenes interspersed throughout, *The Vicar of Wakefield* nonetheless takes its engagement with sensibility and its moral qualities seriously.⁶ Brissenden describes the structure of the novel as a reflection of “a radical disquiet with the nature of man and society” which Mack foregrounds in his introduction to the novel by describing the society it represents as “motivated rather by a degree of selfish hypocrisy and a rank fetishism of power that would in all likelihood have driven even the likes of Thomas Hobbes to despair (250, xvii).⁷ Yet if the novel is really as dystopic as these comments infer, why then has it been considered “one of the most genuinely beloved of our so-called English ‘classics’” for over two hundred years (Mack xi)? The answer lies with the novel’s protagonist. The Reverend Doctor Charles Primrose, Goldsmith’s quixotic ‘hero’, is at the centre of the satire, irony, humour, and Christian sentiment that have for so long made the novel’s reputation critically ambiguous but almost universally popular with readers.⁸

Goldsmith introduces the vicar in his Advertisement to the novel as a trinity figure, bringing together “the three greatest characters upon earth; he is a priest, an

⁶ For a discussion of the text as a fairy tale, see Mack x, Battestin 208, and Paulson 270. For its classification as a fable see Benedict 50, Zomchick 155, Spacks *Novel* 131, and Macaulay 28.

⁷ I think Brissenden is overstating the case when he suggests that much of the novel “sound[s] like an episode in [The Marquis de] Sade’s *Justine*” (247).

⁸ Peter Dixon details some of the major approaches to criticism of *The Vicar of Wakefield* in his chapter on the novel in *Oliver Goldsmith Revisited* while Benedict suggests that the novel has “puzzled critics for over two centuries by its blend of irony and sentiment” (49).

husbandman, and the father of a family” (3). Reverend Primrose is clearly a Christian protagonist, a descendant of characters like David Simple and Henry Fielding’s Parson Adams in *Joseph Andrews*, the latter of whom shares Primrose’s quixotic and comedic nature. Taking the spiritual health of his family under his direction, Primrose advocates a life of temperance, honesty, and practicality for himself and his wife along with their four sons and two daughters (9-12). He is a proud father who has raised his family with the shared character of being “all equally generous, credulous, simple, and inoffensive” (12). Both his pride in his family and his faith in the spiritual and moral background he teaches allows Primrose to send his oldest son George, off into the world saying: “as he was possest [sic] of integrity and honour, I was under no apprehensions from throwing him naked into the amphitheatre of life, for I knew he would act a good part whether vanquished or victorious” (17). But while he is a man of faith and a devoted father, he is also a flawed character, whose pride leads him to obstinacy, ineffectiveness, and a false sense of security of his place in his family and his community. This mix of admirable and damnable qualities in Primrose is one reason why, for much of its critical history, *The Vicar of Wakefield* has been read as a re-telling of the biblical story of Job, a story of punishment and redemption, suffering and faith.⁹

It is critical for readers to acknowledge the tension inherent in the Christian stories of Job and Primrose: both men’s human foibles centre around pride, and a belief that they are “good men” because they have faith and therefore do not deserve to suffer

⁹ For a particularly adept discussion of *The Vicar of Wakefield* and its relationship to the Book of Job see Martin Battestin’s chapter “Goldsmith: The Comedy of Job” in *The Providence of Wit*. In this chapter he also offers a summary of critics who discuss the novel as a Job parable (see n11 on 196). See too Jonathan Lamb’s *The Rhetoric of Suffering: Reading the Book of Job in the Eighteenth Century*.

are not responsible for acting to make their own lives or those of their families better. Being stripped of all of earthly comforts, both physical and emotional, Job and Primrose are eventually forced to recognize their need for humility. Primrose also learns the importance of being an agent of family's salvation as expressed in the Bible in Proverbs 11.25: "Help others, and you will be helped" and in verse 29: "the man who brings trouble on his family will have nothing at the end." But, ironically, it is the men's flawed nature that makes readers identify with them, so that their pride and ineffectuality is part of their appeal as well as their downfall.¹⁰ The struggles between pride and humility and selfishness and benevolence were certainly connected to Christian spirituality beyond the story of Job as well, though. Hugh Blair, "one of the most influential clergymen in the eighteenth century" and a close friend of David Hume and Adam Smith's, details the connection between the individual and his society within a Christian context in his sermon on sensibility that is particularly germane to my consideration of Reverend Primrose and those in and around his 'little republic' (Dwyer 19-20).

For Blair, Christ was the first man of feeling and sympathy because he wept with the family of Lazarus at the tomb of the dead man when they were grieving. The real value of Christ's fellow-feeling was that he had the power to turn the feelings of suffering into action by resurrecting Lazarus (27-8). Using Christ as a model, then, Christians must not just sympathize with others, and "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" but they must also turn their feelings into action; for Goldsmith, like

¹⁰ Battestin suggests, "it is [Job's] very frailty as a human being—his pride and petulance and partial vision—which gives value to his eventual triumph over adversity by making his example worthy of the emulation of other imperfect men" (201).

Blair, sensibility without action is selfish and foolish (22).¹¹ Christians must also beware of pride and a “contracted attachment to worldly interests” like Primrose’s pride in his writing, his family’s pride in their (imagined) social status and his pride in his worldliness.¹² All of these are considered by Blair as “directly opposite to the Christian character” (26). For Blair, and I argue the same is true for Goldsmith, the ultimate aim for a Christian man of sensibility is to be “equally useful to himself, and to those with whom he is joined in society” (25). And so, just as he suggested in his example of Jesus and Lazarus, according to Blair the man of feeling should be judged on his actions, not just his sensibility: “we must inquire not merely how they feel, but how their feelings prompt them to act, in order to ascertain their real character” (42). Goldsmith’s novel shows agreement with this kind of sentiment.

The balance that Primrose struggles to attain, and the difficulties he has in learning this lesson, are reinforced for the reader because the vicar is the narrator of the text, and as such he is the character who voices both didactic, spiritual counsel and expressions of pride and self-interest that make him at once a Christian role model and a “fool of feeling” (Benedict 47). Hopkins does not believe that Goldsmith intended for Primrose to come across as a Christian hero because, as he writes, “Goldsmith disliked intensely those clergymen who concerned themselves in such disputes to the neglect of more important duties . . . Goldsmith fixes the ruling passion of Dr. Primrose on the most trifling religious issue possible . . . [which] marks the religious orthodoxy of his narrator

¹¹ Blair theorizes selfishness as “the favourite and distinguishing virtue of the age” (36).

¹² See within the novel: pride in writing (14); pride in family’s social status (44, 70-1); pride in worldliness (60).

as suspect to the discerning eighteenth-century reader” (174-5).¹³

Rather than trying to argue that Primrose is a object of suspicion, scorn and satire in the novel, as Hopkins does, or that he is a heroic clerical figure of sensibility, as Bäckman and Mangin do, I think Primrose, like Job, embodies what is best about the man of feeling and spirituality but also what is worst about him (91, qtd. in Rousseau *Goldsmith* 60). For example, in the first half of the novel, when Primrose is displaying his pride in his role as *paterfamilias* and abdicating his responsibility for his family’s sufferings he is a satiric figure, mocking the ineffectual man of feeling archetype and representing the pride and self-ignorance that afflicted Job.¹⁴ However, when he is actively engaged in trying to reclaim his daughter after her abduction and trying to help others become active in making their lives better he is modelling the ideal man of feeling and action that Goldsmith sees possible within the Christian construction of morality and sensibility.¹⁵ Through the vicar, Goldsmith reinforces that the sensibility of the individual usually has a palpable effect on the society around him; he further stresses that this effect is not inherently positive or negative, but is contingent on the individual’s motivations

¹³ Primrose explains that one of his “favourite topics” is matrimony and the importance of clerical monogamy. He describes the common view of Wakefield as having “a parson wanting pride, young men wanting wives, and ale-houses wanting customers.” (12). Given that Primrose’s major spiritual concern, and his chief work within Wakefield, is “exhorting the married men to temperance and the bachelors to matrimony” his work is less concerned with alleviating the suffering of the poor or improving the lives of his parishioners than with debating his favourite topic which should make readers question what kind of Christian role-model he is (12). John Dussinger argues that Primrose is an “authority figure in the Establishment, without any real authority [who] averts spiritual concerns by riding the hobbyhorse of the Whistonian controversy, while coaching his family with platitudes about the vanity of riches” (152).

¹⁴ See 20-1, 27, 42-3, 45, 61, 79, 85-9, and 110 in the novel. This is a strong indictment against the kind of ineffectual wallowing in emotion that Henry Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling*, Harley, has come to epitomize since the novel’s publication in 1771. As Richard Jaarsma puts it: “the man of sentiment,’ increasingly popular as a hero in eighteenth-century literature, is clearly not Goldsmith’s idea of a well-rounded man” (339).

¹⁵ See 28, 80-1, 108-10, 123-4, 128, and 144-7 in the novel.

and actions.¹⁶ That Primrose is a failed man of feeling for the first half of the novel is not just a satire on the man of feeling; it is also a testament to the difficulty of putting Christian theology into practice in a family where worldly desires are just as important as spiritual goodness.

Early in the novel Primrose gives readers an example of the irony in his character and the criticism of sentiment that Goldsmith is offering: while Primrose is a caring and supportive father encouraging George and Arabella Wilmot's happiness and upcoming marriage, his recalcitrant arguments for monogamy put their happiness at risk when he angers the father of George's fiancée with his writings on the subject, unfortunately, while trying to impress him (14). This creates a rift between the Primrose and Wilmot families, and later, when Primrose honestly confesses the change in his financial situation—the family fortune was invested with a London merchant who went bankrupt and fled the city, leaving the family indigent—just before George's wedding so that the it can take place with no deception, he ends up preventing it from happening at all (15).¹⁷

In this case, Primrose's sentiments prompt him to act but from what comes across as a selfish adherence to principles with no consideration of the effects his actions might have on George and Arabella. The relative who delivered the news that Primrose's

¹⁶ This argument appears at the end of the century in the *Monthly Magazine's* article, "Ought Sensibility to be Cherished or Repressed?": "The masculine Genius of Philosophy would no longer be ashamed to own Sensibility for his sister, if she would always keep in mind the maxim of the good Marcus Aurelius—"Neither virtue nor vice consists in receiving impressions, but in action" (709).

¹⁷ Raymond Hilliard asserts that the ironic mistakes, as in this scene, that the vicar frequently makes serve to "defeat the Vicar's every aspirations as paterfamilias" but that the trope of the ineffective father is a commonplace in eighteenth-century literature; what sets Goldsmith's novel apart, though, is that it follows the failure from the father's point of view instead of from that of his children (465-6). For more on absent and inadequate fathers in eighteenth-century fiction, see Brian McCrea's *Impotent Fathers: Patriarchy and Demographic Crisis in the Eighteenth-Century Novel*.

fortune was lost suggested that the vicar should delay telling the Wilmots until George and Arabella were married to ensure a happy and financially stable future for his eldest son, but Primrose was unwilling to consider that. He lacked enough prudence to wait until the marriage to mention the change, and Mr. Wilmot, Arabella's father, had too much prudence to allow the marriage to happen after being told about it.¹⁸

For the most part, though, the vicar spends far more time talking and reacting emotionally than acting in the story. Primrose is so easily preoccupied by his thoughts and feelings of spiritual vanity that he becomes insensitive to the physical dangers of his family. When the family is making its journey from Wakefield to their new home the vicar is so caught up in the discussion about sensibility and morality that he is having with their new travelling companion, Mr. Burchell, that he almost overlooks that his younger daughter, Sophia, is drowning in the lake. Once he realizes her danger he is too overcome by his feelings to take any action to save her: "my sensations were even too violent to permit my attempting her rescue: she must certainly have perished had not my companion, perceiving her danger, instantly plunged in to her relief, and, with some difficulty, brought her in safety to the opposite shore" (20). John Dussinger juxtaposes Primrose's "failure to act responsibly" to the "'healthy', level-headed Burchell" insisting that Primrose is too trapped by his mind and his emotions to have an effective influence on anyone beyond himself (153). In this scene, Goldsmith shows, both by positive and negative example through Burchell and Primrose respectively, the importance of benevolent *action* over emotional inertia. This episode also proves that the vicar is aware

¹⁸ Battestin considers this a key message of the novel, as well as a major point of connection with the Job motif: "As in *Tom Jones*, an important purpose of *The Vicar of Wakefield* is the definition of prudence, the most elusive and ambiguous of the moral virtues..." (204).

of the very real negative consequences that could have stemmed from his emotionally pre-empted inaction.

Mr. Burchell is the only man of feeling in the novel who consistently puts his feelings into action; as the assumed identity of Sir William Thornhill, Burchell is as important in the discussion of sensibility and sentiment in *The Vicar of Wakefield* as is Primrose himself. Thornhill/Burchell is a more experienced and rational man of feeling than Primrose—though he is quixotic and ‘whimsical’ nonetheless, preferring to live in disguise as a pauper than as a titled gentleman—who learned much earlier in life the danger of excessive feeling and the importance of benevolent action (19).¹⁹ When the reader first encounters Burchell, the vicar describes him by saying: “his person was well formed, and his face marked with the lines of thinking” and his “conversation, which was at once pleasing and instructive, induced me to wish for a continuance of it” (18).

There is good reason for Primrose to want to spend more time talking with Burchell: from their first encounter, Burchell has been putting his benevolent feelings into practice, even at the expense of his own needs. The extent to which Burchell sacrifices his own well-being for the sake of others can be read two ways: it can be read as continued satire on the man of feeling who gives so much away that he has nothing left for himself, thus proving the foolishness of such a character; it can also be read as evidence that Burchell is a Christ-like figure, relying on the goodness of others to sustain

¹⁹ Burchell reveals on page 20 that his true identity is Sir William, when he is telling Primrose about Sir William’s reputation and inadvertently uses the pronoun “I”. Readers, who know the truth long before Primrose and his wife, would no doubt have cringed, as Deborah does when she is finally let in on the secret, to see how poorly they treat someone who is in reality their financial and social “better” (153).

him while he gives away all he has to help others (28).²⁰ A compelling argument could be made for either interpretation, but Goldsmith seems to be investing Sir William Thornhill-as-Burchell with the positive Christian qualities of active benevolence, forgiveness, and patience that make him a positive character in the novel, while still making him a decidedly human one with flaws and a penchant for disguise. I do not think that he is an embodiment of Christ or a *deus ex machina*; as I read Goldsmith, the significance of this character is that Burchell/Thornhill's actions for and reactions to those around him should be achievable for *both* the poor and affluent characters he represents in the novel (Benedict 15). He is, as Blair advocates, a Christian character motivated to act on his feelings of sympathy while aiming to be useful to himself and others, which leads Hilliard to characterize Burchell/Thornhill as "the exemplary father-figure Dr. Primrose is not" (473).

As Burchell, Sir William first tries to instruct Primrose in the importance of acting wisely to serve society and to convey the personal and public dangers of too much feeling (19).²¹ He then saves the life of Sophia, with whom he falls in love with and eventually marries (20-1). He leaves the family as they arrive in their new neighbourhood but returns some days later to visit, during which time he gives strong evidence of his good

²⁰ Brissenden describes him as "a melancholy man of feeling" (248).

²¹ When describing his early experience of sensibility, Sir William-as-Burchell details the "sickly sensibility" of a body that is too sensible to any physical or emotional stimulation. An ideal representation of this type of man of feeling is satirized just a few years later in the character of Matthew Bramble in Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771). Like Burchell, Bramble eventually learns to direct his interest outward, to remedying the ills of his family and community rather than focusing on his own body and mind, and in so doing becomes a heroic figure.

sense, but this only serves to make Primrose blame him, with “too much acrimony” as his narrative voice confesses, for his “broken fortune” and “folly.” (29).²²

Despite his poverty, though, while working in the fields with the Primroses, Burchell continues to prove he is physically and emotionally useful to them:

It is true his labour more than requited his entertainment; for he wrought among us with vigour, and either in the meadow or at the hay-rick put himself foremost. Besides, he had always something amusing to say that lessened our toil, and was at once so out of the way, and yet so sensible, that I loved, laughed at, and pitied him (34).

Burchell is ultimately displaced from this scene of idyllic family work and play by the arrival of Squire Thornhill. As the Primroses become more interested in Squire Thornhill, the promise of wealth and reputation in London that he represents, and the desire to make an allegiance between him and one of their daughters a wedge is driven between them and Burchell. He, knowing of the Squire’s poor morals, takes action to try and save the family from ruin, but they are all blind to everything but their own ambition and pride.

One of the funniest, yet most instructive, scenes in the novel takes place at the Michaelmas eve party when the “innocent amusement” of country games involving the Primrose and Flamborough families and Mr. Burchell is interrupted by Squire Thornhill’s “two great acquaintances from town, Lady Blarney and Miss Carolina Wilelmina Amelia Skeggs!” (49). Primrose is unable to describe the mortification of his daughters being

²² Primrose’s willingness to blame Burchell for his past will come back to haunt him at the end of the novel when Burchell is one of the characters the vicar must rely on for the restoration of the Primrose family’s freedom and happiness.

found enjoying the pursuits of the lower classes, though it is where they rightfully belong.²³ They immediately retire to engage in “high-lived dialogues, with anecdotes of Lords, Ladies, and Knight of the Garter” (50). The two ladies are London prostitutes brought to the country by Squire Thornhill to help him entrap Sophia and Olivia Primrose to join him in London for a life of sexual promiscuity. Of course they are passed off as ladies of quality, but the Primroses are not familiar enough with “real” women of quality and fall for the deception. Sir William-as-Burchell knows their character all too well, and though his interspersions of “*Fudge!*” after each of the ladies’ comments seems unconscionably rude to Primrose and his wife, he is trying to discredit the women without having to reveal his real identity (50).

A couple of days later when Burchell returns to visit Deborah tells him that they are planning to send the girls to London with Lady Blarney and Miss Carolina, and Primrose relates that a “warm dispute” erupts between the two: “My wife very strenuously insisted upon the advantages that would result from it. Mr. Burchell, on the contrary, dissuaded her with great ardor, and I stood neuter” (58). Being unable to resolve the conflict, and seeing that his attempts to help the family were falling on deaf ears, Burchell leaves the house, but he does not give up his commitment to save the girls (while Primrose stands around doing nothing).

The girls hear shortly after this episode that their trip to London has been called off, and after some indiscreet reading in Mr. Burchell’s “letter case” they discover that he has written a letter to the London ladies warning them not to introduce “infamy and vice

²³ For more on the class struggle within the novel, and the dangers of trying to move between classes, see Chapter 7: “The embattled middle: longing for authority in *The Vicar of Wakefield*” in Zomchick.

into retreats where peace and innocence have hitherto resided” (64, 66). In their passions of anger and frustration at the cancellation of their trip to London the whole family misinterprets Burchell’s letter and assumes that he is accusing Sophia and Olivia of being bad influences on the city ladies. The family attacks him as “in the midst of the flattering calm [they] burst upon him like an earthquake” to “overwhelm him with the sense of his own baseness” (66). Burchell threatens to have the family arrested for breaking into his pocket-book but then leaves after the vicar tells him never to return. Having acted on their selfish desires for revenge they have broken their friendship with Burchell, the most rational and active man of feeling in any of the novels of this period, and their worst calamities begin to fall upon them soon thereafter. Burchell does not return to assist the family until the final chapters of the novel.

After Burchell’s departure, Primrose is again left on his own to deal with the desires of his family and his struggle between being a man of Christian morals and a man of pride; his inability to reconcile these parts of his responsibility leads him to be totally ineffectual. Rather than learning from Burchell’s model of benevolent action and public and private responsibility, Primrose continues to separate himself from the responsibilities of his role as *paterfamilias*.²⁴ He does so by allowing all of the “temporal concerns” of the family to be taken care of by his wife, Deborah (12). Primrose’s most significant abdication of his private and public responsibility as *paterfamilias* happens when he ignores his concerns about the family’s relationship with Squire Thornhill. This

²⁴ For a discussion of how Goldsmith’s characterization of Primrose as a failed *paterfamilias* represents “contemporary efforts to define the ‘relative duties’ of husbands and wives and of parents and children” in conduct books of the period, see Hilliard’s “The Redemption of Fatherhood in *The Vicar of Wakefield*” (468).

choice not to act results in tremendous suffering both for him and his wife and children, it marks him a foolish man of feeling, and signals a failure to enact the Christ-like action that Blair praises in the man of sensibility. It also reinforces that the sentimental inaction can have just as strong an influence on the community as sentimental action.

Although he acknowledges having serious concerns about the character of Squire Thornhill, Primrose allows his wife and daughters to plot the union between the Squire and Olivia, his eldest daughter.²⁵ When the Squire presents them with a side of venison this generous action overrides any concern that the vicar had been speaking of, as he says “I therefore continued silent, satisfied with just having pointed out danger, and leaving it to their own discretion to avoid it” (27).²⁶ As Thornhill resists making an offer of his hand and fortune to Olivia, Primrose eventually even allows Deborah and Olivia to exploit the affections of the worthy farmer, Mr. Williams, who sincerely loves Olivia and offered to marry her (and who would have been a much more suitable match for her) as part of Deborah’s plan to force the squire’s hand and make him propose to Olivia. Though the vicar makes Olivia promise that she really will marry Mr. Williams if her schemes to secure Thornhill fail he allows her to set the terms of the courtship and to set the date by which she must submit to marrying either Thornhill or Williams (75). He is unwittingly removing the obstacles that could prevent Squire Thornhill’s plan to seduce Olivia by allowing her too much freedom in directing the courtship.

²⁵ See 17, 27, 33, 75, and 81 for evidence of Primrose’s misgivings about the Squire.

²⁶ When commenting on this scene, Norman Jeffares points out that “the irony is that it is a very real danger indeed which he has pointed out: and the vicar knows it” (43). By choosing not to act on his concerns, Primrose is putting his daughters in the same danger he is cautioning them about.

The plot to secure Thornhill, at the temporary expense of Mr. Williams, seems to be floundering, as the young squire remains unwilling to propose marriage to Olivia and although this causes Primrose “some uneasiness” he still takes no action to stop the scheme (75). He even allows the Squire to form part of the ridiculous family portrait designed to upstage the Flamboroughs and everyone else in the neighbourhood (70). And when gossip and “scandalous whispers” begin to move through the community that the Squire’s relationship with the family and its daughters in particular is inappropriate the vicar still chooses not to respond since “scandal ever improves by opposition” (71). By choosing to remain silent, again, because of his feelings of pride and resentment, the vicar is giving tacit approval to the continuation of the relationship with the Squire and this, in turn, convinces their neighbours that he condones the Squire’s behaviour towards his girls. Yet again, the vicar’s personal emotions prevent him from taking action to assist his family, which leads the community to think him foolish and the Squire wicked.

When it is revealed a short time later that Olivia has been abducted, and her ruin almost certainly guaranteed, the vicar is now unable to do anything productive to save her and he allows his grief takes over:

But all our earthly happiness is now over! Go, my children, go, and be miserable and infamous; for my heart is broken within me!’—‘Father,’ cried my son, ‘is this your fortitude?’—‘Fortitude, child! Yes, he shall see I have fortitude! Bring me my pistols. I’ll pursue the traitor. While he is on earth I’ll pursue the traitor (79).²⁷

²⁷ Though he first curses the squire and threatens violence against him, later in this scene Primrose changes his tone, and expresses his faith in God, saying “Blest be his holy name for all the good he hath

The exclamation points in this section, point to the excessive grief and anger of Primrose, yet readers know that it is impotent rage, and the scene is followed shortly after by a fever brought on by too much anxiety and excessive feeling. The vicar's extreme emotional response is quite probably tinged with a degree of guilt, and when he claims that Olivia's error is a result of her simplicity this reflects on the vicar's own simple-minded belief that identifying the danger she was in took away his moral obligation to protect his daughter, as he earlier failed to protect his son, from a preventable form of pain (80).

While Primrose pities his poor Olivia and wishes that she had died rather than lose her virtue and compromise the family's reputation, the reader may feel compelled to pity the suffering of Primrose himself: as Amelia Opie details in her 1801 novel *The Father and the Daughter*, a father's grief over his daughter's loss of honour can lead to madness and seemingly interminable suffering.²⁸ Still, perceptive readers should recognize that the pity that is invoked for Olivia should lessen that felt for Primrose because he is culpable for refusing to turn his feelings of danger and distrust and his concerns for his children's well-being into action before she was abducted.²⁹ As Spacks makes clear in *Novel Beginnings*, "sensitivity to the misfortunes of others may imply

given, and for all he hath taken away" (79). This is exactly the same sentiment as Job's early response to his sufferings: "The Lord gave, and now he has taken away. May his name be praised!" (Job 1.21).

²⁸ Fanny Burney is famously known to have said that she "really sobb'd" in the last half of the novel (Rousseau *Goldsmith* 53).

²⁹ John Zomchick theorizes that the vicar's failure to protect his family is ironically a product of his love for his family: "the vicar fails to lay down the law because such rigor is incompatible with the affective ties that define the family" (160). He rephrases this approach a page later: "the family's needs involve him in a conflict with its members, a conflict that threatens the all-important familial harmony" (161-2).

awareness of institutional as well as individual sources of misfortune. Pity can—and in this fiction often does—entail blame” (128). Both Olivia and her father share in the blame that is implied by the pity in this scene. This episode serves particularly well to undermine Brissenden’s assertion that the vicar’s Christian feelings are “always vigorously implemented in positive action” (245).

Primrose does take action soon after, though, by undertaking a journey to find Olivia, to help her repent for her actions, and to forgive her and bring her back to the safety of the family home. For me, this is only his second significant action in the novel and it is importantly motivated by his love for his daughter, and his Christian faith in the power of forgiveness and redemption.³⁰ After the vicar recovers from his fever of sensibility, his quest to find Olivia is waylaid by his reunion with his eldest son, George, who has been gone from the family for three years in an attempt to make his fortune in the world. George’s story as a “philosophic vagabond” takes up the next twelve pages, detailing his painful experiences in the public world, learning the dangers of pride and selfishness, and that a philosophic learning does not provide enough knowledge to live and succeed in a commercial society (as Moses’s and the vicar’s experiences with the sharper at the fair make clear as well). But despite the many calamities he encounters, including a stern reprimand from Sir William Thornhill cautioning him against the friendship of Squire Thornhill, George remains resourceful and has learned from his many experiences in the world. Chief among his lessons is that “the public is a many-headed monster, and that only such as had very good heads could please it” (104).

³⁰ His first act was to find a space for Mr. Burchell to stay at his house, saying “hospitality is one of the first Christian duties” (28). He compares Burchell’s need for shelter to Christ’s reliance on the kindness of others (28).

Realizing the importance of both action and rational judgment, George has become a more experienced and more aware subject in the public world, though he retains his Christian faith in the fundamental goodness of people.

Unlike Yorick's *Sentimental Journey* in pursuit of emotional experience and sensual satiation, which was published two years after *The Vicar of Wakefield*, George's journey has been dedicated to learning and growing both as a person and as a public subject, and in detailing his observations and learning from them, he is internalizing the public gaze and projecting his own responses to it, in the same way that Ophelia did in my discussion of the previous chapter. Shortly after relating his experiences in the world, George is offered a commission to go to the West Indies. In a convoluted series of events, George is offered this position by the scheming Squire Thornhill, in an attempt to get him out of the country so that the Squire can marry his former fiancée Arabella Wilmot without obstruction. George leaves to fulfil his public role as heir to the Primrose family, and to make a respectable living by acting on behalf of the monarchy. When he returns again at the end of the novel he once more proves himself to be an active and intelligent man with a strong sense of family and of honour in juxtaposition to his feckless father.

Being convinced that George is off to a successful future in the army, the vicar continues on his way to find Olivia, which he does almost immediately. His unqualified welcome of his poor daughter as he "flew to her rescue" signals his transition from passive observer to active assistant in his children's lives (108). Olivia tells her father that Squire Thornhill was behind all of her sufferings, and he finally articulates what he should have known long before: that all of his suspicions about the Squire should have overridden his pride in his "worldliness" and his desire for the family to be married into

wealth (60). He also learns that Burchell had taken great pains to try and convince Olivia not to trust the Squire, and that the letter Burchell wrote to the London ladies was meant to accuse them of dishonesty and vice and to protect the Primrose girls. Olivia insists that Burchell was always “our warmest sincerest friend” because he cared for the family enough to act on their behalf even though it cost him their friendship (109).

After learning that Olivia was privately married to Squire Thornhill after leaving home the vicar is completely reconciled to her, despite Olivia’s confession that the marriage was not binding and that the Squire was “married” in the same way to at least half a dozen women by the same “priest” (109). But Primrose tells his daughter that she should not tell the authorities about the priest and have him tried for his crimes because she has given her word to keep the situation a secret; he continues to struggle between his pride of strictly adhering to the Christian sentiments in the bible and his familial responsibility to take action against those responsible for his daughter’s seduction and betrayal. He interrupts her confession to offer a mini-homily on evil and goodness that offers his justification for inactivity:

Even tho’ it may benefit the public, you must not inform against him. In all Human institutions a smaller evil is allowed to procure a greater good; as in Politics, a province may be given away to secure a kingdom; in medicine, a limb may be lopt [sic] off to preserve the body. But in religion the law is written, and inflexible, *never* to do evil. And this law, my child, is right: for otherwise, if we commit a smaller evil, to procure a greater good, certain guilt would thus be incurred, in expectation of contingent advantage. And though the advantage should certainly follow, yet the interval between commission and advantage,

which is allowed to be guilty may be that in which we are called away to answer for the things we have done, and the volume of human actions is closed for ever (110).

For Primrose, it is better to take no action and avoid the risk of suffering guilt or God's retribution, even when it is for the benefit of the public and the greatest good, than to risk being active.³¹ I see this as Goldsmith's greatest criticism of Primrose: that he misses the larger issues of Christian benevolence in his dogmatic commitment to scripture. Although Primrose is virtuous insofar as his life is dictated by Christian faith, his virtue ultimately leads to his failure and suffering as a father.

After preaching to Olivia, Primrose leaves her at an inn five miles from home and goes on ahead to prepare the family for her return. Again, in attempting to spare Olivia from her "offended mother", he is turning his feelings of love and concern for his daughter into action designed to protect her (111). But he is prevented from effecting a reunion between Olivia and her mother and siblings when he returns home to find that the family house is burning down, with everyone inside. His initial response is a "loud, convulsive outcry" that serves to warn the family of their danger and everyone but the two young boys escape. Primrose springs into action and rushes into the burning house to rescue his crying children, receiving a serious burn in the process, and in so doing fulfilling his role as *paterfamilias* (113). He realizes that the safety of his family—he calls them "our treasures"—is far more important than any of the material goods that the family has for so long taken great pride in (113).

³¹ David Durant offers a compelling discussion of the ways that "what is stressed [in the novel] is that Dr. Primrose's good principles lead to and in large measure cause the depravity he abhors" in his article "*The Vicar of Wakefield* and the Sentimental Novel" (480).

The family's material loss, and their gratitude to have survived with the family intact, prompts the community to express their values of sympathy and sensibility as they overcome the proud attitude of and family squabbles with the Primroses to provide all their material needs. Primrose says of Flamborough: "my honest next neighbour, and his children, were not the least assiduous in providing us with every thing necessary, and offering what ever consolation untutored benevolence could suggest" (113). The vicar's actions to help his family now lead the community around them to act on the same principles of benevolence, showing how his active sensibility has the extended influence of prompting those outside the family to offer their aid.

In the process of rescuing the boys the vicar sustains an injury to his arm that renders him physically unable to do much to alleviate his family's needs, but though his body has been rendered ineffective, he remains committed to being a rationally and spiritually viable father and husband. When Squire Thornhill arrives at the Primrose's new lodgings, provided by a poor neighbour, to announce his marriage to George's ex-fiancée Arabella Wilmot and to ask for the family's blessing, the vicar reacts with uncharacteristic firmness of purpose and mind, asserting his family's honour and strongly resenting the damage done to Olivia's happiness:

'Mr. Thornhill,' replied I, 'hear me once for all: as to your marriage with any but my daughter, that I never will consent to; and though your friendship could raise me to a throne or your resentment sink me to the grave, yet would I despise both. Thou hast once wofully [sic], irreparably, deceived me. I reposed my heart upon thine honour, and have found it baseness. Never more, therefore, expect friendship from me. Go, and possess what fortune has given thee, beauty,

riches, health, and pleasure. Go, and leave me to want, infamy, disease, and sorrow. Yet humbled as I am, shall my heart still vindicate its dignity, and though thou hast my forgiveness, thou shalt [sic] ever have my contempt (121).

This speech results in Thornhill seeking revenge by having his steward come to demand the vicar's rent, which because of the fire he is unable to pay, and he is arrested and taken to prison. He instructs the family on how to prepare for their hardship and insists that Moses help support Olivia who has fallen insensible "from a consciousness that she was the cause of all our calamities" (122). Just a few chapters back it was the vicar who was falling insensibly into a fever brought on by his excessive sensibility and the consciousness of his guilt, but now, in his role as narrator, he has displaced this emotion onto his daughter thus allowing himself to take on the role of rational, spiritual leader.

