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**Touching Fiction: Embodied Narrative Self-Reflexivity and Eighteenth-Century
British Sentimental Novels**

By

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B.A. (Hon), M.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Cultural Mediations

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Abstract:

Title: Touching Fiction: Embodied Narrative Self-Reflexivity and Eighteenth-Century British Sentimental Novels

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This thesis examines the intersection of sentimentalism and self-reflexive narrative practices in eighteenth-century novels featuring men of feeling. Major works in the sentimental canon such as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67) and A *Sentimental Journey* (1768), Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), and Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1771) include men of feeling as a means of dramatizing the benefits as well as the anxieties of aligning sympathetic human nature with the body's sensibility. However, these works also share a tendency to employ self-referential narrative techniques – including typographical play, editorial and authorial intrusion, multiple competing narrative voices, fragmentation, digression, and a proliferation of printerly metaphors – that betray a distinctly eighteenth-century concern for the book as a physical object, and for the parallels between printed books and human bodies. My thesis argues that these narrative methods could be productively approached as strategies of *corporeal defamiliarization*, which support the moral and aesthetic aims of sentimentalism by engaging with the materiality of texts and drawing attention to the embodied characteristics of both literary and affective experience. This project traces the genealogy of the connection between sentimentalism and an embodied mode of narrative

self-reflexivity from dual origins in Augustan satire and the Scottish Enlightenment, to its manifestations in the novels of Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie, and to the gradual loss of coherence of this connection in post-Revolution fiction such as Robert Bage's *Hermesprong* (1796) and Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800). Along the way, individual chapters focus on specific insights into sentimentalism's relationship to larger debates in the period about language, technology, medicine, and gender. Ultimately, I argue, these insights taken together reveal (a) the subtle and complex means by which sentimentalism adapts neoclassical ideals of virtue to the needs and concerns of an increasingly modern and commercial British society, and (b) that sentimentalism could be regarded as a later manifestation of somaticism, a worldview that rose to prominence around the turn of the eighteenth century. As critics including Richard Kroll and Deidre Lynch have examined, the somatic cultural imagination of eighteenth-century Britain balances a privileging of embodied experience with a sophisticated appreciation for the mediated and unstable foundations of knowledge, identity and value.

For Heather McAlpine

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Introduction: Structuring Feeling in Eighteenth-Century Fiction

If a creature be generous, kind, constant, compassionate, yet if he cannot reflect on what he himself does [. . .] he has not the character of being virtuous.

Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 1711.

This project examines the intersection between sentimentalism and narrative self-reflexivity in eighteenth-century British fiction. At the centre of this study is a set of texts published in close temporal proximity, including Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1771), and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), each of which draws on the contemporary cultural concern for sensibility to explore the limits and possibilities of a new model of virtuous masculinity in the figure of the man of feeling. Equally significantly, however, these works also share a tendency to employ self-referential narrative techniques, including typographical play, textual fragmentation, anti-linear structures, visual puns, manipulations of digression and intertextuality, and the use of intrusive or unreliable narrators, authors, and editors. These techniques not only function to disrupt the narrative flow and engage with the novels as fictional texts, but they also, importantly, draw attention to the books as mechanically manufactured, material objects. The sentimental novels of Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie thus consistently display a distinctly eighteenth-century concern for books as physical objects that reflects their participation in print culture, but they also exhibit a consistent fascination with the conceptual parallels between printed books and human bodies. Rather than evidence of a tension within sentimental poetics or an anticipation of modernist and postmodernist literary experimentation, instances of narrative self-reflexivity in these works can best be

accounted for as strategies of what I call *corporeal defamiliarization*, which operate in conjunction with the sentimental thrust of the novels by denaturalizing the embodied aspects of literary and affective experience. The scope of this thesis covers the emergence of this specifically sentimental mode of narrative self-reflexivity from its twin origins in Augustan satire and the Scottish Enlightenment, to its culmination in the works of Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie, and, finally, to its eventual dissolution after the French Revolution. Integrated with literary analysis of these texts, my research will also build on the work of critics such as Richard Kroll in *The Material Word* (1991) and Deidre Lynch in *The Economy of Character* (1998), by offering insights into the intricacies of eighteenth-century Britain's embodied or, to use Kroll's term, *somatic* culture, a culture that integrates its concern for material, corporeal experience with an appreciation for the social, linguistic, and technological mediations of knowledge, meaning and identity.

Considerable attention has been paid in recent decades to the significance of self-reflexive textual practices in *Tristram Shandy*. However, as I explore in greater detail in the first chapter, critics often bracket off discussions of these practices from the novel's relationship to contemporary literary and cultural trends, including sentimentalism. As Thomas Keymer notes, the "widespread contemporary sense of *Tristram Shandy* as the defining work of its immediate day, tied intimately into the writing of a culture it both reflects and influences, is rarely registered in modern criticism" (4). This tendency to bracket Sterne's novel off from its sociohistorical moment is in part traceable to the influential formalist Victor Shklovsky whose essay, "The Parody Novel" (1925), helped rejuvenate the critical reputation of *Tristram Shandy* by analyzing its formal self-consciousness. In it, Shklovsky defends Sterne's current relevance and proto-formalism,

but in order to do so he is forced to describe *Tristram Shandy* as being in line with the formalist principle that “sentimentality cannot be the content of art” by asserting that sentimentalism “is a rare phenomenon in Sterne” (200). In the decades that have followed, discussions of *Tristram Shandy*’s narrative style have usually been framed either in terms of its indebtedness to earlier literary movements or, quite often, its anticipation of the structural and linguistic experimentalism of modernism and postmodernism. As Alexis Tadié has recently observed, “by and large, essays on Sterne have either tended to emphasize the modernity of his texts, or have, on the contrary, insisted on the necessity of reading the novels within the framework of earlier traditions” (5). This despite the fact that Sterne’s literary reputation within his own time depended as much on his recognized skill as a sentimentalist – or as Vicesimus Knox put it, Sterne’s genius for “shaking the nerves” (251) – as it did on the remarkable playful self-awareness of his work. Moreover, by ignoring or downplaying *Tristram Shandy*’s connection to the rise of sentimentalism, critics overlook the fact that, as Barbara Benedict argues in *Framing Feeling* (1994), one of the generic conventions of sentimental fiction in general is its propensity to incorporate “self-conscious structures” into its narrative form, including, she notes, “ironic reportage” and “epistolary exchange” as well as typical Shandean stylistic features such as “interruptions, digressions, and narrative fractures...and highly stylized, exclamatory rhetoric” (12-13).

