Affective Transmission and the Invention of Characters in the Victorian Bildungsroman

AMANDA AUERBACH

OVER the course of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), Lucy Snowe finds herself fantasizing about an imaginary version of Ginevra Fanshawe (a student at the pensionnat where Lucy works) who is capable of appreciating Graham Bretton's love. Lucy pictures to herself a scene in which Ginevra is on holiday: "Ginevra seemed to me the happiest. She was on the route of beautiful scenery; these September suns shone for her on fertile plains, where harvest and vintage matured under their mellow beam. The gold and crystal moons rose on her vision over blue horizons . . . but all this was nothing. . . . Ginevra had a kind of spirit with her, empowered to give constant strength and comfort."[1] As Lucy imagines the situation of her friend, she participates in a feeling of happiness she attributes to Ginevra. But is this delight in being loved any more likely to belong to the shallow young woman than an appreciation of the beauty of her natural surroundings? If this emotion does not belong to Ginevra, then to whom *does* it belong?

Lucy half-admits to herself that this pleasure is not likely to belong to her companion, whom she has made into "a sort of heroine" (159). Perhaps it belongs, then, to a more sentimental version of Ginevra that Lucy chooses to invent for her personal amusement while everyone else is on holiday. And yet it is not just Lucy who thinks of her in this way; Ginevra also serves as the romantic heroine for a larger audience when she is cast as one in the school play.[2] This suggests that the feeling Lucy participates in does not belong to a version of Ginevra at all; instead, it is an affect that circulates through the multitude that collectively regards her. The "electric chord of sympathy," which Lucy imagines to connect Ginevra and Graham while they are apart, also conjures the idea of affective transmission (159).[3] Rather than being a vicarious emotion, the pleasure of being loved is an emotion in which Lucy, as a member of the crowd, directly participates.

Amanda Auerbach received her PhD in English from Harvard in 2018. Her current book project, *Getting Lost in the Novel: The Impassioned Movements of the Self in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, argues that moments when characters get lost lead us toward definitions of subgenres of the novel that reflect the protagonist's and reader's moment-to-moment experience.

Victorian Literature and Culture, Vol. 48, No. 4, pp. 665–691.

doi:10.1017/S1060150319000214

Lucy does not just get emotionally swept up; this sense of exultation, which leads her to imaginatively exceed the bounds of watchful reason and self-awareness, compels her shortly thereafter to physically stray beyond the city walls. There, she gets caught in an irresistible gust of wind in which all she can do is "career in its course, sweep where it swept" (164). Once she is carried to Graham's house and begins to mix more regularly with the populace of Villette, she continues to ascribe the powerful feelings in which she gets caught up to imaginary characters. One such character is the fictitious version of Lucy beloved by Graham. Another is Vashti, the central figure in the play to which Graham takes Lucy. A third is Polly, Graham's sprightly and doll-like (and in those senses not very real-seeming) future wife.

Lucy repeatedly distances herself from interpersonal and therefore uncontrollable emotions that take hold of her by attributing them to fictitious characters. It may seem that such a behavior is in line with Lucy's reputation for being slippery, passionate, and committed to self-suppression. And yet this practice on the part of Brontë's protagonist is surprisingly typical of heroines in the tradition of the female Victorian bildungsroman, in which the protagonist leaves the protection or confinement of the home and becomes part of a larger social world. Becoming subject to affective flows involves becoming emotionally continuous with a larger community, such as Villette or, in the case of Elizabeth Gaskell's Margaret Hale, Milton, or in the case of George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver, the community of St. Ogg's. The novels I address here all center on the experiences of women, who were seen in nineteenth-century Britain as being more susceptible to affective influences such as popular novels, seduction, and hypnosis, which disarm self-control.

With regard to her obsession with self-control, Lucy's values are aligned with those of the Victorian bildungsroman as a whole (not just the instances that center on women). In addition to featuring this process of becoming part of a community, this subgenre emphasizes the importance of self-discipline. Andrew Miller claims that the plot of the bildungsroman grew out of a nineteenth-century obsession with moral improvement, which "brings burdens of self-observation, discipline, and correction."[4] Elisha Cohn similarly sees the plot of the bildungsroman as one that follows the protagonist's effortful acquisition of a social identity, even punishing lapses of consciousness with "failure and suffering."[5] I take an interest in how heroines such as Lucy, Margaret, and Maggie obscure from themselves their own failures of self-control by attributing the irresistible affects that overtake them to a fictitious character. In

doing this, they indulge in "rapturous self-forgetting," cathecting onto a character in order to suppress analytical self-awareness.[6] These characters serve as vessels for protagonists' emotions, much as the unelaborated characters in a fantasy do. I call this act of projecting an interpersonal emotion into an imaginary character "self-distancing." The term evokes the function of this act of projection: to place at arm's length the part of the self that eludes self-control.[7] The alienated hero of the bildungsroman discussed by Georg Lukács, René Girard, and Franco Moretti adjusts his desires to suit an external reality that is at odds with them.[8] The adjustment of the heroine of the female bildungsroman does not occur at the level of desire but at the more superficial level of the heroine's belief about her desires. This gendered variation of the larger tradition calls into question the premise of the bildungsroman as a whole, raising the possibility that the adjustment of the self to external demands is *never* as complete as it seems—even, perhaps, if one is a man.

The bildungsroman is thus oriented toward the self-contained and self-controlled individual. The work on the nervous body (that is, the body as a network of nerves) and biopolitical affect that pervades Victorian studies, by contrast, takes an interest in the self as it is caught up in a larger network. Critics who address these topics tend either to turn away from self-discipline or to found it on something other than the will. Works that take an interest in the nervous body, like Vanessa Ryan's *Thinking Without Thinking* and Nicholas Dames's *Physiology of the Novel*, present self-discipline as a long-term process of moral and aesthetic training. Critics who discuss biopolitical affect understandably tend to focus on strategies for managing populations rather than those aimed at governing individual subjects.[9] And yet the turn to man-as-species and the turn to the nervous body also invite new interpretations of novels in which characters think of themselves as self-disciplined and self-contained. How does such a belief shape how characters process the experience of being overtaken by affect? Heroines of the Victorian bildungsroman who see themselves as self-controlled individuals register the uncontrollable emotions that nevertheless take hold of them as belonging to vividly imagined others. But how does this phenomenon of self-distancing take shape?

Imagining Affective Transmission

The Sorrows of Young Werther notoriously instigated a string of copycat suicides by young men soon after its 1774 publication. This event

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150319000214 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dramatically shows the power of a literary sensation to overwhelm individual minds and bodies. The feeling that led the young men to kill themselves may have been a personal sympathy on the part of each with young Werther. This possibility is suggested by the fact that the young men who killed themselves did not just metaphorically put themselves in the hero's shoes, but actually dressed up in the yellow pants and blue jacket he is described as wearing.[10] And yet it is also possible to see the publication of Goethe's novel as an occasion that unleashed a collective feeling. Adela Pinch has shown that people in the eighteenth century appreciated the strange ways that passions can be transmitted from one body to another. They worried that the feelings they believed to be their own may have originated elsewhere. Prior to the Victorian period, then, emotion was considered a powerful interpersonal force.