He chastises those of his parishioners who try to prevent the bailiffs from taking him to prison, reminding them to listen to his teachings from the pulpit and not put themselves in danger by committing a base act against another person. He tries to leave his spiritual flock with instructions to "contribute to make [their] lives more happy" while saying it will be "my comfort when I pen my fold for immortality, that not one here shall be wanting" (124). This speech to his parishioners is the clearest expression of Primrose's awareness that he must be, as Blair argues, useful to himself and the community around him, and that there is a clear reflexivity between his feelings and actions and those of others. Having prepared his family and his spiritual community for his departure, the vicar is led off to prison; his injured body has not prevented him from active benevolence, because the action he took came from his sentiments and not physical assertion.

The next six chapters take place in the prison, where the vicar suffers his final emotional hardships and realizes the importance of submitting completely to the will of God and of placing no value in earthly life. After coming to this resolution, Primrose experiences a miraculous series of events that restore wealth, happiness, and harmony to himself, his family, and his society. One of his first tasks when Primrose arrives in prison is to offer forgiveness and assistance to Mr. Jenkinson, a man who deceived both himself and Moses at the market taking two of their horses with only a gross of green spectacles and a false draught on Mr. Flamborough's name as payment (55, 63). Jenkinson has ended up in prison as a result of his many deceits and disguises; it was by impersonating a clergyman that he was able to dupe Primrose at the market. He is sincerely repentant for his many "tricks." Primrose's willingness to forgive Jenkinson becomes one of his most important actions in prison and is responsible for much of the good fortune in the resolution of the novel, a truth to which Jenkinson himself alludes (126).

Primrose's next responsibility is to give direction to his family on how they should best support themselves while he is in prison. He has the two youngest children, his "treasures" Dick and Bill stay with him; Deborah is to focus her attention on Olivia, whose health has been steadily declining since she returned to the family; and Moses is to go out and work to support the family. As Primrose explains to Jenkinson a short time later, "there is but one way in this life of wounding my happiness, and that is by injuring [my family]" (130). In assuring their safety, Primrose is assuring his own, just as his unwillingness to act on behalf of his children in the early part of the novel brought suffering on them and himself. Goldsmith is quite insistent throughout the text that the vicar's thoughts and feelings are directly related to the happiness of his family, and that

his actions, or lack thereof, have a direct influence not only on his own well-being but on that of the people around him, both in his family and his community. So, having first taken care of his immediate family, Primrose turns his attention to the prison community, and to teaching and helping them to improve their lives, just as he did in his speech to the parishioners before he left them. He makes a commitment to using his time in prison to reform the people and their manners in accordance with his spiritual belief in the inherent goodness of mankind and the importance of repentance (129).

Primrose explains that his plan in the prison is based on “giving sensibility to wretches divested of every moral feeling,” and that his aim is to spread his own feelings, and the Christian theology that inspires them, to others (132). He does so in order to create “temporal services” that will make the prisoners more emotionally and materially comfortable and healthy. He makes work plans, like basic manufacturing, to give the prisoners something to do with their time, and establishes a system of rewards and punishments to encourage the prisoners to act morally, and he explains, with characteristic pride, that “in less than a fortnight I had formed them into something social and humane” (133). The vicar’s once ineffectual feelings of righteousness and piety have been turned into a sincere desire to help his fellow being, and in enacting his sensibility through a rational and well-considered plan of action he is reinforcing that for Goldsmith, faith in Christian benevolence and its reliance on sensibility can have a positive and productive effect on both the individual and the society of which he is part.

Primrose is relatively content for the next few weeks, working to improve his inmate neighbours, when he hears that Olivia’s health is getting worse. He writes to Sir William Thornhill, hoping to obtain some relief from the uncle of Squire Thornhill so

that he can go to be with his child and offer her the support she needs and deserves from him: “Not it was, that my confinement was truly painful to me; my soul was bursting from its prison to be near the pillow of my child, to comfort, to strengthen her, to receiver her last wishes, and teach her soul the way to heaven. She was expiring, and yet I was debarred the small comfort of weeping by her” (137). Rather than giving her over to providence, as he wished when she first disappeared, now Primrose wants to be an active part of relieving her pain, which would relieve his own parental suffering.

The next day he learns of Olivia’s death, and is finally convinced by his fellow prisoners to submit to Squire Thornhill’s demand to bless his marriage with Arabella Wilmot in the hopes of getting himself out of prison and being able to assist his family. While waiting for Thornhill’s reply, he learns that Sophia has been abducted and that his eldest son, George, has been arrested for challenging Squire Thornhill to a duel in recompense for his sister’s lost honour (which he did at his mother’s behest). The vicar is not able to control his passions or his grief and the old ineffective man of feeling Primrose emerges with a call that God would instantly let him die. But George, steadfast in his suffering and his decisions, chastises his father and reminds him of his duty to succour the family and to spiritually prepare them for a righteous death. Rather than just offering a sermon to his son about fortitude and helping to prepare his soul for death, since George is to be executed for his crime, Primrose wants his words to be useful to his family and community, and he invites the whole prison to his cell to hear his words. He is now too weak in his own body to go among them, but all the prisoners assemble around his little straw bed to hear his sermon.

His words recall to readers' minds the epigraph on the title page, "*Sperate miseri, cavete faelices*", taken from Robert Burton's 1621 *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and which shares the sentiments that Jesus expressed in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3-12). Primrose's sermon, like that in Matthew, tells people to put their faith in God and to trust that all of their earthly suffering will be removed in heaven. Primrose tells the prisoners that they will be blessed in heaven, and that their misery is a necessary step towards eternal bliss. Though this sermon has been read as the ultimate expression of Goldsmith's Christian message and proves that the novel's theme is one of sacrifice and faith, I find it hard not to read this section ironically, given the scenes that immediately follow it. Since Goldsmith has been arguing for the importance of personal agency and socially benevolent action throughout the novel it would be disingenuous for him to then suggest that no earthly, or social, relief is possible.

This is particularly true because relief does come, almost immediately, as Sophia arrives with Mr. Burchell/Sir William Thornhill; he has rescued her from danger for a second time. The vicar's humble apology for the family's mistreatment of Burchell is returned with a magnanimous reply of pity, which nonetheless entails the blame that Spacks mentions: "you never deserved my resentment. I partly saw your delusion then, and as it was out of my power to restrain, I could only pity it!" (149). Though it was out of Burchell's power to prevent the suffering of the Primroses, he nevertheless took every action he could to attempt it. Rather than seeing Burchell/Thornhill as a *deus ex machina* here, for me his response only further reinforces the Primroses' earlier failings, and it establishes firmly that one individual's feeling and actions can not be solely responsible

for social reformation: for Goldsmith there needs to be a systemic reformation of society that reinforces the importance of sympathy, benevolence, and rationality.

Primrose immediately offers Burchell Sophia's hand in marriage—he says “I give you no small treasure”—but Burchell defers his answer until George arrives and recognizes him as Sir William Thornhill (150). Now no longer under the obligation of a disguise, Sir William begins to preside over the cases of George's accusation of duelling, Sophia's abduction, and the vicar's imprisonment by his nephew the Squire. It also turns out that Sir William is a fine physician, able to heal both body and mind, and prescribes a cure for Primrose's burnt arm that offers immediate relief. The novel moves to a speedy conclusion as the Squire is revealed as a villain, George is released from his chains since the man who appeared to duel with him was an imposter (160). He is then reunited with Arabella Wilmot. Jenkinson then reveals that Olivia is legally married to the Squire and her virtue is therefore not ruined, and the vicar learns that the merchant who lost all his money has been found with it all and a good deal more so his fortune is restored. Sophia agrees to marry Sir William and honour and justice are returned to the Primrose family and the society at large. While Sir William plays an important role in the resolution, so too do the testimonies of Mr. Jenkinson and Mr. Baxter, the arrival of Arabella Wilmot who intended to relieve the suffering of the family as much as possible, and the arrest of the merchant holding Primrose's fortune.

The community around the Primroses has helped to support the positive conclusion to the novel. And the vicar has the final honour of joining his daughter and Sir William and George and Arabella in marriage and solidifying the happiness of his children as he once inadvertently prevented it. The “unspeakable” pleasure that the

family experiences in Chapter 32, as evidenced in their frivolity much to the chagrin of Primrose, is a result of the re-establishment of family and community bonds, that nourish the spirit of the vicar and each of the people to whom he is connected. The novel traces the struggle between selfishness, pride, and ineffectuality and generosity, benevolence, and sympathetic action, and ultimately reveals both Goldsmith's faith in the principles of Christianity and in the power of the individual to affect his community and vice-versa. Sensibility is the key to the spirituality in the text, as well as the interpersonal relationships, though it has taken much suffering to learn that the positive potential of feeling lies in benevolent action and that the dangers of feeling exist in impotence and a dogmatic reliance on theory instead of practice. These lessons are much more easily learned in Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality*.

“Our satisfactions will be doubled by feeling for each other”: Lessons on Sympathy and Benevolence in *The Fool of Quality; or, The History of Henry Earl of Moreland*

Unlike the enduring popularity of and critical interest in Goldsmith's novel, Henry Brooke's first novel, *The Fool of Quality; or, The History of Henry Earl of Moreland*, published at the same time (between 1765 and 1770), is largely marginalized in studies of the novel of sentiment. The novel was quite popular when first published, going into at least six re-printings before Brooke's death in 1783 and several more editions of the abridged version, much more widely read than the original, prepared and published by Methodist minister John Wesley in 1781 (Beasley 77).

Despite its eighteenth-century popularity, the novel is routinely subject to harsh criticism and has largely fallen out of favour among contemporary scholars of novels of

sensibility. Baker refers to the novel as “strange” and “quixotic” (114, Brooke xiv). Beasley classifies it as an “uneven but interesting and energetic” text while Benedict is struck by the novel’s “didactic tone” which she says “alienated several readers” (74, 49). The most famous introduction to the novel, written by Charles Kingsley in 1859 and reprinted by Ernest Baker in 1906, mixes praise for Brooke’s work along with the acknowledgment that “some intrinsic defect in it has caused it to be not undeservedly forgotten” (Brooke liv). Kingsley details what he sees as the “patent” flaws in the novel: “The plot is extravagant as well as ill-woven, and broken besides, by episodes as extravagant as itself. The morality is Quixotic, and practically impossible. The sermonizing, whether theological or social, is equally clumsy and obtrusive. Without artistic method, without knowledge of human nature and the real world, the book can never have touched many hearts, and can touch none now” (liv).

While *The Fool of Quality* is still frequently mentioned by critics of the novel of sentiment, suggesting it has greater value than Kingsley ascribes to it in the previous quote, it is generally only briefly discussed as one of many novels of sentiment featuring the “man of feeling” in the mid-eighteenth century and is routinely considered less valuable than the writings of Sterne, Mackenzie and Goldsmith.³² At least part of the minor reputation of the novel is a product of the narrative structure to which Kingsley

³² Benedict dedicates half a chapter to the novel in *Framing Feeling* (47-9, 60-8); Spacks spends over 9 pages discussing it in the chapter “The Sentimental Novel and the Challenge to Power” in *Desire and Truth* (119-28), and mentions it twice in passing in her chapter “The Novel of Sentiment” in *Novel Beginnings* (129, 157); Mullan discusses it for almost 6 pages in *Sentiment and Sociability* (133-5, 142-3, 145); Todd mentions it briefly on three pages in her chapter “Fiction: The Man of Feeling” in *Sensibility, An Introduction* (89, 95, 96); Barker-Benfield spends no more than four sentences on it in his two brief references to the novel (64, 149). Despite its relatively minor presence in these studies, Beasley insists that Brooke’s “contribution to the development of the novel during the last half of the eighteenth century was quite significant.” (75)

refers. Certainly, the novel is discursively heterogeneous, encompassing episodes of political, philosophical, educational, historical, and mythological content within a framework for personal development and public harmony based on the rhetoric of Christian faith and benevolence. And though the episodic structure of the novel, frequently lacking in smooth transitions, may exasperate modern readers I generally agree with Benedict, who suggests that Brooke may have used the structure to “evoke the network of social concerns implied by sentimental ideology” (68). Jerry Beasley adds that the structure of “fits and starts” is an accurate representation of “the often irrational movements of human feeling” (77).

Whether the structure is to be read as a reflection of the instability of feeling or as a failed generic hybrid, the episodic content consistently reflects Christian morality, as Blair taught it, through its repeated assertion of the importance of public action based on sympathy and interpersonal relationships. For that reason, I consider Brooke’s novel as important as Goldsmith’s novel for my analysis of public and private feeling in the mid-eighteenth-century novel. That the novel was eventually abridged and published by John Wesley as an exemplary novel of how to live a Christian, and Methodist, life speaks to its significance as a spiritually didactic text to an extent that actually exceeds Goldsmith’s. Structural discontinuity notwithstanding, throughout the didactic, historic, and educational insets, the *Author/Friend* dialogue, and the narratives of the Clinton family and their friends, Brooke consistently argues that the education and socialization of an ideal gentleman—a Christian man of feeling and reason and physical acuity—is central to his optimistic, almost utopic, fable of British social life and harmony.

For Brooke, like Goldsmith, the individual is not only able to influence the public world through his feelings he has a moral obligation to act on his feelings in order to benefit friends, family, and strangers alike. Mona Scheuermann summarizes the most important quality of Brooke's novel as "social usefulness, which implies both benevolence towards others and self-sufficiency for oneself." (387) I am particularly interested in tracing this scheme for social usefulness, though not its practicality, through Brooke's comprehensive plan for the education of young boys that combines the Christian rhetoric in *The Vicar of Wakefield* and its message of the importance of benevolent action with an emphasis on sympathy and *sensus communis* and a tone that is at once didactic and enthusiastic.

Though they share a commitment to Christian faith and its importance for the development of individual and social happiness, Brooke's novel differs from Goldsmith's in two significant ways: first, the protagonists are not the primary sufferers of the novel, but are the alleviators of suffering; second, one of the two protagonists is a young boy who is learning how to personally avoid and socially prevent the kind of suffering that afflicted the Primrose family, and little Harry Clinton's abductor and teacher, Mr. Fenton/Mr. Henry Clinton. Because much of the novel details the growth and experiences of the innocent and cherubic Harry Clinton, from the time that he is a small boy until he becomes the Earl of Moreland, the novel's mood is decidedly more optimistic than Goldsmith's tale of worldly experience and suffering. Through Harry, Brooke sees the potential to influence a new generation of men of (Christian) feeling. By reiterating the confidence in sympathy and social interconnectedness that Brooke gained from reading Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks*, a text Beasley argues "left an especially lasting

impression” on him, Brooke presents a novel dominated by what John Mullan refers to as “muscular optimism” (75, 135).

Readers are introduced to Harry Clinton as the younger, neglected, son of the Earl of Moreland, being raised more by his nurse and her poor family than by his aristocratic parents who are only interested in coddling their heir: his nurse explains that “they don’t mind him—they take him for a fool” (6).³³ An old “dumb gentleman” in the nearby town, Mr. Fenton, takes an interest in Harry and his evident goodness. When he learns that Harry’s parents are not giving him the attention he needs to become a well educated and moral young boy, Mr. Fenton takes responsibility for teaching Harry and offering him support by becoming his “dada.” Though Harry has inadequate parents, Mr. Fenton, as an extended version of Mr. Burchell’s character, steps in to take on the role of active and affectionate parent. Before proceeding with the analysis of Harry’s education in sensibility I think it is necessary to contextualize it with the discussion of class that features prominently in the early pages of the novel and creates tension in the way critics have interpreted Harry’s process of self-development and socialization.

Unlike any other protagonist in this project, Harry Clinton is not clearly situated within a family or class at the outset of his experiences. While he is undoubtedly of the titled class by birth, his early childhood is spent with a working rural family and his actions display the physical robustness characteristic of lower classes not the gentility defined by his birth-status or the material trappings associated with it that characterize his brother, Dicky (2). He is, in practice, disenfranchised from his family at the beginning of

³³ Ironically, Mr. Fenton explains to Harry that he is wearing a “fool’s coat” when he is dressed for a polite audience with his family (20).

the novel, as is his abductor, Mr. Fenton who, like Mr. Burchell, is living life under an assumed name that denies his patrilineal identity. Early in the novel readers learn that Mr. Fenton is really Henry Clinton, the younger brother of Harry's father, Richard, the Earl of Moreland, and that little Harry is named after this long-lost uncle. The brothers were estranged when they became adults, as Richard pursued a life in keeping with his station, including a friendship with the King and many of the political ministers of state, and Henry went into trade and eventually made a fortune as a merchant. When Henry and a delegate of merchants go to see Richard about violations to the city charter and are rudely rebuked, he describes his older brother as uncivilized: "When courtiers (said he) acquire common-sense, and lords shall have learned to behave themselves like gentlemen, I may do such a one the honour to acknowledge him for a brother" (27). The social rivalry between aristocrats and merchants drives a wedge between the brothers; that Henry, the cit, takes over responsibility for raising and socializing young Harry Clinton is indicative of the fear (and reality) of the usurpation of social authority from the aristocracy by the rising middle class.

The novel offers sincere praise for the values associated with the commercial middle class, which Benedict describes as "physical activity, friendship, rationality, observation, and morality" (64). I agree with Beasley that the ambiguity of Harry's class and his uncle's status as a "self-made benevolent man" are methods that Brooke uses to argue "that the virtues of hardiness, honesty, sympathy, and hard work define a true path to happiness that anyone, of whatever class or rank, may take if trained to choose it" (76). While Baker is justified in saying that the novel traces the "upbringing of an ideal nobleman"—readers know that Harry will be returned to the Clinton family and will

eventually become Earl of Moreland once he is ‘properly educated’ as the novel’s subtitle suggests—his class does not define the morality of his actions (115). I take issue with Spacks’s assertion in *Desire and Truth* that Harry remains an “emotional aristocrat” throughout the novel who is impotent because the charity that he dispenses is from someone else’s fortune and that he is passive throughout the novel since “action has no necessary value, given the mysteries of Providence.” (121, 124) Harry routinely intervenes in situations where he perceives want or inequity, and learning to make judicious decisions about when to offer aid and how best to make use of his resources is the major lesson to be learned in his ‘sentimental journey’ to Fleet-prison with Mr. Clement.

While I acknowledge that the novel offers an in-depth discussion on class tensions in eighteenth-century Britain, I am not foregrounding Harry’s class, or Mr. Fenton’s, too strongly in my discussion of sensibility and subjectivity for a specific reason. Brooke repeatedly insists throughout the novel, especially in the dialogues between *Friend* and *Author*, that a person’s value and his or her influence on society are defined by Christian moral qualities and actions and *not* his or her station in life: “*Author*. There lay my error, sir; unhappily I didn’t reflect, that royalty or station was necessary to Christian resignation and lowliness of temper” (119). *Author* explains again at the end of the next chapter: “I apprehend that true gentility is altogether independent of fortune or fashion, of time, customs, or opinions of any kind” (138). The point is further reiterated in the comparison

between the king and the poor man that *Author* offers at the end of the next chapter:

we find the body of the king to be as frail, as obnoxious to pains, disease, and inclemencies, even as naked, poor, and perishable, as that of a beggar. But if we take the eye of faith to see further than with that of philosophy, we behold their souls alike immortal, of equal dignity and extent . . . Here all other distinctions fall away and lose their respect (154).

The universal potential for refined feeling and benevolent action is continued in Brooke's characterizations as many of the characters of sensibility in the novel, including Harry's tutor Mr. Hammel Clement and the earl's confidant Mr. Meekly, are neither of the aristocratic nor the merchant middle class, suggesting that for Brooke, like Goldsmith, the value of sensibility has more to do with Christian faith and action than financial or patrilineal status.

Though Harry encounters class through the different dress he is expected to wear when he is presented to his parents, he does not consciously consider himself part of a particular class until Mr. Fenton teaches him of the structure of British society when he is much older (273). So, at the outset of his tutoring by Mr. Fenton, to which I will now return, Harry is completely socially ignorant, which is the common starting point for sentimental characters in novels of the period.³⁴ It is far more important to Mr. Fenton to begin Harry's moral education than to teach him the intricacies of social status. He begins with little fables and tales about animals, similar to contemporary nursery rhymes, to "open his mind and cultivate his morals" but he soon proceeds to telling mythological stories involving people doing remarkable things in their communities (6). Mr. Fenton

³⁴ Mullan explains that "it is appropriate that Henry Brooke made a child the benevolent hero of *The Fool of Quality*, for the sentimental paragon was supposed to possess an innocence which 'the world' has lost" (145).

tells Harry about Hercules, a man of physical and emotional strength who, “went about the world doing good in all places; helping the weak and feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, and comforting those that cried, and beating all those who did hurt or wrong to others” (21). In the story he tells, Hercules is a hero as long as he is acting on behalf of others, but when he gets a fancy coat from a woman he becomes consumed his own vanity and becomes a socially ineffective “fool and a coxcomb” (21). One of Harry’s earliest lessons, then, is about the importance of self-moderation because personal feeling and (in)action can have such a strong influence on others.

At the same time that Harry is getting his education, Mr. Meekly is undertaking a re-education of his father, the Earl. Mr. Meekly dialogues with the Earl about the nature of self and the responsibilities that individuals have towards one another. During one of their conversations, Mr. Meekly explains the relationship between self and society to the earl in a way that clearly expresses Brooke’s overarching message in the novel: “no soul was ever capable of any degree of virtue or happiness, save so far as it is drawn away in its affections from self; save so far as it is engaged in wishing, contriving, endeavouring, promoting, and rejoicing in the welfare and happiness of others” (33). The different modes by which Harry and his family respond to the needs of others are soon put to the test, when the poor child Ned appears at the house.

Harry encounters Ned begging at the hall-door, crying and poor, with no parents and few clothes. When Harry learns of Ned’s suffering he takes him into his room, clothes him, and offers to share his parents with Ned (47).³⁵ Harry made a bed for Ned

³⁵ Later in the novel, when Ned is returned to his rightful parents his parting speech to Harry—which refers to his act of clothing, feeding, and caring for the poor—is almost a verbatim repetition of

and provided him a warm place to sleep for a few days, but when he was out in the yard one day the maid came through the room and found Ned, attacked him in “a fit of disgust”, and threw him out of the house (48). Harry assumes that the maid, Susy, acted with authority from his family and is disgusted by their treatment of someone in need. Accordingly he takes Ned from the Clinton family home to his dada’s in the nearby village and both boys are welcomed with open arms (48). It is at this point in the novel that Mr. Fenton leaves the village near the Clinton household, taking Harry and Ned along with him, abducting the boys (who were more than happy to join him) and taking them to Hampstead. The Clinton home was in an uproar when Harry was found to be missing, but within a few weeks they received a letter that Harry was not harmed and, within the space of a year, they were “restored to their former cheerfulness and tranquility” without him (52). Scheuermann explains that children receiving a warped social education from their aristocratic parents “require a better education not just for their own sakes but for that of society” (389). She goes on to argue that “there is no sentimental attachment to the ideal of a parent-child relationship” in this model, but that instead, the goal is to produce “the most accomplished and perfect of all human beings” and this is what Mr. Fenton promises Harry’s parents in the note he leaves when he abducts the child” (389).

Jesus’s speech on acts that will please God at the final judgment in the gospel of Matthew (25.35-6). Ned says: “I never shall be able to say the word farewell to you, my Master Harry! I was hungry and you fed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was a stranger and you took me in; the whole world to me was fatherless and friendless, when you were father and mother, and a whole world of friends to me, my true lord and master, Harry!” (248). Harry’s benevolent actions are explicitly enacting Christian theology, which is no doubt what John Wesley found so intriguing about the novel.

Once at Mr Fenton's home in Hampstead he takes Harry into a huge room filled with clothes and asks Harry to take responsibility for distributing them, as necessary, to those in need around the estate. Harry tells his dada that he has given him a "very sweet gift!" of "doing good to other people" (54). Mr. Fenton teaches Harry that the knowledge of having been of service to others will be a benefit to him because it will make him aware that his life has been useful and will mediate any suffering he might personally experience (54). This message—"the very remembrance of your having clothed, and fed, and cured, and comforted the naked and the hungry, the wounded and the afflicted, will be warmth, and food, and medicine, and balm to your own mind" (54)—is undoubtedly part of the "practically impossible" morality that Kingsley criticized and that John Mullan said "could not be followed amidst any practical business of social life" (135).

Notwithstanding the impracticality of this moral teaching, the overall message that Brooke is sending is one that insists upon the interaction between self and other, and of the mutually constitutive benefits of acting on one's feelings. That the novel is so extravagant in its expression of the interdependence of private and public usefulness does not negate the sophisticated argument that Brooke is making about the dual-functioning of sensibility in the eighteenth century. Brooke's engagement with sensibility is an aspect of the novel that is rarely critically examined. For me, in scenes like this which are steeped in Christian rhetoric, Brooke offers the clearest articulation of the understanding that sensibility and feeling are both a process of projecting and internalizing feeling that influences both the feeling individual and the society in tangible ways in eighteenth century fiction.

Among the people that Harry helps is a family on the verge of death, found by the side of the road (56). The family is eventually identified as the Clements, consisting of Hammel, Arabella and their son, Tommy. After a disastrous series of calamities with Harry and Ned's previous tutor, the stern and vindictive Mr. Vindex, Hammel is engaged as the young boy's tutor and proves to be another example of a man of refined moral feeling who will influence the boys to right action. Mr. Fenton explains to Hammel that God did not save him for his own benefit, but so that his life and experiences could be used to help others: "It was not to you that God intended any benefit by restoring you to life; it was to those, and I hope they are many in number, who are to have the advantage of your example and instructions" (123).

Having been born to a low class man who went on to make a fortune in trade, Hammel is sent away to be educated as the "one gentleman in the family" showing that he, like Harry, is stuck between classes (70). Hammel's education, consisting primarily of classical learning in Greek and Latin and in mythology, is useless in the practical world which Hammel quickly learns after being disinherited by his father (in a plot twist that makes little sense) and being thrust into London public society with no means of support. Hammel is unqualified for any useful position that his friend, Mr. Goodville is able to find for him, so he turns to polemical writing to support himself (81). This eventually gets him arrested for sedition and libel against the government; his wife and her aunt sell off everything the family owns, including their business, to procure his release. They did this out of concern for him, though all he wanted was for them to post his bail so that he could fight the case in the courts. The excessive goodness and care of Arabella Clement and her aunt, Mrs. Graves cause the family to go broke, because their benevolence,

though active, was not mediated by reason and temperance. The family moves from calamity to calamity, much of it brought on by unscrupulous and selfish associates like those David Simple encounters in his travels through London. Hammel is often forced to beg and solicit ‘charity’ by gunpoint to save his family from dying of hunger.

When Mr. Fenton engages Hammel to be Harry and Ned’s tutor he stresses the importance of a practical and spiritual education, something never given to Hammel himself:

First, be it your care to instruct him in morality; and let the law precede the gospel, for such was the education that God appointed for the world. Give him, by familiar and historical instances, an early impression of the shortness of human life, and of the nature of the world in which he is placed. Let him learn, from this day forward, to distinguish between natural and imaginary wants; and that nothing is estimable, or ought to be desirable, but so far as it is necessary or useful to man (126).

Under Hammel’s tutelage Harry develops, physically and mentally, into a strong eight-year-old boy being “exercised in feats of bodily prowess and agility and in acts of mental benevolence and service to mankind” (127). But he has to struggle with the feelings of self-approbation and pride that challenged Reverend Primrose for so much of *The Vicar of Wakefield*. After beating up a young nobleman who was tormenting the poor young boys in his village and making himself the hero in their eyes, Harry is overwhelmed with guilt that his pride drove him to treat the young lord with such scorn (157). He confesses his mistake to Mr. Fenton, who explains to Harry that there are two boys within him, the good boy and the naughty boy, comprising “two different spirits or principles” within

him (165). Mr. Fenton goes on to teach him that every person is capable of either good or bad actions as their motivations incline them. When people are motivated by “proud, scornful, ostentatious, and revengeful” feelings their actions have a negative effect on themselves and others, but when they are moved to act by “humble, generous, loving, and forgiving” thoughts they positively influence their community and their own hearts and minds (165).

To concretize this lesson, Mr. Fenton sends Harry, accompanied by Hammel, on a ‘sentimental journey’ to Fleet Street prison (171).³⁶ He encourages Harry to ask questions of all the prisoners, to find out the motivations for the actions they undertook that caused their imprisonment, and to provide financial support for those prisoners who are most interested in alleviating and consoling the sufferings of their fellow prisoners. In learning to reward the generous and humble feelings of the prisoners Harry will be learning to value those qualities in himself. Harry must use his discretion when giving out his dada’s five hundred pounds and must give him an account of how the money was spent upon his return. Hammel, the world weary man of feeling, is sent along to guide and protect Harry without dictating how the money should be spent.³⁷ When they return to Mr. Fenton over three weeks later, Harry has spent one thousand pounds more in charitable giving than he was sent with. Harry details the stories of many of the ninety-five prisoners they released

³⁶ Harry’s trip is an emotional journey, where he is intended to grow and act on the observations of feelings, especially suffering, that he encounters. In this particular episode the novel shares its strongest affinities with *A Sentimental Journey* and *The Man of Feeling* (especially with Harley’s visit to Bedlam). Goring refers to Yorick and as “a tourist of the emotions” (157) and though Harry is much like him in this respect, he is not just experiencing these feelings for his own pleasure; his encounters with the prisoners at Fleet Street offer edification of personal benevolence and its ability to affect both self and other.

³⁷ This narrative is awkwardly interrupted by a long episode detailing the life of Henry Clinton and how he came to be known as Mr. Fenton. The episode spans Chapters XII-XV (181-218).

with the initial five hundred pounds given by Mr. Fenton, and in several of the cases, those receiving the charity reflect the same Christian ideals, like “the meekness of Moses and the patience of Job” that motivate Harry’s offers of support to them (238).

Though he agrees that Harry has acted well and learned much on his journey to London, he is concerned that Harry will never be accepted in polite society in London if he is not allowed some of the “fashionable foibles and fashionable vices of the age” (220). Hammel is anxious that Harry is too good a man to exist in society, as Brissenden and Goring suggest of the man of feeling, and that his principles will lead him to be too easily exploited, as young Sir William Thornhill was, and considered “a mere idiot among people of distinction” (220). Mr. Fenton is not willing to send Harry into the fashionable world of London until he is better educated in the moral, spiritual, and practical values of his society. Over the next two years readers are told that “little interesting” happens to Harry, who continues to grow in mind and body. During this time, Mr. Fenton teaches him about the structure of British society and politics (257-84). He instructs that people, created in the image of God, are divinely invested with the ability to do good for others and that the aim of society is to restrict selfishness (and the will to power that stems from it) and to advocate sympathy and shared action. Harry’s significant insight after Mr Fenton’s lesson is to cry out: “how frightful, how detestable is that power, which is not exercised in acts of benevolence alone!” (273). This is perhaps the most practical of the many lessons that Harry is given by Mr. Fenton and it challenges Mullan’s assertion that “Brooke’s novel is not attempting to make sympathy the basis of social and moral being” but that “sympathy here is focused to a special intimacy, an exceptional indulgence” (142). While there are certainly numerous scenes which dwell on

the kind of lavish experience of suffering sympathy that has for years affected the literary and critical reputation of the man of feeling archetype, it would do a substantial disservice to Brooke's novel to limit its expression of sympathy and its social usefulness to these episodes. Just as Harry must learn that there are good and bad boys within him but that both form part of who he is, the reader must learn that there are socially active and socially passive forms of sensibility being presented in the novel, and that society must acknowledge this dual presence and strive to assert the values that promote active benevolence instead of impotent sympathy.

After one more rescue of a worthy family, which involves a suit against a nobleman and a chance for Harry to dialogue about his knowledge of the British political system and his views of the monarchy and produces a meeting between him and the King and Queen, Mr. Fenton decides that it is time for Harry's education to expand beyond what he can learn in the isolation of his country home (308). The move represents not only a change in the physical space that Harry and his adoptive family inhabit but also a change in the focus of his education. The country, as Brooke explains earlier in the novel in a dialogue between Mr. Fenton and Mr. Fielding, is the ideal space for the cultivation of health and social happiness:

Did any poets or philosophers ever place their golden eras or golden scenes amidst such a town as London? A man can scarce be himself . . . It is true that I am fond of society and neighbourhood; but experience has shown me that London is not the place in which I can enjoy it . . . If I wished to be the most recluse of all anchorites that bid adieu to the commerce of mankind, I would choose London for my cell (148).

For Mr. Fenton, then, the city is an ironic space where the multitude of people leads individuals to feel socially isolated and alone. Individuals are also less responsible to one another in the city since their actions can be more anonymously carried out. Aside from a short trip to the prison in London, and a visit to the King and Queen at court, Harry's exposure to the world has been rural and many of the stories he has heard from the people he helped have foregrounded the bonds of community felt in small towns, as the Primrose family experienced after their house burned down. One of the reasons for the emphasis of country life as the most salubrious is the emphasis on "natural" living throughout Brooke's novel. Brooke emphasizes personal freedom, physical and emotional heartiness, the value of exercise, and the importance of knowing one's neighbours and working to make their lives better.