This propensity manifests itself, for instance, in Sterne’s more explicit foray into the genre of sentimental fiction, his travel narrative *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. The plot in this case largely revolves around the benevolent Parson Yorick’s observations as a cosmopolitan connoisseur of sympathetic transactions, yet the

episodic narrative is constantly disrupted by intrusive and self-referential scenes similar to those of *Tristram Shandy*. In one passage, for instance, Yorick is trapped in France and, in order to address the problem of providing an “account” for himself, embraces the chance to merge his identity with the fictional character of the same name from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*:

There is not a more perplexing affair in life to me, than to set about telling any one who I am—for there is scarce any body I cannot give a better account of than of myself; and I have often wish’d I could do it in a single word—and have an end of it. It was the only time and occasion in my life, I could accomplish this to any purpose—for Shakespear lying upon the table, and recollecting I was in his books, I took up Hamlet, and turning immediately to the grave-diggers scene in the fifth act, I lay’d my finger upon YORICK, and advancing the book to the Count, with my finger all the way over the name—Me Voici! Said I. (85)

In reaction to this gesture, the French Count agrees to procure new identification papers for Yorick. However, these papers list his occupation as a court jester, the occupation of the original “Yorick” from *Hamlet*, and the sentimental Yorick’s identity thus becomes inextricably intertwined with his own intertextual referent. *A Sentimental Journey* also ends with a typical bawdy pun that manipulates print conventions as it exposes the borders of the narrative frame. Yorick is at one point forced to share a room with a lady and her servant. They draw a curtain between the two beds to prevent any mischief, but the lady’s servant sneaks in between the beds as added protection. Yorick, being as much a sexual as a sentimental tourist, finds an excuse to reach out from the curtain blindly, and the scene, volume, and novel all abruptly come to a close with the following line:

When I stretch'd out my hand, I caught hold of the Fille de Chambre's ---

End of Volume II. (125)

The abrupt and absurd “end” to the novel is humorous and playfully self-referential, but in a manner that specifically manipulates the potential conceptual connections between the end of a book and the end of the servant’s body. More about the central relevance of this intersection of print, bodies, sentiment and narrative play will be said in a moment.

In *The Man of Feeling*, Mackenzie adopts a number of recognizably Sternean elements that led many contemporary reviews to lump the two authors together. Both *A Sentimental Journey* and *The Man of Feeling* begin abruptly in *medias res*. More generally, Mackenzie presents the picaresque adventures of his sentimental protagonist, Harley, through a labyrinth of narrative techniques that include typographical playfulness, along with disruptive digressions, numerous gaps, intertextual insertions, fragments and self-conscious inconsistencies, as well as a pastiche of competing and unreliable narrative voices and editorial frames. The narrative is framed and constrained not only by a mysterious narrator called “the Ghost” and a meddling editor whose interjections often call attention to problems, gaps, inconsistencies and changes in handwriting, but also, more problematically, by a fictionally-constructed original manuscript that, as the preface asserts, has been partly destroyed, leaving significant parts of the story fragmented and incoherent.

Smollett’s *Humphry Clinker* reacts to the current fashion for sensibility through its memorable depiction of the sentimental, if cantankerous, Matthew Bramble. Significantly, however, the tale of Bramble and his travelling entourage also intermingles its forays into sentimentalism with self-conscious formal practices through its

manipulations of “epistolary exchange” that occasionally, as with Mackenzie’s faux-editorial interruptions and footnotes, betray the gaps, borders and fractured nature of the pile of “Letters” that compose the narrative. Furthermore, Smollett himself intrudes as a fictional character within his own novel on multiple occasions, including when Matthew Bramble and his family stay at Smollett’s cousin’s house in Scotland and Melford incorporates a sample of Smollett’s landscape poetry into one of his letters (249). As will be closely analyzed in subsequent chapters, Smollett also intrudes as the host of a dinner gathering of Grub Street writers that serves as an opportunity for Smollett (the author) to merge his satire of modern print culture with a playful investigation of the embodied impact of literary production on authors.

When the structure of sentimental fiction is attended to – which, as Barbara Benedict has pointed out, is too often not the case (11) – the disparity between its occasionally densely self-referential narrative form and its explicit devotion to representing and evoking sympathetic feeling is often treated as a problem or a tension. In *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel* (1993), for instance, Ann Van Sant suggests that in the case of *The Man of Feeling*, its multiple layers of editorial and narrative distance ultimately serve to “etherialize rather than materialize” the protagonist’s body and hence undermine the work’s ability to communicate feeling (110). Because we do not receive Harley’s story directly, she writes, he exhibits “neither the surface tactility nor the physiological structures through which feelings occur” (110). Benedict herself, meanwhile, whose work represents perhaps the most extensive recent exploration of sentimental literary form, argues that the “self-conscious” stylistic conventions of novels of sensibility operate in dialectical opposition with their emphasis

on sentiment, and function to systematically moderate the inherent radically individualistic potential she attributes to the realm of feeling. Benedict writes,

Certainly, sentimental fiction does celebrate internal experience [. . .]. At the same time, the [. . .] tonal instability, structural fragmentation, and multiple narrative voices work to externalize these interior experiences, to deprive them of authority, and to subordinate them within a social frame. (12)