In the Victorian era, the collective feelings that overwhelm self-control were often associated with the crowded context of the theater. This juxtaposition occurs in *Villette* when the "passions of the pit," which seem to shake the body of the legendary actress who plays Vashti, carry Lucy along with them, as if they were "a deep, swollen, winter river, thundering in cataract and bearing the soul, like a leaf, on the steep and steely sweep of its descent" (257, 259).[11] How, we might ask, does Lucy's consciousness of being part of a crowd lead to her being overcome by the impassioned performance of Vashti?[12] We might call to mind Athena Vrettos's discussion of the interest Victorians took in the "state of suggestibility in which viewing, hearing, or reading about a disease aroused corresponding symptoms," which Sir James Paget identifies in 1875 as "neuromimesis."[13] Alexander Bain and Gustave Le Bon both addressed emotional transference in the context of the crowd. In his 1859 *The Emotions and the Will*, Bain described this phenomenon, claiming that great actors could "[manifest] emotion . . . so as to render it infectious to all beholders."[14] In addition to catching true emotions, the spectator could also catch false ones. Gustave Le Bon more explicitly situates the experience of emotional transference in the crowd: "[I]deas, sentiments, emotions, and beliefs possess in crowds a contagious power as intense as that of microbes."[15]

For Le Bon, the figure of the crowd is suggestive of a total homogenization of humanity, which implausibly extends to unspoken ideas and beliefs.[16] Nevertheless, Le Bon's speculation enables us to appreciate the power of the figure of the multitude to open us up to the idea that the boundaries between people are more porous than, in Western culture, they are often made to seem.[17] In the Victorian period, the resemblance

between the structure of a group and that of the nervous body made it possible to entertain the idea of affective transmission without giving up bodily boundaries. This resemblance enables an emotion transmitted between people to be seen as spreading through a single extended body. According to Victorian physiological psychologists, such as Alexander Bain and George Lewes, the nerves distributed throughout the body have the same properties as the nerves in the brain, perhaps including the property of consciousness.[18] Rather than there being a single center of consciousness located in the brain, there are multiple centers of consciousness distributed throughout the body. The individuals in an assembly might be seen as these distributed centers of consciousness. The crowd thus resembles the physiological subject. Contexts such as the theater, in which everyone is facing and having an experience of the same object (the imaginary character), reinforce the sense that the crowd is of one mind.

In novels in the bildungsroman tradition, which seem to be all about individual characters, the incorporation of the theater or another spectacle can more or less obliquely signal a concern with the phenomenon of affective transmission. Lucy performs alongside Ginevra in the play directed by Monsieur Paul and watches two other plays with Graham. In Brontë's earlier bildungsroman, *Jane Eyre* (1847), there is the pantomime in which Rochester pretends to marry Blanche Ingram. There is also the performance of Jane's charge, Adela, who used to dance and sing for the "great many gentlemen and ladies [who] came to see mamma."[19] The song she sings upon being introduced to her new governess of "a forsaken lady, who after bewailing the perfidy of her lover, calls pride to her aid; desires her attendant to deck her in her brightest jewels and richest robes" (87), bears some resemblance to the plot of *Jane Eyre* in which the lovers are only reunited once the heroine inherits money. In Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), as we shall see, the Deanes' drawing room in which Stephen Guest courts Lucy Deane is described in theatrical terms. The scene of a play is similarly evoked at the beginning of Gaskell's *North and South* (1854), when Margaret casts her sleeping cousin Edith as Titania in white muslin and blue ribbons. The episode in which the throng of angry workers regards Margaret shielding Thornton with her body makes it clear that a spectacle need not be a theatrical performance or a play in order to elicit the sense that the crowd is possessed of a single consciousness. In picturing to herself a scenario in which Thornton addresses the crowd, Gaskell's heroine even supposes the multitude is an individual that might be reasoned with.

These references to groups of spectators summon the multitude of novel readers who collectively, in spite of their physical dispersal, regard the characters in the story.[20] David Kurnick argues in *Empty Houses* that certain Victorian novels by failed playwrights are "lined with longing for the public worlds" of the theater "they would seem to have left behind."[21] In the novels I focus on, this is not a defeated but a potent longing, which has the power to conjure the unseen and uncountable crowd of the novel's readers. We will see that the heroine of the Victorian bildungsroman also partakes of this potent desire, summoning crowds through her verbal or physical enaction of an experience that an imaginary character in her (the heroine's) situation *would* have. The similarity of the fictional world to a theatrical setting is directly invoked in *Jane Eyre*. "A new chapter in a novel," we are told, "is something like a new scene in a play: and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must fancy you see a room in the 'George Inn' at Millcote, with such large figured papering on the walls as inn rooms have" (79).[22] The narrator of a novel can be seen as a stage manager, then, who displays her characters to the audience, which is comprised of the novel's readers. Perhaps the affect that circulates among this crowd of audience members reaches the narrator qua stage manager herself. Perhaps this affect determines the quality of the emotion the narrator ascribes to her characters.

For example, in *Jane Eyre*, the narrator might assign to Jane the child the mature sense of righteous indignation that the adult narrator and her mature readers feel upon witnessing Mrs. Reed speak to the girl "rather in the tone in which a person might address an opponent of adult age than such is ordinarily used to a child" (30). Jane the narrator might attribute to St. John, as he gazes at the portrait of Rosamond Oliver or reluctantly withdraws his hand from hers, a feeling of profound love that he does not himself feel. After all, Jane the character refuses to believe St. John when he says of his love for Rosamond, "Allow me to assure you that you partially misinterpret my emotions. You think them more profound and potent than they are" (319). The fires that Bertha Mason lights, which spread from room to room, can be seen, much like the fire in the theater on the night of the performance that overpowers Lucy in *Villette*, as materializing affective transmission. If this is so, then there is a violent rage that circulates around Rochester's first wife (who resembles Blanche Ingram, the heroine of the pantomime) without particularly belonging to her. Finally, it is plausible that the desire expressed in the words "Jane! Jane! Jane!", which is so powerful that it

reaches all the way to where Jane is, does not belong to Rochester (357). The unrealistic, supernatural quality of this final incident raises the possibility that this episode cannot be understood without reference to a world that lies beyond the realistic and natural-law-abiding world of Brontë's characters. Perhaps this strange moment at which desire proves all-powerful can only be understood with reference to the world of the narrator and readers who ardently wish for Jane and Rochester's reunion. Attributing interpersonal emotions to imaginary characters may be something that female narrators of the Victorian bildungsroman, such as Jane and Lucy, are particularly likely to do.