Moving the family to London allows Mr. Fenton to expose Harry to the social world that Hammel Clement feared he was unprepared for, but the emphasis, as always, is on Harry interpreting the situation for himself (308).³⁸ Like Ophelia in my previous discussion, Harry is taken to hear the "sentimental meltings and varied harmony" of the opera and the theatre as part of his introduction to public society (309). Harry is particularly captivated by the accomplishments of Senior Volanti, a performer he sees at the theatre. After meeting Volanti and hearing of his plan to fly through London on a wire, Harry makes a plan to prove that he is not as foolish as the rest of society has long

³⁸ In *The History of the English Novel*, Baker suggests that Mr. Fenton's method of educating Harry is directly based on Brooke's reading and admiration of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's educational book, *Émile*, published in 1762. Baker suggests that Brooke "agreed with Rousseau that the basic principle of education should be to bring out the healthy original instincts, to foster and develop the spontaneity and probity of nature." (115). Certainly, both men offer educational programs based on experiential epistemology and the primacy of learning to engage with the world through feeling. Brooke, however, is much more optimistic about the social potential of the young child and does not espouse the same kind of physical harshness that forms part of Rousseau's education for *Émile*.

considered him. From his first meeting with his parents as a small child to the party where he kissed the candlestick to his acceptance of the unadorned painting of Queen Mary instead of the ornamental painting of the King, Harry has been considered a fool because of the niceties of his feelings and his artless behaviour. Harry's plan is to get revenge on the mass of society who think that his sentiments make him a fool: "Why the public, as you know, sir, have put the fool on me from my birth; Homer says, that revenge is sweet as honey to the taste; and so I am meditating in turn how to put the fool upon the public" (310). Doing so would help Harry to reclaim his respectability and help his understanding of his role in society, but it would also humble the polite crowds who place little value in sincere action and who are easily tricked by their overindulged senses.

While Harry is making plans to embarrass the public, he is diverted by going to a masquerade, in keeping with the common trope of social initiation in the literature of the period which I discussed in the previous chapter. Mr. Fenton agrees to take Harry though he explains that the masquerade is not beneficial because the individuals put on costumes but know nothing of the characters they are pretending to be: they are all form and no substance. As Castle has admirably explained, the masquerade is so central to discussions of the self and subjectivity in the eighteenth century because of the connection between appearances and their manipulation of reality. Mr. Fenton chose to outfit Harry as Mercury, the messenger of the Gods, in a splendid and highly ornamented costume. But though Mr. Fenton believes that Harry's plain street clothes have "been a mask and disguise to your internal ornaments" he belies that the "brilliancy" of Harry's costume "shall now, on the other hand, disguise and conceal the simplicity of your manners"

(312). In both cases, Harry's dress both reveals and conceals elements of his identity and behaviour. There is always more to Harry than can be seen by his clothing or appearance, which represents the form and substance that marks him as a well-rounded, dynamic character.

Since Harry's educational program has been to observe the world around him, he is reticent to complete his learning by making himself the general object of the gaze rather than being a gazing subject so he chooses not to remove his cape for much of the event. When Mr. Fenton asks him to remove it, Harry, like Ophelia, becomes instantaneously the object of everyone's attentions: "Our hero had hitherto kept himself concealed, being secretly ashamed of the lustre of his apparel; but, at Mr. Fenton's desire, laid his cloak aside, and instantly all the eyes of the assembly were upon him" (315). The shame that is often such an integral part of the young woman's entrance into public society in novels of sentiment and sensibility is shared by Harry in this scene; this comparison is not meant to effeminize him, but to highlight the difficulty, regardless of gender, of moving between the position of being a watching subject and a watched object. It is much easier for Harry to observe society than to be watched and judged by it himself. This insight suggests that the individual's ability to affect the public through their feelings is the less arduous and less painful element of the public-private dialectic. But the experience of being gazed at, though shame-inducing for both men and women, is necessary for the negotiation between self and other and the personal subjectivity resulting from the process. Harry makes such a fine appearance at the masquerade that the King and Queen, already enamoured with him from their first meeting, earnestly petition Mr. Fenton to let Harry join them at court. He refuses to let Harry go until his

education is complete, and suggests that if he turns out as well as Mr. Fenton hopes he will, that he will not let him part from him.

After the masquerade, Harry is finally able to put his scheme with Senor Volanti into practice and announces in the papers that Senor Volanti will fly from the top of Clement's steeple and land several blocks away. When all of the rich and noble people arrive to watch the spectacle, Harry calls out from his coach that the stunt is an April Fool's joke and that all the spectators have been made fools. As the "fools of fashion" leave, the rope and a feather bed are brought out, and Senor Volanti jumps off of the spire and lands among the crowds who were not chased off by fear of looking foolish (321). Among the fools who are chased away by Harry's joke is Lord Bottom, the young man whom Harry beat up in the village and who later tormented Harry on his first trip to London. Having gotten his revenge, Mr. Fenton takes Harry away from "whatever London could exhibit of elegant, curious, or pleasing" to the General Hospital and the Bethlehem Hospital so that he can learn about suffering and death just as he learned about emotional suffering at the Fleet Street Prison (321). Mr. Fenton then leaves the city allowing Harry, accompanied by Mr. Clement, to indulge in his benevolence as he sees fit. Harry is soon offended by a secular philanthropist who challenges Harry's Christian understanding of the world and he return to Hampstead fearing that he is losing his faith in himself, his God, and his society. Harry and Mr. Fenton engage in a long discussion about the nature of sin, the nature of God's relationship to humans, and the existence of evil at the end of which Harry is reconfirmed in his faith in Christian theology as the primary motivation for private and public action (325-34).

As happened earlier in the novel, the scene shifts from Harry's spiritual education to that of his father, Richard, Earl of Moreland. The Earl, his wife, and their heir Lord Clinton had taken the grand tour together, but young Lord Clinton, Harry's brother contracted smallpox in France and died and his mother died of grief a few days later. The Earl, now home alone in England, and Mr. Meekly discuss the nature of suffering and sin in the bible, with Mr. Meekly ultimately denying the importance of the physical body and thus of its sufferings when they are interrupted by Harry's arrival. Harry finally explains to his father that Mr. Fenton, the "old despicable man" as the Earl calls him, is in fact his long lost brother (340). Harry gently admonishes his father for his anger toward Mr. Fenton, henceforth known as Henry Clinton, saying:

you wanted me not when he took me, my father; you had other and richer treasures—comforts that were infinitely more worthy your regard; but, little and despicable as I was, he had nothing but me. I became his only comfort—the only treasure in which he delighted. Yet, as soon as he heard that you wanted consolation, he chose rather to be without it himself (340).

Mr. Clinton's willingness to sacrifice his own happiness for the sake of his brother's is further confirmation that he has taught Harry as much by example as by precept, and that he puts the values of sympathy and generosity before his own happiness.

Harry explains to his father the education in sympathy and benevolence he received from his uncle and happily confesses to having spent over fifty thousand pounds in the exercise of his charity. To his father's incredulous response, Harry explains that he spent the money not on fineries in London, but "in hospitals and in prisons, my father . . . In streets and highways, among the wretched and indigent, supplying eyes to the blind,

and limbs to the lame, and cheerfulness to the sorrowful and broken of heart; for such were my uncle's orders" (346). No longer is Harry just an agent of charity, in this scene he begins to prove that his spiritual affinity to Christ is not merely through their shared Father: Harry is becoming a Christ-figure, a fact that Benedict points out in her analysis of the novel as well (65-6). Although, again, this is hardly a realistic representation of an individual in his society, it does suggest, as Spacks has argued that "sensibility constitutes a form of divinity" in the sentimental novel (*Desire* 124).³⁹

Mr. Clinton is soon reconciled to the Earl, and the family is brought together again. Mr. Meekly and Mr. Clinton realize that they have known each other in the past, when the latter was able to rescue the former from financial distress while in Holland. The three fine men of feeling, the Earl of Moreland, Mr. Clinton, and Mr. Meekly take on the joint responsibility as parents for Harry, who is now old enough to be their companion as well as their ward. With financial contributions from each of the men, Harry confesses his plan to start a school for young boys and girls to put his generosity into more lasting and effective practice by training a new generation of children to act and think like him (370). Unfortunately, the Earl dies before Harry is able to put his school plan into practice and Harry becomes the new Earl of Moreland, heir to a fortune of millions, yet melancholy over the loss of his father, his mother, and his older brother. To give him comfort, Mr. Clinton proposes a tour around France.

³⁹ Though she mentions the ideal connection between sensibility and divinity, Spacks is sceptical about the moral claims of sensibility and religiosity in her analysis of novels of the 1760s and 1770s, including *The Fool of Quality*.

On their trip Harry finally learns about the difference between private and public grief, as he privately grieves for the loss of his family and its effect on his life while he also grieves for the losses of others they encounter from Mr. Clinton's past in their travels. Mr. Clinton decides that Harry is finally old enough and mature enough to learn the "horrible and detestable nature" of the self: "Self was never beloved, never will be beloved, never was honourable or respectable in the eye of any creature. And the characters of the patriot, the hero, the friend, and the lover, are only so far amiable, so far reverable [sic], as they are supposed to have gone forth from the confines of self" (399). Though Brooke's message, throughout the novel, has been that there is a need for balance between the needs and health of the private self and those of the public, in this scene he is abnegating personal value and placing all worth on benevolence and outwardly-directed feeling. I see this as no more valuable than placing all of the value on the inwardly-directed feelings of the wallowing fellow-feeling so often associated with novels of this period like *The Man of Feeling*, and amply present in *The Fool of Quality*. The real innovation in Brooke's novel is the extent to which he balances self and other, private and public, throughout Harry's education, and I find it unfortunate that one of the final lessons Mr. Clinton offers him undermines that balance.

The novel finally concludes when Harry and his uncle arrive on the continent as all the intertwined relationships weaving through the many characters' life-narration episodes come together and are unified into a small community of sympathetic, feeling, and loving friends. Harry is introduced to Abenamin, a Moroccan prince travelling with Mr. Clinton's cousin, the Marchioness D'Aubigny, and they form an immediately close friendship. When it is later revealed that Abenamin is actually Abenaide, Mr. Clinton's

granddaughter, travelling in disguise as a young boy for her safety, Harry instantly falls in love with her and the pair are quickly betrothed. The entire family returns to England where Harry, the Earl, marries the young princess, and the joy, wealth, and happiness of the Clinton/Moreland family spreads throughout the neighbourhood. The marriage festivities are the most overtly aristocratic events Harry takes part in during the novel, with hundreds of guests taking in the excessive finery of the bride's Persian wedding outfit and the family's largesse expressed in the most exuberant way possible. Though Harry's romantic relationship with Abenaide seems rather ill-fitting with his otherwise almost completely celibate life, as Spacks derisively points out, it provides the assurance that the Earl will fulfil his Christ-like role as an actively benevolent hero and as a husband and father as well, re-establishing the patrilineality that Brooke undermined for so much of the novel. Harry will be a new kind of nobleman, educating his children as he was educated to know that their individual desires and feelings can and should be used not only for their own happiness but for the happiness and well-being of all in their society.

There is no question at the end of *The Fool of Quality*, and at the end of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, that the individual can have a meaningful and tangible influence on their community through the expression of their sensibility and the exercise of their Christian benevolence. This is the greatest contribution these two novels make to the tradition of the novel of sentiment and to the discourse of sensibility in the eighteenth century in general.

Chapter Three

“The More Routine Horrors of Families out of Joint”: Destructive Socialization and Sensibility in *A Simple Story* and *Secresy*

At the heart of this chapter is an investigation of the public, external forces that impress on the literary subject—community expectations, family demands, the demands of a lover, and social expectations for gendered behaviour and expressions of feeling—and the destabilizing effects these forces frequently have on the individual’s sense of him or herself as a subject and on his or her relationship to society-at-large. In particular, I want to interrogate the way that a loss of subjectivity, stemming from an expression of sensibility that transgresses these external public forces, is concomitant with the increasingly dystopic representations of society as isolated and selfish in the fiction of the last decade of the eighteenth century. My assertion is, that if social and institutional forces governing expressions of sensibility and behaviour are causing the individual subjects of a society to lose a sense of themselves under the weight of cultural expectations, the society, too, is being destroyed by this same process: as these forces and expectations isolate individuals, the mimetic function of socialization breaks down, and this in turn ruptures the “affective ties” of sensibility and socialization that hold the community of individuals together.

Unlike the personally productive and socially beneficial potential of sensibility that I described in the first two chapters, my final two chapters focus on the privately destructive and socially chaotic manifestations of sensibility in the 1790s. The idealism and utilitarianism of sensibility frequent in those literary works inspired by the

philosophical optimism of the Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, and Adam Smith between the 1740s and the 1770s had, by the 1790s, been supplanted for some writers by the exuberant revolutionary rhetoric of Jacobins supporting the ideals of the French Revolution like Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. By the middle of the decade, though, this rhetoric was also steeped in their frustration and disillusionment over the political and social realities at home in England, and in France where the revolution failed to live up to the ideals of individualism and freedom that initially sparked it.¹ The tension between optimism and dejection in the non-fiction writing of the Jacobins created an intellectual climate in which novelists, especially those sympathetic to Jacobin ideology, could challenge and destabilize the models of oppression—such as questioning what constituted socially-sanctioned feeling and gendered behaviour—which they saw in their society. It is Jacobin ideology, then, which takes the place of moral philosophy about *sensus communis* as a dominant influence on the representation of sensibility in the literary texts in this chapter.

The revolutionary emphasis on individualism, particularly the rights of the individual to exist without oppressive legal and social strictures, is foundational to the destructive effects of social forces on private subjects and their feelings that is a dominant theme in this chapter. The tie to these ideals, inspired by the French Revolution, is of

¹ The French Revolution is generally agreed to have begun with the storming of the Bastille prison in Paris in July of 1789 and to have ended in 1799 when Napoleon Bonaparte was named “First Consul” and began his dictatorship of France. Summarizing the social critique sparked by the Revolution, David McCracken writes of Godwin in his introduction to *Caleb Williams*: “[h]e found virtually all man’s institutions radically corrupt and corrupting—not just the monarchy, aristocracy, legislature, court system, and war, but the entire legal system, blame and punishment, all forms of government, customary promises, even disease....Godwin was the confident spokesman for personal freedom, for the rights and the duties of individual men” (viii).

specific importance because the two novels I am examining in this chapter were written by authors known to be closely involved with the Jacobin political and philosophical community in the 1790s: Elizabeth Inchbald, whose novel *A Simple Story* was published in 1791 and Eliza Fenwick, who published her only novel for adults, *Secresy; or The Ruin on the Rock*, in 1795.² Epitomizing the tension of the 1790s, Isobel Grundy describes *Secresy* as both a “world of idealism” and of “resistance to accepted ideology” (25).

Kelly articulates that the almost unavoidable literary reaction to the French Revolution that dominated the political, ideological, and literary consciousness of the 1790s was, in part, an examination of the tension “between the claims of the individual self to freedom of action and authenticity of being and the claims of society on the individual to conform to social and institutional codes and conventions” (“Jane” 285). This chapter investigates the ‘claims of society on the individual’ through the language of feeling and sensibility, and explains how the transgression of expected behaviour leads to the simultaneous destruction of subjects and the social forces acting on them. As my treatment of Inchbald’s and Fenwick’s novels will elucidate, a common element of Jacobin fiction is to show social expectations as a restrictive and oppressive force, creating what Kelly calls “a social and political hegemony” that individual authors construct as impediments to personal freedom (“Jane” 286).³

² Grundy explains that *Secresy* is Fenwick’s only novel intended for adults and that “[i]f she ever wrote anything else of the scope and ambition of *Secresy*, it is not known to survive” (7). For more on Fenwick’s known writing see Isobel Grundy’s introduction to the novel (12-15).

³ Contemporary readers will no doubt recognize Louis Althusser’s 1970 Marxist description of the state as “a ‘machine’ of repression” within the Jacobin critique of social forces (131).

Rather than focusing on the ways that sensibility unifies individuals and solidifies their relationships within society while helping the individual to develop subjectivity, the novels of this period aim for the “desocialization of the individual” and show, ironically, how too much pressure can ultimately cause a breach not only in social harmony but also in individual subjectivity and self-understanding (Kelly “Jane” 288). For example, the more Miss Milner feels pressured to act as a non-coquettish fiancée to Lord Elmwood, the more strongly she feels the need to break away from that model and assert her independence of thought. She transgresses the rules while recognizing that such actions may deprive her of the love and acceptance from Elmwood she so desperately desires, which for a time they do. Her home and relationships are disrupted as a result of her resistance to social expectations, and as she suffers the loss of her fiancé, those around her suffer for the disruption of their domestic harmony. As Castle explains it, “Miss Milner disturbs the family microcosm. She embodies literary as well as social discontinuity” (*Masquerade* 301). Worse still, in the struggle to decide whether to be herself or the version of herself she is expected to socially portray, Miss Milner loses the understanding of who she really is.

Inchbald’s novel seems to have been the first novel of the 1790s to show the destructive effects of external social pressure on the private sensibilities and subjectivity of both male and female protagonists. In the third section of this chapter, I argue that Fenwick’s text, published five years after Inchbald’s, elaborates on the representation of misanthropy and tyranny that so unsettles readers, and their understanding of Lord Elmwood, at the beginning of the third volume of *A Simple Story*. For, if Inchbald’s novel details the conditions under which the man of feeling can, by social pressure and

transgression, be caused to turn tyrant while making clear the personal suffering of such a change in subject-position, Fenwick's novel explores the costs of this rejection of society through the lifestyle and habits of the tyrannical Mr. Valmont and his family. Together, these novels expose the dangers of polite society by repeatedly dismantling the precarious subjectivity that comes from experiences of sensibility in the fashionable world where private desires are supposed to be sublimated beneath the weight of public expectations.

Certainly, there are other Jacobin 'desocializing' fictions in the period during which *A Simple Story* and *Secresy* were written which share with these two texts a clear criticism of the oppressiveness of social rules for behaviour and personal expression which all too often leads to individual suffering and, either temporary or permanent, loss of self.⁴ After the publication of these two texts in the first half of the decade, 1796 emerges as a significant year in the publication of novels intended to challenge the oppressive hegemony of social rules governing gendered behaviour and detailing the consequences of denying personal desire. This year saw the publication of Robert Bage's *Hermesprong, or Man as He is Not*, Inchbald's second novel *Nature and Art*, and Mary Hays's novel *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney*.⁵ In particular, Hays's novel, engages with

⁴ One of the most important novels of this period is William Godwin's 1794 novel, *Things as they Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. In her introduction to the Broadview edition of Robert Bage's novel *Hermesprong*, Pamela Perkins refers to *Caleb Williams* as "extravagantly pessimistic" in its detailing of the systemic flaws of law and society in England at the end of the century. *Caleb Williams* traces the title character's attempts to avoid destruction at the hands of his employer, a wealthy squire named Ferdinando Falkland (10). Godwin's novel is substantially different both in tone and content to *A Simple Story* and *Secresy*, is far more explicitly political in its intent and is more concerned with class than either Inchbald's or Fenwick's text, but given its significance I feel that it needs to be mentioned as a text that formed and informed the literary context of Inchbald's and Fenwick's reception and writing.

⁵ Perkins describes the "fairy-tale implausibility of *Hermesprong's* happy ending" in her introduction to the novel (28). *Hermesprong* is different than the other novels published in this year, since it has less of the "gloomily pessimistic visions" common in novels of the 1790s (Perkins 11). Perkins describes Bage's novel as a hybrid of sorts, bringing together "the unconventional comic outlook of such

the “multiple psycho-socio-political debates” of the period in a way that resembles and reflects the writing of Inchbald and Fenwick (Grundy 25).

In the character of Emma Courtney, readers are reminded of the tenacity and spirit of Miss Milner and the intelligence and commitment to principles of Caroline Ashburn, yet they also encounter the stubbornness of the former and the pride of the latter. Like *A Simple Story*, *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* features an engaging but also frustrating and socially transgressive young woman asserting her beliefs, and her passion for a man for whom she should have no such feelings. Emma’s desire for Augustus Harley and his continual rebukes of her conduct replay elements of the Dorriforth/Miss Milner relationship, but Augustus is never willing to capitulate to Emma’s demands, making her assertion of desire even more shocking than the reciprocated emotions of Miss Milner. Like Miss Milner’s fiery spirit and her willingness to toy with the feelings of Dorriforth to please her own sense of self-importance, Emma’s errors are, so Hays tells her readers in the preface, “the offspring of sensibility” and the difficulty of “loving virtue while enslaved by passion” (4).⁶

older contemporaries as Smollett and Sterne [Bage was born in 1728] with the political radicalism of the younger novelists of the 1790s with whom he is more usually grouped” leading her to argue that “he is a figure who slips through the cracks in literary history” (19). Certainly the humour and happiness that is consistently present in Bage’s novel sets it apart from the always serious and often gloomy tone of *A Simple Story*, *Secresy*, *Nature and Art*, and *Emma Courtney*.

⁶ Hays revisits female sensibility and agency in her 1799 novel *The Victim of Prejudice*. Here, her young heroine, Mary Raymond, is raped by her neighbour, Sir Peter Osborne, and is afterward unable to marry her true love, William Pelham, who is married to someone else (though he does offer to let her become his mistress). Mary’s reputation as a ruined woman prevents her from easily obtaining work to allow her to support herself without becoming a prostitute. Mary’s continued victimization and social ostracization after the rape is another way that Hays tries to represent the tyranny of social opinion and the strictures governing female behaviour and sexuality at the end of the century.

Like *A Simple Story*, too, Hays's novel pays attention to education and suggests that individuals are fundamentally the product of their education—a common argument in Jacobin writing: as Emma explains to her “son” Augustus when she begins to recite to him her life story, “[w]e are all the creatures of education” (8). Miss Milner's inappropriate actions and suffering, like Emma's, could have been avoided, according to the conclusion of *A Simple Story*, if her father had only “bestowed upon his daughter A PROPER EDUCATION” (338). The education of Sibella Valmont is also of central importance in *Secresy*, as her uncle and guardian, the tyrannical misanthrope Mr. Valmont, has educated her according to Rousseau's education of Sophie in the final book of his 1762 educational treatise *Émile*. Sibella has been educated in complete social isolation by her uncle who insists to her: “you were not born to think; you were not made to think” and “you shall not reason” (43). For Valmont, as for Rousseau, “nothing is required of [Sibella] but obedience” to her uncle's will and later, ideally, to that of her husband (59).

In each case, education consistently fails to provide the women in these novels with the necessary knowledge to develop a sense of self that would allow them to succeed as subjects in the public world.⁷ In fact, the accepted education of women works against Miss Milner, Sibella Valmont, and Emma Courtney in these novels, as it denies that rational thought and personal agency, along with sensibility, are acceptable qualities for women in society. The pressure to conform forces each of these women to resist their

⁷ Education is one of the Ideological State Apparatuses that Althusser describes as part of the “private institutions” that enforce social ideology (137). In Althusser's model, education is not just an external force, but an institutionalized vehicle for the propagation of social expectation which “ensure[s] subjection to the ruling ideology,” and makes it particularly difficult to resist (128).

own personal feelings and thoughts in order to find an acceptable social subject position. None of these women is ultimately able to successfully deny her private thoughts or feelings to support the public ideology, though, and each suffers and dies as a result.⁸

While it would be melodramatic to seriously argue that social forces were fatal to women, Mary Wollstonecraft certainly makes the argument in her 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that poor education is the key impediment to women gaining equality with men, improving their social and legal standing in public, and forming private partnerships based on rational compatibility and mutual affection: “I have turned over various books written on the subject of education, and patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools; but what has been the result? – a profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore” (75).⁹ Wollstonecraft took particular umbrage to Rousseau’s position of educating women only for the pleasure of men. She writes of Rousseau’s insistence on female ignorance, weakness, dependence, and obedience:

⁸ Like Inchbald, Fenwick, and Hays, Amelia Opie also argues against the restrictive social codes governing female behaviour and its destructive influence on the individual subject to the pressure to conform in her 1805 novel, *Adeline Mowbray*. Adeline goes mad after her lover Frederic Glenmurray dies, though she eventually recovers her senses. In the end, though, like her literary sisters, Adeline dies after suffering social rejection and censure for living out of wedlock with Glenmurray and bearing his illegitimate child. Unlike Sibella or Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood, though, Adeline is able to be reconciled to her family before her death and to commend her daughter, Editha, into her mother’s loving care.

⁹ Wollstonecraft is more explicitly critical of the kind of education women receive in Chapter Two of *Vindication*: “Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness or temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of a man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives” (89).

“What nonsense! when will a great man arise with sufficient strength of mind to puff away the fumes which pride and sensuality have thus spread over the subject!” (97).¹⁰

Caroline Ashburn is the only female character in either *A Simple Story* or *Secresy*, who manages, as Wollstonecraft encourages, to educate herself to be both rational and autonomous without sacrificing her social status and acceptability. Caroline is on the one hand an exemplary character, trying to model her subjectivity for Sibella and trying to guide her friend from her uneducated state into a more ‘enlightened’ position but with disastrous consequences. On the other hand, Caroline has not been read as a particularly amiable or realistic character, as my discussion of her on pages 42-4 explains in greater detail. It seems, then, that the options for resisting the external forces of family, social expectations and even love, in novels of the 1790s are at best limited for women and that the likelihood of transgressing the ideological hegemony in favour of private feeling while retaining a socially acceptable subject position is remarkably slim.

Though I have hitherto focused on the social forces oppressing female characters, which was certainly a dominant theme in novels during this decade, I also want to argue that these socio-ideological forces of family, education, and love are equally hard on the male characters in these novels. As I argue in the next section of this chapter, Mr. Dorriforth/Lord Elmwood suffers as greatly as Miss Milner does under the pressure of the behaviour and emotions he is expected to exhibit. Indeed, if the available subject positions are limited for women in these novels, they are not much better for men. From

¹⁰ In her fiction, Wollstonecraft also addresses the social pressures that restrict female agency and experience. Her final and unfinished novel *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, published in 1798, details the social and legal victimization of Maria by her husband, George Venables and Maria’s attempts to advocate her own right for freedom. Though the novel was not completed when Wollstonecraft died, the possible endings appended to the fragment suggest that she had a less tragic ending in mind for Maria than was the fate of her literary predecessors Miss Milner, Sibella Valmont, and Emma Courtney.

almost the first scene when readers encounter him, Dorriforth must struggle to repress the anxiety he feels about taking responsibility for Miss Milner after the death of her father, must hide his feelings of inadequacy, and must resist showing his approbation of her behaviour in order to fulfil his role as a Catholic priest and guardian. When he is freed from his vow of celibacy and released from the priesthood in order to become Lord Elmwood, he must again conceal, and struggle against, his feelings. He is expected to make a wise decision about the choice of a spouse in order to do justice to his family's noble heritage and his inheritance, and he chooses to marry his social equal, the virtuous but vapid Miss Fenton. Indeed, much of the tension and conflict that arises in the second volume of the novel involves Lord Elmwood encountering a disjunction between his private feelings and passions and the conduct that his social status and subject position compel him to perform. This tension between his private and public selves combined with a similar tension within Miss Milner creates a highly combustible situation where sacrifice and loss are inevitably required of both characters if they are ever to have a chance at a happy romantic relationship.

In the third and fourth volumes of the novel, when Elmwood-the-lover becomes Elmwood-the-tyrant, this is a direct result of his decision to completely suppress his private feelings in favour of his public position and patriarchal right as lord of his family manor. This decision is the result of first choosing to give privilege to his private desires and subsequently having those exploited and betrayed by his unfaithful wife. Unwilling to be made the object of public ridicule and private suffering again, Elmwood denies any internal sensibility and reverts to the safety of being a stereotypically cold, rational,

aristocrat. Using public respectability and social status as a defence mechanism is a strategy also employed by Augustus Harley in *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney*.

After many failed attempts to get him to declare his affection for her, Emma writes to Augustus and says “*My friend—I would give myself to you—the gift is not worthless*” (124). Harley is slow to respond and when he does his reply is perfunctory and cold. She calls him a “*Barbarous, unfeeling, unpitying, man!*” and though he promises to write to her again, it is two chapters later when she explains that “weeks elapsed ere the promised letter arrived—a letter still colder, and more severe, than the former” (126,134). Like Elmwood, Harley chooses not to express the emotional entanglements and pressures he feels when thinking about Emma. He does finally explain his conduct to her, but only on his deathbed:

I have sufficiently fulfilled the dictates of a rigid honour!—in these last moments—when every earthly tie is dissolving—when human institutions fade before my sight—I may, without a crime, tell you—*that I loved you.*—Your tenderness early penetrated my heart—aware of its weakness—I sought to shun you—I imposed on myself those severe laws of which you have causelessly complained.—Had my conduct been less rigid, I had been lost (178).

In order to protect himself emotionally, and in order not to commit adultery, Harley has had to pretend to be and act like someone he was not. This cost him and Emma suffering and confusion, but, as with Lord Elmwood in volumes three and four of *A Simple Story*, it was safer for Harley to suppress his private desires in favour of his public reputation in a way that Emma, and Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood, was never able to do.

In considering these examples of the literary trends in the last decade of the eighteenth century it seems clear to me that the social and educational forces that insist that women be emotional, irrational, and dependent against which the female characters struggle in these novels oppress the male characters with similarly unrealistic expectations of stoicism, rationality, and independence. That both the male and female characters suffer, lose a sense of themselves, and are forced to decide between public respectability and private happiness suggests to me that the social forces impinging on the literary subject in Jacobin novels of the 1790s are personally destructive for both male and female characters, and that “breaking the tie that binds” is an almost inevitable consequence of restricting private sensibility for the sake of public sentiment.¹¹

Destroyed By Too Much Feeling: Socialization and Sensibility in *A Simple Story*

Elizabeth Inchbald’s first novel, *A Simple Story*, published in 1791, has enjoyed considerable interest among scholars over the last thirty years. Much of the interest has focused on Miss Milner, the coquettish heroine of the first two volumes, and her struggle for self-assertion and power in a patriarchal world. While many have argued that this novel should be studied because Miss Milner is Inchbald’s quasi-autobiographical vision for a “form of female rebellion”, this reading fails to offer an analysis of the novel *in toto*, and more problematically, it marginalizes the novel’s other main character, Dorriforth—who becomes Lord Elwood (Tompkins xii). One of the greatest omissions in modern studies of *A Simple Story* is that until relatively recently Lord Elmwood has been treated

¹¹ This is the title of Charlene Bunnell’s argument on family relationships in the Romantic novel.

as an almost one-dimensional “patriarchal tyrant” character whose presence in the novel is primarily to oppress the female heroines.¹² I argue that Lord Elmwood is not just the “the fulcrum upon which female sensibility precariously balances” but that his emotions and sense of self balance just as unsteadily upon those women in return (Ward 13). Affording Elmwood a more prominent, and less stereotypically destructive, role in the novel allows readers to follow not only the social pressures exerted on Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood, but also the heavy pressures exerted on Dorriforth/Lord Elmwood and the challenges to self-identity and social harmony that both suffer in response.

Earlier critics are justified in presenting Inchbald’s novel as a remarkable engagement with gender and sensibility in the late eighteenth century, but they mis-attribute her greatest accomplishment: the novel is remarkable because *both* male and female characters suffer from the social pressures exerted on them by roles that deny the expression of mind and body through sensibility, and because the sensibility that both feel makes their suffering more similar and tragic than oppositional. In a time when her fellow Jacobins were striving for greater equality between the sexes, Inchbald—in an irony that is testament to her skill—managed to achieve parity between her male and female characters by making both so vulnerable to each other and the society that informs their sense of self and right behaviour that they are mutually undone. My analysis emphasizes the interdependence of the relationships between the male and female characters in the novel, though I foreground Lord Elmwood in my discussion to some

¹² Caroline Breashears and Shawn Lisa Maurer have done exceptional work re-thinking the significance of Inchbald’s male characters, with Breashears offering one of the few published analyses of *A Simple Story* that foregrounds Elmwood’s narrative significance. Candace Ward also re-thinks Elmwood’s role in the novel and takes tentative steps toward challenging traditional interpretations of the novel, but eventually capitulates to the standard Elmwood-as-antagonist position.

extent because he has been so neglected in studies of this novel. Primarily, though, I foreground him because his life, experiences, and changing sense of self provide a constant narrative thread unifying the four volumes of the novel.¹³

The novel opens with a description of Dorriforth's education and personality, and Inchbald sets him up as a quintessential public man of reason: "He refused to shelter himself from the temptations of a cloister, but sought for, and found that shelter in the centre of London, where he dwelt, in his own prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance" (3). Not only is he a well-educated and prudent man of society, he possesses the qualities "not unworthy the first professors of Christianity" making him a seemingly perfect man of feeling in the Shaftesburian model of earlier in the century: he thinks rationally, acts well, has a good moral sense (*sensus communis*), and is dedicated to his friends (3). But Dorriforth's character soon begins to show signs that he may not be *just* the archetypal man he appears to be on the first page of the novel.