Benedict thus presents the form of sentimental fiction as evidence of a “contradictory impulse” within sentimental writing to both “celebrate and to control feeling,” which results in an awkward though consistent tension or “strain between portraying unselfconscious responses and framing these responses for the reader as moral lessons and aesthetic experiences” (13).¹

The difficulties that critics have had in reconciling the self-reflexive narrative structures of sentimental novels with their overt devotion to sympathetic feeling is certainly understandable. Admittedly, there does appear to be something counter-intuitive and inherently problematic about a text that ostensibly represents the virtues of “unselfconscious” feeling, yet seems to go out of its way to introduce layers of mediation that interpose levels of affective and epistemological distance and undermine any sense

¹ In *Sensibility: An Introduction* (1986), Janet Todd’s approach is more mixed as she alternates between treating the formal features of sentimental fiction as supporting and undermining its emphasis on feeling. On the one hand, she notes, like Van Sant, how characteristic techniques introduce distance: “Gaps are written into the works through the pretence of missing chapters, torn sentences and mutilated letters. . . . The result of these various devices – asterisks, dashes, meandering narrative and fragmentation – is that readers are to some extent prevented from indulging in an identifying fantasy with a character or an author” (6). However, at the same time, through these same devices, readers are “forced to respond to the emotion conveyed” in an atomistic and decontextualized manner (6). As well, she argues, as I do in “Body/Language,” that there is an important correspondence between the form of these novels and sentimental concepts of language: “these devices force the literary nature of the work on the reader by indicating the inadequacy of the medium – language – in which, despite their intrusive presence, most of the business of the work is still transacted” (6).

of unmediated or unselfconscious access to the events and feelings it describes. The perceived gap between sentimentalism and these narrative structures has also widened due to the fact that, at the same time that the critical reputation of widely recognized self-reflexive texts such as *Tristram Shandy* has been elevated – a change initiated by Shklovsky and his formalist contemporaries and emphatically supported in recent decades by postmodern theoretical and aesthetic trends – the cultural capital of sentimental literature has remained at the same low ebb since its abrupt fall from popular and critical favour around the turn of the nineteenth century. As John Mullan writes in *Sentiment and Sociability* (1988), since sentimentalism’s fall from grace, scholars of eighteenth-century British literature have usually treated the phenomenon “as an oddity or a problem— less to be explained than to be explained away” (14). Furthermore, as will be dealt with in my first chapter, “Body/Language,” since the linguistic turn, critical approaches tend to conflate narrative self-reflexivity with metafictional explorations of language and, by extension, with the role of language as a mediator of history, knowledge and subjectivity. As a result, the relevance of these textual practices tends to be intertwined with current theoretical and cultural concerns that are conventionally viewed as distinct and opposed to those of the eighteenth century and its perceived ties to Enlightenment values of progress, reason, and order.

In contrast with the current cultural and theoretical privileging of language, the rise of sentimentalism has typically been constructed as entangled with philosophical and scientific developments, such as the development of the nerve paradigm in medical science, and the widespread adoption of Locke’s associationist model of cognition, that approached knowledge, meaning and identity as rooted in embodied sensation. These

developments, in turn, are often assumed to have given authority to private feeling through their naïve faith in the individual's unmediated access to the material world, and the transparency and correspondence of words to things, all of which appear incompatible with the kinds of questions raised by modernist and postmodernist self-reflexive texts. In literary criticism, these types of assumptions permeate Watt's enormously influential *Rise of the Novel* (1957), which ties the emergence of the novel genre to the rise of "philosophical realism" and the rise of the individual. Critics such as R.F. Brissenden, meanwhile, have made similar arguments regarding the underlying assumptions inherent in sentimentalism, which Brissenden asserts "all derive from one basic notion. This is that the source of all knowledge and all values is the individual human experience" (22). The types of accounts offered by Watt and Brissenden, in turn, fold quite comfortably into master narratives of sentimentalism as a precursor to the rise of Romanticism and the birth of the modern individual.

Revisiting the Genealogy of Sentimentalism

A number of recent critics from a variety of fields have raised serious questions about many of these influential assumptions. For instance, in *The Material Word* (1991), Richard Kroll has argued that we need to re-examine Locke and other thinkers regarding Restoration and eighteenth-century hegemonic concepts of language, knowledge, cognition and sensation. Contrary to popular belief, this period espoused a complex and sophisticated appreciation of the means by which one's access to the world is mediated

by, among other things, linguistic structures. However, this fact has been overlooked because of misconceptions about the period's somatic worldview, which privileges materiality and embodied sensation. Deidre Lynch, meanwhile, has built on Kroll's research in her analysis of the typographical and embodied orientation of eighteenth-century print culture. In the course of her analysis, Lynch also questions Watt's thesis that the rise of the novel necessarily coincides with the rise of a proto-Romantic individual. Wahrman has continued this work in his re-visitations of eighteenth-century identity from *The Making of the Modern Self* (2004). Rather than viewing the eighteenth century as a time in which a coherent concept of the modern individual with a "deep inner core of selfhood" (198) began to emerge, Wahrman builds on Lynch as well as Terry Castle in asserting that this period was more notable for its investment in forms of identity play that would later be resisted and considered transgressive after the Romantic turn.

Critics such as J.G.A. Pocock, John Barrell, Michael Mckeon, and Robert Jones have shown how, far from an age characterized by confidence in the transparency and certainty of knowledge, meaning, and value, the eighteenth century was marked by contemporary transformations in the relationship between the categories of public and private which produced widespread anxiety, bitter debate, and epistemological uncertainty. Regarding sentimentalism, meanwhile, scholars such as John Mullan, John Dwyer, and Mark Phillips have tied this cultural development to thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, including Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith, whose sympathy-centred theories constructed human nature as inherently virtuous and sociable, propelled by exchanges of benevolent feeling, and invested in the common, public good.