I find the idea of self-distancing helpful for interpreting first-person narrations such as *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. Nevertheless, first-person narrations can also block the reader from identifying moments at which their protagonists are overcome by affect. Because self-distancing involves a refusal to understand one's own experience, the person who does this is not in a position to describe what she is doing. Both Lucy and Jane believe, when their attention is directed toward one of their story's characters, that they are vicariously participating in emotions that belong to that character. Third-person narrations, by contrast, can present a protagonist's experience of being overtaken by affect as it unfolds, before she has the opportunity to misinterpret her own experience in a way that could also mislead the reader.

In addition to being more reliably rendered, self-distancing also tends to be more striking in third- than in first-person narrations. A heroine who goes on to be a first-person narrator tends to appropriate a preexisting identity in the story she is telling—like that of Bertha Mason—that is consistent with the projected emotion (in this case, violent rage). This act of appropriation is less elaborate and strange—and therefore also less apparent—than the act of inventing from scratch a fictitious character that is capable of bearing an emotion. We might consider, as an example of such an act of character invention, the sentimental heroine in love with Graham Bretton, whom Lucy Snowe invents out of thin air and grafts onto the body of Ginevra. The former act of emotional projection is more narrator-like because a narrator ascribes emotions (if the narrator is reliable, the attribution is accurate rather than projective) to the preexisting characters that play a role in the story she is telling. Perhaps for this reason, the latter, more fanciful act of emotional projection tends to be carried out more frequently by the heroines of third-person narrations, such as *North and South* and *The Mill on the Floss*, who do not go on to become narrators.

To appreciate the difference the framework of self-distancing can make to our understanding of heroines of the bildungsroman and their experiences, it will be necessary to spend more time close-reading individual novels. What are the motives of heroines who strategically attribute their emotions to imagined others? How might such acts of projection influence how their lives unfold? The rationale of focusing on *North and South* and *The Mill on the Floss* in particular is that these third-person narrations display the two main motives for self-distancing I have identified in novels of this tradition. One motive for self-distancing, of which *Jane Eyre* is arguably an example, is to conjure an individual character endowed with a superlative capacity for bearing ennobling emotion: a hero or a heroine. Jane, when she accuses Mrs. Reed, is no ordinary child. This desire to construct such a heroine may lead Jane to choose to be with Rochester, with whom she can "talk . . . all day long," perhaps about the past; it could also motivate her decision to write the story of her life (384). Self-distancing, in this case, amounts to an act of saying, "This emotion does not belong to the crowd of which I am a member but to a self-contained character whose emotions have an exceptional energy and force." In Gaskell's *North and South*, this desire on the part of Margaret Hale to participate in the sense of moral heroism leads her to pursue, without realizing that she is doing this, opportunities for self-distancing.

Margaret's Uncontrollable Heroism

Late in Gaskell's novel, the summer evening in London reminds Margaret of an episode in her childhood life: "On some such night as this, she remembered promising to herself to live as brave and noble a life as any heroine she ever read or heard of in romance, a life sans peur et sans reproche; it had seemed to her then that she had only to will, and such life would be accomplished. And now she had learnt that not only to will, but also to pray, was a necessary condition in the truly heroic."[23] By linking the scene in her current life to her childhood vow, Margaret constructs for herself a plot of moral correction. She plays the heroine who learns the error of her ways and goes on to live a better life. Some readers see Margaret as she prefers to see herself, against the picturesque backdrop of the London sunset, as the heroine of a plot of education in which her character is ultimately perfected.[24] Here, we will consider her instead as a character motivated by a desire to participate in the emotions she attributes to heroes and heroines, which is different in nature from a desire to avoid error or even a desire for moral

improvement. Margaret cultivates this emotion not through acts of the will or of prayer, but by becoming part of the crowds of Milton. These crowds differ in social class both from the novel's intended audience and from the theatergoers evoked when the novel opens on the pretty if soporific scene of Edith cast as Titania in a white dress and blue ribbons who fell asleep on the "crimson-damask sofa" (5). A more important difference for present purposes is that the affective force which surrounds spectacles witnessed by Milton's throngs of workers is much greater than that which would surround a more exclusive theatrical or literary performance.

The scene that unfolds when Margaret criticizes Thornton's plan to put down the riot at first seems to be similar to earlier conversations in the novel in which she criticizes the way he behaves in relation to his workers. First, Margaret opposes his plan to put down the riot by calling in the military. When he reasserts his masterly authority, she answers him with moral indignation: "Go down this instant, if you are not a coward. Go down and face them like a man. . . . If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man" (177). In the process of defending the helpless workers, Margaret choreographs an encounter between them and a more heroic version of Thornton. She participates in the feelings of courage and sympathy that she assigns to the noble character of the master. It becomes clear that Margaret's boldness is derived from some such illusion on her part when Thornton's act of going to confront the men, which forces her to face the reality of what she has just persuaded him to do, immediately causes her to lose courage.

Thornton, meanwhile, assumes that Margaret's sense of assurance and conviction, as she exhorts him to confront the crowd, *are* her own. We can see this when he excludes her from the group of women in need of protection: "Perhaps I may ask you to accompany me downstairs, and bar the door behind me; my mother and sister will need the protection" (177). The idea of Margaret's courage in the face of the crowd at first makes him angry, causing a "dark cloud" to come "over his face" and his teeth to set (177). It eventually provokes him to assume the position before the crowd of strikers that Margaret verbally assigns him. As a consequence, she must follow him and make *his* spectacle of the character of Margaret acting bravely a reality. Although Margaret temporarily loses courage, she then gets swept up in the crowd's "repressed excitement," which she assigns to Thornton as he stands "with his arms folded; still as a statue" before the crowd (178). When she "rushed out of the room, down stairs" and lifted "the great iron bar of the door with an

imperious force," we can see this repressed excitement, to which Margaret is as subject as Thornton, bursting forth through her body (178).

Rather than being unique to Margaret, the passions of heroic valor to which she is subject extend to and beyond the surface of her body. This accounts for the sense of moral power her body communicates to those who observe her. In her book on the blush, Mary Ann O'Farrell discusses Margaret's remarkable ability to control, to advantage, the position of her body: "The effect of Margaret's powerful body (whether on the passing workmen who comment or on the professionals who exclaim to themselves) creates improbable congruences between the uprightness of her carriage, the erections that mark some sexual desires, and the moral-seeming rectitude that converts good posture and full figure into personal dignity and national symbolics ('What a queen she is!')."[25] I argue that the reason that Margaret's self-controlled body *seems* to overflow with collective feeling is that it *does*. The sense of moral heroism that powerfully affects Margaret does not remain enclosed within but circulates around her body.