When his friend, Mr. Milner, is on his deathbed, he explains that he has chosen Dorriforth to be his daughter's guardian because Dorriforth is the only man "uniting every moral virtue to those of religion, and native honour to pious faith; [who] will protect without controlling, instruct without tyrannizing, comfort without flattering, and perhaps in time make good by choice rather than by constraint, the dear object of his dying friend's sole care" (5). Such a man seems too good to be true, and too good to be a real man. Mr. Milner has tremendous faith in his friend's self-control and rationality, which he no doubt exhibits in his public life, but this construction of idealized

¹³ Others have noted that Dorriforth may be the primary link between Part One (vol 1&2) and Part Two (vol 3&4) of the novel, though not necessarily for the reasons I suggest in this discussion. See Kelly (*English*), Spencer ("Introduction"), Breashears, Ward.

masculinity does not take into account Dorriforth's personal feelings, experiences, and passions. For while Mr. Milner has no doubt about his friend's moral fortitude, Dorriforth himself "feared he had undertaken a task he was too weak to execute—the protection of a young woman of fashion" (6). This weakness reveals a remarkable clarity for Dorriforth, that his public persona may not be strongly enough constructed to carry out his friend's wishes in private. When the public priest takes his moral theories and rational philosophy home with him, his private desire to be admired is put in peril: "he dreaded the repulses his admonitions might possibly meet from her" (6).

What Dorriforth's fears reveal in this scene is that he is privately a man of feeling and sensibility. When he is concerned about Miss Milner's arrival and her future being in his hands, these cares are visible because he possesses "such a gleam of sensibility" that "on his countenance you beheld the feelings of his heart—saw all its inmost workings—the quick pulses that beat with hope and fear, or the placid ones that were stationary with patient resignation" (8). When Dorriforth finally goes to pick up Miss Milner, his response to hearing her name is that "he turned pale—something like a foreboding of disaster trembled at his heart, and consequently darted all over his face" (13). Dorriforth-the-priest is also Dorriforth-the-vulnerable-man of sensibility, who is terrified of, and by, his necessary interaction with a young woman. These two aspects of Dorriforth's personality are in tension throughout the novel, which leads Caroline Breashears to suggest quite rightly that the "difficulty of reconciling these models [of masculinity] . . . becomes the structuring principle in this novel" (453).

From their first meeting, when Miss Milner is brought to tears and he must hide his face in his handkerchief to keep from revealing similar feelings, the tension between

Dorriforth's available models of masculinity define his character in the novel at the same time that they deny him a stable sense of himself as a man and social subject (13). This scene also serves to establish the interdependence of the two characters, and this too functions as a tool of identity-making and un-making. Dorriforth and Miss Milner have a more explicit discussion on the degree to which they are dependent upon each other for the understanding of their virtues a short while later. Neither is what the other expected him or her to be, which they confess in a scene that is both comic and instructive. Dorriforth expected Miss Milner to be the stereotypical coquette as he heard her described before their first meeting, and she expected him to be a stereotypical priest, old and ugly, so both were basing their initial judgments on socialized preconceptions.

Since Inchbald's novel probes psychological experiences of realistic individuals, these stereotypes are quickly challenged; Miss Milner has more of her father's generosity, kindness, and virtue than Dorriforth imagined, while he is more attractive and engaging than she guessed he would be.¹⁴ Dorriforth is more embarrassed by Miss Milner's different opinion of him than she is of his: "this was spoken in an artless manner, but in a tone which obviously declared she thought her guardian both young and handsome.—He replied, but not without some little embarrassment" (16). When he returns the compliment and asks if she does not realize that she is beautiful, she tellingly replies: "I should from my own opinion believe so, but in some respects I am like you Roman Catholics; I don't believe from my own understanding, but from what other people tell me" (16). Socialized preconceptions of character abound in this relatively

¹⁴ In his highly influential study of the novel, Gary Kelly writes that "the strength of *A Simple Story* is in the simple accuracy of its psychological observations, an accuracy derived both from experience and study" (*English* 80).

short scene, among them the insult that Miss Milner offers to the “unthinking” Roman Catholics who blindly follow the dictates of another’s (papal) authority, and this exposes the way that both the male and female characters in the novel are directed and restricted by their society.

Miss Milner and Dorriforth continue to test each other’s personalities, looking for inconsistencies between the public persona and private feelings of the other and trying to decide whether their mistaken first impressions were really wrong. While Dorriforth (for the time being) maintains his status as a man of feeling who could “never disguise his uneasiness” and trembles whenever he thinks of Miss Milner’s precarious social situation, she quickly shows signs that her public social role may be more important than any concern for propriety or the thoughts of others (19).¹⁵ The predominant passion of Miss Milner, which supports her social status as a coquette, is her vanity: “vanity defined into all the species of pride, vain-glory, self-approbation—an inordinate desire of admiration, and an immoderate enjoyment of the art of pleasing, for her own individual happiness, and not for the happiness of others” (19). The irony of this situation is that the more Miss Milner foregrounds her socially-constructed coquette position, the further she alienates herself from Dorriforth: the only character she truly cares for, the only man she has any interest in appealing to, and the one who wants to respect her for her private feelings and not her public behaviour.

¹⁵ For a description of the difference between the “public” and “private” Miss Milners see Inchbald, 50.

Dorriforth takes great steps to rectify what he perceives as flaws in Miss Milner's behaviour and personality, and tries to socialize her sensibility through the careful display of his emotions. If some critics have seen Dorriforth's reserve as a sign of his uncaring and patriarchal right of authority they do so by ignoring the many signs that Dorriforth's actions spring from his care for his ward.¹⁶ By restricting his own expression of that "gleam of sensibility" discussed earlier, Dorriforth means to offer Miss Milner a proper model of socialized feeling, tempered by rationality: he is offering her an education in subjectivity that she never received as a child. Importantly, Dorriforth is not imposing stricter rules on Miss Milner than he keeps himself, though the differences between their usual behaviour makes this seem harsher than it is:

Notwithstanding that dissimilarity of opinion, which in almost every respect, subsisted between Miss Milner and her guardian, there was generally the most punctilious observance of good manners from each towards the other—on the part of Dorriforth more especially; for his politeness would sometimes appear even like the result of a system he had marked out for himself, as the only means to keep his ward restrained within the same limitations (23).

It is also worth noting that Inchbald describes Dorriforth instructing Miss Milner with "more than usual gentleness in his tone of voice" (23). This phrase suggests that Dorriforth's actions are a result of his feeling, not his social status or gender so that even when he is offering the criticism and instruction that forms part of his public role as her

¹⁶ Todd refers to the novel as "a biting attack on authoritarian patriarchy" (*Sign* 228); Katharine M. Rogers describes Dorriforth as "frighteningly inflexible" and, once he becomes Lord Elmwood, as possessing an "arrogant vindictiveness" ("Inhibitions" 70, 71).

guardian, he is doing so with a gentleness that reflects his private sentiments as well; eventually, though, it will become harder for him to balance these two aspects of himself.

But Miss Milner is not the only one to be educated in the first part of the novel: though Dorriforth teaches Miss Milner to lay aside her coquette persona by telling her to “exert your reason” instead of only feeling, she teaches him to give more credence to his personal (some might say selfish) feelings and to be less reluctant about showing his passions and emotions (25). His response to her “lessons” is generally confusion or misunderstanding (32, 43, 59, 63). It is difficult for Dorriforth to maintain his socially-prescribed masculinity while fully expressing his emotions.¹⁷ Miss Milner’s ‘education’ of Dorriforth has sometimes been referred to as a “conversion” narrative or as a “metamorphosis”, but I do not believe that is what is happening here.¹⁸ It is a shifting of values that stays in flux throughout Dorriforth/Elmwood’s life. He is no more “converted” to a man of selfish sensibility than Miss Milner is converted to be a figure of publicly restrained sensibility. The point is that these positions are in tension^s, and must co-exist in order for the individual to see him or herself as both a private subject and part of a social community; it is not about choosing one or the other, but finding a balance between them that works for each person.

¹⁷ My usage of the term socially-sanctioned masculinity is inspired by Elaine McGirr’s study of character-types in the eighteenth century novel and her assertion that the key elements of masculinity in the period centre on the “naturalizing of masculine roughness,” both physically and emotionally; in her paradigm, “real men” in eighteenth-century fiction were defined by “action, articulation, and hardness” (15). Making a similar argument, Eleanor Wikborg explains that “Inchbald shows how the pronouncedly masculine type of man...has been socialized to fear and suppress his capacity for tenderness as a sign of weakness” (49). Part of what I am attempting to do throughout this project is to challenge the rigidity of these artificial social constructions which, despite their artificiality, served as prevalent ideals that could and did have devastating effects on individuals who did not fall neatly into these stereotypical pigeon-holes.

¹⁸ See Barker-Benfield (255-6), Castle (*Masquerade*, 305).

Dorriforth initially manages this balance between reason and feeling: he never acts out petulantly or merely for his own benefit and his acts of sensibility stem from a moral sense of propriety and a responsibility to help others. Indeed, as Barker-Benfield points out, Dorriforth manages to act as a man of feeling and reason for quite some time and for much of the first two volumes the kindness in the guardian/ward relationship comes from him (255-6). Miss Milner encourages Dorriforth to upset this balance by learning to put his own feelings and passions before those dictated to him by reason or public sentiment. This privileging of the personal over the public is one of the major critiques levelled against sensibility in the later eighteenth century, which Fenwick's novel explores in some depth.¹⁹ Dorriforth's "education" is so significant because it details a shift in one man's understanding of sensibility from altruistic to narcissistic, the endpoints of the sensibility continuum: he moves from the utopic Shaftesburian model of sensibility to a dystopic self-obsessed model common in Gothic novels. Dorriforth's transition is extreme: most literary subjects experience sensibility somewhere in between these archetypes. The extremity of this shift in experiential prerogative, putting the private before the public, challenges Dorriforth's understanding of his defined social persona and calls his subjectivity into question.

The first tangible sign that Miss Milner is turning the tables on her would-be teacher of social sensibility and rationality occurs when she presents Harry Rushbrook to her guardian. But before I discuss this scene in detail, I want to explore and unpack

¹⁹ The concern with the emotional "navel-gazing" that Spacks and Jones see sensibility representing in the later eighteenth century is dangerous not only because it diverts attention from social responsibilities and can result in a breakdown of social cohesion but also because indulging in private feeling serves no moral purpose and can be exploited for immoral purposes ("Ambiguous" 152 and *Radical* 6). The latter form of exploitation, combined with a selfishness of feeling that was modelled for her by Valmont and which is exacerbated by her social isolation, is what happens to Sibella in *Secresy*.

Inchbald's set-up of this scene through her description of Dorriforth's flaws. The narrator describes Dorriforth as possessing "shades of evil" in his character: "an obstinacy; such as he himself and his friends termed firmness of mind; but had not religion and some opposite virtues weighed heavily in the balance, it would frequently have degenerated into implacable stubbornness" (33-4). Dorriforth sees his behaviour as a firmness of mind that is testament to his masculinity, as do his friends. But the narrator also says that religion and "opposite virtues" provide a balance for Dorriforth's harshness. Dorriforth's stubbornness, stemming from his feelings of self-importance, propriety, male rights, and selfishness is supported by his friends and the socialization of public men but is also kept in check by his faith, his profession, and the many good qualities—sensibility among them—that he also possesses and that form another part of his social persona. Instead of seeing him as a one-dimensional representation of "ahistorical patriarchy" as many have done, Inchbald is offering a much more realistic character, full of tension, contradiction, and both good and bad qualities: Dorriforth is shown as a realistic man in a way that few characters in late eighteenth-century novels are (Maurer *Proposing* 1).²⁰

When Dorriforth's "once beloved" sister marries against his wishes, she destabilizes his authority in the family and he responds by banishing her. This process of distancing the object of hurt and rebellion symbolizes how difficult it is for Dorriforth to deal with the private emotions of love, disappointment, anger, and betrayal that undermine his understanding of his social standing and his rights as the patriarch of the family. It is so difficult that Dorriforth not only banishes his sister, but also her offspring

²⁰ Though she considers Dorriforth/Elmwood primarily as a tyrant, Jane Spenser's comments in the introduction to the Oxford edition of the text provide an important explanation of the narrative focus: "it is male behaviour, not female, which appears fascinating, wayward, and contradictory in this novel" (xix).

as well, though tellingly, he keeps the responsibility of providing for his nephew after his sister's death. He is willing to perform his duties, but *will* not or *cannot* feel the effect of them: this choice depends on whether one wants to see Dorriforth as a tyrant who consciously avoids feeling the effects of his actions, or as someone who is in constant conflict between duty and feeling and really cannot recognize or internalize his feelings. I think the latter is a more interesting possibility.

Miss Milner, however, has no problem feeling sympathy for the condition of young Harry Rushbrook—likely because she was not the one who commanded his exile—and goes to visit him. She then decides to bring Harry home with her to meet his uncle because she feels that “it is proper, affection, should have some share in [Dorriforth's] benevolence” (35). Dorriforth likes the child, and treats him with great affection until he finds out that he has been tricked by Miss Milner, and that the young boy is not the son of a frequent visitor but is really his nephew. Dorriforth quickly puts the child down and leaves the house. Miss Milner returns Harry to his home in the country and apologizes to Dorriforth who then returns home. Miss Milner has not succeeded in reconciling uncle and nephew, but she has taken her first step in forcing him to feel as she thinks he should.

The problem is not that Dorriforth does not feel, as I have suggested before, but that his feelings are difficult to reconcile with his role as a man of rationality and socialized masculinity. Terry Castle suggests that Dorriforth's personality and public/private conflict represents the central satire of Inchbald's novel, because his “self-restriction, physical and psychic inhibition” represents “the morbid state, in Freudian terms, of civilization itself” (292). Castle's position is that Dorriforth's conflict between

rationalized self-restriction, emotional turmoil, and the uneasy fit between personal expression and patriarchal power is less about the man, than the society that shaped his sense of identity.²¹ Further to this argument, in her insightful reading of the novel, Eleanor Wikborg suggests that Dorriforth is a “psychological prisoner of his society’s ideal of masculinity” that is made more difficult by his affection, at first as a guardian and then as a lover, for the rebellious Miss Milner and her constant challenges to his persona of authority and rationality (95).

The society in which Dorriforth was educated, and which shaped his experiential interpretation of himself as an embodied male subject, is equally responsible for the impending collapse of his sense of self when he is no longer able to maintain the careful control over his personal passion and emotions that social sensibility requires of men.²² Inchbald’s novel interrogates the “conventional world” of socialized gender and the power struggle between public and private inherent in it; the result is an assertion, as Castle has phrased it, that “freedom in one realm entails loss in another” (314). For Dorriforth to have his personal feelings he senses that he must relinquish his role as a reserved man of rational and active social sensibility, and for Miss Milner to fully express her personal feelings she eventually chooses to relinquish her public morality.

The difficulty of negotiating the “continual and continuing series of overlapping subject-positions” which Paul Smith presents in *Discerning the Subject*, and which I

²¹ See also Maurer’s argument that “the need to reconfigure masculine gender identity along with the new forms of patriarchy is what drove much of the discourse about women” in the late eighteenth century (*Proposing* 2).

²² McGirr suggests that “male characters (and real men)... who adopted ‘feminine’ pursuits” and who resisted the emotional roughness to which I earlier referred “were subjected to increasingly violent satiric correction over the century” (13).

discussed in the introduction to this project, affects Miss Milner herself, but is ironically also the approach she uses to effect the change in Dorriforth's personality that she wishes to see. After Miss Milner fails to reunite Dorriforth and Rushbrook as she had hoped, it is not surprising that she turns to other forms of unsettling Dorriforth's understanding of himself through the tension between his private emotions and the public forces dictating his acceptable behaviour.

Miss Milner's next approach is to cultivate Dorriforth's jealousy and pride, two of the emotions that most strongly affect her own expression of passion, to teach him to be passionate as well. In doing so she foreshadows his cuckolding at the beginning of the third volume and makes him realize that he can adopt a position of violent masculine power which troubles him tremendously. Sir Frederick Lawnly serves little other function in the novel than as a pawn in the power struggle and subsequent relationship between Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood and Dorriforth/Lord Elmwood.

Dorriforth seems unsure what to make of Lawnly initially. While he wants his ward to be married and no longer his responsibility, he is unconvinced that Lawnly is the right kind of man to support her privately or socially. He observes their relationship with "alternate pain and pleasure" and "under such care he trembled for her happiness—yet trembled more lest her heart should be purloined, without even the authority of matrimonial views." (19) Dorriforth fears for his ward when she is around Lawnly, and despite the obvious foreshadowing, Inchbald is also showing Dorriforth's discernment of another male subject-position that he rejects: the rake/libertine. As the novel progresses, Dorriforth/Elmwood defines himself as not-Lawnly even when he is unable to articulate more about his own subjectivity.

Miss Milner manipulates Dorriforth's feelings by falsifying her passion for Lawnly. Part of her reason for deferring to Lawnly is to deny her growing love for her guardian, a taboo that is compounded by his subject-position as a Roman Catholic priest.²³ Dorriforth confesses to being terribly confused by Miss Milner's vacillations regarding Lawnly: "Your words tell me one thing...while your looks declare another—which am I to trust?" "Which you please," she returned with an insulted dignity that astonished, awed, yet did not convince him" (51). Dorriforth is unable to rationalize Miss Milner's behaviour, and in desperation he calls in his ever-perceptive friend and teacher, Mr. Sandford to help alleviate his confusion: "I brought him hither...merely that he might be present on this occasion, and with his discernment relieve me from a suspicion that my own judgment can neither suppress or confirm" (56). Miss Milner, unwilling to confess her love and suffering from a passion she does not know how to control is essentially silenced; her evasive behaviour makes her seem more the coquette than she really is, because she cannot defend herself against the charge. Both are stuck in liminal positions: only once he is enlightened about her love for him is Dorriforth able to understand that rationality will not serve him as well as passion in understanding Miss Milner, and only then can she bring her public and private passion into unison.

The acknowledgement of Miss Milner's love and Dorriforth's major identity shift from priest to peer happen virtually concurrently, causing even more confusion and destabilization of identity for both characters. As soon as Miss Woodley learns of Miss Milner's love for Dorriforth, she immediately makes plans to separate them (88). At the

²³ See Wikborg and McCrea who both argue that the taboo is uncomfortably close to incest; both mother and daughter confront this taboo in the text.

same time, the current Lord Elmwood, Dorriforth's cousin, has become dangerously ill (91). Miss Milner, herself unwell—no doubt from the concealment of her true passion—arrives at Bath and very soon after gets a visit from Dorriforth, now Lord Elmwood, in which his expression of care for her well-being is perhaps his most affecting expression to date (98).

After Elmwood is divested of his priestly vows, he is free to become a lover/suitor but he is not yet prepared to make the personal shift that his public status-change has made possible; he is unsure that his “weak senses” can deal with the “ravishing pleasures” now available to him (107). Elmwood is supposed to marry Miss Fenton, the epitome of polite femininity, who feels nothing excessive and is always calm and passive, but he is still drawn to the coquettish Miss Milner and offers to do anything to make her happy (112). The floodgates of Elmwood's long restricted emotions and senses open when Miss Woodley finally tells Elmwood about Miss Milner's love (128-31). Elmwood reveals that his passions are once again “confused” by Miss Milner, though they are now also “triumphant” (131). But he clearly perceives the danger of losing control of his emotions and his sense of self: “my reason shall combat to the last” against excessive passion because “I am transported at the tiding you have revealed, and yet, perhaps, I had better never have heard them” (131). After becoming Miss Milner's “profest [sic] lover” Elmwood's experiences of the world and the people around him change completely (136).

The rest of the second volume focuses on the exceptionally tempestuous relationship and power struggle between Elmwood and Miss Milner, as both strive to maintain their identity and their influence over one another. Elmwood tries to combat his

excessive passion by instituting harsh rules in an attempt to physically establish control where he has emotionally lost it. Miss Milner rejects the physical control by continually forcing Elmwood to acknowledge the degree of his love for her. This struggle has traditionally been read as a sign of Elmwood recognizing his “patriarchal right to rule [Miss Milner]” while she “constantly overturns and disturbs conventions and expectations” in a straight-up male (patriarchy, rationality, power, aggression) versus female (subversive, emotional, manipulative, rebellious) feminist conflict (Bannet 80, Ty *Unsex'd* 88-9). But as I have shown in the preceding argument, the characters are struggling more with their own identity conflicts and internalized experiences than they are trying to overthrow either the male or female symbolic order. Castle and Wikborg are right that narcissism and self-interest are significant components of the second volume (307, 96). The preoccupation with personal feelings and passions has caused both characters to lose their grip on who they are as private and public subjects, and the aggression and confusion they express is as much a result of disorientation as gender politics. Breashears suggests that Elmwood’s actions are “less sinister than many readers have assumed” because he acts out of fear of becoming the “effeminate slave of his fiancée” (457-8). On the one hand this is a decidedly political concern for the rights of patriarchy but on the other it reflects the anxiety that this specific man has of losing his ability to think and act for himself, forcing on him interdependence he does not know how to accept (457-8).

Sensibility in conflict with public expectations of behaviour and power is responsible for the continual destabilizing of identity that Elmwood experiences. Jealousy and pride, which Miss Milner first taught Dorriforth to feel, become key emotions that

she uses to give herself the power of an active subject in a society designed to restrict her. She uses Lawnly to undermine Elmwood's role as her lover; and her willingness to profess love to Elmwood while still encouraging the flirtation of Lawnly forces him to recognize his potential cuckold status, which was hinted at when (as Dorriforth) he first duelled with Lawnly (62).²⁴ When he again perceives Lawnly as a threat to his newly-acquired subject-position, he is "hurt beyond measure" and is overcome and finally undone as a stereotypically emotionally-strong public man: "he had not the power to conceal how much he was affected. He trembled—when he attempted to speak, he stammered—he perceived his face burning with the blood that had flushed to it from confusion, and thus one confusion gave birth to another till his state was pitiable" (171).

Elmwood has now lost his public persona as a rational and self-controlled man of fellow-feeling, he has lost his own sense of masculinity, he is overcome by his own passions and emotions, his pride has suffered, and everything he fought with himself to prevent has now happened: Elmwood has descended into identity-chaos. As Dorriforth and Elmwood, the priest, guardian, friend, lover, cuckold, dueller, student, and fiancé, subject-positions have overwhelmed his ability to process who he is. After this pitiable scene, Elmwood breaks off the engagement and promises to leave for Italy in one week, where he will stay until he can rid himself of his love for Miss Milner and the confusion it has caused in him. Though she is devastated by the news, Miss Woodley tells her that she must look as she wants to feel, in order to change her mood: she must internalize an

²⁴ When Lawnly began to bathe Miss Milner's hand in kisses without her permission, Dorriforth struck him. The result was a duel between the two. Dorriforth's reaction to his first attack on Lawnly suggests that he does not consider himself an aggressive male, a type he identifies as uncivilized, but his actions again caused him to question his identity and these feelings of confusion return when he sees Lawnly talking to his fiancée in his own home (62, 171).

external projection and thus superficially rectify the pain she feels. But instead of choosing to display love for Elmwood, she opts for scorn, and “so desirous was she to attain the appearance of these sentiments, she made the strongest efforts to calm her thoughts, in order to acquire it.” (176) There is no reason to suspect that Miss Milner alone possessed the ability to put on a false emotion as a way of talking herself into a change in her internal sentiments.

Elmwood’s letter to Miss Milner is also a way to talk himself into a change of his feelings for her, but his situation is more critical because he has lost himself and must struggle to re-establish his identity if he is to have any public or private future; he must re-learn how to balance mind and body, sentiment and passion, public and private. Ideally, he would integrate his many subject-positions, and find a way to make his public persona from early in the first volume support his private emotional connection with Miss Milner. But he chooses to adopt a façade instead, suggesting that perhaps he did learn from his ward/fiancée after all. Ironically, both are driven to hide their emotions at the very moment when their expression could be of most use to them as individuals and as a couple.

In a scene that denies both characters agency and thus causes readers to question Elmwood’s and Miss Milner’s subjectivity, Sandford finally recognizes that the two really do love each other, and should be united in marriage. Both are stunned by Sandford’s threat that they should separate forever or immediately agree to marry, and neither can do anything but passively follow his directions to the altar. Far from the celebratory climax of the novel, both appear disembodied at the ceremony: Miss Milner is “covered with shame, sunk on the bosom of Miss Woodley” and Elmwood is “lost in

zealous devotion to heaven.” (192) As spouses, both have now adopted one more subject-position that brings with it a new series of social and personal responsibilities and effectively nullifies many that have come before it.

With fewer roles to embody, Lord and Lady Elmwood live in harmony and balance, creating an interrelation between husband and wife that sustains their private and public roles. Inchbald breezes past this time of stasis, choosing instead to push the narrative on to another time of disassociation.²⁵ When volume three begins, Lady Elmwood is dying in exile, having traded in her role of wife for that of adulteress, and Lord Elmwood has become an “example of implacable rigour and injustice” (195). The foreshadowed cuckolding of Elmwood has happened through Lady’s Elmwood’s affair with Lawnly, now the Duke of Avon, the same man who earlier threatened Elmwood’s happiness.

But Elmwood, who has once more lost the balance between his public and private affections and has once more been forced to give up a subject-position that was meaningful to him, that of a happy husband, wastes no time reacting. He represses his devastation and reverts to a masculine model of righting a wrong through the exertion of male authority: he challenges the Duke to a duel, and rather than simply wounding him, he exacts terrible vengeance: the Duke was “so maimed, and defaced with scars, as never

²⁵ There has been great debate about the 17 year span of time that is covered in two or three pages at the beginning of volume three. See Spenser, Barker-Benfield, Ty, Castle, Breashears, Ward, and Rogers for varying explanations to this gap ranging from textual anomaly, a splicing together of two separate texts, evidence of an unskilled writer, bending to social pressures, and the inability to represent the pain of adultery. I read this substantial temporal omission in the narrative as an example of the radicalism of Inchbald’s novel; in skipping over the marriage of Lord and Lady Elmwood, Inchbald is reinforcing that happiness and social stability are not what interest her in this novel, but that her goal is to examine what happens when tension and conflict interrupt the public and private status quo.

again to endanger the honour of a husband” (198).²⁶ Katharine M. Rogers vilifies Elmwood for his behaviour: “he is scarcely criticized for reacting with an arrogant vindictiveness which seems much worse than the adultery which provoked it” (“Inhibitions” 71). In her desire to praise Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood as a woman of revolutionary feminist spirit, Rogers is unwilling to see that Elmwood’s actions in this scene proceed from anything other than cruelty and ignorant male behaviour, but his motivations are far more complicated than this and they stem more from loss than choice.

Given the conventions of the novel at the time, there seem to have been few options beyond a duel that would have allowed Elmwood to avenge his wife’s adultery while re-asserting the masculinity lost when his wife cheated on him. I want to return to Wikborg’s idea that Dorriforth/Elmwood was a “psychological prisoner” to socialized masculinity and add to it Kelly’s idea that Dorriforth/Elmwood is “locked in a moral and psychological bastille built by reason and pride” (86). Having experienced a variety of painful male subject-positions, Elmwood found as a husband a space he could and did embody happily. When caused to lose such a highly valued subject-position of modern masculinity, he has to choose between becoming a tyrant or giving up his public respectability (he could become like Fenwick’s Valmont or go mad like Opie’s Mr. Fitzhenry in *The Father and Daughter*). The lack of options for Elmwood’s reaction to his situation is not meant to mitigate his cruelty to the Duke, but to suggest that Elmwood is looking for a new way to express his subjectivity without Miss Milner/Elmwood.

²⁶ Barker-Benfield explains that duelling was considered a cruel and uncivilized way of resolving conflicts between men by the mid-eighteenth century (70-82).

Breashears cleverly argues that “it is as though the general rule of patriarchy, by which women are defined in terms of their relation to the father and husband, at this particular moment takes on a certain gender reciprocity” (469). Elmwood is lost without his wife, and the only accepted model of masculine behaviour that will allow him to articulate a sense of self without her, or her memory, is that of the tyrant; but in accepting this role he must sacrifice the humanity and kindness that he previously associated with his love for Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood.²⁷ This “choice” is reminiscent of Maurer’s description of “the victimization done to men by their own increasingly oppressive gender roles” (“Masculinity” 156).

The strictness of Elmwood’s prohibition of mentioning Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood or their child is a desperate attempt to keep the tyrant social role in place because he could not maintain the façade if he were forced to remember his love and kindness. In choosing to protect his emotions and to avoid the continually painful re-experiencing of his wife’s adultery and his loss of face, Elmwood rejects his social responsibilities as a land-lord, father, and friend and thus again privileges the private over the public. My reading of Elmwood’s character leads me to argue that this oppressive role is not a sincere conversion of him to a misanthropic tyrant but is instead a coping mechanism: his fragile sense of himself and his role in his family and his society is dependent upon maintaining the façade of tyranny. Only when his daughter is in serious jeopardy does he allow his long-repressed role of father to surface; in picking up the sword again, this time as a saviour instead of an avenger, he is finally able to re-assert his masculinity and his caring simultaneously.

²⁷ cf. Osland (95).

I have chosen to focus on the first two volumes of *A Simple Story*, not because I see it as more satisfactory than the second half, and not because I see them as separate entities. If anything, I am trying to employ the same strategy as Inchbald: I am focusing on the narrative of disruption, not periods of stasis. Rather than tracing all the parallels and reversions of the novel, which have been studied by many capable scholars, in the context of my current discussion I am interested primarily in how the negative effects of sensibility and socialization are manifested in the novel at the end of the century.

These negative effects are well-entrenched by the early pages of the third volume and do not change until the end of the fourth. Elmwood's relationship with his daughter is less affecting to his sense of self than that with his wife, primarily because their interaction is so limited until the final pages of the novel. While he acts the tyrant, Matilda cannot be formative to his understanding of himself, but once he casts off that mask, his ability to love and care for the spitting image of "Miss Milner—dear Miss Milner" is as strong as his love for the original (274). The novel is about the conflict, confusion and loss that occur with the disconnection between several significant dialectical forces that shape socialization: reason and passion, masculine and feminine, power and submission, public and private, sensibility and sentiment, self and other. Once initiated in the ways of selfish, narcissistic sensibility Dorriforth/Elmwood is unable to maintain a balance between these many forces, and suffers a complete breakdown in his sense of self, that leads to the adoption of a misanthropic subject-position as the only way to manage his repeatedly painful social experiences. After seeing how socialization creates a tyrant I now want to investigate the familial effects of such tyranny. To do this, I will now turn to Eliza Fenwick's enigmatic novel, *Secresy, or The Ruin on the Rock*.

A Dangerous Family Legacy: Learning Misanthropy and Excess in Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy*

In the height of the period when the rights of the individual over those of the society were being discussed within the context of the revolutionary events in France, Eliza Fenwick published a novel that, even more than Inchbald's impressive text, epitomizes the confusion and conflict about socialization and sensibility at the end of the century. Both Inchbald and Fenwick present images of misanthropy and self-disconnection through one man and his family, but while Inchbald examines the experiences that cause Lord Elmwood and his family to reject society, Fenwick interrogates the effects of such a rejection, and looks beyond the Valmonts to see the family's struggles within the world their patriarch has rejected. Compared to Inchbald there has been comparatively little written about Fenwick's novel, though it has been available in a modern edition since 1974.²⁸ Those critics who have discussed the novel have often offered a feminist reading of Sibella Valmont's sexual agency and her un-socialized yet moral and rational articulation of subjectivity.²⁹ While these are valuable arguments, they are, in my reading of the novel, too narrowly focused. Sibella's agency and self-directedness come across as so remarkable primarily because readers have the

²⁸ The first modern edition was issued by Garland in 1974 with a very brief introduction by Gina Luria. In 1989, Pandora also released an edition of the novel with an introduction by Janet Todd. But aside from a 1982 discussion of the novel in Katharine M. Rogers's *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England*, little was published about the novel until Broadview Press released its first edition of the novel, edited by Isobel Grundy, in 1994 (second edition released in 1998).

²⁹ See: Sarah Emsley's "Radical Marriage" (1999), Anne Close's "Into the Public: The Sexual Heroine in Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy* and Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter*" (2004), and Ranita Chatterjee's "Sapphic Subjectivity and Gothic Desires in Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy*" (2004).

actions of Mr. Valmont, Clement Montgomery, Mrs. Ashburn, and Caroline Ashburn against which to read her thoughts and actions.

Through these five characters, Fenwick represents a continuum of sensibility, rationality and socialization in the novel that shows not only some of the major socially gendered stereotypes of behaviour in 1795 (the tyrant, the libertine, the coquette, the female philosopher) but also the way that these competing models of social behaviour put so much pressure on Sibella that she ultimately self-destructs under the multiple influences of those around her and her attempt to conform to these different, and often conflicting, expectations for her behaviour. Sibella's only experiences of socialization involve her watching as the characters around her, despite what they say to the contrary, put their own personal agendas before the welfare of the community. Julia Wright explains that "[i]n *Secresy*, the rising conflict is dramatised through a series of letters in which the misogynist clashes with the feminist, the libertines with the romantics, and the nabobs with the radicals, as advocates of conflicting visions of society try to manipulate the course of events and of other characters" (149).