Their work has undermined the view that sentimentalism does, in fact, privilege privacy and individuality by tying the emergence of a “culture of sensibility” – to use Barker-Benfield’s term – to concepts of sympathy and sociability.²

In the cultural context mapped out by these various interventions, a very different picture of sentimentalism emerges. Though grounded in the feelings of sensible bodies, sentimental identity is not widely viewed as exclusively private and individual, but is understood instead as fundamentally socially or publicly turned. The moral sentimental theories of Hutcheson, Hume and Smith often emphasize the social circulation of sympathy over any consideration of the privacy of emotion. If anything, these thinkers position themselves overtly in opposition to those, such as Bernard Mandeville and Thomas Hobbes, who grounded human nature exclusively in individual self-interest. Sentimentalism is also preoccupied with the material inscriptions of emotion on the surface of the body through blushes, facial expressions, gestures, and, of course, tears, all of which function as sensible signs that communicate embodied knowledge and meaning. In doing so, sentimental writing conveys an understanding of the sensitive body not as intrinsically private, but as a social nodal point, continuously emitting and reacting to the sentimental signifiers that circulate constantly in an increasingly urban and commercial

² A note on terminology: there is a long history of debate around whether or not “sentiment” and “sensibility” should be viewed as synonymous terms when studying the eighteenth century. Some critics, among them Anne Van Sant, have chosen to treat the concept of “sensibility” as more closely aligned with the body and embodied sensation than “sentiment,” which is viewed as tending to apply to a more refined and intellectual concept of feeling. These kinds of distinctions, though potentially heuristically useful, were not uniformly recognized within the period and may, in fact, serve to suppress the considerable slippage and commonalities between the two domains. My own work follows Barker-Benfield, Janet Todd, and others in treating the two terms as largely interchangeable. In line with this view, I also use the terms “sentimentalism” and the “culture of sensibility” interchangeably and, by extension, I treat sentimental fiction as emerging out of a wider cultural turn toward feeling or sensibility that impacted a variety of fields, including science, medicine, history, aesthetics, politics, economics, etc.

British society. In this way, sentimental writing's approach to the communicative body can be thought of as part of what Lynch describes as the "typographical culture" of the eighteenth-century, a culture that was preoccupied with the eloquence of material surfaces, and treated the exterior of the body like the face of the page, as a surface on which characters (understood as both persons and typeface symbols imprinted on pages) were inscribed and read (6).

Furthermore, this understanding of sentimental "character" plays into Wahrman's observation that the eighteenth century espoused a "non-essentialist" approach to identity that, notably, has "a whiff of the post-modern, long *avant la lettre*" (xviii). He argues that in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, during the peak of the influence of sentimentalism, British culture actually paralleled the "post-modern" preoccupation with identity play and its emphasis on the malleability, plasticity, and alterability of subjectivity.³ Along these lines, Wahrman observes that this part of his cultural history of selfhood

is at the same time likely to strike the reader not only as strangely remote but also as uncannily close. Many contemporary intellectual-political movements, from feminism through post-colonialism to multiculturalism, have emblazoned their banners with the imperative of destabilizing and denaturalizing modern Western

³ I draw on Wahrman's insights significantly throughout this thesis, and find his explorations of eighteenth-century identity play enormously useful. Nevertheless, while I support his work's basic premise regarding the remarkable fluidity and permeability of identity categories at this juncture, as well as regarding a noticeable heightening of tensions and anxieties surrounding forms of identity play toward the end of the century, I also wish to emphasize that tensions and anxieties regarding the instability of boundaries between race, class, gender, and other identity categories were present, if not quite as dominant, throughout the period. Concerns about figures and people that transgressed or subverted conventional categorical divisions – Amazons, men of feeling, noble savages, intelligent animals like the Ourang-Outang, automatons – existed alongside strains of discourse that were more tolerant and accepting.

notions of identity and self, emphasizing instead the liberating post-modern potential in recognizing their limits, their gaps, and their contingencies. It may thus prove somewhat disorienting to discover, as we become better acquainted with the *ancien régime* of identity, that some of those charged political goals that our contemporaries have set for a better future had been (*mutatis mutandis*) taken for granted by our predecessors two and a half centuries ago. (xvii)

With this in mind, the ideological underpinnings of the culture that gave rise to sentimentalism and those that underpin the self-referential narrative playfulness of modernist and postmodernist fiction no longer appear as fully irreconcilable. At the same time, however, there remain important distinctions that my own work acknowledges and explores. It is important to keep in mind that part of the reason these characteristics of eighteenth-century culture have remained largely hidden from view in the last few decades has been a result of the hegemonic narratives of the period rehearsed by scholars in the twentieth century and beyond. These scholars, as Kroll argues, have been resistant to the possibility of imagining models of mediation, epistemological uncertainty, and identity play within a worldview that privileges embodied sensation rather than language or discourse as the prime mover of subjects and society.

Drawing on these types of insights, this dissertation argues that the new cultural concern for feeling emerges out of a wider somatic and typographical culture in eighteenth-century Britain. Furthermore, placing the culture of sensibility in this context offers a potentially fruitful alternative grounding for approaching self-reflexive practices in sentimental fiction. The works of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie, instead of employing these practices in a manner that anticipates contemporary fiction and theory

by engaging with their own status as linguistic constructions, are more centrally concerned with texts as concrete, tactile, material objects. Furthermore, rather than approaching these practices as evidence of contradictory impulses or tensions within sentimentalism – a perspective that could be seen to re-affirm sentimental fiction’s reputation as a “problem” or an “oddity” – I propose viewing narrative self-reflexivity as an integral part of the sentimental aesthetic. Emerging out of a wider somatic culture that approaches identity, knowledge, and meaning as both material and textual at the same time, self-referential techniques operate in conjunction with the specific moral, aesthetic, and ideological aims of sentimentalism by supplementing the narrative’s focus on the embodied origins of sympathetic feeling and by denaturalizing texts as physical objects capable of impacting the nervous physiology of sentimental bodies.