Collective feelings require the presence of larger groups or crowds. In solitude, Margaret produces the sense of a public spectacle by closely attending to the force of her words, as if she were both an actress in and a spectator at a play. As she does this, she becomes caught up in the heroic passion to which she is susceptible. She then invents a fictitious character who speaks in a high heroic language. We can detect three shifts in the tone at the end of Margaret's speech the day after the strike: "I would do it again, let who will say what they like of me. If I saved one blow, one cruel, angry action that might otherwise have been committed, I did a woman's work. Let them insult my maiden pride as they will—I walk pure before God!" (191). The tone of the first sentence is one of defensiveness toward those who have assumed she is in love with Thornton. The tone of the next sentence betrays a subtly theatrical sense of simple pride in the fact that she might have helped to prevent violence. By the third sentence, she is swept up in passion and has posited an imaginary character facing an entire crowd of other imaginary characters. She speaks in a high language that departs from her everyday speech because she has adopted the language of the central character she projects. The imaginary character is an alternate version of Margaret's past self, who scorns insults rather than being upset by them.

Once Margaret learns that Thornton loves her, she has the benefit of carrying around with her a captive audience from whose position she can regard her own performance. This audience becomes multitudinous

when we consider Thornton's metonymic association with his workers. Although she only realizes "how much she valued" the "respect and good opinion" of Thornton much later, she begins immediately after the proposal to enjoy the sensation of being regarded by that crowd (284). She takes advantage of this sense of having an audience by mentally addressing "sharp, decisive" speeches to Thornton, inventing a fictitious character whose high sense of what her honor demands leads her to decline his proposal in stronger terms than Margaret uses (198). After shuddering at "the threat of his enduring love," Margaret works herself up much as she does in her shame after the strike: "What did it mean? Had she not the power to daunt him? She would see. It was more daring than became a man to threaten her so" (198). Again, Margaret ascends in tone, ultimately alighting upon language that might be spoken by a heroic character who has the power to daunt Thornton. We also see Margaret's continued reliance on rhetorical performance in London, when after recalling her youthful resolve to act as a heroine, she begins to think in exalted terms about prayer as "a necessary condition in the truly heroic" (412).

Once Margaret is forced to lie to protect her brother and is branded by Thornton as a liar, she discovers the value of his "respect and good opinion." Perhaps when she leaves Milton behind after her father's death, she comes to appreciate more fully the value of the larger captive audience, which would come with Thornton's hand in marriage. If she were to become his wife, what then would her everyday life be like? We can gain some idea from Thornton's words when he first divulges his feelings for Margaret. He tells Margaret that the thought that he has received his life from her hands "doubles the gladness . . . makes the pride glow . . . sharpens the sense of existence till [he] hardly know[s] if it is pain or pleasure" (195). Thornton's new life is of such a high value to him that he is more watchful and possessive of it than ever. Margaret considers Thornton's statement blasphemous, and this seems reasonable. Thornton has, after all, said that the thought of Margaret having given him life makes it dearer to him than the thought of God having given him life could have made it. Thornton's new feeling for his life is indisputably worldly: the value he places on his life is such to make him jealous lest God, Margaret, or anyone else should take it away.

If Thornton becomes jealous of losing his life, then Margaret will be equally jealous of losing the captive audience she has acquired, which consists of Thornton and those who work for him. We are told that "Margaret was not a ready lover, but where she loved, she loved

passionately, and with no small degree of jealousy" (124). Her extreme concern to impress Thornton implies that once she has gained his regard and respect, she will be jealous lest anything, even a stray regret or daydream, should lead her to lose them. Constantly regarded by him and those who report to him, Margaret will need to tirelessly perform the actions most befitting Thornton's wife and participate in the noble feelings she attributes to that imaginary character. Then her every action will become inextricably bound to her sense of gladness in life, which is less worldly than Thornton's. Every action will become the source of the affect that carries her beyond the ordinary sense of her worldly existence.

Through her acts of self-distancing, Margaret imaginatively converts the feelings of Milton's crowds into the passions that animate individual heroes. She thus experiences her life as approaching as closely as possible the novels she liked to read as a child. A different motive for self-distancing is to disavow an emotion, which reflects negatively on the person who partakes of it—not just because the emotion is interpersonal but because it is in itself dishonorable. When Lucy is caught in the throes of a collective pleasure in being loved that circulates around Ginevra, she does not just maintain her belief in her own self-control. She also denies her participation in a pleasure she considers it foolish and a sign of moral weakness to indulge. When self-distancing is motivated by a desire to create distance between oneself and an emotion that is shameful, it amounts to an act of saying, "This emotion belongs to another, who is a different kind of person from myself." This act of self-distancing in which the heroine is motivated by a desire to preserve her claim to moral sensibility features centrally in *The Mill on the Floss*.

Maggie's Uncontrollable Pleasure

Most accounts of the novel, including those of Elisha Cohn and Vanessa Ryan, which I discuss here, tend to treat the passionate impulses of Maggie the child as being utterly of a piece with the feeling that leads the mature heroine almost to elope with Stephen. For my account, it is important to distinguish between the personal emotions that guide Maggie as a child and the interpersonal and therefore more confusing and irresistible ones in which she gets swept up once she is older. Unlike affective pulls, the personal emotions that guide her as a child can be curtailed by self-discipline. Early in the novel, we are told that "Maggie rushed to deeds with passionate impulse."[26] One particularly vivid example of this tendency is the episode in which, after being

scolded for allowing her hair to hang in her face, she cuts it all off. She begins cutting her hair on the confident assumption that when they see her, her family members will admire her cleverness and she will triumph over them. She acts before she sees "not only" the consequences of her actions, "but what would have happened if they had not been done with all the detail and exaggerated circumstance of an active imagination" (69). For Maggie, to exercise self-discipline is to engage in an act of seeing into probable consequences, which suppresses the personal emotions that have bad consequences.

The incident that catalyzes Maggie's self-discipline occurs when, as a young child, she runs away from her family with the plan of joining the Gypsies and being their queen. After one of her blind, passionate impulses instigates the journey, the heroine begins to become aware both of the fact that she does not completely know where she is going and of the traps and dangers she might be walking into:

> For poor little Maggie had at once the timidity of an active imagination and the daring that comes from overmastering impulse. She had rushed into the adventure of seeking her unknown kindred, the Gypsies, and now she was in this strange lane, she hardly dared look on one side of her, lest she should see, the diabolical blacksmith in his leathern apron grinning at her with his arms akimbo. It was not without a leaping of the heart that she caught sight of a small pair of bare legs sticking up, feet uppermost, by the side of a hillock; they seemed something hideously preternatural—a diabolical kind of fungus. (119)

As she wanders on, she confronts horrors that arise from her "active imagination" (the phrase also used to describe her after-the-fact survey of the consequences of the haircut) before she registers what she sees in front of her. In the style of *Northanger Abbey* (1817), in which Catherine Moreland is wrong to be afraid that the abbey is haunted but right to dread her future father-in-law, the specter of the blacksmith with his arms akimbo is dispelled only to reveal the small pair of bare legs sticking up. This small boy is a member of the band of Gypsies that Maggie seeks, and the Gypsies *do* pose a danger to her, stealing her thimble and intimidating her. On the way to meet the Gypsies, Maggie acquires the self-consciousness that alienates her from her impulsive self. After experiencing the protracted terror of bad consequences that comes from following one such impulse while her eyes remain open, she never does that again. Seeing catches up with passion and nips it in the bud. Once Maggie puts aside these personal impulses, another path to inadvertent action awaits her.