There are, therefore a number of role models available to Sibella. As such, even in isolation she can experience the mimetic and socializing influence of watching other people's expressions of feelings and thoughts and shaping her behaviour in response. The problem, though, is that those around her are so consumed by the importance of their beliefs and of enforcing their own style of behaviour that the socializing gaze becomes

corrupted by narcissistic selfishness.³⁰ The excessive social pressures that each of the characters put on Sibella and on each other, in an attempt to promote their own ideological agendas, result in the breakdown of community and personal suffering at the end of the novel. An increasing focus on individualism in *Secresy* leads to too many competing agendas of socially expected behaviour and feeling being espoused, and the dogmatic personal adherence to each of these principles by the main characters ultimately proves too chaotic and leads to Sibella's annihilation and to social dissolution.

To highlight the tension between private feelings and public ideology, Fenwick uses the epistolary form for her novel, which allows her to successfully (de-) construct the internalization of social rules and the projection of personal thoughts and feelings in a form that is both shared and intensely personal. Many of the letters from different characters also reflect multiple interpretations of the same situation, allowing readers to see both the polite and the personal responses to and misinterpretations of characters and their surroundings thus giving a sense of the chaotic polyvocality that eventually overwhelms Sibella. Julia Wright has described the unsettling experience of reading the novel as “an unresolved cacophony of social values, mores, and expectations that reflects the turmoil of the period” (149). For me, the epistolary structure of the novel highlights the destabilizing nature of Fenwick's narrative.

The interplay between private and public expressions of sensibility and judgment in the letters enacts the Möbius strip of sensibility in *Secresy* in a way that perhaps most epitomizes the interconnectedness and tension between personal and social thought and

³⁰ In her article on the morality of spectatorship in the eighteenth-century Gothic novel, Fiona Price argues that part of Fenwick's aim in *Secresy* is to show “that it is important to have a shrewd idea of the corruption of the gaze within fashionable society” (8).

feeling in the period. This epistolary novel allows readers to see, from various angles, the struggles within the Valmont family and the society around them and allows the family to be both a public and a private space depending on whose subjective experience is being read. In representing “the more routine horrors of families out of joint” *Secresy* also portrays a society that is desperately trying to assert a hegemonic ideological identity and the dangers and anxieties of failing to do so (Spacks *Novel* 217).

Fenwick’s interest in “families out of joint,” and their effect on individual subjectivity, centers on Mr. Valmont, a one-time member of court and now a confirmed misanthrope and stereotypical Gothic tyrant. Valmont’s training as a misanthrope actually begins quite early by observing his father, Sibella’s grandfather, who spent most of his life as a recluse in Valmont Castle, revelling in the family’s illustrious history and disdaining all contemporary society (61). Sibella’s uncle was the first born son and was consequently treated as “the only hope, the only joy, the only object of the careful solicitude of his anxious parents” in keeping with social practice (62). But while Valmont received a “stately kind of education” because of his status in the family, the care he received was focused on training him for his station and not educating him as an individual; he learned early to over-value status in the definition of subjectivity.

In addition to having a prominent position within his own family, Valmont internalized his father’s fascination with rank, family honour, and “high birth.” By watching his father, and observing his treatment as a first-born son juxtaposed to his younger brother, Valmont learned to put his rank and the display of his family status before any of his personal characteristics. When he arrives at court as a young man, expecting to be welcomed by his equals and invited into a world of propriety, honour,

and rank, he is shattered by a world that put surprisingly little stock in “high born” status markers, valuing instead those with the most excessive or affected personalities. Valmont felt “lost in the motly [sic] multitude” and saw “his high-born pretensions to notice and deference pushed aside by individuals obscure in their origin, but renowned for artful intrigues, for bold perseverance, and dazzling success!” (62). Valmont’s education and socialization within the walls of Valmont castle and his father’s antiquated understanding of social roles did not prepare him for entering London society. If anything, his education taught him to focus on the importance of external qualities like birth-status instead of valuing personal thoughts and feelings so he never learned to cultivate his subjectivity as anything other than the first-born Valmont in his family line and subsequently never had to learn to moderate his passions or balance them with the needs of others. Valmont never found a place in London society because what he wanted was prominence and he did not know the rules of personal agency to gain that status of his own accord.

The greatest challenge to Valmont’s understanding of social rules happened when he fell in love. Valmont, “loaded with the punctilio of the last age” made a formal offer of marriage to Lady Margaret B— a renowned coquette (63). His secluded education caused him to have unrealistic notions of “female delicacy, of honourable love, and of unchanging fidelity” but Lady Margaret, “without an atom of real tenderness in her heart,” tormented him with her coquettish affectation and eventually destroyed his hopes by toying with him, devaluing his high birth, and finally publicly ridiculing him with her dismissal (63). Valmont was unable to cope with the disconnection between his private expectations and the social reality of Lady Margaret’s actions being driven by self-

interest and affectation instead of rank.³¹ Instead of being a social experience where his private ideas reflected public sentiment, the corrupted, and corrupting, behaviour of affected society causes Valmont to feel that he has lost himself and his status, resulting in his retreat to the safety of his family estate where his subject position is assured.

In her re-telling of this story, Caroline criticizes Valmont for allowing his reaction to be dictated by selfish passion:

Mr. Valmont consulted no other guide than his passions; and instantly drew an angry and false picture of mankind . . . his mind had not fortitude enough, had not comprehension enough, to cast aside his own prejudices; and instead of attempting to reform mankind, he retires to rail at them; and carries with him the pride, selfishness, and love of power, in which all the vices of society originate (63).

Ironically, although Valmont “oppose[s] himself to general customs and general experience,” his characteristics are just as selfish and affected as those of the society he scorns (60).

Valmont suffers humiliation and his sense of his role in society is shattered because he has a different understanding of the rules that dictate social sensibility than do those around him, and he expects others to conform to his ideas. He feels lost at court because he cannot see himself reflected in the thoughts and actions of people there, in other words mimetic socialization fails to be successful since there is such a clear divide between private and public feelings. Not only does this cause Valmont to be denied a

³¹ Valmont’s disappointment is a critique of the class-system which Fenwick sees as an impediment to morality and individuality in British society. Spacks argues that “the characters within [the novel] who prove proudest of their lineage and rank are frivolous or malignantly misguided” (*Novel* 219).

subject position in polite society, but it also causes him to lose the position of aristocratic heir to an ancient family that he was raised to believe epitomized who he was. His inverted understanding of socialization, that it is based on private sentiment and notions of honour and not shared public experience, is similar to Arabella's in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, but Valmont has no moral guides to teach him a new way of understanding social interconnectedness, so he is never reconciled to the reality of his society as Arabella is.

Caroline feels sympathy for Valmont's painful experience in public, saying "I could not hear this anecdote, nor can I repeat it, without a sensation of pain, so strongly do I enter into the irritable feelings of your uncle" at being so poorly prepared for social engagement (63). Yet, Valmont does exactly the same thing to Clement, sending him into the world with no knowledge of its rules or guides to help him socialize properly. And like his father, Clement suffers, not from a mistaken understanding, but from a lack of moderation and willingness to be driven by his passion rather than reason. Castle suggests that "mothers and fathers seem to be at the root of the problem" in the novel, and she is right (19). It is a parent's civic and moral responsibility, as Wollstonecraft insists in *A Vindication*, to provide proper education and socialization for children in order to facilitate their subjectivity and moral sensibility (235). If parents fail to provide emotional and intellectual support, the child will likely be influenced by their own passions and desires, like Clement, and will develop a selfishness that can serve to destroy the fabric of society. Wollstonecraft's assertion that "the weakness of the mother will be visited on the children!" applies equally to the father, as Valmont shows repeatedly in the novel (274).

Valmont's reaction to a humiliating personal experience that deconstructed his understanding of socially acceptable behaviour, and influenced his parenting, is similar to Lord Elmwood's in *A Simple Story*. Both men have certain expectations for themselves and others (especially women) to follow, and neither is able to withstand having that challenged. Both react with an excess of passion and choose to hate society, and isolate themselves from it, rather than try to reform it. Most strikingly, both father-figures assert their right to restrict the young women under their care from experiencing the world; by denying them access to role models of socialized femininity, Valmont and Elmwood hope to lessen the risk of their children becoming like the women who signified their own social rejection. Valmont, however, has the added responsibility of educating his son, Clement, whom he thinks should also be a misanthrope. Valmont chooses to educate Clement and his cousin, Sibella, according to his perceptions of socially acceptable behaviour for young men and women. As Caroline later explains, Valmont's goal is to "place another Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden" in the attempt to create a new anti-social family model (60).

Valmont's plan embodies Fenwick's challenge of traditional gender characteristics in the novel. Grundy highlights this theme in her introduction, and suggests that "it is most strikingly, though not only, in the area of sexuality that Fenwick *reverses* gender roles" [my emphasis] (29). She suggests that the most active and rational characters in the novel are women (Sibella and Caroline), and the most ineffectual and emotionally unstable are men (Clement and Arthur especially).³² On the surface, this

³² Cf Spacks *Novel Beginnings* 219.

position upsets traditional gender characteristics and offers an easy feminist reading that sees Fenwick ascribing positive social qualities to women while chastising the rules of the male-centred society that undermines their right to agency. Such an argument is reminiscent of those that see Miss Milner as the oppressed “new woman” acting against the tyranny of Dorriforth/Elmwood’s patriarchal right in Inchbald’s narrative. Again, this kind of argument discounts the nuances and interdependence that necessarily form a part of social interactions, and makes gendered characteristics like sensibility too absolutely connected to sex.

To say that Sibella and Caroline are agents of reform or revolution because they exhibit “masculine” traits of rationality, strength, and an ability to articulate their own emotional and intellectual understandings is as unsatisfying to me as arguing that Clement and Arthur are feminized because they are often slaves to their passions and emotions. These gender role “reversals” still require readers to tacitly accept that passion, emotion, and weakness are feminine while rationality, strength, and articulation are masculine, and further that each person should exhibit only those gender traits that correspond to their sex.³³ Fenwick’s novel does more to upset than affirm this argument, because both the male and female characters exhibit mixes of these qualities throughout the novel, destabilizing the traditional gendering associated with them. This dynamism of

³³ At this moment, it is worth remembering that “[t]he paradigm that there are two genders founded on two biological sexes began to predominate in western culture only in the early eighteenth century” (Trumbach 112). What this means is that rather than being a naturalized argument, gender and sex had only been understood together for a relatively short period of time when Fenwick was writing, and the alliance between the two was as much political as epistemological. For more on the creation of sex in the eighteenth century, see my discussion of the *scientia sexualis* in the introduction to the dissertation as well as Laqueur (149-92).

character has been read as a flaw in Fenwick's writing, but is actually one of her most interesting accomplishments.³⁴

More specifically, through Valmont's project for Sibella and Clement, Fenwick rejects philosophical writings, especially by Rousseau, that use education to reify the institutionalization of the artificial binaries whereby man represents public/reason/strength/independence and where woman represents private/emotion/weakness/dependence. Instead of simply inverting the binary through Sibella and Clement to make a reformist argument, Fenwick shows the strengths and weaknesses in both characters to place the focus of subjectivity on actions and thoughts, not sex. In her introduction to the Broadview edition of the novel, Grundy makes it quite clear that Rousseau's gendered education project in *Émile* is a central source of critique for Fenwick (25), as it was for her friend Mary Wollstonecraft three years earlier in *A Vindication*.

Both women reject Rousseau's idea that "the education of the women should be always relative to the men. To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, and take care of us when we grow up, to advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable: these are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught in their infancy" (Wollstonecraft 159).

Wollstonecraft argues that "all the sacred rights of humanity are violated by insisting on blind obedience" from either male or female children and Fenwick reinforces the

³⁴ The most notable critic of the novel is Terry Castle, whose 1995 review "Sublimely Bad" in the *London Review of Books* lambasted the "incoherent characterization" in the novel, along with a good deal else (18).

pernicious effects that this social force has on Valmont's children, especially when such an obedience is demanded by a tyrannical parent (163).

For Fenwick, as for Wollstonecraft, the socially accepted mis-education of young women as objects of male affection prevents their assertion of personal, rational subjectivity, and forces men into restricted roles like those that challenged Elmwood's sense of self. Wollstonecraft argues: "the instruction which women have hitherto received has only tended, with the constitution of civil society, to render them insignificant objects of desire" (79). Valmont, in the same vein as Rousseau in *Émile*, tries to prevent Sibella from receiving any education outside of learning to obey him or taking any steps towards articulating a rationalized sense of self: "I tell you, child, you cannot, you shall not reason. Repine in secret as much as you please, but no reasonings. No matter how sullen the submission, if it is submission" (43). Valmont tries desperately to restrict female agency because he wants to avoid anything that would again upset his understanding of acceptable feminine behaviour. Fenwick rejects his technique of anti-socialization, though, because it depends on Valmont's force (external) and discounts Sibella's (internal) experiences of emotional and intellectual sensibility. Fenwick makes it clear that Valmont's restrictions are only able to affect Sibella's body, not her mind: "he demands only the obedience of a fettered slave. I am held in the bondage of slavery. And still may Mr. Valmont's power constrain the forces of this body. But where, Miss Ashburn, is the tyrant that could ever chain thought, or put fetters on the fancy?" (73).

Sibella's experience of sensibility is at the far end of the continuum to Mr. Valmont's: she has never experienced social failure, she has not learned to value her status in the family above her own virtues, and she has spent her life in unrestricted

experiences of the natural world around her. Rather than directing unmediated passion towards a cultivated aversion to society like her uncle, critics have made a point of describing Sibella as a child of nature, a fair savage, who represents unsocialized ‘natural’ sensibility in a novel that focuses almost entirely on affectation and excess.³⁵ Despite Valmont’s attempt to give Sibella only as much education in obedience as will make her a submissive wife for Clement, she actually ends up with a greater ability to articulate her subjectivity than either her uncle or her husband.³⁶

This is partially because there are no impediments placed on Sibella’s expression and experience of her feelings. Clement writes of her: “Custom has not placed its sordid restraints on her feelings. Nature forms her impulses. Oh, she is Nature’s genuine child!” (154). But though she is unfettered by the “tyranny of custom” Sibella is not weakened by her sensibility as most women were thought to be; in fact, she is one of the strongest characters in the novel (Rather 197).³⁷ Spacks suggests that Sibella’s strength, and ultimate weakness, both stem from her cultural ignorance: being a child of nature makes her more physically and emotionally strong than the women around her, but it deprives her of the knowledge that shapes social subjectivity. So despite Sibella’s substantial

³⁵ See Spacks’s *Novel Beginnings* 218, Castle’s review *Sublimely Bad* 18, Snow’s “Habits of Empire” 159.

³⁶ According to Sibella, once she and Clement sleep together they are married. Though he does not believe it a binding marriage, Clement does call himself her husband when he writes to Murden (v.2, letter III 154).

³⁷ One of Wollstonecraft’s major critiques of the traditional education of women is that it teaches them only to rely on their senses and experiences, to the extent that they become the “prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling” (137). This is her interpretation of “civilized women” and certainly Mrs. Valmont and Lady Laura Bowden reflect this truth. But Sibella, despite her reliance on feelings and experiences of passion, does not fall victim to a similar weakness because of her frequent exercise and access to fresh air. For more on physical health and sensibility see Cheyne and Rather.

differences from her uncle, she ultimately falls victim to the same kind of ignorance that he does. But while Valmont had the choice to experience the world and then retreat home, Sibella is prevented from gaining the knowledge to save herself because her sex leaves her dependent on her uncle's permission, which he never grants her, to leave home and enter society.

Clement, on the other hand, *is* able to experience the world as his (illegitimate) father did. He is sent forth to learn all that polite society has to offer, but is commanded to hate it as his father does, with no other instruction, and with no guide to assure his moral, emotional, or intellectual safety. The uncultivated passions and feelings of Clement share an affinity with Sibella's, but he has no interest in balancing them with reason as she does, because they are not used as an example of the weakness of his sex, and pose no real threat to him. All the experience that Sibella wanted to expand her understanding and to gain experience of the role she is supposed to play in her society was offered instead to Clement, who sought only dissipation in appearances, affectation, and excess. Clement "is not given to look beyond the surface" so he does not experience the jarring disconnection between observation and discernment, and perception and projection that incites Valmont's misanthropy (268).

The result of this shallowness is Clement's "feeble and wavering character" and a disdain for leaving the pleasures of society (350). While Sibella desperately wants to experience the salubrious effects of society and gain a variety of experience to help cultivate her rational sensibility, Clement only seeks varieties of pleasure. Clement's inclinations easily allow him to find a subject position in London society: he becomes a libertine, revelling in the excess of a dissipated and affected society, learning no more of

himself than what pleasures he most enjoys. Though Sibella's body is a slave to Valmont's misanthropic anti-socialization, Clement's mind and body make him a slave to fashionable society. Neither son nor daughter is able to achieve gendered subjectivity through Valmont's educational plan that stems from his own lack of social awareness and acceptance.

An expression of her perpetual frustration at self-development, Sibella's most exceptional reaction to her "education" and her observation of Mr. and Mrs. Valmont's marriage, is her belief in gender equality, and the need for the social valuation of women: "To be the companion, I must be equal—to be the friend, I must have comprehension and judgment: must be able to assist, or willing to be taught" (157). Sibella's opinions are a result of her familial observations and her feelings and thoughts on proper behaviour, but these conditions seem too limited for her to offer such a clearly polemic argument—she ventriloquizes both Wollstonecraft and Mary Astell—for gender equality. This opinion seems outside the context of Sibella's experience which might it possible to read her articulation of equality as a 'natural' or innate knowledge about sex and gender. Sibella's articulate, yet socially inexperienced, argument seems on the surface to weakens the experiential social critique that Fenwick offers throughout the rest of the novel.³⁸ One way to read Sibella's natural gaze and its resulting articulation of social change is as another Gothic trope in the novel. Price argues that the "gaze instructed by nature" is often used as an alternative to the corrupted gaze of fashionable society in Gothic texts

³⁸ Spacks argues that Sibella's actions stem from her "*natural* manners" and that she "knows nothing of the artificial rules governing social behaviour" (*Novel* 189). If this is true, then it would be hard for her to offer such a clear social criticism unless the rules for gender exist outside of social interactions, which I argue is unrealistic both historically and contemporarily.

(13). While it does not completely resolve the problem with this scene it does establish Sibella as having an alternative model of social observation that affects her subjectivity while juxtaposing it to Clement's corrupted sensibility through the gaze of London society.

Sibella defines herself and her experiences against Caroline and Mrs. Valmont while rejecting the mind-numbing obedience that Mr. Valmont demands of her and reveals a clear capability for rational thought and interpersonal discernment. Yet, she still becomes a "romantic enthusiast" who is directed by the passion of her love for Clement (140). Caroline blames this on Valmont's deeply-flawed educational plan and lack of nurturing Sibella's mind while teaching her to rely on her 'natural' sensibility. Her strength and dedication to her feelings makes Sibella an engaging character, yet she still represents the dangers of too much passion and sensibility in women, just as Clement represents a similar danger in men.

Todd argues that Fenwick, like so many others of her time, expresses a strong ambivalence about sensibility and socialization in both sexes: "Like Mary Wollstonecraft in her fiction, Eliza Fenwick herself remains both for and against a sensibility which she found politically dangerous but emotionally attractive" (Introduction ix). The dismal ending of the novel suggests that Fenwick's concern about the dangers of sensibility, either 'natural' or social, when unmediated by reason, outweigh its attractiveness for both men and women. In his attempt to re-visit Eden, Valmont has raised both his male and female 'creations' without access to the tree of social knowledge but with abundant experience in the uncultivated passions of nature. As a result, both characters become sensualists: Sibella by compulsion and Clement by inclination. Clement is even more

vulnerable than Sibella because while he too is unfit for “entering the world without protection” having “so much to learn of the manners of society” he is sent into the world alone, like David Simple (194). His naiveté and penchant for sensual pleasure make him easy prey in the culture of excess, and he wastes no time in giving any of his moral sensibility like Sibella’s over to a search for pleasure.

As the novel progresses, Clement becomes the character “blown about by every gust of feeling” because, as Arthur says to him, “you have no moderation” (243). Sibella, on the other hand, becomes increasingly stoic in her suffering, proving the “firmness of character” and ability to “reason and resolve” that Arthur finds so attractive in her (264). Once she learns that her purest passions have clouded her judgment and deceived her about the worthiness of their object, she stops expressing her feelings as she once did. Though Caroline can still sense Sibella’s ‘natural’ sympathy, Sibella confesses on her deathbed that “sensation has been dead in me” since she learned of Clement’s fickleness (358).

Since the models of ‘natural’ and selfish sensibility both cause individuals to suffer personally or publicly, Fenwick offers another model of sensibility that is both rational and sympathetic through the character of Caroline Ashburn. In Caroline, Fenwick places all the strength and articulation of Sibella along with some of her passion, the sympathy of Arthur Murden, and even some of misanthropy of Mr. Valmont. With all these positive and negative qualities in tension, Caroline epitomizes a realistic struggle to maintain a balance between what she wants, what she thinks is best for others, and what she feels is wrong with her society. After learning of the dangers of selfish sensibility and excess as a child in India, and learning to scrutinize her own behaviour

and the reactions of others to it, Caroline spends the rest of her adolescence and adulthood trying to overcome these trappings of her social condition and upbringing. She becomes a woman of rationality, benevolence, and restrained (yet ever present) feeling in stark contrast to her mother, Mrs. Ashburn, and her example of affectation, vapidness, and selfishness.

Caroline writes to Sibella that she is shocked at her mother's delay in meeting her dearest friends upon their return to London: "I repined at her [Mrs. Ashburn's] want of sympathy for the feelings of those who I imagined were expecting her with fondness and impatience" (51). But she quickly learns, like David Simple, that polite society is not designed around sincere friendship and shared moral concern for one another: "Here my enthusiasm in the search of sincere and uniform friendship would have been extinguished; but that my hopes yet rested on Mrs. Valmont" (51).³⁹

Caroline's last hope to see true friendship between her mother and Mrs. Valmont, and thus to learn the rules of socialization in polite company, fails as soon as she meets Mrs. Valmont, a caricature of affected sensibility. The scene carefully offers both a standard of polite femininity and Caroline's thoughtful and feeling response to it:

My Sibella, can you not imagine, you hear your aunt mingling complaint and compliment, languor and restlessness, and labouring to interest real sensibility by moans of imaginary disease? Can you not imagine my mother secretly urging her triumphs over the immured Mrs. Valmont, by lamenting the slavery of pleasure to which she herself is perpetually

³⁹ Grundy also points out the connection between Caroline's quest and David's in a footnote: see Fenwick (51 n4).

compelled? And can you not see your disappointed, disgusted Caroline Ashburn viewing caresses without warmth, hearkening to professions without sincerity?" (52-3).

More than any other scene in the novel, this episode clearly shows that Caroline sees a substantial distinction between the idea of sensibility as a socio-moral feeling where individuals share in the pleasure and strive to alleviate the pain of those around them, and an expression of affectation, excess, and selfishness. Caroline explains the difference to Sibella in a subsequent letter, when discussing Lady Laura Bowden: "A delicate languor pervades her manners, and this is generally honoured with the name of sensibility. I am apt to call it affectation; for the sensibility that I understand and admire, is extreme only in proportion to the greatness of the occasion; it does not waste itself in vapours" (69). Much of the novel concerns itself with the effects on society when individuals become obsessed with their own feelings and forget that the outward- and inward-looking elements of sensibility are both necessary for healthy social development.

Though Fenwick articulates her social criticism most clearly through Caroline's voice, she is not an ideal character. Despite the effusiveness of her emotion for Sibella, Caroline does not come across as a particularly happy character, nor does she have anyone else in the public sphere with whom she can share experiences and emotions.⁴⁰ While she is a character who understands sensibility and its potential public and private benefits, the society in which she lives seems instead to value selfishness and anti-social behaviour. This conflict leads to Caroline's ineffectiveness and isolation throughout the novel. As Julia Wright comments, "Caroline is respected by many but heeded by few"

⁴⁰ See Ranita Chatterjee's article which speculates about Caroline's homo-erotic love for Sibella.

(152). Her situation is actually quite sad, because although she wants the best for those around her she is alone in her thoughts and is disgusted by the only society she knows.

Ironically, Caroline even plays a part in Sibella's abduction and eventual destruction despite her best intentions to save her friend. To be part of Sibella's downfall causes Caroline tremendous grief, and shakes her understanding of who she tries to be in her society: "Must I too conspire to make Sibella the victim of secrecy? — Unhappy sufferer! Yet more unhappy Caroline! She debarred the use of her judgement, erred only from mistake; I, alas! Have sinned against reason and conviction!" (325). The repeated use of exclamation points is telling, because it enforces the degree to which Caroline feels the effects of Sibella's suffering, and feels even more her own role in it.

Like Dorriforth/Elmwood in *A Simple Story*, Caroline finds solace in her rationality and self-restraint in the light of her suffering: "Nought but the power I have long laboured to obtain and have in part obtained over my sensations could have preserved any degree of fortitude in me under the most trying events of my life, events which have lately befallen Miss Valmont and Mr. Murden" (334-5). But this rationality and controlled feeling still leave her terribly unhappy and isolated at the end of the novel, as she watches her "wretched hopes . . . sinking in disappointment" (335). Unlike Dorriforth/Elmwood, however, Caroline has no public position that justifies her restraint, or allows her to use her rationality effectively. The accepted gendering of rational sensibility as masculine leaves Caroline without any productive social role; she lives alone without having, or wanting, a place in her mother's world of artifice, and is therefore denied social subjectivity as a woman. Castle's reading of Caroline as a "supercilious bourgeois prig" is an unfortunate over-simplification of her character

because it does not recognize how much she suffers and how much she sincerely cares for Sibella (18). Caroline, more than any other character in the novel, understands her personal and public failure in her dealings with the Valmont family but she is excluded from finding a role to recuperate her usefulness.

The nature of Caroline's suffering is unusual for a woman in a novel of sensibility; Frances Sheridan's Sidney Bidulph is one of the few other female characters who struggles with rationality, duty, and feeling, in a similar fashion. Another close female analog to Caroline in late eighteenth-century fiction is Maria Edgeworth's title character *Belinda*, who does manage to single-handedly reform her circle of friends, their understandings, and their relationships in a decidedly optimistic, though totally unrealistic, narrative of rational sensibility. That Fenwick makes her most personally accomplished character so publicly impotent speaks to the dystopic nature of the text, and marks its difference from traditional "happy ending" novels like that offered by Edgeworth.

The complete failure of Valmont's educational plan reinforces that nurture has at least as much influence on subjectivity as nature, and that behaviour has less to do with sex than with experience and education. Sibella and Clement are ultimately both destroyed by the faulty socialization they received in Valmont Castle, their over-reliance on passion and feeling instead of rationality and self-control which have been repeatedly asserted as necessary for a healthy society of individuals. Weakness is not a feminine quality, it is a quality resulting from a lack of rigour; strength is not masculine, it is about physical health, will, and the ability to persevere. Reason and emotion are equally present in men and women but their expression is reliant upon the individual's exertion of them.

Sex allows and restricts access to knowledge, but is not itself the source of that knowledge. Sensibility can socialize and it can destroy; it is an experiential epistemology that creates and challenges meaning. These are the most significant expressions of gendered subjectivity that Fenwick makes in the novel, and these make her novel a “heavyweight” as a “novel of ideas” (Grundy 25).

That none of the characters emerges as an ideal and that none end the novel happily suggests that Fenwick was not as optimistic as Inchbald about society’s ability to overcome selfishness and sensuality and to establish a moral community of shared feelings and thoughts. Both Fenwick and Inchbald have offered novels that explore the destructive elements of sensibility and socialization that counterbalance the productive effects represented in the philosophical writings of the mid-century. Both perspectives are necessary to represent the dynamic understandings of, and responses to, sensibility as both a productive and destructive method of the social internalization and personal projection of identity in the mid- to late-eighteenth century in England.

Chapter Four

Violating the Self and the Family: Experiencing the Terrors of Sensibility in *The Natural Daughter* and *Zofloya*

As I suggested in the introduction to the previous chapter, the last decade of the eighteenth century saw a shift in focus with respect to literary discussions of sensibility. No longer considered the ameliorative and socially positive force it had been for authors like Henry Brooke and Oliver Goldsmith, in the literature of the 1790s sensibility became steeped in the revolutionary rhetoric of individualism and freedom espoused by the English Jacobins. In particular, sensibility became one of the ways of negotiating between the rights of the individual to autonomous experiences of feeling and the responsibilities of individuals to conform to expressions of thought and feeling that would serve the common social good.¹

In Chapter Three I explored the ways that the Jacobin political rhetoric of individualism prompted novelists Elizabeth Inchbald and Eliza Fenwick to write texts featuring protagonists who were destroyed by the excessive external/public pressure to conform to restrictive social constructions dictating acceptable gendered behaviour. In this chapter I am still concerned with the prevalent rhetoric of individualism in the 1790s, but my focus is not on the ways that social ideology seeks to control and limit the expression of individual sensibility. Instead, this chapter looks at the external/public ramifications of allowing individuals to be entirely driven by selfish, internal/private desires. As I have striven to show throughout this project, the relationship between

¹ Cf. Kelly's comment on 168 of this dissertation.

external/public and internal/private expressions of thought and feeling is always reciprocal. This chapter represents the final twisting of the Möbius strip of sensibility to show how the internal/private thoughts and feelings of an individual have a powerful ability to exert pressure on the external/public institutions, especially the family, that seek to restrict that individual's desire for a self-driven life.

My argument in this chapter is that the desire of an individual to express a subjectivity that is primarily reliant upon his or her own passions and sensations has the ability not only to destroy social bonds and institutions, but also to destroy the individual him or herself. Private feeling—the desires, passions, and sensations that influence an individual's understanding of him or herself—need not necessarily be selfish. As I showed in Chapter Two, Harry Clinton's private feelings about his behaviour and his treatment of others, both when he is “good” and “bad,” influence his social actions and lead him to emphasize benevolence and sympathy when interacting in public in *The Fool of Quality*. The private feeling of guilt, which Rev. Primrose experiences throughout the second half of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, is another example of the way that the feeling subject can choose to consider others within his or her own private understanding. In this chapter, however, my focus is on private feeling that is selfish, in that the feeling subject considers him or herself the only being worthy of consideration. Because subjectivity-through-sensibility emphasizes mimesis as part of teaching a subject his or her place in the world, the refusal to take part in this social exchange is, in itself, a socially destabilizing experience. Further, when the feeling subject actively seeks to violate the rules of mimetic socialization and takes steps to destroy the institutions, like the nuclear

family, that are responsible for establishing the relationships between public and private feeling, he or she is likely to be destroyed in the process.

This chapter represents two different ways of engaging with the anxiety surrounding sensibility in the last years of the eighteenth century, though both are connected by their focus on the destruction of the family that results from too much selfish feeling. The first approach is Mary Robinson's political Jacobin critique of individual passion in the novel, *The Natural Daughter*. The second approach is Charlotte Dacre's contentious and stylistically bombastic Gothic novel, *Zofloya, or the Moor*, which sets up and then mercilessly destroys the possibility of subjectivity formed by inner/private experiences and a rejection of external/public influence. Both novels set in opposition the agency of a selfishly-driven individual to the family unit that is supposed to inspire his or her moral development as private individuals and members of a collective, affective society. Both Robinson and Dacre focus their narratives on the way that a selfish individual can destroy their family. Robinson, however, concludes her novel by suggesting that there are other models of familial and personal behaviour that can allow for a relationship beyond the selfish and destructive family model that has been her focus. The novel concludes with the tyrants being overthrown, and the selfish pride of Lord Francis Sherville towards his sister, Lady Susan, being overcome. The long suffering, and innocent, Martha Morley becomes part of a family committed to the mutual happiness of its members after desperately, but unsuccessfully, seeking that same acceptance from both her biological family and her husband. Dacre's novel, however, consistently denies the possibility of a happy ending, and makes the family's reunion in the final scenes of the novel one of torment and emotional violence, rather than

reconciliation. Dacre's and Robinson's similar representation of the family as a source of violence is contrasted to their different understandings of the possibility for familial ties to withstand the pressures of selfishness and to re-establish a healthy balance between internal/private and external/public feelings.

My focus on the potentially destructive effects of individuals upon their families in these novels has a larger social significance. Borrowing from a common eighteenth-century philosophical position, I argue that within *The Natural Daughter* and *Zofloya* the family serves as a small sampling of the values and behaviours prevalent in the society at large. My argument concurs with Lawrence Stone's assertion that "the microcosm of the family is used to open a window onto this wider landscape of cultural change" (3-4). Along with his discussion of the family as a social metaphor, Stone suggests that the most common model for family interaction in the mid-to-late eighteenth century was one where the family was "organized around the principle of personal autonomy, and bound together by strong affective ties" (7). This family structure is at the heart of Robinson's and Dacre's social criticism, as the majority of the families involved in the action of both texts—the Bradfords, the Morleys, the di Loredanis, and the Berenzas—are weakened by a heavy focus on individual autonomy and self-direction. Though this serves as an admittedly small sample, Robinson and Dacre are both suggesting that this model of putting self before family (and society), or internal sensations before external sentiments puts undue pressure on the "strong affective ties" keeping the family together, thereby opening the door to social instability. That Robinson can envision a possibility for the affective ties of the family to be re-established at the end of her novel suggests that her

vision of British society, and the future of the feeling subjects within it, is ultimately less dystopic than Dacre's.