Origins of Sentimental Self-Reflexivity: The Scottish Enlightenment and Augustan Satire

However, to get to this point – where narrative strategies that engage with the materiality of texts and exploit parallels between texts and bodies could be deployed in support of sentimentalism – two significant changes had to occur, both of which I analyze further at various points throughout this project. First, a new generation of theories of moral and aesthetic sensibility had to subtly redefine sympathetic feeling in ways that transformed the body into a potential source for the social communication of virtue rather than a source of vice and corruption. Secondly, authors of sentimental fiction had to re-appropriate literary techniques previously employed by Augustan satirists to strengthen the associations between vice and the realm of the flesh, and reinflect these techniques to

serve the new concerns of a culture that, by contrast, closely aligned moral virtue with the body and embodied sensibility.

Regarding the former, as a number of scholars from Habermas onward have argued, the emergence of a commercial public sphere in the eighteenth century brought into dialogue, for the first time, cultural realms that had long been separated by the traditional boundaries between public and private. In the process, however, this development destabilized the dominant discourse of value through which people could understand and distinguish virtue from vice, since this distinction was often mapped onto the now unstable and porous division between the public and private realms. In response to this crisis of value and meaning, the traditional understanding of public and private was defended by neoclassicists like the Third Earl of Shaftesbury and Alexander Pope, whose views dominated the earlier part of the century. J.G.A. Pocock and John Barrell have argued that these neoclassical writers can be seen as defending a “civic humanist” worldview in which the pursuit and defence of public virtue was viewed as integral to the health of society and involved sacrificing or suppressing personal, private concerns in favour of a devotion to political life and the promotion of neo-Platonic intellectual ideals of harmony, reason and order. In this classical model, economic concerns and bodily desires were both considered private matters, any attention to which was understood as an indulgence in vicious self-interest leading to luxury, effeminacy and the moral denigration of the republic as a whole – a point driven home, as Robert Jones observes, by Shaftesbury’s didactic painting, *The Judgment of Hercules*, in which Hercules is depicted having to choose between the difficult and self-sacrificing defence of virtue and the luxurious, effeminate temptations of the flesh (Jones 23).

Notably, in *Characteristics* (1711), Shaftesbury offers a theory of moral and aesthetic sense that would ultimately influence the rise of sentimentalism but that also represents one of the most powerful attempts in the early eighteenth century to defend traditional, classical values. In the work, Shaftesbury proposes an internal moral sense that operates akin to the external physical senses, yet which derives a superior intellectual pleasure from the defence of public good and is responsive to the transcendent ideals of order, harmony, and reason. By connecting public virtue to feelings of pleasure, Shaftesbury appears to bring private interest into line with public good. However, by dividing feelings of pleasure between the abstract and sociable pleasures of mind that tend toward virtue and the vulgar and selfish pleasures of the body that tend toward vice, Shaftesbury's theory of sensibility was limited. And in many ways it re-affirmed and naturalized the traditional distinction between virtue and self-interest while also upholding related divisions between public and private, mind and body, masculinity and effeminacy, and the aristocratic and commercial classes.

The early eighteenth-century understanding of strictly separate public and private realms had two consequences of primary concern here. First, it entailed that the realm of corporeal sensation and commerce were in the beginning of the century grouped together as self-interested private matters considered to be often opposed to and always in tension with the public pursuit of virtue. Consequently, the meaning of commerce and the meaning of the body both became intertwined with the fate of private self-interest. Second, the classical separation of public and private offered no means of imagining the increasing influence of commerce over eighteenth-century politics and culture except in terms of moral corruption. Writers and thinkers at the time thus responded to the

economic and social changes around them by engaging in bitter and confused debate over the meaning of virtue and vice, typified by the uproar over Mandeville's calculatedly provocative *Fable of the Bees* (1714) – a work that, despite being reviled by classical humanists, helped a great deal to naturalize the neoclassical connection between physical pleasure, commerce and private vice. In response to the rise of a modern commercial public sphere in Britain, some authors attempted to articulate new justifications for the traditional ideal of public virtue, some articulated more private models of virtue like economic frugality or domestic femininity, while many others resigned themselves to exposing and satirizing the inevitable corruption of the age.

Later sentimental theories of moral and aesthetic value by Scottish Enlightenment writers from Francis Hutcheson to David Hume, Adam Smith, and Lord Kames re-visited the Shaftesburyan model of feeling as pleasurable sociable affection, but they also introduced significant changes that fundamentally re-worked this model to more fully reconcile virtue and self-interest. The process by which the division of private self-interest and public virtue was undermined involved re-thinking both commerce and the body. On the subject of commerce, for instance, Hutcheson tempers the Shaftesburyan model in his *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) by describing private commercial self-interest as morally neutral, while Hume in *Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals* (1751) and Smith in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) both go further and treat commercial self-interest as potentially virtuous. Smith, for example, uses the Stoic concept of self-command to re-imagine commercial self-interest as a virtue. Self-command, in Smith's account, is always approved of by the impartial spectator, that imaginary observer whose spectre moderates human action and

facilitates the social circulation of sympathetic identification. From this approval “arises that eminent esteem with which all men naturally regard a steady perseverance in the practice of frugality, industry and application, though directed to no other purpose than the acquisition of fortune” (*Theory* 9).

However, these philosophers are capable of incorporating certain forms of self-interest within the realm of public good partly because the theories of sentiment they advocate also posit a shift in thinking about virtue and the body. While discussing the movement away from Shaftesbury in mid-century discussions of aesthetic value, Jones observes that “later writers reformulated taste in a way which brought bodily pleasure within the orbit of virtue” (23). A similar change manifested itself just as potently in theories of moral sensibility as it did in the often inseparable discussions of taste. Particularly in Hume and Smith, the “sense” that gives rise to feelings about moral value is no longer considered as separate from the external physical senses or from sensual pleasure. Rather than a distinctly mental and internal analog to the physical senses, moral and aesthetic sensibility is instead assumed to be equivalent to and originating from corporeal sense experience. For instance, Hume’s correlative to his theory of morals, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), asserts that knowledge and cognition never venture beyond the restrictive limitations of the physical senses (27), while Smith predicates his model of sympathy on the assumption that humans are prisoners of their own sensations (*Theory* 1). Indeed, Smith argues in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that the unifying thread between his own work and that of Scottish contemporaries like Hume and Hutcheson is a new appreciation for the origins of virtue and taste in “immediate sense and feeling” (320).