Book 6, in which Maggie meets Stephen, opens like the scene of a play set in the Deane family's drawing room: "The well-furnished drawing room, with the open grand piano and the pleasant outlook down a sloping garden to a boat-house by the side of the Floss, is Mr. Deane's. The neat little lady in mourning whose light brown ringlets are falling over the coloured embroidery with which her fingers are busy is, of course, Lucy Deane" (409). This passage is similar to the one in *Jane Eyre* in which the chapter of the novel is likened to the scene of a play. In both, the narrator functions as a stage manager who is displaying to the readers—whether verbally or by a lift of the curtain—the characters in the novel. Both chapter beginnings, which reference the theater, occur at the moment when the heroine is for the first time issuing into a larger social world. Jane is on the brink of leaving Lowood on her journey by train to Thornfield Hall, and Maggie is about to begin her stay with the more affluent and socially active family of her cousin Lucy.

In the passage that begins book 6, Eliot's narrator seems merely to designate the objects (and, later in the passage, the actions) that have already been discerned by an audience. Maggie is not an actor in this scene; still, its theatrical style sets the tone for the new consciousness of "admiring eyes always awaiting her" that she feels in the society of St. Ogg's (454). As an adult, Maggie finds it too easy to fall in with the collective feeling of pleasurable anticipation. This sense of pleasurable anticipation can be seen as an interpersonal version of the younger Maggie's passionate impulses. Both involve expecting, with unquestioned confidence, the imminent fulfillment of desire.[27]

Tellingly, the first time Maggie gets carried away in a wave of collective feeling occurs when she is in the boat with Stephen and Lucy. Like the boat, she becomes susceptible to impulses that shake bodies other than her own. When she is moved in this way, she is apt to project imaginary characters, drawing (unbeknownst to herself) the raw materials for those characters from her own body and Stephen's. In the process of trying to row the boat, her foot slips. When Stephen catches her, Maggie posits a more general scene: "It was very charming to be taken care of in that kind graceful manner by someone taller and stronger than one's self" (432). Maggie does not see Stephen taking care of her, as in the earlier episode in which she and Stephen are first acquainted and she sees an attractive man paying *her* "the tribute of a very deep blush and a very deep bow" (425). Rather, she posits a scene in which "one" individual is taken care of in a kind and graceful manner by a second individual, "someone taller and stronger." Maggie attributes the

emotion that affects her to the imaginary heroine, who finds her situation "very charming." The night after this, we are told, Maggie does not think "distinctly of Mr. Stephen Guest" or dwell "on the indications that he looked at her with admiration" (435). What is yet more curious is that even in the moment when Stephen is interacting with her, Maggie is not particularly aware of him or herself, even as she projects a scene that unfolds through their actions.

After Stephen keeps Maggie from falling in the boat, there are a number of other moments at which she distances herself from an interpersonal emotion. When he comes to the house with sheet music, for example, he offers to take Maggie's arm to walk with her outside. The narrator seems to speculate, "There is something strangely winning to most women in that offer of the firm arm; the help is not wanted physically at that moment, but the sense of help—the presence of strength that is outside them and yet theirs meets a continual want of the imagination. Either on that ground or some other, Maggie took the arm" (462). This aside, in which the narrator seems to stray from the plot, actually enacts Maggie's thought process. Just as the narrator imagines a scene in which a woman is offered a firm arm, so too, under the influence of affect, does Maggie. The woman in such a scene, Maggie imagines, finds the offer "strangely winning."[28] Maggie recollects what *she* is doing (walking with Stephen) only long enough to wonder, "How came she to be there? Why had she come out?" (462). Without being aware of what she is doing, she walks with Stephen. In doing so, she unwittingly produces the physical scene her uncontrollable pleasure leads her to posit.

One of the most complicated passages, which the concept of self-distancing is uniquely capable of illuminating, is Maggie's critical boat ride with Stephen. Cohn identifies this episode as an especially long moment of lapsed consciousness and agency at which Maggie's "sensation evacuates" her "interiority." According to Cohn, the "vague ecstasy" that imbues the passage does not belong to Maggie "nor quite to the narrator either, as a diegetic figure or omniscient voice."[29] I would point out that the suspension of agency does not necessarily imply the suspension of consciousness. Indeed, an earlier description of the way that Maggie feels in Stephen's presence implies that the intensity of her sensory experience is inversely proportional to that of her energy: "[S]he was absorbed in the direct, immediate experience without any energy left for taking account of it and reasoning about it" (457). The narration does give us access to the heroine's experience of pleasure as her energy

wanes, and yet, especially on the occasion of the boat ride, the way that it does so is far from straightforward. Cohn claims that the experience narrated on the occasion of the boat ride is not Maggie's own; I argue, slightly differently, that it is not *only* Maggie's own. We shall see that it is an interpersonal feeling which leads her to project an imaginary character.

When she is led into the boat for the final time, "Maggie felt that she was being led down the garden among the roses, being helped with firm and tender care into the boat, having the cushion and cloak arranged for her feet and her parasol opened for her (which she had forgotten)—all by this stronger presence that seemed to bear her along without any act of her own will, like the added self which comes with the sudden exalting influence of a strong tonic" (528). Rather than "being led down the garden" and "helped with firm and tender care into the boat," Maggie "felt" that she was being led and helped. The "felt" hints at her sense of removal from the person who is led and helped in spite of her awareness that this person must be herself. Her feelings lead her to project onto her past self (whom we have seen led down the garden and helped into the boat) her present feelings. Once she gets through the present scenes that overlap with past ones, she loses awareness of what is happening in the present. Every moment when the present breaks in on Maggie's consciousness is like the moment when she is surprised by the parasol. Blind to what is going on around her, she instead attends to the sensation of being steered and having her weight supported by Stephen. This physical sensation leads Maggie to project a scene in which a stronger presence bears her along "without any act of her own will." Rather than being conducted, as Maggie is by Stephen, the character in *this* scene (who is not quite Maggie) is borne or carried.