There was a pervasive concern about the relationship between private and public feelings and responsibilities in the final decade of the eighteenth century. In a 1795 text called *The Spirit of Despotism*, English minister and moralist Vicesimus Knox expressed tremendous concern about a society where “every one is immersed in private concerns—private pleasures, and private interest, acknowledging no public care, no general concern, nothing out of the sphere of domestic or personal affairs, worthy of any regard” (151). Knox's treatise is primarily intended to challenge the way that aristocratic classes are running rough-shod over the middle and lower classes, but his critique reveals a wider social issue: selfishness, a product of an increasingly individualistic society, was becoming a dominant concern in British culture. One of his clearest criticisms is against “that senseless, sullen, cruel pride, which marks the spirit of despotism” and which is “totally destitute of feelings for others” in that it “scarcely acknowledges the common tie of humanity” (196). He is particularly averse to those citizens who “seem to think the world, and all that it contains, created for its own exclusive gratification” (196). Knox's comments could easily be directed to Dacre's protagonist, Victoria di Loredani, and to Robinson's two chief antagonists, Julia Bradford and Mr. Morley. His final comment epitomizes my treatment of private feeling as selfish feeling in this chapter.

In his recent monograph *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s*, written as a modern expansion of Knox's text, John Barrell's historical research supports the claim that “Britain had more and more elevated the pursuit of private interest at the expense of the public good” and was subsequently “developing a new and alarming

relation between public and private (7). Barrell's text interrogates the "mist of suspicion" that permeated discussions about "the liberalism of enlightenment thought" in the final decades of the century. He draws particular attention to the way that private conversations about politics and the monarchy became public, political statements that either upheld the monarchy and the restrictive social codes of the aristocracy or posed a dangerous challenge in the guise of liberal individualism.

Anxiety about the French Revolution and the monarchical tyranny it sought to overthrow drew discussions about the rights of the individual in society into clear focus in England. As the events in France failed to live up to the idealized republic of free individuals that many of the English Jacobins supported, and as the realities of the Reign of Terror made themselves known across the Channel, individualism was represented as an even more dangerous social framework.² Chris Jones explains some of the tensions that were foregrounded in the ideologically tense climate of the Revolution saying:

Reason versus passion, universal benevolence versus partial affection
or enlightened selfishness, individual judgment versus the opinions and
customs of society, the artistic imagination versus just moral and social ideas;
while these issues had been debated within the philosophical and fictional

² The motto of the French Revolution was "liberty, equality, fraternity" which sought to allow personal freedom for citizens and to ensure that the aristocracy and monarchy were not dictating the lives of those below them on the social scale. Liberty, or the "exemption or freedom from arbitrary, despotic, or autocratic rule or control" invests individuals with the rights to think and act autonomously (OED 2.a.). I think that the liberty that was such a focus of the French Revolution, what Jones refers to as the "promise to mankind" that was an optimistic and emancipatory idea, can also be read as a way to condone the preoccupation with the self that Knox is critiquing in England. For me, this represents one of the "threats" of Revolutionary ideology. This chapter, then, really explores the potentially dystopic consequences of offering individuals greater personal liberty, politically, emotionally, and physically. This was sometimes intentionally connected to the Reign of Terror and some of the failed ideals of the Revolution, as in the case of Craik and Robinson, though there is sometimes a less explicit connection.

writings of the century, their clash was now seen against the background of the French Revolution, its promise to mankind, and its threat to unreformed Britain (23).

This chapter is particularly concerned with the friction between “reason versus passion” and “individual judgment versus the opinions and customs of society.” I also see that much of the anxiety about sensibility and its connection to individualism is explicitly connected in Robinson’s novel to the events in France in the 1790s. Though both novels under consideration in this chapter look at sensibility in the aftermath of the political and ideological successes and failures in France, Robinson embeds the events of the Reign of Terror into a plot involving four of her main characters. Mrs. Sedgley first meets Mr. Morley when they are imprisoned by Jean-Paul Marat during the Terror, and she only agrees to marry him in prison as a way to preserve her life. Later, the ultimate marker of Julia Bradford’s selfish depravity comes when she is found to have fled England after wrongfully imprisoning her mother only to become the lover of Maximilien Robespierre in Paris. As his mistress, Julia is able to have her sister Martha and her brother-in-law/ex-lover imprisoned and sentenced to death. Only when Robespierre is overthrown and sentenced to death himself do Martha and Mr. Morley escape. Julia, in a final act of selfishness, commits suicide in Robespierre’s bed to avoid paying for her actions.

Robinson was by no means the only author during the 1790s to explore the revolutionary events in France or the associated danger of giving individuals too much personal liberty.³ Helen Craik’s 1800 novel *Adelaide de Narbonne, with Memoirs of*

³ In their introduction to *Rebellious Hearts, Women Writers and the French Revolution, 1789-1815*, Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke claim that novelist, poet, and well-known letter writer Helen

Charlotte de Cordet also features Marat as a character epitomizing the destructiveness of selfish passion. Craik uses her female character Charlotte Cordet to rail against Marat's involvement in the "present system of terror" in France that resulted from "every species of barbarous devastation, where self-interest pointed to it as the means of securing success in any coveted object of pursuit" (I: 54). Like *The Natural Daughter*, *Adelaide de Narbonne* involves an innocent woman, Madame de Narbonne, being imprisoned in the Abbayé prison and being forced to choose between marrying the selfish and licentious tyrant Marat, or dying. Madame de Narbonne's friend, Charlotte, who like Martha Morley is described as "eminently gifted with a good heart, and superior abilities," ends up murdering Marat near the end of the novel as a way of restoring order to France. She willingly admits to murdering him by "declaring that it was a duty she owed her country, and mankind in general, to rid the world of a monster, whose sanguinary doctrines were framed to involve the nation in anarchy and civil war" (IV: 280). Craik represents Marat as a selfish and tyrannical character whose private desires, along with those of Robespierre, were forced on the people of France and led to the events of the Reign of Terror in 1792-3.

Robinson's depiction of destructive selfishness through her explicit use of the Reign of Terror is echoed in the allegorical reading of Dacre's novel, which is equally concerned with explaining how individualism could create frightening personal, familial, and social scenarios. Though Dacre's novel is set in sixteenth-century Italy, it still

Maria Williams "was perhaps the most important British interpreter of the French Revolution" (4). They also foreground the presence of Revolutionary ideals and characters in Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* (1792), Helen Craik's *Adelaide de Norbonne* (1800), and Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814) as important literary responses to the events in France during and after the Reign of Terror.

reflects Robert Miles's argument about how 1790s Gothic fiction was influenced by the French Revolution. Miles, a scholar noted for his work on the genre in the final decades of the eighteenth century, is inspired by the writings of the Marquis de Sade to argue that "the bloody horrors of the revolution pushed novelists to new extremes of imaginary violence, as they strove to compete with the shocking reality" of the Reign of Terror ("The 1790s" 43). Dacre's text imagines violence not only against the social institutions that seek to limit individual power, like the family, but also against the feeling subject who seeks to destroy any opposition to the gratification of her passions. That the arch-villainess, Victoria di Loredani, is ultimately destroyed at the end of the novel in a scene that mimics her own torture and murder of an innocent victim earlier in the text, is evidence that Dacre refuses to allow the possibility of a self-driven character to escape retribution. If anything, the parallel between the two scenes is an ironic and perverted expression of the mimesis that is so fundamental to the creation of social bonds.

Like Dacre, Matthew Lewis explores sensual excess and a selfish pursuit of passion in his 1796 novel, *The Monk*, a text that rivals Dacre's in both violence and flamboyant writing. Like Victoria di Loredani, Lewis's arch-villain, the monk Ambrosio, eventually sells his soul to the Devil in order to avoid having to face the consequences of his crimes (which include rape, incest, and murder). For me, the connection between the English Gothic tradition of which Dacre and Lewis are important parts and the sado-masochistic writings of The Marquis de Sade is not just their invocation of "imaginary violence" in response to the revolution.⁴ I read the Marquis de Sade's work as an example

⁴ I think Miles makes an important point about the use of violence in the Gothic, but I want to make it clear that Sade's diegetic violence is but one of many generic options available to English writers

of the kind of extreme individualism that Dacre and Lewis interrogate in their novels. The fascination with what John Philips calls a “profound distrust of all collective enterprises and of the ideologies that underpin them” is rigorously, and usually violently, explored in Sade’s writing and is a theme that appears in both Dacre’s and Lewis’s fictions (119). Dacre’s novel is certainly less explicitly political than Robinson’s, and makes no obvious mention of the Revolution or the ideals of individualism and freedom from aristocratic and monarchic control that underpinned much of the enthusiasm behind it. That said, her novel nonetheless questions the “collective enterprise” of the family and the ideology of social control that supports it and that caused many English Jacobins to sympathize with the overthrow of the monarchy in France. Dacre’s novel ends with the violent destruction of both the family unit and the selfish individual who violated its conventions, suggesting that Dacre does not see a way of reconciling individual desire and family responsibility. Unlike Robinson, who sees in Martha’s rational sensibility the chance to reconcile Lord Francis Sherville’s family and to re-establish the importance of family bonds at the end of the *Natural Daughter*, Dacre concludes her novel with death and regret.

In both texts the main characters are forced to begin their narrative journeys with unhealthy family experiences. In Robinson’s novel Martha is scorned and mocked by her

responding to the Revolution. For more on the ways that “the French Revolution demanded a revolution in formal and generic conventions” and how “Helen Maria Williams, Helen Craik, and Mariana Starke, wrote in ways that redrew generic lines” see Craciun and Lokke’s book *Rebellious Hearts* (9). See also Kelly’s *English Jacobin Novel* and *English Fiction of the Romantic Period*, Nicola Watson’s *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel, 1790-1825*, Chris Jones’s *Radical Sensibility*, Ann Jones’s *Ideas and Innovations*, Kevin Gilmartin’s *Writing Against Revolution*, M.O. Grenby’s *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, and Lisa Plummer Crafton’s edited collection *The French Revolution in Debate in English Literature and Culture* for more on the diverse relationship between the French Revolution and English fiction in the 1790s.

parents and sister for her decided lack of refined (read affected) and personal sensibility and is forced to enter the world with almost no emotional support. Martha's sister, Julia, learns to follow her parents' example of only caring about her personal desires which leads her to a life of crime and sensual excess. In Dacre's text, Victoria and her brother Leonardo are, like Julia, instructed in selfishness by their parents and their sense of security is destroyed by the excessive sensibility of their mother, Laurina, and her family desertion. Though *The Natural Daughter* is not in most ways a Gothic novel, it shares with Dacre an almost fetish-like preoccupation with "violence done to familial bonds" which Kate Ferguson Ellis contends is a major theme in Gothic texts (3). Robinson's emphasis on the excessive sensibility of Julia and Mr. Morley and their continual juxtaposition to the rational, moral feelings of Martha Morley and Mrs. Sedgley/Lady Susan further connects the novel with thematic elements of the Gothic since the genre has long been seen to be closely associated with sensibility, especially in an exaggerated form.⁵ *The Natural Daughter* and *Zofloya* explore the painful and often violent effects of the excessive emotions of passion and terror—on both the self and the family—which often drive Gothic plots.

For the purposes of this chapter, I want to consider the ways in which Robinson's and Dacre's transgressions of subjectivity and family together reflect a Gothic terror of the breakdown of social bonds through individual actions and sensibility. Both of the novels in this chapter were written at the height of the Gothic's popularity in the last few years of the eighteenth and first few years of the nineteenth century, when anxieties about

⁵ Spacks refers to the Gothic as "a direct offshoot of sensibility" (*Novel* 198).

identity, individualism, and social cohesion filled both philosophical and fictional literature. Miles's simplified definition of the Gothic states that it is "a discursive site, a carnivalesque mode for representations of the fragmented subject" (4). Diane Long Hoeveler's assertion that the Gothic often allows for the "fantasized overthrow of the public realm. . . in favour of the creation of a new, privatized, feminized world" which is rarely successful, is another way in which I see both Robinson and Dacre sharing Gothic elements in their texts (*Gothic* 4). In *The Natural Daughter* and *Zofloya*, then, the writers create a discursive space in which to articulate *and* dismantle current modes of social interaction (both in public and private spaces) and the stress this places on an individual's sense of self.

Throughout *The Natural Daughter*, Robinson contrasts the goodness of Martha to the selfish behaviour of her sister and she ultimately destroys the misanthropic Julia and her "monstrous" lover Mr. Morley. Dacre, on the other hand, offers the Berenza family as the possibility of a rational and affective family, but has both Berenza and his brother Henriquez die violently, thus pre-empting the establishment of the kind of family that concludes Robinson's novel. In fact, Berenza's commitment to study human behaviours and to "increase his knowledge of the human heart" first brought Victoria to his attention (58). He fell in love with Victoria, and were it not for the stain on her honour perpetuated by her mother's adultery, Berenza would have married Victoria and "relied upon the power he believed himself to possess over the human mind for modelling her afterwards so as perfectly to assimilate to his wishes" (58-9). His passion for Victoria causes him to ignore the shock he feels when she verbally attacks her mother, even when her actions "visibly shocked" him and "excited his disgust" (62). Berenza's philosophical probing

into human character is not a reliable defence against his desire. Victoria's conscious attempts to deceive him by controlling her temper in his presence convince him of her sincerity and goodness, and ironically this sureness ends up being one of the things that leads to his death.

Berenza's brother, Henriquez, is not blinded by love for Victoria, but his more rational scrutiny of her actions is subverted when Victoria tricks him into thinking she is his angelic fiancée Lilla. After she seduces and sleeps with him, Henriquez's awareness that he has been duped by Victoria leads him to kill himself. Dacre seems unable to allow her characters of rational sensibility to survive, but is equally insistent that her selfishly tyrannical characters be punished. There seems to be no way out of the social dystopia that Dacre creates in her novel. So, while both *The Natural Daughter* and *Zofloya* share a commitment to showing the dangers of selfish sensibility and the destructive effects of too much private feeling, both on the individual and his or her community, Dacre's Gothic tale of emotional and physical violence is perhaps ultimately closer to the nihilistic individualism espoused in Sade than the cautious optimism of Robinson.

“Prejudice had been her destruction”: *Selfishness and Violations of the Family in The Natural Daughter*

When Martha (Bradford) Morley reflects near the end of the novel that she has been destroyed by the prejudice of others around her, particularly her immediate family and her husband, who were jealous, capricious, and selfish she sums up the danger of too much sensibility that this chapter seeks to explore. Robinson's exceptionally bleak narration of human foibles and the pernicious effects of too much selfish passion on the

personal safety of others offers up a dystopic reality where the fabric of social cohesion is torn apart by those most responsible for keeping it together: the family. The novel, then, is a dramatization of Christopher Flint's discussion of "situations in which self and family are utterly irreconcilable and yet inevitably joined" (252). While this narrative and its approach to family and social experience is infused with Robinson's gender politics, her critique in the novel goes far beyond the Jacobin feminism that continues to draw readers to the text.⁶

Much recent criticism of *The Natural Daughter* has focused on how the novel is an expression of Robinson's feminism and often foregrounds Martha's ability to exercise agency in the public world after she is evicted from Morley's house.⁷ There has been little investigation of how Martha's rational sensibility serves as a point of juxtaposition to the society around her and to the other (male *and* female) characters' seemingly uncontrollable passions. Unquestionably, Martha's ability, in most cases, to balance her thoughts and feelings and to keep a level head when challenged is the exception to the behavioural rule in the novel, as almost all of the other characters routinely perpetuate acts of emotional cruelty and social destabilization as a result of selfishness and pride.

⁶ Adela Pinch points out that "the social currency of feeling in the eighteenth century and the romantic period is inseparable from its complex interactions with ideas about gender" (12).

⁷ For examples of this trend see Ty's *Empowering the Feminine* (1998), Anne Close's "Into the Public: The Sexual Heroine in Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy* and Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter*" (2004) and Morgan Rooney's "Belonging to No/body: Mary Robinson, *The Natural Daughter*, and Rewriting Feminine Identity" (2006). In Sharon Setzer's introduction to the Broadview edition of the novel, she calls the novel a "fictional extension of Robinson's argument in *A Letter to the Women of England*, which reinforces its significance as a primarily feminist text (27). Setzer's full-length article, "Romancing the Reign of Terror: Sexual Politics in Mary Robinson's *Natural Daughter*" (1997) offers a fine reading of Robinson's feminism in historical context.

But rather than focusing on the exemplary behaviour of Martha in the face of almost-perpetual antagonism, which receives due attention from other critics, I am interested in what *The Natural Daughter* suggests about personal passion and its destruction of social and familial bonds. Robinson shows, with painful clarity, how the late eighteenth-century polite society in her novel is crumbling because it is filled with individuals who are only interested in and motivated by their own feelings and desires. One of Martha's most important roles in the novel is to serve as a clear juxtaposition to this model of polite society. For me, the text exemplifies how passion that is not tempered by reason *and* ties of family and sentiment, like Martha's is, can become a form that violates both social bonds and personal happiness.

Robinson wastes little time in making her social critique clear. In a scene that harkens back to the medical teachings of George Cheyne in the 1730s and the splenetic writings of Tobias Smollett in the 1760s and 70s, Robinson opens her novel with a rather miserable character named Peregrine Bradford. He is described as having a "wealth and love of ostentation" making him a "pompous invalid: whose luxurious life had been the bane of his constitution, and whose enormous fortune had deprived him of almost every felicity" (91).⁸ Bradford's ability to gratify every one of his desires the moment he has them has made him unhappy, though unwilling to re-establish the balance between want and need that doctors tell him is so necessary to his health. Bradford is one of the "most disgusting of all the various species" of travellers, and citizens, in England because

⁸ Bradford's characterization is strikingly similar to Smollett's description of the travelers that Matthew Bramble encounters in *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771). Both texts offer discussions on the importance of physical and emotional balance and the dangers of excessive self-indulgence. Both also offer a satirical critique of Britain as a dissipated society through the representation of personal illness.

“though he lived only for the world, he followed every propensity of his perverse nature, in defiance of the world’s opinion” (92). Bradford’s selfish desires and his inability to ever feel satisfied or satiated causes him to become a tyrant in his family, and a blight on his social community.

Peregrine Bradford is the father of Martha, later Mrs. Morley, and Julia and husband to a resigned, unhappy wife, Mrs. Bradford. His family is only kept from hating him by the fact that they are related (92); the ties are financially strong, though not particularly affective. The family dynamic of the Bradfords in the opening chapters of the novel makes three things abundantly clear: first, that personal passions and selfishness can drastically affect the happiness of the other members in a family; second, that there is a difference between the affected sensibility of Peregrine and Julia Bradford and the pragmatic good-natured sympathy of Martha; and third, that the different kinds of sensibility being expressed affect how the characters respond to others in the family and, by extension, society at large. Robinson shows family as a key form of socialization and subjectivity, as throughout the rest of the novel the Bradford daughters enact and respond to the styles of personal and social behaviour modeled for them by their parents.

Raised at the family mansion and educated by a French governess, Julia is described as the “model of feminine excellence” appearing “small in stature; faire, delicately formed, humble, obedient, complacent, and accommodating” (92-3). Ty suggests that she is “a descendent of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Julie in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, of Henry Mackenzie’s *Julia de Roubigné*, Wollstonecraft’s Maria in *Wrongs of Woman*, Hays’s Emma in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, and possibly even of the heroines from Robinson’s earlier novels” suggesting that she is meant to be read as the

stereotypically beautiful but socially passive lady of sensibility (*Empowering* 75).

Unfortunately, Julia's delicacy and excessive sensibility make her an ineffectual aid to her father and to those travellers the Bradfords encounter on their way to Bath. She is too busy crying and swooning to offer any assistance, while her older sister Martha, a "giddy, wild, buxom, good-natured and bluntly sincere" woman, wastes no time coming to the aid of the distressed in any way that she can (93). When Martha ran to help Sir Lionel Beacon after his curicle overturned immediately after their first meeting, Julia was unable to render any assistance and instead stood "overwhelmed with terror. For the sight of blood would have been too severe a trial for her sensibility" (99). Julia was too concerned with her own response to the situation to be of any use to her fellow man, and when Sir Lionel offers the ladies his company after Martha's assistance, Julia rebukes him by suggesting that Martha's "affected humanity was always involving her in difficulties" (100). The female pronoun at the end of this ironic sentence seems intentionally vague because it could apply to both sisters: it foreshadows Martha's later sufferings as a result of her sympathetic 'adoption' of Fanny and suggests the extent to which Julia focuses on her own responses to situations instead of considering others.

The difference between the sisters may be a product of their socialization and education: while Julia was raised by her parents and educated in the family home, Martha was raised and educated at a country boarding school, spending less than six months with her parents since the age of three (93).⁹ Martha's socialization was not influenced by the

⁹ The juxtaposition between two dissimilar sisters or brothers is among the most common motifs in eighteenth-century characterization. Within the texts being studied in this dissertation alone, the "good" and "bad" sibling dyad appears in *The Adventures of David Simple* (David and Daniel), *The Vicar of*

wealth, selfishness or petulance of the Bradford family, which likely accounts for her being “more judicious in her feelings” and hence her frequent disagreements with family members. It is not clear, though, what specific experiences she has at boarding school that might have positively affected her sensibility (101).¹⁰ Again, there is some ambiguity here with respect to Robinson’s characterization about the girls’ nature, but in highlighting their different experiences as children she seems to be suggesting, at the very least, that Martha’s absence from the Bradford home prevented her from becoming as self-centred as her sister and parents. Robinson repeatedly emphasizes the differences between the sisters in the early chapters of the novel, foregrounding the ways in which Julia serves as her father’s favourite through her unwillingness to challenge his desires and petulant selfishness while Martha’s sincere desire to improve her father’s health leads him to call her a “busy jade” (101). Julia is popular with her parents because of the kind of sensibility she showed in the scene I just discussed, and because she is as spoiled and selfish as her parents, and has no desire to see any of them sacrifice their own desires for the sake of the rest of the family. Despite Ty’s suggestion that “it is tempting to read Martha and Julia as representative of what Austen might call sense and sensibility, or what Inchbald might call nature and art” reading the sisters simply as opposite modes of feminine behaviour undermines the larger, non-gender specific social criticisms of excess and selfishness that Robinson explores in the novel (*Empowering* 74). Even before the major action of the plot begins, then, the scenes of exposition clearly suggest that the

Wakefield (Olivia and Sophia), *The Fool of Quality* (Richard and Henry Clinton, Sr and Jr), *The Natural Daughter* (Julia and Martha), and to a lesser extent, in *Zofloya* (Leonardo and Victoria).

¹⁰ For more discussion on the ways the sisters represent alternate modes of female social behaviour and gender criticism, see Ty and Setzer.

novel is concerned with rules for social inclusiveness, the disconnection between self and other, and the destructive emotional influence of unchecked passions that Chris Jones and Spacks suggest are such a part of late-eighteenth-century anxieties about sensibility (4, *Novel* 159).

Martha's family is prejudiced against her because she does not support their excessive lifestyle. This makes Martha the "anti-social" character in their eyes: she is the person who is breaking-up the family unity and causing discord by questioning her father's actions. Ironically, though, Martha is much more sincerely concerned about her father's health than her sister or mother. While Martha may be frustrated by her family's refusal to listen to reason, they are equally upset when challenged and made to feel guilty for their passionate selfishness. The tension within the family society, and the way they are affected by one another's emotions, is palpable during the scene where Mr. Bradford's doctor has suggested a life of physical and emotional moderation as a cure for his patient's continual indispositions.¹¹ Martha is trying to convince her father to take the doctor's advice which upsets him; he is trying to get his wife to make Martha be silent which makes Mrs. Bradford angry; she then gets mad at Martha which encourages Julia to get mad at Martha so as not to be left out; and Martha quietly acquiesces to their demands (106). This scene is rife with examples of how all of the characters jostle to assert their opinions and make their influence felt.

¹¹ As Adela Pinch argues in *Strange Fits of Passion*, the feelings are "not always lodged within the private, inner lives of individual persons, they rather circulate among persons as somewhat autonomous substances" (1). David Hume also suggests that "the passions are so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce correspondent movements in all human breasts" (qtd. in Pinch 1).

Martha's frustration with the family's dysfunctional relationships reinforces her willingness to enter into marriage with Mr. Morley after only a short acquaintance. Martha's jealousy of Julia's social and familial popularity also contributes substantially to her decision to accept Morley's proposal and though she "was not in haste for an husband . . . she, like her father, was weary of perpetual contradiction" (115). The letter of intention that she receives from Mr. Morley is frank, seemingly unselfish, rational, and not overly emotional, which appeals to Martha who "was not one of those romantic females who are led from the paths of rationality by the phantoms of vanity and caprice" (115). Martha accepts Morley's offer and as they prepare for a life of moderation and rational happiness Mr. Bradford's now-unchecked avarice, aided by the "gentle acquiescence" of Julia, finalizes his decline. Again, Robinson carefully juxtaposes the happiness of a family based on shared sentiments and mutual usefulness to the family being slowly destroyed by affected emotions and selfishness.

Martha quickly learns, however, that her marriage is not to be the balanced relationship she had hoped, and that her life of perpetual contradiction is not over when she leaves her father's home. She discovers that her husband "chose a girl of Martha's open and ingenuous temper, because he imagined that he might govern her with facility; believing that the sense of obligations for her removal from parental tyranny, would render her passive when he asserted the authority of a husband" (117-8). Despite being a man of "unblemished reputation" in society, Morley has "some peculiarities" in his private life, among which are jealousy, pride, and will to have his wishes entirely catered to by his wife. But Martha's sense of herself as an active subject in the world makes her want to devote as much energy to the happiness and safety of all those in the community

outside her husband's home as to the man inside of it. In fact, her willingness to care for the needs of others, and her pride in doing what she feels to be right, are what begin to draw the censure of her family upon her, and to drive a wedge between her and her husband.

Mr. Morley's absence from the family home allows Martha an increase in her ability to indulge "her benignant propensities" and this ability to act more autonomously makes her quite content to have him absent (121). While he is away on business, Martha finds a young woman and her new baby struggling to survive in the village near Morley House. Martha's interest is piqued, as is her sympathy for this woman's plight, and she offers to assist and support the mother and baby without revealing anything about their lives or their identities. Martha's pride at quietly being able to offer assistance brings into relief the opulent gestures of public giving that those around her consider charity. Mr. Bradford and Julia believe that extending assistance to someone is only worthwhile if it could be publicized and thereby could raise the reputation and influence of the giver (101). Mr. Morley shares his in-laws' interest in publicly acknowledged benevolence, and "by his indefatigable labour to obtain the character of a philanthropist and a Christian he had exalted his name" (117). Morley's preoccupation with presenting the right social persona of himself as a benevolent, religious philanthropist is more concerned with individual accomplishment than with social well-being. Even if the actions of Morley and his in-laws relieve the sufferings of the poor, it is a secondary benefit to the reputation of the philanthropist. Robinson's treatment of this issue supports R.F. Brissenden's assertion that as the eighteenth century came to a close "it was realized that the element of self-satisfaction inherent in such an attitude [of philanthropy] was perhaps not very

admirable” (83). This is a decidedly dystopic treatment of sensibility, which Chris Jones describes as “empt[y]ing the term of any social idealism, [and] emphasizing its individualism and the emotional selfish indulgence which was seen as its inevitable concomitant” (ix).

When Mr. Morley returns he is unhappy to hear that his wife has taken a protégée without consulting him (128). What makes him even more upset is that the child is not of noble birth: “‘It is some beggar’s offspring’ said Mr. Morley. ‘Some artful low-born jade has imposed on your mistaken sensibility’” (129). But the anonymity and poverty of the child is what excites Martha’s sympathy, which is not mistaken, but not directed in the way that Morley sees as most advantageous to his reputation. He begins to worry that the child might be Martha’s own illegitimate daughter which would make him a cuckold, a social character he is not willing to accept. The more he presses her for information about the mother and sees how upset she is, and the more she refuses to give in to his assertion of spousal authority their passions of pride become overwhelming and a rift is cast between them. Robinson argues that “there could be no domestic harmony where hearts did not beat in unison,” and Mr. Morley’s and Martha’s pride cause a crisis in their family and the roles that each plays in that family (130). Julia adds her own excessively polite sensibility into this crisis by criticizing her sister’s actions and reminding her of the conflict that her sentiments used to cause in their family unit. But Julia is also gratifying her own desires in undercutting her sister’s familial authority by drawing Mr. Morley’s attention to herself instead of Martha.

After Mr. Morley listens to the gossip and prejudicial opinions of Julia, Lady Pen, and Sir Lionel, he is convinced that he has in fact become a cuckold and that it is “time to

act decidedly” against Martha (136). Each of the other characters has other motivation for speaking ill of Martha. Lady Pen loves scandal and intrigue and hopes to discredit Martha so that it will turn Sir Lionel off of Julia; Julia is trying to make Sir Lionel jealous by getting Mr. Morley to dedicate himself to her; Sir Lionel is more interested in making fun of the assumed father, and fellow libertine, Lord Francis Sherville than he is in making Martha look bad, though his words ultimately have that effect. With at least five people representing and interpreting, through their own personal interests, the ‘truth’ about Martha’s relationship with little Fanny, the cacophony of voices and motivations becomes emotionally disorienting and prevents the reality of the situation from being articulated. The interrelation between the family and friends assembled at Morley-house is epitomized in the description of their evening outing: “the whole group set out on foot; some to torment, and others to be tormented” (134). This small community has shown itself to be both selfish and pernicious, and to have clearly made Martha their victim.

The interference of Julia, Lady Pen, Sir Lionel, and Mrs. Bradford convinces Mr. Morley to shut his doors against Martha and bar her from her family home. And, although she was not happy in her husband’s home, a space as tyrannical and selfish as her father’s, she is devastated to be exiled from the safety of family protection. She tells Lord Francis “I am of all human beings the most unhappy . . . I am abandoned by my family, and deserted by my husband; I can return to Morley-house no more” (141). Though it is not “a kind of Edenic home” as Ty suggests, Martha is upset to lose the social community that has defined her sense of belonging and identity, and is devastated that these defining aspects of herself could be so easily taken away (*Empowering* 77). The cruelty of her family’s behaviours is offset by Lord Francis’s offer to care for Fanny:

“how generous, how benevolently noble did such conduct appear, when contrasted with the jealous and suspicious pride of Mr. Morley” (140).

The jealousy and pride of Mr. Morley is only eclipsed by that of Martha’s mother and sister. After leaving Morley-house and going to London with Lord Francis and little Fanny, Martha tries repeatedly to get assistance from her mother and sister, but she is completely spurned, which begins her long journey to again find inclusion in a social or familial community. When she next sees her sister (in a compromising position with Sir Lionel), Martha is not surprised when Julia says to her: “your indiscretion has nearly broken the hearts of all your relatives; and after what has happened, you must be sensible that we can no longer acknowledge you” (152). Martha is not the only character in the novel to struggle to find family, support, and acceptance. Many of the other characters in the text are also attempting to overcome the challenges of family anger, selfishness, and gossip. The woman that Martha helps, “Mrs. Sedgely” (who is later revealed as Lady Susan Sherville), has been rejected by her family much like Martha has been for wrongs committed while in France during the Revolution. Lady Louisa Franklin, who is Lady Susan’s and Lord Francis’s sister, also has to deal with the ramifications of losing a husband and becoming a subject of community gossip.

These three women can represent the most traditional trope of the sentimental novel of “virtue in distress” which, along with Robinson’s biographical experiences, informs many of the feminist readings of the novel.¹² However, their sensibility is just as indicative of the “alienation, of intellectual and cultural dislocation” that Brissenden suggests is a major subtext of the trope of “virtue in distress” at the end of the century

¹² See Setzer, Rooney, Close, and especially Ty’s *Empowering the Feminine*.

(66). The ideas of dislocation and separation are central to understanding the actions that drive the plot as well as helping to explain the thoughts and actions of most of the characters in the novel. For those who take on antagonistic roles, particularly Julia and Mr. Morley, there is often a disconnection between their public expression of sensibility and their personal passions and sentiments. This disconnect reflects a lack of self-understanding and guilt which prompts inappropriate and sometimes emotionally harmful actions. Similarly, for those characters whose public expressions of feeling do represent their internal perceptions of emotion, this sincerity is often not valued by the people receiving their sincere sentiments and can lead to a social rift. In both cases disconnection serves to destabilize social bonds.

I see that detailing the importance, and difficulty, of maintaining consistency and honesty between the internal perception and the external projection of subjectivity is at the heart of Robinson's novel. Much of the alienation and feeling of disconnection she describes comes from Brissenden's assertion of "the sanctity of individual judgment" that places undue significance on internal perception (69). Too much focus on the individual devalues the form and sincerity of that self being projected and received. It is the insincerity of Mr. Morley's projection of his inner self in juxtaposition to Martha's sincerity that precipitates her social exclusion. Since Morley is lying to others about who he really is, he assumes that his wife is doing so as well. This increasing distrust of the external/public projection of a character's subjectivity affects the sensibility and sentiments of both the male and female characters throughout the novel.

The other main character whose experience of sensibility and violation of family bonds reinforces the themes of alienation and social disorientation in the novel is Mrs.