The body's reactivity to sensation occupies the central position in their models of human nature. And this important shift from intellectual to more physically-grounded sensibility allows Hume and Smith to argue that the self-interested pursuit of physical pleasure and a concern for the public good can be coordinated rather than opposed. Hume, for his part, argues toward the end of his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* that the opposition between any kind of self-interest and "social affections" is a false one (81). As long as it is kept within bounds, self-interest coheres with the sociable pursuit of public good because it is through the selfish pursuit of pleasure and aversion to pain that one seeks out the sympathetic pleasures of social life and the approbation of others. In this way, the model of sympathy articulated by Hume and Smith, by intersecting embodied sensation with a sociable concern for public good, offers a vision of moral virtue that potentially resolves the crisis of value. As a result, rather than a tempting distraction from the pursuit of abstract, metaphysical ideals, by mid-century, authors writing about sentiment in a variety of fields, including fiction, began to explore the possibility of associating the body and embodied sympathetic sensibility with virtue and social harmony.

In sentimental fiction, these kinds of changes also manifest themselves at the level of narrative form. At the beginning of the century, many notable texts that employ narrative self-reflexivity are Augustan satires of commercial print culture, such as Pope's *The Dunciad* (1728), Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) and Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (1730). These works still appear heavily invested in a neoclassical value system, and thus treat the commodification of literature as an encroachment of private concerns on the public realm, as well as a threat to social order and the public aim of art to promote the

cause of virtue. To make their case, Pope's and Swift's Rabelaisian satires employ self-referential techniques that tend to foreground the materiality of books alongside representations of bodily functions and physical deformity in order to undermine the authority of commercial print culture by exploiting the traditional connections between economic self-interest and debased corporeality. Pope's *The Dunciad*, for example, describes the world of print as a kind of unnatural, alternative kingdom in which a new Prince of "Dulness" is crowned because of the immense size of a pile of his unsold volumes, while Daniel Defoe makes an appearance as earless and deformed, and journalists compete with each other by digging through the filth and faeces of the Thames. In *A Tale of a Tub*, Swift adopts the voice of an incompetent, rambling, and uneducated Grub Street hack hired to produce a work to distract religious enthusiasts. In a manner that anticipates Sterne, this satire of print culture is peppered with deliberate typos, missing passages, excessive digressions, and other self-referential disruptions that defamiliarize the work as a physical, mechanically manufactured object. In one digression on madness, the narrator proclaims that reason is constantly being corrupted by bodily vapours. Even more disturbing, the body's internal operations which intrude upon reason are unknowable. Instead, we must resign ourselves to a superficial knowledge of ourselves and our material surroundings: "He that can with *Epicurus* content his ideas with the *films* and *images* that fly upon his Senses from the *Superficies* of Things; Such a Man truly Wise" (632). As these satires warn, a world dominated by the corrupting influence of commerce is conceptually inseparable from a world enslaved by the debased needs and desires of the body.

Though no longer invested in the same worldview, the later sentimental novels at the centre of this study nevertheless consistently employ self-referential techniques that draw quite directly from the Augustan satirical tradition. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* are both heavily indebted to Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*. Meanwhile, the faux-editorial frame of *The Man of Feeling* justifies a variety of playful references to the deformities of the physical manuscript, and elements of Smollett's satires of print culture from *Humphry Clinker* draw directly from the Augustan-era parodies of hacks and pamphleteers. Despite these structural parallels, however, the self-reflexive practices of these texts operate in conjunction with sentimental concerns that are importantly distinct from those of the earlier generation of Pope and Swift. To give a few short examples, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* engages with the physicality of texts in a scene in which Corporal Trim shakes a book vigorously when asked to look for a boat inside its covers. While Trim is lightly satirized for naïvely expecting an actual, material boat to be contained within the covers of a book, he is also indirectly rewarded for his behaviour when a folded up sermon misplaced by Parson Yorick does, in fact, fall out of the book in the boat's place. The happy accident results from engaging with the physicality of texts and ultimately yields a morally-didactic message typical of sentimental fiction in the form of a sermon, which Sterne inserts into the text, and which Trim reads dutifully (98-99). *Tristram Shandy*'s notorious black page, meanwhile, is not only a self-referential manipulation of print convention that denaturalizes the material surface of the printed page, but also, importantly, a symbol of lament over Yorick's death designed to evoke sympathetic tears.

While these types of narrative techniques betray an indebtedness to Augustan satire, they appear in a cultural and literary context in which, as discussed earlier, the realm of materiality and embodied sensation are increasingly aligned with the circulation of sympathetic and virtuous feeling. Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie, then, re-appropriate existing formal practices designed to associate printed books with human bodies originally employed to expose the debased nature of commercial and corporeal self-interest. They re-deploy these strategies to serve a new sentimental aesthetic that aligns an attention to materiality with the promotion of virtue and sociability. Rather than calling attention to the materiality of books and bodies to satirize the commodification of culture, these strategies of corporeal defamiliarization expose and interrogate the embodied aspects of literary production and reception in order to bring literary experience within the purview of sensibility. In a similar fashion to the Scottish moralists' modifications of Shaftesbury, sentimental novelists modify a mode of writing originally invested in a classical worldview to address the concerns of a new cultural paradigm of sensibility.