Once Maggie realizes that she and Stephen have gone too far, she emerges from her state of self-oblivion in which she is utterly blind to what is going on around her. She has begun to suspect that the pleasure which overwhelms her is, at least in part, her own. After transferring from the rowboat to the Dutch schooner, the pleasure she experiences is too bound to the particularities of her present situation for Maggie to be able to attribute it to just any similarly situated imaginary character (as, at an earlier moment, she ascribes her pleasure to a woman being helped on the boat). This means that in order to put off realizing that her pleasure is her own, the act of projection must become more creative. When Stephen expresses his happiness to Maggie, we are told, his words give rise to a vision that "for the time excluded all realities" (534). We are

not told the content of the "vision," and yet we are told what she sees (534). Rather than actually seeing an imaginary vision that is invisible to the reader and the narrator, Maggie convinces herself that what she sees originates in the mind of an imaginary character who is not herself. She tricks herself into believing that what she sees is not herself and her surroundings but an imaginary woman who is having a vision.

The idea of a vision that "excluded all realities" comes as an inspiration. If Maggie cannot see realities, then what she *is* seeing must not be realities but someone's dreams. Maggie can then let the excluded realities in again without admitting their reality or their specific reference to her at this present moment. The vision "excluded all realities—all *except* the returning sunbeams," and, we are soon told, "all *except* the hand that pressed hers, and the voice that spoke to her, and the eyes that looked at her with grave, unspeakable love" (534, emphasis mine). In other words, the vision only excludes realities *as* realities; it only excludes Stephen *as* Stephen. The real setting sun is converted into a series of "delicious visions" this character sees flowing over her; the real sky to the west is, to this enchanted character, "the wondrous aerial land of the west" (535). In the scenario Maggie imagines, a character's merely psychological experiences are converted into a physical scene, much as Maggie's sensation as she walks to the boat with Stephen is converted into a scene of a person being borne along by a second self. Having successfully tricked herself into believing that the surroundings she enjoys arise from the visions of an imaginary character, Maggie attributes her feelings to this dreaming heroine.

Maggie's pleasures are dangerous because they lead her to overlook her physical and (on the schooner) mental role in producing the scenes she posits. Furthermore, even if she could be sure that she played no role in producing these scenes, indulging in such scenes reflects poorly on her character as a self-renouncing heroine, and this ideal of self-renunciation *is* one that Maggie holds dear. Thankfully, there is a way for her to hold on to the character of the self-renouncing heroine even as she continues to be shaken by passionate impulses. She can preserve her safety and her reputation by positing only scenes that center on safer subjects than romantic love. She can continue to attribute her uncontrollable pleasure to the characters she projects.

Rae Greiner has recently argued of *Middlemarch* (1871–72) and *The Lifted Veil* (1859) that Eliot subscribed to Adam Smith's theory of sympathy. She goes onto make the more surprising claim that Smith and Eliot both saw ignorance of the interiority of others as a precondition for

projecting oneself into their cases. The narrator of *The Lifted Veil*, Greiner argues, is incapable of sympathy as a result of his detailed access to the interiority of others. Comparing him to Rosamond Vincy, Greiner avers, "Latimer's clairvoyance is like Rosamond's thoughtlessness in that both are portrayed as failures of sympathy keyed to a lack of imagination."[30] Rather than facilitating our sympathy, the telepathic narrator who gives the reader access to the inner lives of characters actually impedes the reader from imagining how she would feel in a character's situation. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot depicts a process of engaging with others that involves attributing to them feelings to which we are independently subject. Rather than asking how I feel in their shoes, as the sympathizer does, the spectator can choose to attribute to others a feeling that has taken hold of her from which she wants to distance herself. When the spectator avoids responsibility for a feeling by hurling it recklessly onto those around her, she is not concerned with their interiority. Because she ignores what she knows about their feelings and intentions, how much insight she has into that interiority does not matter. This act of attribution differs from those I have been describing thus far in being more self-conscious and controlled. Rather than projecting feelings on the nearest body, the individual chooses the people (or, as we shall see, animals) she converts into imaginary characters.

As a child, Maggie uses imagined others to satisfy her desire for different forms of interpersonal interaction that respect the alterity of others, rather than attributing to others whatever feelings she has independent of them. She uses her doll to satisfy, alternately, her need to punish and her need to soothe. This practice involves endowing her doll with realistic feelings of pain and comfort. She also uses imaginary others to satisfy her need for love. She tells Philip: "I never forget anything, and I think about everybody when I'm away from them. I think about poor Yap—he's got a lump in his throat, and Luke says he'll die . . . he's a queer little dog—nobody cares about him but Tom and me" (209). When she is young, she has a bias toward thinking about those who are unfortunate and therefore more likely than Tom to care for her love. When she gets older, the act of imagining others makes her more rather than less lonely. She tells Bob, "I haven't many friends who care for me," thinking about others only as those who do not think much about her (320). Maggie has realized that other people are not really the friends she used to imagine them to be. And yet she might still put those she knows to an imaginative use that is not interpersonal. They could be made to bear the eruptions of feeling that ensue

once Maggie enters the larger world. They could harbor the pleasure that, in Maggie's limited life, has no other place. She intuitively uses her cousin Lucy this way when she converts her into an imaginary character with her "little blond angel head" waiting to be filled with an interior life (277).

The heroine could make her rounds among the imaginary characters, attributing to them feelings, as Lucy makes her rounds among her pets, ranging in dignity from her "chestnut horse" to the smaller "animals" that the narrator refrains from naming, lest Lucy should appear "too trivial" (418). We see a glimpse of such a pleasant life for Maggie when, avoiding Stephen, she goes to visit her aunt Gritty and stands "smiling down at the hatch of small fluffy chickens" (506). As she goes to her work of sewing or teaching, the heroine could assign to the objects she encounters her own uncontainable pleasure.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator likewise invites us (and by extension herself) to fancifully attribute the feelings that brim through the language to inanimate objects and animals. Before the story of the Tulliver family begins, the narrator speaks dreamily of "the full stream, the vivid grass, the delicate bright green powder softening the outline of the great branches and trunks that gleam from under the bare purple boughs" outside of Dorlcote Mill (2). We might translate this by saying, "The stream *looks* full and the grass *looks* vivid and the delicate bright green powder makes the outline of the great branches *look* softer than it otherwise would." Such a translation is perfectly comprehensible, but this wording leaves us nowhere to place the sensations of fullness, sharpness, and softness. We can infer from the narrator's description of the landscape that the stream must feel full, the grass must feel vivid, the delicate powder must know the soft feel of the outline of the branches and trunks, which must look like gleaming eyes from under the purple boughs, which must feel themselves to be bare.