Sedgley. The stories and experiences of Martha and Mrs. Sedgley intersect quite early in the novel and theirs remains the strongest social and emotional bond throughout the text. The extent of Mrs. Sedgley's alienation from her family and social identity is most strongly conveyed through her reluctance to name herself. In their first few meetings when she is first discovered by Martha, the woman does not offer a name, and leaves her child with Martha without any sense of who its mother is. When she later meets the woman when they stay at the same inn in Holborn she learns that the woman is named Mrs. Sedgley (159). She only learns that her real identity is Lady Susan Sherville in the final two pages of the novel (294). That Lady Susan is denied public access to her authentic identity, and the social position and family association that accompany it, speaks to the degree of control that her family asserts over her. Her loss of a legitimate claim to the subject position of Lady Susan Sherville is a product of family pride and alienation, effected by her brother and father.¹³

Like Martha, Mrs. Sedgley was partially responsible for her familial rejection. She too was driven away from her family by a father whose "imperious tyranny" caused him to exercise his power over his children and to disavow the importance of their feelings and happiness. When she is offered the chance to go abroad with a friend of the family, a fashionable and dissipated woman, Mrs. Sedgley begs to go. She explains: "my parent, never having been fond of me, was soon persuaded to consent" (161). Her father's increasing misanthropy and desire for social isolation confirms Mrs. Sedgley's reluctance to return to a family home that is devoid of sympathy, affection, and sociability. Though

¹³ Because naming is such an important indication of identity and socio-familial belonging I will continue to refer to Lady Susan as Mrs. Sedgley to reinforce Robinson's criticism of her alienation.

it is only partially responsible for the events that follow, the lack of “strong affective ties” in the family prompts Mrs. Sedgley to leave the safety of her home and take the trip that sees her become a prisoner of Marat at the Abbayé during the height of the Reign of Terror (Stone 7).

After receiving little comfort from the thought of going home, and being imprisoned in France on their way there, Mrs. Sedley and her travelling friend find kindness and support from an English man who offers to help her be freed if she will marry him. Being terrified of Marat and her fate if she remains France, Mrs. Sedgley accepts the Englishman’s offer to marry, but not because of any lustful desire. What motivates her is survival: “life was the temptation he offered; and I had not fortitude to resist it” (166). After a week of comfort in the prison, Mrs. Sedgley is abandoned by her husband who organized a sham marriage to take sexual advantage of her, and since her travelling companion had already been released to leave for England, she is forced to remain alone in the prison with no form of emotional or financial support, for another five months.

After being fortuitously preserved from the guillotine (and the alternative of becoming his lover) by the untimely death of the “barbarian inquisitor” Marat, Mrs. Sedgley, who is now visibly pregnant, is unable to return home to her family because of her condition.¹⁴ Her family places a higher value on the pride of their political sentiment than they do on the terrors to which their kin has been exposed or the emotional

¹⁴ This scene is remarkably similar to the situation of Madame de Narbonne in volume three of Craik’s novel, *Adelaide de Narbonne*. Like Craik’s novel, there are clear elements of the Gothic tyrant and of virtue in distress in this part of Mrs. Sedgley’s narrative.

difficulties she endured by choosing to put her reputation at risk to preserve her life.¹⁵

The family's passion, particularly her father's and her brother's, to preserve their reputation trumps her need for their support, and her actions serve to permanently separate her from them (167).

Ostensibly alone in the world, Mrs. Sedgley knows that there are kind and sincerely feeling people to help her, she singles out the Duchess of Chatsworth as an example, against whom she juxtaposes the selfish and affected feelings of her family. She describes the Duchess by saying: "I know that from her bosom the benignant graces of sensibility and generosity banished the mean fastidious scorn which, in less enlightened beings, acts as a watch-guard on the feelings, keeping aloof the noblest sentiments of friendship and humanity" (168). Hoping to find a similarly benevolent soul, Mrs. Sedgley arrives in London and appeals to her travelling chaperone, but this supposed woman of feeling refuses to acknowledge Mrs. Sedgley since it would negatively affect her own reputation.¹⁶ In the months between Mrs. Sedgley's desertion in Paris and her eventual release from the Abbayé, a rumour crossed the channel and made its way through London that Mrs. Sedgley had not only had a Paris prison marriage, but that she had also agreed to be the mistress of Marat. Mrs. Sedgley scorns the "high sentiments of aristocracy" that are insulted by the rumours, without bothering to determine their truth, along with the letter she receives "with the commands of all my relatives never again to disgrace them by either bearing the name or venturing into the presence of my family" (172). The

¹⁵ They consider her an "idolater of Rational Liberty" while they are staunchly opposed to "the faintest shadow of democracy" (167).

¹⁶ Martha later reveals that this woman is Lady Pen Pryer, whose love of scandal and gossip partially contributed to Martha's earlier unhappiness at Morley-house and who is generally described as a dissipated, shallow, and emotionally artificial character throughout the novel (174).

prejudice of her family, and the pride of her female friend, continues to force Mrs. Sedgley's downfall, an experience with which Martha can certainly identify.

When the two women meet after Martha's separation from her husband they form a close friendship and travel together as successful strolling actresses.¹⁷ The two women support each other and share in the sorrows and joys of each other. This marks one of the first relationships for either of them that reflects life as mutually caring and emotionally and intellectually balanced. But even this small attempt at happiness and belonging is shattered by yet another example of emotional violence that comes from a family member Martha has never even met.

While Martha has been struggling to find a new social role and identity for herself, Julia has been practicing the art of manipulation and artifice and has married the pretentious aristocratic Gregory Leadhead. When she delivers him a healthy, full-term son only four months into their marriage, a scandal is almost inevitable. But the stigma of having a son who is clearly not a legitimate child is somewhat lessened for Gregory by the positive reputation and beauty of Julia, and the desire of the family to avoid acknowledging the cuckolding of their eldest son. But when her judgemental in-laws

¹⁷ The discussion of Martha's acting style is among the most problematic of Robinson's arguments in the novel. She is described as being a good actress because she is the "pupil of Nature": "she was lively and unaffected: her smiles were exhilarating; her sighs were pathetic; her voice was either delicately animating or persuasively soothing: she neither giggled convulsively nor wept methodically: she was the thing she seemed, while even the perfection of her art was Nature" (179). Whether this is indeed an attempt to vindicate her own life as an actress, as Ty suggests, it does not work well with the rest of the text (*Empowering* 79). Connecting nature and art serves to make Martha's expressions sensibility both on and off the stage a "natural" behaviour that has little to do with her choices or motivations. My problem with this interpretation is, that if Martha's goodness is natural, then Mr. Morley's and Julia's badness is "unnatural." This changes the focus of the novel from an interrogation of subjectivity, personal choice, and socialization to one of inherent moral quality, which does not seem to me to be Robinson's main interest in the rest of the novel. I see Martha as just as much a product of social influence and agential choice as the negative characters in the novel. Her ability to act benevolently (in public on stage, and towards others in her private life) is still socialized, and does not come from natural sympathy or sensibility.

learn that Julia is the sister of a strolling actress, who has the “arrogance of appearing in the county where the Leadenheads where persons of such importance” they considered it “unpardonable” (193-4). The Leadenheads find this added threat to their public reputation too much for their ‘noble’ sentiments and their humbled pride, and they make Julia and Gregory separate.

Martha’s brother-in-law Gregory, in particular, is so upset by this perceived blight on his family’s shining public reputation, that he forms a plan to “punish” Martha and drive her from their neighbourhood and drive away the stain of her and Julia from his family. Martha becomes the scapegoat for Julia’s immoral behaviour and as a direct result of the Leadenhead’s assertion of public and financial pressure, she is fired from her position as an actress and forced to leave Mrs. Sedgley behind. She laments that she is “once more driven to wander over the globe, the victim of persecution.” (194). She writes a poem about the Leadenheads accusing them of “vulgar scorn” and “vulgar pride,” and having too much selfish passion.¹⁸

Martha is devastated to be forcibly separated from her only friend, and her comments reflect the sympathy that has provided her with stability and which she is loath to lose:

They had built their fabric of esteem on the firm foundation of congenial virtues, cemented by congenial sorrows. The strong power of sympathy had wound a spell about their hearts, which seemed to exclude every sentiment less pure and exalted. Severe was the pang which was destined to divide them;

¹⁸ The whole Leadenhead family seems to be included in the novel to offer yet another example of the dysfunctional effects of selfishness and personal desires on family and social stability. For more on their description as a family see 175-7, 181-9.

while each commenced a new and painful journey, either to behold the flowers of fancy prematurely wither; or to know that weeds, thriving as they were destructive, would perpetually annoy them (198).

This is the first time in the novel that readers see the “strong affective ties” that Stone argues are characteristic of a new family mode in the eighteenth century. The scene serves as an important moment of juxtaposition and possibility. It challenges the dystopic representation of families who seek to destroy any of their members who put the family reputation in jeopardy, even with good reason. It shows that individuals can have positive effects on each other through family-like interaction and affinity and shared “virtues.” It also suggests that shared sentiments are more important in the construction of a safe space for individuals to live authentically than are biology and heredity. This scene foreshadows the positive family created by the alliance between Martha and Mrs. Sedgley’s families at the end of the novel.

Aside from their shared experiences of familial and social rejection and the destabilizing effect it has on their physical and emotional lives, there is one more major element that ties these two characters’ narratives together: Mr. Morley. Both women have been emotionally victimized by their relationship with him, as he is one of the people (along with Julia) who is most responsible for Martha’s social ostracization and emotional torment. The end of the novel reveals that he was also the Englishman who seduced and abandoned Mrs. Sedgley in France and fathered little Fanny. Following his mistreatment of her, when her chance of family support is taken away, Mrs. Sedgley moves to the neighbourhood near Mr. Morley with the hopes that his lawful wife would adopt and raise Fanny as a legitimate adopted child thus saving her child from a life of

emotional and financial hardships; Mrs. Sedgley exercises sincere parental affection to protect Fanny, even if it means that she will not be able to physically comfort the child by giving her to Martha. Martha in turn feels so sincerely for the mother's suffering and the social stigma attached to her, that she willingly takes the child under her care and promises to support Fanny. Both women express sincere social and familial affection that stands in glaring opposition to Mr. Morley's reaction to the child.

Though he is described as having "the character of a philanthropist and a Christian" and is publicly known for being a serious man of sympathy and sensibility, Mr. Morley is furious at his wife's adoption of the child (117, 111).¹⁹ He wastes little time in accusing Martha of unfaithfulness and amoral conduct of which he is actually most guilty.²⁰ Though he appears shocked at the moral implications of his wife's behaviour, despite his own immorality in France, Setzer suggests that Robinson clearly privileges Martha's sincere expression of feeling for Fanny, along with Mrs. Sedgley's parental devotion to the child privilege over Morley's unsympathetic and judgmental personality (538).²¹ Setzer rightly points out that Robinson equally condemns Morley's willingness to listen to "malicious innuendoes of the housekeeper and Julia" instead of

¹⁹ This description is supported by Mrs. Sedgley's own description of her seducer's reputation and personality: "The deserter of me and my sorrows was, to all other beings, the most amiable of mortals. The noblest philanthropy, the tenderest feelings, seemed to characterize his nature. So pure, so amiable was he in the opinion of all mankind, that even had I accused him of dishonour, the story would not have been believed; and I loved him too tenderly to be the destroyer of that reputation, the loss of which I felt but too acutely" (174).

²⁰ Sharon Setzer has called this the "great irony" (537) of the novel.

²¹ This characterization reflects Robinson's political feminism beyond the scope of *The Natural Daughter*. As in *A Letter to the Women of England*, Robinson suggests here that many of the good characters are female, and the bad ones male—Julia is an obvious exception to this rule. For more on Robinson's gendering of moral goodness and its connection to her Revolutionary politics, see Setzer 539.

trusting in his wife (536). Eventually Mr. Morley's anger, resentment, and jealousy at the thought of Martha's alleged infidelity make his sensation "too poignant for the resistance of human fortitude" leading to his "rash conduct," just as his excess of passion and lust led him to deceive and seduce Mrs. Sedgley in France.

The first person that Martha encounters after being forced by the Leadenheads to leave her acting troupe and her dear friend Mrs. Sedgley is Mr. Morley. He is shocked and saddened to see his wife so physically changed and asks her about her life since their separation. In one of the most poignant scenes of the novel, she explains to him that her life has been one of isolation and necessity unfairly forced on her by the same precepts of religion and honour that Mr. Morley thinks she is offending in her current career. After revealing that she is a strolling actress, Morley does not ask about her suffering or her health, but complains that his "high-bearing severity was humbled to the very extent of humiliation by this avowal" (201). He is focusing on the surface, or public, display of her morality as expressed in the social role she has taken on (out of financial desperation), rather than the internal reality of her emotional and moral subjectivity. When he then criticizes the irreligion of her *profession*, she fires back by arguing that "religion and humanity—at least what seemed such—deserted me to perish!"²² After he continues to berate her choices and the "imprudent conduct" of protecting a bastard child, and demands to know the father of the child and Fanny's whereabouts, Martha tries to separate from him, saying "you intimidate me by your violence: but you shall never force

²² I want to stress that his concern is with the *appearance* of impropriety, not with any proven misconduct. This reinforces the superficiality of his judgments, which are true of his actions in the novel in general; I see this superficiality as a sign of Mr. Morley's unwillingness, not inability, to see beyond his own perceptions and desires.

me to betray a being whom I would ever hold nearest to my heart, even though you menaced to arrest its beating” (202). She laments the prejudice, false pride, and persecution of Mr. Morley and her family and refuses to re-join his house.

While Martha is eventually convinced to temporarily reconcile with Mr. Morley near the end of the novel, she first has to acknowledge the violence perpetrated against her by her mother and sister, of which Mr. Morley is also an indirect part. When Martha hears that Julia is suffering physically and financially after the scandalous break-up of her marriage to Gregory Leadhead, Martha offers her sister assistance. She realizes that her sister’s machinations, including her desire to see Martha humbled, her passion for popularity, and her lustful and excessive desires for pleasure have been responsible for the destruction of her familial happiness and much of her struggle for social acceptance and a respectable position in polite society. Yet, she is still drawn by the ties of family and sympathy to aid the suffering Julia (212). Julia’s pride and scorn cause her to reject her sister’s offer of assistance, breaking the final tie of family bond between them.

When she hears that her mother is dead from the shock of Julia’s adulterous scandal, Martha realizes that the “kindred blood” she shared with others is now gone, and her role as daughter and sister is destroyed by her sister’s selfishness and uncontrollable passion: “an orphan’s misery was hers; for she had no friend to solace or protect her” (213). Martha’s internal struggles for family acceptance have manifested in public expressions of scorn and alienation at the hands of two individuals, her sister and her husband, more driven by their own passions and false sensibility than any shared social sentiment. It is at this point in the novel when Robinson explicitly states that Martha’s suffering is not just the story of one woman, but is representative of a wider social

experience of young women being physically and emotionally ruined by the “sharp sting of kindred persecution!” (213).²³

Martha eventually finds that her mother is alive but has lost her reason after being confined to a madhouse by Julia. Mrs. Bradford has only enough sanity left to remind her of the terrible treatment she offered to Martha, the daughter who sincerely loved her, and of the blame she carried for exiling Martha and allowing Julia to develop into a selfish, insatiably lustful despot. Martha cares for her mother and offers her sympathy and love at the end of her life, and re-establishes that family bond just in time to watch her mother die. When Julia denies Martha access to the family home when she tries to attend her mother’s burial, that undoes the bond just recently re-established and again forces Martha into the world alone.

But this is not the end of Julia’s or Mr. Morley’s tormenting of Martha. After a brief trip abroad and a re-connection with little Fanny and Lady Louisa and Lord Francis Sherville, along with a brief sighting of Mrs. Sedgley, Martha returns home to England and hears of Mr. Morley’s failing health. Thinking that some of his failing health might be “compunctious sorrows” for his mistreatment of her, Martha decides to go see Mr. Morley and try to be reconciled to him before he dies (268). By trying to bring her public persona and reputation into line with her emotional and rational sympathies for her husband, Martha is trying to re-establish not only a family bond, but also the subject position of being a wife that has long been antagonistic to her sense of self. But when she appears at Morley-house she is denied access because the house “has a new mistress”

²³ This message is reified in the discussion of Mrs. Sedgley which I have already explained is a parallel in many ways to Martha’s.

according to the housekeeper (269). Julia has taken over as mistress of Morley-house, having become Mr. Morley's mistress, despite the fact that since his last meeting with Mrs. Morley he had publicly become the "sternly reproving moralist; the village censor; the promulgator of Christian charity; and the unequalled example of candour, honour, and humanity" (252). Once again, Morley's public persona has allowed him to conceal a private selfishness, dissipation, and lust which for Robinson reaffirms the danger, and potential violence, of a society where sensibility is much more strongly associated with physical appearance and social position than with sentiments and actions.²⁴ I think one of the reasons that Robinson waits until the final pages of the novel to reveal Morley's hypocrisy regarding Fanny's illegitimacy is to reinforce the damage that can be done when private passion is not just concealed, but hidden beneath the guise of social morality. Morley is a fine example of the social criticism that Jones offers in his discussion about how "benevolence and sympathy [had] become social fashions cloaking the urgent demands of a selfish rapacity" in the late eighteenth century (43).

After a few months, Julia's increasingly messy, public divorce begins to impose on Mr. Morley's ever-important reputation, and he casts her out from Morley-house (275). Around this time, Mrs. Sedgley is reunited with little Fanny and takes her to live a quiet family life in an isolated home in Switzerland. Mrs. Morley, meanwhile, is trying to get Lord Francis to acknowledge his parental responsibility for Fanny (who he still thinks is the father) while at the same time building a new family with him and his sister lady

²⁴ Ann Jessie Van Sant suggests that "sensibility is associated with the body, sentiment with the mind" throughout the mid- to late-eighteenth century, and Robinson certainly seems to be showing the difference, both practical and moral, between the two in this novel (4).

Louisa. But again, her happiness with the Shervilles is short-lived, when she receives a letter that her husband is dying and she must immediately go to him.

As Martha suspected months ago, Morley's life was being shortened by "that stern reprover Conscience; his strength was wasted by nights of feverish rumination, and days of immitigable sorrow [...because] the consciousness of having injured the innocent and the defenceless is the never-failing source of this heart-corroding evil (278). Morley finally confesses to being a major source of scorn and emotional violence against Martha, but also tells her of the degree of Julia's involvement: "That sister was your rival.... she was the soft, seducing fiend that tempted me to the destruction of your happiness" (281). After admitting to being the father of the son Julia had just after her marriage to Gregory Leadhead, he tells Martha that he only broke off the relationship with Julia once he became convinced that she had killed that child because of the problems it caused her. In this case, the emotional violence of both Morley and Julia has manifested itself in physical violence against another family member. No family bonds are sacred to Julia, and Morley's willingness to let her get away with infanticide (ending their relationship hardly counts as a condemnation of her actions) suggests that he is not much more concerned with the ties of sentiment and sensibility that are so central to both familial and state happiness. Selfishness and private passions have become the overwhelming motivating principles for action within the family and this has destroyed the family bonds and undermined social harmony and the morality of public personae.

Yet, though Morley acknowledges his responsibility for Martha's suffering and promises to be reconciled to her before his death, he does so only with the promise that Martha will prove to him that she is not the mother of Fanny, and that she is innocent of

all he once suspected her of. He says he believes her to be innocent but needs to know that his scorn of her really was not deserved before he dies (280).²⁵ Willing to do anything to fulfill her duty to him, though she feels no need to publicly prove her innocence given that she personally knows it to be inviolate, Martha and Morley leave for Switzerland in order to bring a conclusion to tension between identity, action, sympathy, and passion that has dominated the sub-text of the novel.

Along their way, Martha and Morley have their last encounter with Julia, as she tries one more time to break in upon her sister's happiness and satisfy her desire for power and her lust for Morley. After being detained in France on their way to Switzerland, the Morleys are imprisoned at the *Abbayé* prison. When they are called to be confronted by their jailor, they meet none other than Julia, the "unnatural fiend" who has now become the mistress of Maximilien Robespierre, the ambivalently reputed French Revolution leader (289).²⁶ Julia tries to convince Morley to leave her sister and join her in a life of debauchery and excess, while threatening to kill her sister. But she never gets the chance to act out her final act of emotional (and decidedly physical) violence against her sister because Robespierre is executed and Julia commits suicide in his bed to avoid being sent to the guillotine herself.²⁷ Setzer offers a most articulate explanation of how

²⁵ Here Robinson is clearly showing the ridiculous logic whereby a woman unjustly accused still has to prove her innocence in order to re-gain any amount of social face despite her husband being able to maintain his reputation as a pious and moral man even after acknowledging his immoral behaviour. This acknowledgment of a sexual-moral double standard is a direct echo of Robinson's argument at the opening of *A Letter to the Women of England* (42-3).

²⁶ See Gregory Dart's explanation of the ambivalence about Robespierre's character in the 1790s (16-18). While Robinson, like most in England, was horrified by the Reign of Terror, her depiction of Robespierre as a Gothic villain *par excellence* may not adequately reflect the character of the real historical figure.

this scene reinforces the multi-layered subtextual triangle I just mentioned above: “at this point in the novel, the dizzying hall-of-mirrors effect becomes almost overwhelming, as Martha enters the carceral world previously occupied by her double, Mrs Sedgley” with the same man who precipitated the latter’s familial alienation (541). The paralleling of Mrs. Sedgley and Martha offers multiple examples in one text of how personally-obsessed feeling destroys family units.

After burying Julia, the Morleys finally arrive in Switzerland, where the novel concludes with the exposure of Mr. Morley’s paternal monstrosity. Mrs. Morley asks to meet with Mrs. Sedgley before exposing her to Mr. Morley as the mother of Fanny; but on the way she encounters Fanny who she embraces and calls “my Fanny, my own darling Fanny” (292). Indeed, Martha is as much mother to Fanny as is Mrs. Sedgley, which the women’s continual paralleling only reinforces. But this expression of familial connection, albeit emotional rather than biological, is enough to drive the eavesdropping Mr. Morley into a frenzy. He jumps out of the nearby trees with a “wild and furious” look of “one that was deprived of reason” and accuses Martha of lying to him about not being Fanny’s real parent (292). Both Fanny and Martha are upset by the frenzied behaviour of Morley who grabs hold of Fanny and threatens to throw her over a cliff, in a scene that foreshadows the death of the innocent Lilla in *Zofloya* (293).

The terror of Martha, Fanny, and the recently arrived Lord Francis at Mr. Morley’s threat is extreme as Martha accuses her husband of being a “Monster of cruelty!” (293). Morley’s actions are even more abhorrent after Mrs. Sedgley arrives and

²⁷ Setzer suggests, quite rightly I think, that “nothing less sensational, of course, would provide a fitting end to such an ‘unnatural fiend’ as Julia.” (543). See this page, and the preceding one, for Setzer’s discussion of how this scene expresses Robinson’s response to the Reign of Terror.

finally acknowledges him as the “inhuman *father!*” of Fanny [emphasis in original] (294). Morley’s willingness to destroy his own illegitimate progeny mirrors the infanticide of the “fiend” Julia and proves Robinson’s assertion that selfishness and excessive passion can destroy not only the individual and their family, but also that most vulnerable and sacred of family relationships between a parent and child.

If the Bradfords were *ineffective* parents, as the di Loredanis are in *Zofloya*, then Morley’s and Julia’s selfish willingness to destroy the very creations of their uncontrollable passions marks them as *monstrous* parents. Their aberrant behaviour reinforces the Gothic terror of family disruption that the pat marriage resolution between Martha and Lord Francis is unable to efface from the reader’s mind. Robinson is clearly not intending for the marriage between Martha and Lord Francis to compensate for the amount of suffering that so many characters encountered from the cruelty and hypocrisy of Mr. Morley and Julia; but she is suggesting that the dystopic world she has represented in her novel is not a necessary model of family interaction. There is, at the end of the novel, at least the possibility of hope to overcome selfish and passionate obsession and to re-establish the family as the site of rational and moral feeling. Martha’s sensibility and rationality, combined with the sympathy and moral values she shares with Lady Susan and her desire for Lord Francis suggest this family allows both personal desire and shared “affective ties” to receive equal representation. This kind of balance between internal/private and external/public feelings is the necessary condition for a positive family in Robinson’s fiction. When Charlotte Dacre revisits the role of the family in the regulation of emotion and personal experience a mere seven years later, however, all hell breaks loose.

“Indifferent respecting the fate of others, but tormented with selfish terrors”: The Destruction of Self and Other through Selfish Sensibility in Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya*

Robinson’s novel may have prompted readers to wonder what was happening in the mind and heart of Julia Bradford when she undertook the intentional torment and attempted destruction of her sister Martha. Did she regret any of her actions in those final moments of terror in Robespierre’s bed? Did she finally see herself as the “unnatural fiend” that those around her saw? Charlotte Dacre’s dark and melodramatic Gothic novel, *Zofloya*, explores the sensibility and thoughts of another villainess, Victoria di Loredani, and provides a detailed exploration of the relationship between personal passion, selfishness, and family legacy that suggests a kinship between her and Julia as well as other destructive passion-driven female characters in the late eighteenth-century novel.²⁸ *Zofloya* is a penetrating look into the misanthropic and obsessively selfish feelings that were seen to challenge social cohesion in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. As I argued in the introduction to this chapter, the Gothic novel is deeply concerned with tensions between the individual and his or her society. As Robert Miles argues, the Gothic is a genre where “the conflict shapes itself as that between the demands of alliance (the preservation of ‘blood’) and the urgency of personal choice” (27). In keeping with this understanding of the Gothic, I argue that *Zofloya* is such an extreme representation as to form almost a caricature of the anxieties about sensibility and the

²⁸ Although Victoria certainly has contemporaries in novels of the period, Moreno argues that she is also part of a long legacy of aggressive and passionate women: “Dacre’s heroine, therefore becomes a fitting heir to a long tradition of femmes fatales, from Lilith and Circe to Lady Macbeth and the demon lover Matilda” (423).

relationship between individuals and their families in Revolutionary and Romantic Britain (27).

My central assertion about *Zofloya* is that the horror it portrays is not just the “violent disorder of female subjectivity” but also the destruction of the self which both causes and is caused by the breakdown of the family (Craciun Introduction 23). Dacre’s fear, like Robinson’s, is that the family, and by extension society at large, will be destroyed when the individuals within it fail to recognize their dependence on each other. Victoria, is a villain because she refuses to acknowledge that her subjectivity is influenced by the people around her. In the process of destroying and rejecting those in her close social circle in an attempt to gain the autonomy she craves, she is ultimately destroying herself as well. The three volumes of the novel trace the stages of development for Victoria’s destructive subjectivity and sensibility and show their effect on those around her.

The first volume explains the sense of self Victoria develops in response to the influence of her parents, and particularly in response to her mother’s desertion of the family. The second volume explores Victoria’s fashioning of herself as the wife of Berenza and the deception she has to learn to conceal her selfish desires from public view. It also features the emergence of a fragmented self, personified in the character of Zofloya. The third volume shows the realization of Dacre’s fear about the interrelation between the destruction of the family and the destruction of the self as Victoria loses control over her emotions and actions and becomes both an agent and a victim of

obsessive passions and violence.²⁹ Through Victoria's violent, and I argue ultimately unsuccessful, struggle for emotional and rational autonomy, Dacre is able to explore what Kelly calls "subjectivity *in extremis*" (*Varieties* xxxiv). Most importantly, Victoria's life and struggle for autonomy prove how passionate and selfish feeling can result in what Flint describes as a narrative that "disavows kinship" where "instead of internalized coherence between individual consciousness and social commonality, we see a simultaneous ransacking of self and family" (252).

The value of Dacre's fetishization of the excessive and private world of Victoria's emotional interior is that it brings into relief the suffering that is a necessary bi-product of this kind of selfish sensibility. As many critics have noted, this novel offers little pretence of the kind of realism that Watt considers characteristic of the eighteenth-century novel, and most agree that it is therefore best read as an allegory.³⁰ Dacre's third-person narrative thrives in what Beatriz Gonzalez Moreno calls "a writing of excess exploring transgressions and anxieties over cultural limits and boundaries" and the novel wastes no opportunity to express these anxieties in the most exaggerated way possible (419).

In fact, Dacre's novel was routinely criticized, when it was first published and in subsequent literary criticism, for a style of "high sensibility" that is "vitiated by

²⁹ George Haggerty asserts that "Dacre realizes the violence and brutality of subjectivity itself, and she [Victoria] plays out this violence . . . to victimize everyone close to her; it is a stunning, breathtaking display of personal aggression and rage; but of course Victoria is the victim here; she is the one who is finally cast down into the abyss. It is her own loss that she suffers in the end" (171).

³⁰ Kelly suggests that "the narrator invites an allegorical or ideological reading. The reader is warned against reading the story as a representation of the reader's 'real' world, and is invited to decode the story as an interpretation of that 'real' world" (*Varieties* xxvii). Ann Jones also posits that "Zofloya is allegoric rather than symbolic" (250). Because of this allegorical reading, Zofloya can justifiably be seen as a manifestation of Victoria's own self, as Kelly, Jones, and other critics have noted.

hackneyed expressions,” and a tone that is either “shrilly melodramatic or stiltedly formal” (qtd in Jones *Ideas* 227, 242). Though I agree that the novel’s action is implausible in several places and that the language of excessive feeling often leaves the reader feeling overwhelmed, these deficiencies also work to Dacre’s benefit.³¹ It reinforces, on a number of textual levels, her assertion of the dangers of too much passion for the individual and their immediate social circle. And, despite its many differences and deficiencies in form and style, *Zofloya* shares several thematic affinities with *The Natural Daughter*. Like all the novels in this project that precede it, *Zofloya* it is fundamentally concerned with the development of subjectivity and the tensions between private and public experience and feeling.

Victoria, like Julia before her, is the spoiled daughter of aristocratic parents who never take the time to teach her to think of anyone other than herself and whose indulgence of her every whim leaves Victoria petulant and childish as she enters adulthood. Early in the novel, Victoria’s indulgent parents are torn apart by her mother’s infidelity leaving Victoria to act, physically and emotionally, in her own world for most of the rest of the novel. After Count Ardolph takes Laurina di Loredani away from her husband and children on page 47 there is no longer a consistent family space in which Victoria authentically belongs and which can support her development as a personal and public being. Ann Jones observes that there is “little attempt to suggest a society within which the major figures move and by which they are affected” (248). This point reinforces that in *Zofloya* readers are entering a discursive space where the self dominates

³¹ Diane Long Hoeveler calls it “perhaps the most eccentric female gothic ever penned” and describes it as “almost campy in its self-conscious and hyperbolic posturings” (“Charlotte” 188, 193).

and where it destroys everything and everyone that obstructs its goals, including the family. Herein lies the real terror of the text.³²

Dacre opens her novel by showing the ties of kinship that exist within Victoria's family, and the passionate marriage of her parents, Laurina and the Marchese di Loredani. The couple have only two children, Victoria and her brother Leonardo, on whom "lavish and imprudent" fondness is bestowed (39). The importance of seeing their children happy, whatever their desires, outweighed the "distant reflection of future evil possible to accrue from the indulgence" so that the children were never denied the satisfaction of their passions (40). Just as Laurina had indulged in her impetuous desire for the Marchese at a young age, marrying him without the support or knowledge of her family, she and her husband taught their children to put their own desires above any familial rules for behaviour or moderation.³³ The di Loredanis' behaviour shows not only their own private foibles but also the ills of the public society in which they live. Dacre connects their feelings to the administration of their family and then suggests that these reflect the proud, jealous, and passionate "character" of Venice at the time (41).³⁴ As such, the following description of Victoria's character on her fifteenth birthday is an expression of both public and private subjectivity, representing both her family and social

³² I am reminded here of Judith Halberstam's articulation of the Gothic monster's biggest threat: "the monster, such a narrative suggests, will find you in the intimacy of your own home; indeed it will make your home its home (or you its home) and alter forever the comfort of domestic privacy" (15).

³³ Stone argues that placing the "selfish pursuit of pleasure in this world at the centre of human psychological motivation" was "one of the most important intellectual innovations" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and that this idea was intended to be a "contribution to public welfare and virtue." (236). Dacre's text is evidence that by the latter end of the period Stone discusses, people were becoming increasingly nervous that the focus on the individual was becoming more harmful (hedonistic) than ameliorative (moral).

³⁴ Kelly points out that this is a "typical piece of late-Enlightenment historical sociology" (*English Fiction* 106).

contexts: “beautiful and accomplished as an angel, [she was] proud, haughty, and self-sufficient—of a wild, ardent, and irrepressible spirit, indifferent to reproof, careless of censure—of an implacable, revengeful, and cruel nature, and bent upon gaining the ascendancy in whatever she engaged” (40).