Outlining the Project

The chapters that follow balance literary and cultural analysis as they focus on specific insights that attending to the embodied orientation of sentimental self-reflexivity provide into eighteenth-century Britain's cultural imagination. The first chapter, "Body/Language," examines the deceptively complex relationship between words and

feelings within the culture of sensibility through the lens of self-reflexive sentimental fiction.⁴ It begins by exploring in greater detail some of the difficulties and issues that surround the application of contemporary language-centred assumptions about the significance of narrative self-referentiality to eighteenth-century novels, difficulties and issues that come to the fore in the case of Sterne. Of more central concern is that sentimental writing tends to express a profound scepticism toward language, particularly regarding the ability of conventional words to adequately communicate the subtleties and nuances of sympathetic feeling. Far from skilled orators and rhetoricians, men of feeling are frequently represented as struggling with language and even, in the case of Uncle Toby, “put in jeopardy by words” (72). By contrast, sentiment is frequently represented as communicated more effectively through embodied forms and practices, through looks, gestures, tears, and physiognomic interpretation. Sentimental writing thus appears to set up an opposition between conventional language and the sensible body.

As I will argue, the self-referential textual practices of novels featuring men of feeling initially appear to confirm this understanding of the relationship between conventional language and the embodied realm of feeling. By consistently disrupting the narrative and linear flow of words in ways that denaturalize books as material, tactile objects, sentimental fiction seems to privilege the physicality of texts over and above any consideration of their status as linguistic constructions. However, close attention to examples of narrative self-reflexivity ultimately reveals a more complicated approach to

⁴ As with all of the chapters in this thesis, the main title is composed of two juxtaposed terms whose relationship during the culture of sensibility was either fraught with tension, ambiguous, in the midst of a significant shift, or some combination of all three. As well, the slash is meant as a modest homage to the kind of typographical manipulation and playfulness I analyze in the source material.

the relationship between bodies, language, feelings and texts. Importantly, the typographical self-reflexivity found in sentimental fiction tends not simply to call attention to the physicality of texts, but also to draw analogies between printed texts and human bodies. In these cases sensibility comes to be treated not simply as distinct from or opposed to the realm of language, but also as an alternative sign system in its own right, analogous to conventional language though grounded in the corporeal body. I argue that this duality embedded in sentimental self-reflexivity suggests that the relationship between words and feelings (and also between words and bodies) within the culture of sensibility cannot be described in terms of simple oppositions or absolute dichotomies. I also widen the perspective to consider theories of language from Adam Smith, David Hartley and Lord Kames. These works suggest that this Janus-faced relationship to language is a trend within sentimental writing more generally and, further, that sentimentalism may share genealogical roots with the somatic worldview that Kroll argues emerged around the beginning of the century.

The next chapter, "Feeling/Machines," changes the focus and examines what insights the formal techniques of sentimental fiction provide into the relationship between sensibility and technology. Many of the same narrative techniques that draw attention to the materiality of the text simultaneously engage with books as mechanically-reproduced printed objects. Thus, at the same time that these novels demonstrate a self-awareness of their own physicality, they also betray a self-awareness of their indebtedness to modern technological developments and, specifically, the expansion of technologies of textual reproduction. Furthermore, by drawing attention to the means by which sensitive bodies have the capacity to resemble printed pages through their tendency to exhibit physical

signs or marks imbued with sympathetic significance, strategies of corporeal defamiliarization draw on printerly metaphors also employed by Locke and Hartley in their mechanistic, sense-based models of knowledge and cognition. In doing so, these practices imply that the origins of embodied sensation, may, like those of texts, be traceable to mechanical processes. Drawing on the interrelations between the mechanical copying of printing presses, mechanistic theories of nervous sensibility, and printerly narrative self-reflexivity, this chapter will take a critical look at the role of the mechanical in the culture of sensibility. Significantly, it will also focus specifically on the potential analogies between representations of the figure of the man of feeling and contemporary representations of the automaton. Exploring the parallels between the man of feeling and the automaton yields two significant observations: (1) viewed within the context of Wahrman's concept of pre-modern identity, the man of feeling's hyper-reactive sensibilities raise important questions, not only about eighteenth-century gender divisions, but also about the stability and certainty of eighteenth-century boundaries between humans and machines; (2) perhaps more importantly, the porous borders between men of feeling and emotional automata – or feeling machines – points to important shifts in the relationship between the mechanical and the virtuous, a porousness that also manifests itself in the narrative structure of canonical representations of sentimental masculinity by Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie. This, in turn, reveals new aspects of how the wider culture of sensibility both engages with and resists the hegemonic discourse of civic humanism it inherits from an earlier generation.

The embodied orientation of the textual self-awareness in Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie offers insights into sentimental concepts of language and technology, as well

as of health and medicine. As explored in “Public/Health,” the narrative style of sentimental novels brings together two seemingly distinct definitions of the term “physical book,” one referring to a material, printed text, the other referring to a book of “physick” or medicine. Furthermore, the particular ways these two senses of the term “physical book” converge in novels featuring men of feeling sheds light on important tensions within sentimental fiction’s investment in medical theories and debates. From one perspective, the textual practices of these works appear to strengthen sentimental fiction’s association with good health, both moral and physical, partly by supporting the genre’s concern with privileging and strengthening the body’s nervous sensibilities. However, these same techniques can also be seen to consistently problematize the connection between good health and virtuous sensibility by, in some cases, linking sentimental subjectivity with illness and disability, and in others, by raising questions about the field of medicine and its ability to understand and alleviate the sensible body. In order to address these competing strains in sentimentalism’s relationship to health, I conclude by placing sentimental fiction in the context of contemporary medical developments in eighteenth-century Britain, including the emergence of the nervous paradigm, the popular fascination with physiognomy, and the growth of spa towns as fashionable health resorts. Spa towns in particular exhibit an ambivalent relationship to health and medicine that suggestively mirrors sentimental fiction. These retreats can be seen alternately as spaces devoted to moral and physiological rejuvenation and as vice-ridden products of commercial modernity that, despite appearances, actually contribute to spread of social and physical illness among the British public. Intersections of sentimental self-reflexivity and eighteenth-century concepts of health thus offer further

evidence that the culture of sensibility balances a privileging of the body with concerns about the profoundly mediated, uncertain, and unstable nature of embodied knowledge and experience.