Although this analysis of the passage may seem idiosyncratic, it is invited by the narrator's comparison, a few lines earlier, of the little river to a living being that she characterizes as "deaf and loving" (2). Then the feeling travels to the ducks. The narrator imagines that they are "unmindful of the awkward appearance in the drier world above" (2). It is as though they might heed their appearance but are too "in love with moistness" to care about it (2). Although the narrator abides by her society's standards for the normal behavior of adults and does not actually get wet, she cannot give up her love of moistness. She can only deny that it is her own.[31]

Perhaps Maggie *does* finally learn how to keep her character safe even as she gets swept up in affect. When she and Tom have sunk into the water clasping each other, she might imagine a scene in which "she and Tom had clasped their little hands in love and roamed the daisied fields together" (594). If she feels in regarding this scene what she feels when Tom calls her by her childhood name "Magsie!" just a moment before, then she imputes to the little children the feeling of "wondrous happiness" (594). This feeling is identical to the one, also expressed as "wondrous happiness," she formerly assigns to the imaginary character who dreams of being loved in a boat by a man just like Stephen (535).

If Maggie had lived, she would be able to project her "wondrous happiness" onto Stephen, Lucy, and Philip, whom she might regard as happy. Although Maggie is dead, the reader can project as much pleasure as she feels onto the narrator's descriptions of them without even doing violence to the text: "Near the brick grave there was a tomb erected very soon after the flood for two bodies that were found in close embrace, and it was visited at different moments by two men who both felt that their keenest joy and keenest sorrow were forever buried there. One of them visited the tomb again with a sweet face beside him—but that was years after. The other was always solitary. His great companionship was among the trees of the Red Deeps, where the buried joy seemed still to hover like a revisiting spirit" (596). Philip and Stephen believe that their keenest joy and sorrow are past. Need we assume they are right? The sentence about Stephen, which comes right after this pronouncement, leaves open the possibility that the source of *his* keenest joy is no longer buried in the grave but "beside him." The short paragraph featuring Philip gives the reader permission to make him as happy as she would. If we are still lost in waves of pleasure, we might animate the words "to hover," "joy," "still," "revisiting," and "spirit." Where the emphasis falls depends on what is happening around and within us.

In the female Victorian bildungsroman tradition, the heroine leaves the safety or confinement of her childhood home to become part of a larger and less protected world. The episode in which Lucy gets carried to the house of Graham, the one in which Margaret goes out to face the crowd, and the ones in which Maggie floats into the sea feature a similar movement. These moments in which characters project interpersonal emotions that stir them into fictitious characters have the shape of the larger plot in which the heroine joins a larger social body. This resemblance in structure between the episode of self-distancing and the

trajectory of the plot indicates that, for women at least, joining a larger community involves becoming emotionally continuous with other living beings. Under such conditions, practicing self-discipline cannot involve being responsible for our feelings; it can only involve being responsible for how we attribute them.

I have focused on imaginary acts of self-distancing carried out by fictional characters. Readers of Victorian novels can similarly get swept up, assigning their emotions to imaginary others. Occasionally, the passions in which readers got swept up helped them see authors as emotionally larger-than-life moral heroines. In a review for the *Christian Examiner*, for example, J. E. Bradford comes away from reading Gaskell with the sense "that true religion, the spirit of Christianity, is the all-pervading principle in the mind of the writer."[32] The reviewer thus ascribes to Gaskell a mind that is so full of the spirit of Christianity that it can hold no other principle.[33] Reviewers who found themselves carried away in less honorable passions carried out their own creative acts of character invention, perhaps in order to shield the moral sensibility of female readers. A *Guardian* review of *The Mill on the Floss* claims: "Our impulse at this concluding stage [of the story] is to say that it is one of the grandest and most subduing, as it is one of the boldest pictures ever attempted, of the way in which the soul makes trials for itself and of the unexplored depths of weakness and strength, which temptation, as it becomes more intense and decisive, brings to light."[34] The reviewer thus attributes the passion in which the reader gets lost, not to the body of the young and attractive heroine who cannot reputably bear it, but to the soul. Rather than being "perverted" and "unwholesome," as the erotic passions of Maggie Tulliver would be, the *soul*'s passions take us to the heart of our existential situation.[35]

When we read Victorian novels in the bildungsroman tradition today, we join the ranks of Victorian readers who lost themselves in waves of affect that they then attributed to imaginary characters. The bildungsroman supports this experience by enabling us to avoid acknowledging that the characters to whom we attribute our feelings are the products of our own acts of imaginative and affective projection. The protagonists of the bildungsroman are realistic, tailored to seem like autonomous individuals, distinct from ourselves. In seeking novels that do *not* facilitate this act of self-distancing, we need look no farther than the sensation novels that were first starting to be read in 1860, the year that *The Mill on the Floss* was published. Often, the heroine of the sensation novel is not readily separable from her function as a hub of circulating affect,

both for other characters and her readers. The personal qualities of Lucy Audley in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and Lydia Gwilt in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866) are difficult to pin down because they are obscured by the powerful sensations that surround and attach to these sensational heroines. As the name of the subgenre suggests, we open a sensation novel not to engage with "realistic" imaginary persons who are distinct from ourselves but to get overtaken by an affect. Considered in relation to sensation novels, those in the female bildungsroman tradition, which facilitate the experience of self-distancing, suggest that understanding the emotions we participate in when we read could lead us to lose more than we gain. We could lose the pleasure that comes of seeing characters as objects of our sympathy and love. We could lose the satisfaction of taking the passions in which we get carried away as evidence for a personal emotional capacity rather than as an effect of the porousness of our boundaries.

Notes

This article has benefited from the crucial insights of Elaine Scarry, Deidre Lynch, James Engell, Leah Price, Erica Weaver, Suzanne Smith, Miranda Butler, and, not least, its anonymous referee.

1. Brontë, *Villette*, 158. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
2. The way that Ginevra and Lucy play their roles, directing the erotic energy that surrounds the play's heroine toward the relationship with the fop and away from the relationship with the "proper" suitor, shows the agency of actors to reroute the affects that surround their characters. Here, I merely make the point that there is such an energy to be worked with.
3. By the transmission of affect, I mean the transference of an emotion (which might be thought of as a force or energy) among a group of people. For further reading on the subject, see Teresa Brennan's *Transmission of Affect* and Margaret Wetherell's *Affect and Emotion.*
4. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection*, 39.
5. Cohn, *Still Life*, 3. Many, including Susan Fraiman, Lorna Ellis, and Sharon Locy, treat the novels I discuss as being about development. Like Miller and Cohn, I see the bildungsroman as a plot that foregrounds development in a specific direction—that of self-awareness and self-control.

6. Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 34.
7. Julia Kristeva's idea of the abject is helpful for thinking about self-distancing. The person who self-distances is able to maintain the sense, lost by the person who has an experience of the abject, of the distinction between self and other, inner and outer. Affect poses a threat, similar to the abject, of violating individual boundaries.
8. I have in mind Lukács's discussion of the problematic individual in *Theory of the Novel*, Girard's discussion of the hero's askesis in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, and the "perennially dissatisfied and restless" youthful hero at the center of Moretti's discussion in *The Way of the World* (4).
9. By biopolitical affect, I broadly mean an emotion that is irreducibly collective and can therefore only be said to belong to a population or group. Criticism on biopolitical affect and Victorian novels includes Athena Vrettos's *Somatic Fictions*, Nancy Armstrong's "Gender Must Be Defended," and Anna Gibson's "*Our Mutual Friend* and Network Form." Recent works on biopolitical affect include Judith Butler's *Precarious Life*, Teresa Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect*, Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, Brian Massumi's *Politics of Affect*, and Margaret Wetherell's *Affect and Emotion*.
10. This conception of sympathy originates in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel," Smith begins, "we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (1).
11. "The passions of the pit" can be read as a pun that refers both to the evil forces in hell and the emotions of the audience.
12. In *Somatic Fictions,* Athena Vrettos refers to this scene as a particularly vivid literary example of affective mimicry.
13. Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions*, 83. Vrettos remains close to Paget's interests in her focus on illness and the pathological imitation of pain; I extend the application of neuromimesis to other feelings.
14. Bain, *Emotions and the Will*, 213.
15. Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 148.
16. Teresa Brennan observes, "Even if I am picking up on your affect, the linguistic and visual content, meaning the thoughts I attach to that affect, remain my own" (7). We shall see that the thoughts that characters attach to their affects are not just their own but potentially under their control.

17. My discussion of Paget indicates that for Victorians, the transmission of affect was often seen as pathological. See Brennan for a discussion of the Enlightenment, Victorian, and neo-Darwinian strains of thinking that encourage us to see the transmission of affect as either impossible or pathological.
18. Ryan, *Thinking Without Thinking*, 92.
19. Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 87. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
20. John Plotz reminds us that the question of what counts as a public act is closely linked to whether the crowd is understood as "a set of bodies collected on the street," "the dispersed English citizenry of certain social classes," or "the English nation, wherever and however arrayed" (7).
21. Kurnick, *Empty Houses*, 3.
22. It is significant to my argument that this passage appears at the beginning of the new chapter of Jane's life in which she is on her way to Thornfield Hall, on the brink of entering a larger social world.
23. Gaskell, *North and South*, 412. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
24. Critics who compare Gaskell to Austen include Mary Ann O'Farrell and Janine Barchas. O'Farrell argues that like Austen, Gaskell is interested in physically indexing the heroine-like sensibility of her characters. If Austen uses the blush, then Gaskell uses the blunder.
25. O'Farrell, *Telling Complexions*, 70.
26. Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss,* 69. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
27. We should recall that before Maggie cuts off all her hair, she anticipates the triumph she will experience once her family sees her. When she resolves to see the Gypsies, she has misgivings about her scheme even at the outset. And yet she still anticipates that the Gypsies will "gladly receive her and pay her much respect on account of her superior knowledge" and appoint her their queen (116). Both the pleasure of anticipation and the passionate impulse involve counting one's chickens before they are hatched.
28. In tone, "strangely winning" echoes the "very charming" of the earlier passage. Winning and charming are almost synonymous; both "strangely" and "very" skirt similar questions: What makes being helped so charming? What makes the offer winning?
29. Cohn, *Still Life*, 96.
30. Greiner, "Sympathy Time," 304.

31. In "The Semi-Detached Provincial Novel," Plotz compares the narrator's degree of engagement in the fictional world of *The Mill on the Floss* to that of the reader of Eliot's novel.
32. Qtd. in Chapman, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 20.
33. Although my discussion of self-distancing has focused on women, the act of reading a novel was seen in the Victorian period as having a feminizing effect. Perhaps one reason for this is that reading led such men as J. E. Bradford to become aware of their susceptibility to affective transmission. For a further discussion of the feminization of the reader, see Leah Price's *How to Do Things with Books*, Jennifer Phegley's *Educating the Proper Woman Reader*, and Linda Shires's *Rewriting the Victorians*.
34. Qtd. in Holstrom and Lerner, *George Eliot and Her Readers*, 32.
35. Qtd. in Holstrom and Lerner, *George Eliot and Her Readers*, 33.

Works Cited

Armstrong, Nancy. "Gender Must Be Defended." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 3 (2012): 529–47.

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. 1817. Edited by Susan Fraiman. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004.

Bain, Alexander. *The Emotions and the Will*. London: John W. Parker and Son, 1859.

Barchas, Janine. "Mrs. Gaskell's North and South: Austen's Early Legacy." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 30 (2008): 53.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Lady Audley's Secret*. 1862. Edited by David Skilton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Edited by Richard Dunn. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.

———. *Villette*. 1853. Edited by Tim Dolin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso, 2006.

Chapman, Alison. *Elizabeth Gaskell: Mary Barton and North and South*. London: Icon Books, 1999.

Cohn, Elisha. *Still Life: Suspended Development in the Victorian Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Collins, Wilkie. *Armadale*. 1866. Edited by John Sutherland. New York: Penguin Classics, 1995.

Dames, Nicholas. *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810–1870*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

———. *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Eliot, George. *The Lifted Veil, and Brother Jacob*. 1859/1864. Edited by Helen Small. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

———. *The Mill on the Floss*. 1860. Edited by Jane Smiley. New York: Penguin Books, 2002.

Ellis, Lorna. *Appearing to Diminish: Female Development and the British Bildungsroman, 1750–1850*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999.

Felski, Rita. *Uses of Literature*. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2008.

Fraiman, Susan. *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Furbank, P. N. "Mendacity in Mrs. Gaskell." *Encounter* 40 (1973): 51–55.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *North and South*. 1855. Edited by Sally Shuttleworth. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Gibson, Anna. "*Our Mutual Friend* and Network Form." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 48, no. 1 (2015): 63–84.

Girard, René. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero. 1961. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, trans. David Constantine. 1774. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Greiner, Rae. *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.

———. "Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel." *Narrative* 17, no. 3 (2009): 291–311.

Holstrom, John, and Laurence Lerner. *George Eliot and Her Readers: A Selection of Contemporary Reviews*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez. 1980. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Kurnick, David. *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Le Bon, Gustave. *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. 1895. Edited by Robert Nye. Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 1995.

Locy, Sharon. "Travel and Space in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*." *Pacific Coast Philology* 37 (2002): 105–21.

Lukács, Georg. *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock. 1915. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971.

Massumi, Brian. *Politics of Affect*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

Miller, Andrew. *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.

Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture*, trans. Albert Sbragia. 1987. New York: Verso, 2000.

O'Farrell, Mary Ann. *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

Phegley, Jennifer. *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Literary Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004.

Pinch, Adela. *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Plotz, John. *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics*. Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 2000.

———. "The Semi-Detached Provincial Novel." *Victorian Studies* 53, no. 3 (2011): 405–16.

Price, Leah. *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Ryan, Vanessa. *Thinking Without Thinking in the Victorian Novel*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.

Shires, Linda M. *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History, and the Politics of Gender*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 1992.

Vrettos, Athena. *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Wetherell, Margaret. *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2012.