The happiness of the passionate Loredani family is soon interrupted by the arrival of Count Ardolph, a wealthy German friend of one of the Marchese’s friends. Following the rules of aristocratic hospitality, the Marchese invites Ardolph into his home, unaware that this will soon cause the destruction of his domestic harmony and eventually his own life. Ardolph is, in many ways, the male analog to Victoria in the novel: left to his own devices early in life he gave in to “inclinations naturally vicious” and adopted a life of crime that allowed him to revel in his lustful feelings with “excessive and unlimited gratification” (43). Indeed, Ardolph experienced such sensual stimulation that his ability to be satisfied was almost completely destroyed, leading him to more and more extreme measures to satisfy it. When he arrives in Venice, the narrator describes Ardolph as a “sceptical,” “cruel,” and “dangerous” character whose all-consuming desire is to “disfigure the beautiful fabric of a family’s happiness, and to scatter around him misery and devastation” (43, 44). This description offers a remarkable foreshadowing of Victoria’s own experiences throughout the novel which I suggest means that the novel may be read as Dacre’s warning that the destructiveness of maintaining a life of sensual excess and selfish feeling is not fundamentally based on the gender of the subject, but

rather on the individual's willingness to destroy familial bonds for the gratification of his or her own lustful desires.³⁵

When Ardolph accomplishes his goal of seducing Laurina and carries her away from her family, Dacre does not describe the sensual seduction of the once-happy wife as she will later do when Victoria seduces the all-but-married Henriquez. Instead, the scene is filled with the highly punctuated language of excessive sensibility as the narrator details Laurina's desertion of her family:

Let us forbear to dwell on this scene of weakness on the one hand, and depravity on the other. Complete as he could wish was the triumph of the seducer; he bore his victim from the scenes of her past honour and her happiness!—he bore her from her home!—from the arms of her husband!—from the embraces of her children!—far from Venice, the place of her nativity! (47-8).

The exclamatory nature of this passage is an example of the language scorned by critics. More importantly, though, it highlights that Dacre's primary concern with Laurina's affair is that her selfish passion and desire for flattery, the weakness mentioned, has led her away from the physical and emotional spaces occupied by her family. In order to give in to her passion for Ardolph she has had to give up the person she has always been and

³⁵ Most critics of the novel foreground Victoria's gender in their analyses and many focus on the way that the novel represents a challenge to both male and female Gothic narrative traditions. While these are certainly important arguments about the novel and should be part of a comprehensive study of the text, they are only two of the possible ways of reading the innovation and importance of the novel. For the most common readings of the novel as a challenge to traditional constructions of femininity and the Gothic, see especially Ann Jones's *Ideas and Innovations* (1986), Hoeveler's "Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*" (1997), Dunn's "Charlotte Dacre and the Feminization of Violence" (1998), volume 3 of Kelly's *Varieties of Female Gothic* (2004), Beauvais's "Domesticity and the Female Demon" (2006), and Moreno's "Gothic Excess" (2007).

the reputation she has always had, and in the process of doing so she has also torn apart the people most closely connected to her.

Laurina's flight brings shame and suffering to her family, and it prompts Leonardo to flee the family home, never to return. This exile of the male heir signals the extent of the damage that Laurina inflicted on her family: she deprives it of a future. But although Leonardo is also marked by the stigma of his mother's adultery, and his own life is lived in a continual struggle with his passions and his legacy of indulgence and sensuality, his story is a relatively minor part of the overall narrative and serves primarily to reinforce Victoria's experience.³⁶ Leonardo's physical separation from his family is mirrored by Victoria's emotional separation. While she remains in her father's house, Victoria pains him with the reminders of her mother's crimes and uses her mother's absence to challenge her father's authority in the house and supplant him as the authority in the home. Being so highly regarded in her home leads Victoria to expect that her desires and thoughts will be equally valued in the public and so she develops an indifference to external opinion that the narrator suggests is one of the worst effects of Laurina's desertion (49). By focusing on the self, and denying the importance of public opinion and reproach, Laurina has taught her children to develop their identities only from their own opinions and feelings. This is the great crime that the narrator continually

³⁶ The story of Leonardo fills five chapters in the middle of the novel (105-42). Though there are other references to him, particularly when Victoria and Zofloya join his group of banditti near the end of the novel these scenes still primarily foreground his sister (228-52).

revisits in the novel and is the embodiment of the social dangers of sensibility at the end of the century.³⁷

Victoria's father, who is an almost entirely impotent character in the opening chapters of the novel is also destroyed by his passion, when he encounters Ardolph out on a walk and tries to kill him. The narrator relates that "his aim was rendered unsure by his thirst for vengeance, by the raging and uncontroled [sic] passions of his soul" and he soon falls victim to the calm and collected response of Ardolph (50). On his deathbed, the Marchese tries to implore Victoria to gain control over her conduct for her own sake and for the sake of the public example she offers to others: "Remember, that in proportion to the elevation of thy rank, thy inferiors will look up to thee; and, therefore, it becomes a moral obligation on thee, to keep a guard over thy conduct, so that no possible evil may be derived from thy example" (51). Though Victoria is reminded of her public responsibility to control her passions and act justly, she never internalizes her father's message. She is too strongly influenced by her mother's influence and its correspondence to her own evil heart. Her father's death is as ineffectual in educating her as was his life.

Since Victoria is too young to be left alone, Laurina (who miraculously appeared at the deathbed of her husband just in time to be forgiven by him) takes Victoria with her to Ardolph's home where she lives for over a year. While there, Victoria meets Il Conte Berenza, a philosophically minded man who chastises Laurina and Ardolph for their selfishness and its destructive effects, and she is immediately attracted to him (58). When Berenza finally realizes her attraction, he scorns to marry her because of her disgraced mother, a fact that will come back to haunt him and eventually seal his fate, but is happy

³⁷ See 59-62, 89, 127, 136, 143, 236-7, 244, 246-7 in the novel.

to have her as a mistress. She is so pleased to have gratified her wish of finding a lover that she pays no heed to the way in which he is willing to be with her. Ironically, it is her mother who points out to Victoria the public shame she will bring on the family if she runs away with Berenza. In this scene readers first encounter the great capacity for cruelty that Victoria possesses, as she lashes out against her mother's hypocrisy much to the chagrin and disgust of Berenza (62). He sees Victoria's willingness to publicly (in front of those not immediately related to her) chastise her mother for her familial desertion, and to thereby scorn the duty of filial affection that she owes, as a sign of her personal depravity and almost leaves her for it. After this scene, she realizes that she must conceal the darkest, most vengeful passions of her soul if she is to keep the object, Berenza, she most desires to possess.

In an attempt to save Victoria from physical and emotional seduction by Berenza, Laurina, in her only real parental act in the novel, agrees to Ardolph's plan of tricking Victoria into staying with the Signora di Modena, a spinster relative known for her love of tormenting. Their plan is to keep Victoria confined at the Signora's villa away from their home near Venice. As soon as they arrive at the villa, they make a deal with the acerbic Signora, who is also motivated by self-interest, to keep a strict watch over her and confine her to her room. The next day, Laurina and Ardolph sneak away before Victoria rises leaving her abandoned, and in her eyes betrayed, by her mother once again. When she realizes that she is a captive she initially gives in to "a violent paroxysm of tears" like a traditional heroine of sensibility, but she soon gains control over her emotions and resolves to be revenged: "she checked a rising gush, while rage and the most deadly hatred against those who had thus dared to dupe and to betray her, took possession of her

swelling heart. An ardent desire of revenge followed . . . [thus] did every violent and evil propensity of her nature become increased and aggravated” (72). This resolution foreshadows a key turning point in Victoria’s character, which happens after Berenza proposes, by showing her commitment to a life of revenge and calculated deception.

Victoria’s escape from the Signora’s, with the help of a female servant, soon sees her returning to Venice and into the arms of Berenza (83-8). He is still intrigued by Victoria, but being a man of sense and feeling he wants a companion who is perfect both in body and mind; while he is assured of Victoria’s beauty, he is unwilling to consummate their relationship until he is convinced of the purity and beauty of her mind (91). Though the narrator reminds readers that Victoria’s passions are too “stormy” to allow for “so soft, so pure a sentiment as *real* love” she spends two chapters using all her art to deceive him into thinking her love is sincere and her mind pure (97). She gains control over the “wildest passions” and keeps them hidden, just as she concealed her fury at her mother’s abandonment and betrayal of her at the Signora’s, because it will best allow her to get what she wants. Again, Victoria is forced to suppress her natural character in order to get what she wants, and this constant need to be someone else ultimately undermines her ability to experience and develop a sense of who she really is as a subject. Jennifer Beauvias is right to suggest that the successfulness of Victoria’s performance for Berenza, which she describes as “an incredible ability to ‘shape-shift’ and perform,” ultimately leads to Victoria’s “loss of self” (para 5).³⁸

³⁸ This is one of the only points on which I agree with Beauvais in her analysis of the novel. Her approach to sensibility and the gendering of Berenza is remarkably oversimplified.

In the short term, Victoria's ability to dissemble gets her what she wants as Berenza finally acknowledges that she is worthy of his love (though not of becoming his wife). Only after Victoria saves Berenza from an attempted murder by throwing her body in front of his during a stabbing—perpetrated by her brother, Leonardo, in one of the novel's many unlikely scenes—that he is convinced to marry her (102-3). That Victoria was not sincerely interested in Berenza's life being in danger, but only in the results that saving it might yield her, is made clear by the narrator (102). Her selfishness is further reinforced, following a protracted digression explaining Leonardo's history and how he came to be in Berenza's room on the night in question, when her recuperation from the wound is described: "during her inevitable confinement, external objects not intervening much to distract her regards by flattering her vanity, she had full leisure to concentrate her great and varied powers into one point—that of rendering herself an object of such moment to her lover, that he should consider, with horror, the bare possibility of losing her" (137). Berenza, who finally considers Victoria not just as the daughter of the fallen Laurina (who is only qualified to be his mistress) but as a heroine in her own right after her action to save him, now offers to marry her. But by acknowledging his reluctance to marry her sooner, he reveals to Victoria that she was considered unworthy of him for some time because of her mother, and her pride is almost unable to forbear that. She vows vengeance on him that night, and though she marries Berenza immediately she is still consumed by a "vindictive spirit" and a heart "swelled with unforgiving hate" (139).

Until this point in the novel, Victoria's actions were motivated primarily by anger toward her mother and a need to repress the angry, violent self that she created in response to this emotional betrayal. Despite her desire to destroy her mother, Victoria is

unable to develop a sense of her self that is removed from her mother's influence.

Elizabeth Grosz's Freudian explanation of the child's development of subjectivity in

Volatile Bodies resonates with Victoria's experience.³⁹ Grosz writes:

this necessary dependence [on the mother] implies that the child's body and its bodily experiences are not simply the product of its own endogenous sensations and its various experiments with its bodily capacities; the child's body . . . is like a screen onto which the mother's—and culture's—desires, wishes, fears, and hopes are projected and internalized (75).

As such, Victoria's subjectivity is not independent in the first volume of the novel. This is where much of her anger and resentment stems from, since she is unwilling to accept how much she really is her mother's daughter, both publicly and privately.

Victoria's growing need to repress her violent and immature self for the first volume and the first half of the second volume is a source of increasing frustration to her. This reaches a climax after Victoria's marriage to Berenza, through which she overcomes her mother's public influence, and marks a major change in her character.⁴⁰ Berenza and Victoria have been uneventfully, though unhappily married, for five years during which time she has pretended to be the kind of wife he wanted when his younger brother, Henriquez arrives in Venice. Victoria is immediately struck by Henriquez whom she considers much more attractive than her husband and she struggles to suppress her sexual

³⁹ Hoeveler refers to Victoria's "stunted emotional faculties" which also suggests that Victoria is not fully developed as a social subject (*Gothic* 151).

⁴⁰ Ann Jones also suggests that that this is an important moment in the novel, arguing that it "seem[s] to mark the turning point in Victoria's career" as a villainess (232).

attraction to him. Being convinced that Henriquez is a much better prize than Berenza, she fixates on how to gain his affections. The narrator criticizes Victoria for her “ill-regulated mind” and ignorance of “self-denial” that leads her to think only of him both day and night until “the effervescence of Victoria’s mind increased almost to madness” (143-4). She begins to have terrible dreams, as she struggles with overwhelming emotions: “her bosom ached with the exhausting conflict of the most violent passions; death and destruction entered her thoughts, and twice she started up, as impelled to execute some dreadful purpose, she knew not what!” (145).

During one of these dreams she sees an imposing Moor, on whom she gazes with “inexplicable awe” (146). In her dream, the Moor helps her gain Henriquez’s hand and supplant Lilla as the object of his affections. Though she has never before noticed him in her waking life, for her pride prevents her from taking an interest in a servant or a man of colour, Victoria begins to become fascinated by him after his repeated presence in her dreams.⁴¹ The Moor is Henriquez’s servant, Zofloya, and despite his lower social status and race she is unable to explain her feelings for him or to figure out why she could not “for any length of time banish his idea from her mind” (149). Many recent critics have chosen to see Zofloya as a manifestation of the darkness inherent in Victoria’s subconscious so that he is “less a real personage than the dark and demonic forces within

⁴¹ There has been a substantial interest in the discourse of miscegenation and the racial “other” in much of the recent criticism about *Zofloya*. For more on the racial anxieties in the text see particularly Diane Long Hoeveler, “Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya*: A Case Study in Miscegenation as Sexual and Racial Nausea” (1997); Anne K. Mellor, “Interracial Sexual Desire in Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya*” (2002); Jeffrey Cass, “Milton’s Satan and Dacre’s *Zofloya*: Orientalist Camp” (2002).

Victoria's own psyche." (Hoeveler "Charlotte" 189).⁴² Others have argued that Zofloya actually is the Devil (the character he reveals himself as in the final pages of the novel) which reinforces the evil of Victoria's behaviour and selfishness. While the latter is useful particularly in discussions about race and alterity given the allegorical nature of the novel, either reading of Zofloya's character can be usefully invoked when interpreting the ambiguities about Victoria's character and the nature of her relationship with Zofloya.

For the purposes of my analysis, Zofloya is evidence of Victoria's fragmented self, as she struggles to articulate her private penchant for violence and the fulfilment of her desires with her need to be publicly preserved from being accountable for these private desires. Victoria has no desire for her actions to be made public, which is why Zofloya appears just in time to initiate the first real "action" of Victoria's crimes. He offers to help her kill Berenza, slowly and imperceptibly, so that she can obtain her secret desire while being preserved from public scrutiny. Her response is ecstatic, and the scene where he pledges to assist her returns to the punctuated style of excessive sensibility: "‘You love Henriquez, Signora.’ Yes, yes — to madness! — to distraction! — how canst thou smile, unfeeling Moor?’ . . . ‘I think I could *assist* you, fair Signora!’ ‘Oh, Zofloya, you would bind me for ever to you!’ Eagerly exclaimed Victoria" (156).

Thus, Victoria embarks on a plan to kill Berenza, seduce Henriquez, alienate Lilla, and have her heart's desire. Yet, despite Victoria's insatiable desire for the object of her passion, much like Ardolph's passion for Laurina in the early pages of the novel,

⁴² Kelly asserts that Zofloya is an "emanation of Victoria's desires, an aspect of her self as erotic subject, leading her where she wants to go." (*Varieties* xxvi) Ann Jones also argues that "it is possible to see Zofloya not as a supernatural being at all but as an embodiment of the evil in Victoria herself" (236).

she appears hesitant to begin the process of killing Berenza though she can not explain why (162). Zofloya has to prompt her to continue their plan, asking her “Is not self predominant throughout animal nature? And what is the boasted supremacy of man, if, eternally he must yield his happiness to the paltry suggestions of scholastic terms, or the pompous definitions of right and wrong?” (162). Victoria seems unable to use her own reason to commit to killing Berenza, and the need for external verification of her thoughts, even from the manifestation of her own dark self, again marks her subjectivity as immature.⁴³ Only after she is convinced that Zofloya’s plan for murder is based on cool reflection and sober judgment does Victoria willingly agree to go forward. Though she can feel the passion for achieving her goals, Victoria is unable to fully rationalize her actions, and the sublimation of the mind to the passions will ultimately be her downfall. So, under the careful guidance of Zofloya, Victoria puts on the public mask of respectability, appearing with “unshrinking soul, and eye unabashed by the consciousness of guilt” in “the innocent family circle,” while trying to patiently execute her private plan of social destruction (164).

Having committed to killing Berenza as the expression of her most private wishes, Victoria must move the family away from the public space of Venice to the Castella di Torre Alto, a remote castle owned by Berenza because only in a private setting can Victoria really do the work of her dark self (167). When she makes this decision Zofloya tells her that her fate is now in her own hands, not those of the state, the church, or any other external forces: “your fate, your fortune, fair Signora, will be your

⁴³ My use of this term comes from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argue that “immaturity is the inability to use one’s understanding without the guidance of another person” (81).

own making” (168). He also reminds her that she alone can give him any power to help her, as all his agency comes from her (168). Thus empowered, Victoria, Berenza, Henriquez, Lilla, and her guardian leave Venice and enter the secluded world of Victoria’s desire where all but she will perish.

The process of imperceptibly poisoning Berenza takes longer than Victoria wants, and the more she has to wait, like a child impatiently waiting to open presents on Christmas morning, the more incensed she becomes: “he may linger for years, even till old age shall have chilled the ardent fires that now burn in my bosom, till my passions shall have withered away and my energies damped! Oh, Zofloya! If you desire to serve me, let it beat at once; hitherto you have but trifled” (176). Zofloya rebukes her precipitant desires, and urges patience, but her obsession to possess Henriquez is causing her to lose control of the public persona of the loving wife that she continues to have to wear. She is increasingly described as being “frantic with protracted hope and increasing passion.” Even watching and participating in the death of Lilla’s guardian does nothing to quell her passion, since “the wildest frenzy of passion, the most ungovernable hate, and thirst, even for the blood of all who might oppose her” overwhelms her mind with a “gloomy anarchy” (184).

Victoria and Zofloya continue to quarrel for the next two chapters until Berenza dies, which shows the struggle between Victoria’s desire to destroy all her social and familial connections and the need to conceal those desires to save her from public guilt and to give her a chance to possess Henriquez. When Berenza finally succumbs to the effect of the poison, rather than offering her the possibility of using her charms to seduce Henriquez, Victoria’s actions in his final days serve only to incriminate her in his eyes,

thus driving him away from her. Henriquez's heart "involuntarily turned against the infamous wife" and he "shrunk almost instinctively from her, with a sentiment of horror" (188). Victoria's selfish desires could not be hidden by Zofloya's call for patience and cunning, so her excessive sensibility and desire have the effect of ruining the very relationship she most wanted to pursue. Here again, I see Dacre reinforcing that personal desire is destructive for both Victoria and those around her.

Being denied the opportunity to use her powers of persuasion to woo Henriquez, he is justifiably horrified when she declares her passion for him only days after Berenza's death she focuses her attention on Lilla, Henriquez's fiancée, as the next impediment to her desires (197). Lilla is Victoria's opposite in almost every way. As most critics have noted, Lilla—whose name is suspiciously similar to lily, the symbolic flower of innocence—seems to mock Victoria through her physical and behavioural perfection. Dacre uses Lilla to point out just how different Victoria is from a social ideal of femininity. Lilla is "pure, innocent, free even from the smallest taint of a corrupt thought" with "delicate, symmetrical and of fairy-like beauty" (144). She is as perfect as Victoria is corrupt, but when Henriquez explains his idolization of her to Victoria, she accuses him of "madness, madness!" (173).

Yet although Lilla is the traditional paragon of female beauty, virtue, and sensibility she is completely ineffective in the novel, and comes across as an insipid character who puts all her attention into her public role and expresses none of the passion or personal desire that fuels Victoria's every move and thought. It is not surprising that Victoria spurns this social role. When she arranges to have Lilla kidnapped and secreted away in a cave outside the family castle, what Victoria is really doing is suppressing this

public expectation of sensibility and gendered behaviour in favour of her own private desires as a definitive act of social defiance.

Once Lilla is safely hidden away in the cave, Victoria returns to the castle to claim her prize: Henriquez. He acts like the man of feeling, bemoaning Lilla's disappearance and seeming frantic to find her, while wallowing in the "luxury of his grief" (208). But Victoria intrudes upon his solitude and again throws herself, shamelessly, at his feet matching his passion in grief for her passionate lust:

'Cruel Henriquez! Is it thus you address one, who lives but in your presence? Forbear, at least forbear to taunt a heart that loves as—' 'Signora!' with agitation interrupted Henriquez — is *this* a time? — is *this* a subject — I thought it was never more to be renewed.' 'I can forbear no longer,' exclaimed Victoria, throwing herself at his feet; 'Oh, Henriquez! I love—I adore you to madness!—if you have a spark of feeling, of compassion in our soul, reject me not, but pit a wretch who feels it impossible to overcome her fatal passion!' (208).

Victoria's plea for Henriquez is socially and personally destructive on several counts. First, it is usurping the codes of courtship, with her lustful advances marking her as a wanton woman. Second, it challenges the ties of kinship, since it would be both dishonouring a husband and a brother for Henriquez to give himself to Victoria. Third, it challenges the sanctity of romantic love as it would dishonour Henriquez's relationship with Lilla were he to give in to his lust. Fourth, it exposes Victoria's selfish sensibility and anti-social subjectivity showing that her desire for sensual satisfaction has overridden her need to be safe.

Henriquez dashes all of Victoria's hopes for the realization of her desires, though she promises to pursue him "though death were the consequence!" (209). After this scene, for the first and only time in the novel, Victoria realizes that a less passionate subjectivity might be more suitable to the attainment of her wishes. In a scene worthy of a Faustian tragedy, Victoria offers up a vain prayer that she could turn her aggressive, lustful, passionate body into the "fairy delicacy" of Lilla's only to have Zofloya promise to help make it so. By drugging Henriquez, Zofloya can make it seem that Victoria is the perfect ideal of social femininity, just long enough for her to seduce him and complete his ruin by supplanting Lilla in his affections. But the adoption of a public persona, like a mask in a masquerade, is an artificial expression of self, and it serves as one final step in Victoria's fragmented subjectivity that will ultimately drive her to what Dunn refers to as "Dacre's most expansive scene of violence" (313).

After putting the drug in Henriquez's drink and waiting overnight for it to take effect, Victoria is finally able to achieve her goal of convincing Henriquez that she is Lilla, and he hugs and kisses her as if she was his wife. That she could not gain him in her own right seems not to bother Victoria, who at all costs has attained the height of her selfish desires while effecting one of the clearest acts of family betrayal in the novel. Victoria, who has lost her reason in a "joy-mad" state spends a night of blissful sensual pleasure in the arms of the amorous Henriquez (214-6). But at the moment that she attains the height of her personal desire she has signalled the breakdown of the family social structure, and soon has to pay a heavy price for such a selfish and subversive act.

As soon as Henriquez wakes up, with the effects of the drug now out of his system, he realizes that he has slept with the hated Victoria. He is seized with a "*Real*

madness” at his betrayal of Lilla and the memory of Berenza, and in an act of desperation and anguished sensibility for his unconscious wrongs, he throws himself on his sword (217). With his last breath he says to Victoria: “thus do I escape thee forever, persecuting fiend!” (217). Gone are all of Victoria’s pretences of calm, rational plotting and deceptively suppressed passion and malevolence. Victoria returns to the passionate frenzy of emotion she first experienced when her mother confined her with the Signora di Modena: “Frantic rage fired her soul at the thought, and keen disappointment maddened her brain.—Now she clasped her hands, and twisted her fingers in each other, and now tore, by handfuls, the hair from her head, strewing in agony over the lifeless body of Henriquez” (217). Victoria has finally lost control over her passions and it has caused and been caused by the loss of her greatest desire. Though she momentarily regains her calm, Victoria is unable to recognize her own responsibility for the death of Henriquez, and turns her passion into hate for Lilla, whom she wrongly and selfishly perceives to be the cause of her suffering.

In the first act of physical violence she perpetrates without Zofloya’s help, Victoria releases all of her torment and pain in a physical assault on Lilla, repeatedly stabbing her in a scene of remarkable emotional and physical violence. Moreno refers to Lilla being “symbolically raped by Victoria’s dagger” and foregrounds the cultural gender critique offered in this scene: “Lilla is as unnatural as Victoria [in her goodness] and their confrontation is a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde encounter of two degenerate doubles doomed to destruction” (431). Moreno’s description is an exceptionally clear articulation of Victoria’s rejection of the model of public femininity at the same time that it represents Dacre’s assertion that this perfected model is equally unsatisfying as a role for

women. While Victoria is socially destructive because of too much passionate sensibility and too little sense of social interconnectedness and propriety, Lilla is destroyed because she lacks any of the individuality or passion that would make her a real subject and not just a social archetype. Both women misjudge the importance of balancing self and other, public and private in their subjectivities, and so both are doomed to be destroyed. But Victoria has not yet freed herself from all the social connections of family, so only Lilla is cast into the abyss at this time.

Victoria is not, however, able to remain in the safety of her private world of excess and sensibility: her rash actions of violence and destruction have brought suspicion upon her, and she must flee the family home, just as her mother once had to do, in order to try to save what is left of her self from persecution. She again commends herself to the care of Zofloya and, under cover of night, escapes the castle where both her personal triumph and destruction were secured. That Victoria's private happiness was of such short duration speaks to the difficulty of sustaining an anti-social subject position, and after she leaves the sight of her passionate exploits, "she felt she was no longer mistress over herself or her faculties" and that "her self-confidence vanished, and uneasy sensations filled her bosom." (225, 227) The expulsion of Victoria from her private world marks the climax of the novel for me, and the final three chapters serve as a prolonged dénouement where Dacre ties up all the loose ends of family and personal subjectivity that continue to haunt the now-dejected villainess whose dark passions have totally imprisoned her.

As soon as they escape from the Castella di Torre Alto, Victoria and Zofloya join an outcast social circle when they are accepted into the world of the Condottieri, a group

of bandits who live in hiding on mount Cenis (228). Despite her relative isolation, though, Victoria cannot escape her past actions or the social roles that have haunted her for so long. In her quiet moments of reflection, Victoria again blames her mother for setting her on the road to so much suffering and deviancy showing that she is still not ready to acknowledge her own part in the terrible deeds and hasty passions that led to her isolation and unhappiness (237).

After quite some time, new outsiders arrive at the bandit's cave including a beaten and terrified looking woman. Her character is described in pitiful terms:

her figure, though faded, was still beautiful; her features were haggard and pale; tears streamed down her cheeks, and on her temple appeared a wound, from when the blood flowed over her bosom, which was bare, and cruelly bruised; her long dark hair hung wild and dishevelled, her clothes were torn to tatters, and one fair arm, gashed at the wrist, hung useless by her side (240).

The chief of the Condottieri is struck with horror, and instantly plunges his dagger into the man accompanying this woman with a violence and passion that hearkens back to Victoria's destruction of Lilla. After repeatedly stabbing his prisoner, the chief removes his mask to reveal that he is Victoria's long lost brother, Leonardo, that the man he has just killed is Count Ardolph, the seducer of Laurina and destroyer of the di Loredani family, and that the broken woman before him is none other than their mother (241).

The novel ends with the reunion of the di Loredani family and the proof that each surviving member has suffered and lost themselves in the selfish pursuit of passion. Like Victoria, Leonardo's passion and pride led to his relationship with the treacherous

Megalena Strozzi—the one time lover of Berenza—as detailed in Chapters XII-XV, which also led him to murder, betrayal, and a life of crime as chief of the Condottieri. Laurina’s affair with Ardolph eventually lost its passion, and his addiction to gambling led them to poverty which finally led him to “personal ill usage” when he beat her just before their apprehension by the bandits. Both Laurina’s body and mind were beaten down by her affair with Ardolph, and readers learn that her selfishness and passion led not only to the destruction of her family’s happiness but ultimately to her own destruction as well. On her deathbed, Laurina begs her children to forgive her and asks God for forgiveness as well.

Leonardo forgives his mother and grieves that her life has been as unhappy as his; but Victoria remains steadfast in her rejection of her mother and refuses to give any kindness to Laurina. When Leonardo presses Victoria to forgive her, she revisits the accusations she hurled in the presence of Berenza, bringing the novel back to one of its key moments: “‘Speak!—speak to the poor mother Victoria’ cried the superior soul’d Leonardo—hast thou been in thine own conduct so faultless, and so pure, that thou should’st deny to thy mother the assurance of love and pardon in an hour like this?’ Hah!—that is the very point,’ exclaimed Victoria, with a wild frightful laugh—‘that which I have been my mother made me!’” (246).

Laurina dies with the unforgiving eyes of Victoria boring into her, and with the cruel words of her daughter ringing in her ears. Leonardo’s shock at his sister’s depravity severs the last existing tie of emotion between the members in the di Loredani family, though they reinforce that Victoria has never been able to rid herself of her family’s influence over her life. The two siblings argue over who is to blame, with Leonardo

finally asserting that Victoria is a “Babbling and aggravating fiend!” (248). Much like Julia, whose monstrous behaviour was pointed out by her sister just before her death, Victoria’s monstrosity is made all too clear by her brother (the second time she is called a “fiend” in the novel).

When Zofloya warns Victoria that the secrecy of the bandit hide-out has been compromised, Victoria is frantic to abandon her brother to arrest and probable death, in revenge for revealing the truth about her while saving herself. Being “indifferent respecting the fate of others, but tormented with selfish terrors for her own” she makes a final commitment to Zofloya, offering up her soul and her life if she can avoid having to pay for her sins through public recrimination. After watching Leonardo kill himself to avoid being arrested, Zofloya and Victoria escape the bloodshed of the cave and arrive at a mountain-top far away from danger. But Victoria’s final abandonment of her family and any social accountability by retreating into her own dark world of passion, through Zofloya, is the final act of her own destruction.

Zofloya reveals himself to be Satan, the devil incarnate, who, after chastising her for a life of selfishness, deception, violence, and evil, throws her into the abyss just as she destroyed the innocent Lilla. After allowing Victoria to achieve exactly what she said she wanted, Zofloya comes to exact the price of this self-satisfaction, which is her physical and spiritual death. Dacre ultimately refuses to allow the possibility of such a destructive, selfish subjectivity to exist in her world of terror. Just as Julia destroyed herself in Robinson’s tale of selfishness and violence, Victoria too, at last is forced to take responsibility for the repeated attempts to destroy family bond and for a life of selfishness and excess.

Kelly has argued that Dacre's writing shows that "subjectivity ruled by passion is not independent" (*Varieties* xxv).⁴⁴ For me the point of both Dacre's and Robinson's novels are that subjectivity is never entirely independent, that the subject is always a part of her social environment, and that any definitive attempt to sever the ties between self and other is bound to destroy both. Robinson clearly characterized her selfish, passion-driven characters as "monstrous" and destroyed them in the closing chapters of her novel in order to suggest that it is possible to re-establish social harmony if sensibility is balanced by rationality and shared moral sentiments. Dacre also portrayed her selfish villains as "fiends" and saw to it that all met violent ends. The chief difference between the novels is that Dacre was either unwilling, or unable, to provide any resolution to her plot of family and social violation.

That both women sought to explore the ramifications of giving individuals autonomy over their thoughts and feelings is clear. The substantially different social implications of their respective texts is one of the best testaments to the highly controversial relationship between individuals and their societies, and between the rights of a person to do as they desire and the responsibility of individuals to support their family and community. Even though Robinson reclaims the possibility of hope at the end of her text, what readers of these two novels are primarily left with is a sense of deep unease about the role of the feelings and passions in British society. They are also left with a clear understanding that both the negative and positive discursive possibilities of sensibility, the ability to feel for the self and/or for others, are central to the political,

⁴⁴ He is speaking of Dacre's later novel, *The Passions* (1811), but the argument works equally well for *Zofloya*.

emotional, and cultural dialogues about the experiences of individuals in the fiction of the late eighteenth century.

Though this discussion signifies the end of my dissertation, it does not represent the end of the literary interest in sensibility, which continued into the nineteenth century. In particular, the relationship between private and public feelings and responsibilities remains a concern in British fiction throughout the Romantic and Victorian periods. The major novels of Jane Austen, for example, are consistently preoccupied with the tension between personal desire and familial responsibility. Though Austen is highly critical of the Gothic tradition of excessive private sensibility, she places a high value on the cultivation of rational sensibility, like that of Martha Morley, and on the importance of sympathy in the establishment of strong community bonds.⁴⁵ After Austen, however, literary representations of sensibility tend to focus on the destructive effects of feeling that became such a source of criticism in the fiction of the 1790s. This approach dominates the treatment of sensibility in many canonical novels of the nineteenth century, like *Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The positive effects of sensibility, meanwhile, never seem to return to the literary prominence they had in the 1740s-70s.

The first two decades of the nineteenth century, then, may signal the end of the ambiguous relationship between positive and negative experiences of sensibility as the term's meaning became further associated with its destructive manifestations at the end of the eighteenth century. Even so, sensibility remained important in narratives detailing

⁴⁵ Austen is explicitly critical of Lewis's *The Monk*, and of Gothic novels in general, in her 1817 novel *Northanger Abbey*.

the relationship between individuals and their societies. For that reason, the Möbius model of sensibility, which highlights the interconnectedness between private/internal and public/external feeling may also be useful in helping to understand how both Romantic and Victorian writers envisioned subjectivity in their novels.

The aim of my project has been to theorize a dynamic and heterogeneous understanding of sensibility in the eighteenth century as both a positive and negative force, influencing the subjectivity and socialization of both male and female characters. In doing so, I hope to have opened up possibilities for re-thinking the relationships between private and public feeling, gender, and subjectivity in the centuries that inherited the legacy of the Age of Sensibility and the feeling subjects it produced.

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