Up to this point, my project revolves around a set of canonical sentimental novels written by men and featuring new models of sentimental masculinity. However, in the last chapter, “Sensible/Women” I expand this perspective to consider how the convergence of narrative self-reflexivity and sentimentalism in eighteenth-century literature relates to constructions of femininity. Women’s relationship to sentimentalism was importantly distinct from that of men. And while the culture of sensibility offered justifications for women’s increased presence and agency in the public sphere, these justifications aligned femininity with sensibility in sometimes deeply problematic ways. Anxieties around feminine sensibility tend to coalesce around women’s reading habits, particularly around their weakness for sentimental fiction. In this context, the various issues surrounding women, literature and sensibility tend to converge in textual representations of the quixotic female reader, a figure whose fate during the rise and fall of sentimentalism, I argue, is intertwined with that of the man of feeling. Moreover, the female quixote draws attention to the importance of gender difference in accounting for the relationship between the culture of sensibility and narrative form. While texts featuring men of sensibility, as we have seen, tend to deploy self-reflexive formal practices in order to support a sentimental aesthetic, looking at the quixotic Lydia Melford from Smollett’s *Humphry Clinker* alongside similar characters from Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote* (1752), Mary Robinson’s *The Natural Daughter* (1799), and Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), illustrates how

depictions of quixotic female reading, by contrast, often mobilize similar techniques in a manner that betrays anxieties about the culture of feeling and its effects on women.

Through discussions of Robinson and Hamilton, this final main chapter also introduces some of the tensions and issues raised around British reactions to the French Revolution, an event which, as Janet Todd notes, precipitated a great deal of bitter debate and confusion surrounding the political and ideological significance of sensibility (Todd 130). As the brief concluding chapter elaborates, the kinds of concerns expressed in these novels, and by critics such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More, not only helped give shape to the female quixote as a recognizable type of undisciplined sentimental reader, but also challenged the legitimacy and undermined the authority of sentimentalism. These types of challenges also, more specifically, illustrate the important shifts and conflicts that ultimately led to the dissolution of a recognizable sentimental mode of narrative self-reflexivity. As observable in structurally similar yet ideologically opposed political novels such as Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* and Robert Bage's *Hermesprong* (1796), the techniques adopted by Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie begin to lose their legibility in the turbulent 1790s and no longer seem as unambiguously aligned with the moral and aesthetic aims of a coherent culture of sensibility.

In the end, by approaching this printerly and corporeal mode of narrative self-reflexivity as operating in conjunction with sentimentalism, this project fleshes out a productive means of accounting for the presence of curiously self-conscious structures within narratives ostensibly devoted to unselfconscious feeling. However, the means by which these practices support and complement the moral and aesthetic aims of

sentimentalism also offers evidence that the culture of sensibility may not fit comfortably into conventional metanarratives of the “rise of the individual” and the emergence of deep, private, inner consciousness. Instead, accounting for the ways the embodied forms and practices of sentimental experience are represented as analogous to print and texts requires looking outside conventional assumptions about the meaning of materiality and embodiment in eighteenth-century British culture. As a result, I follow other recent scholars in offering research that poses questions about whether feeling is inherently private and subjective and, by extension, whether the culture of sensibility ultimately belongs in the pre-history of Romanticism and of modern individualism. This project also questions the belief that there is an implicit connection between, on the one hand, grounding experience and knowledge in embodied sensibility, and, on the other, espousing a resistance to theories of epistemological, linguistic, technological, and cultural mediation. The new cultural concern for feeling that emerges in eighteenth-century Britain seems to demonstrate a remarkably complex and consistent sense of the mediated and unstable nature of knowledge and language, and the malleability of identity.

Chapter 1 – Body/Language

Introduction

How did eighteenth-century Britain construct the relationship between words and feelings? When this question is considered in the context of sentimentalism, simple answers remain frustratingly elusive as words and feelings can appear alternately intimately intertwined and significantly opposed. On the one hand, the term “sentiment” itself points to potential conceptual entanglements between the realms of sympathetic feeling and linguistic expression, since, as Deidre Lynch points out, “in eighteenth-century usage *sentiment* designated both a feeling and the language, the piece of writing, [. . .] that articulated that feeling” (44). Moreover, many of the works of sentimental fiction and theory that helped popularize the culture of sensibility are nothing if not books filled with words about feelings. And as the popularity of these books suggests, sentimentalism is inconceivable without the expansion of print culture, and can thus be seen as in part a product of the increased circulation of words among a growing reading public.

Yet, ironically, many canonical eighteenth-century books filled with words about feelings tend to display a profound scepticism regarding the ability of “mere words” to adequately convey the subtlety and complexity of these feelings. In fact, recent scholars such as John Mullan, Claudia Johnson, Janet Todd have observed that sentimental writing in general consistently marginalizes the significance of language while privileging the sensitive body as the primary register of sympathetic feeling. As John Brewer writes in *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1997), “sensibility stressed the importance of bodily sensation [. . .] sentimental eloquence was a matter of sighs, tears and palpitations, not

words” (118). Indeed, as can be seen throughout the sentimental novels of Laurence Sterne, Tobias Smollett and Henry Mackenzie, people overcome by sensibility are frequently at a loss for words. In fact, it almost functions as a measurable rule that the refinement and delicacy of a character’s sympathetic sensibility are inversely proportional to the number of words he or she is able to express. In general, then, sentimentalism, despite its participation in and dependence upon the production and circulation of printed words, tends to represent the realm of language as either opposed to or at least significantly distinct from the realm of sentiment and, furthermore, to privilege the physical body over language as the primary site of sentimental communication.

Closely analyzing the embodied self-referential narrative practices in the sentimental novels of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie opens up some useful avenues of inquiry that can help navigate the deceptively complex relationship between words and feeling in mid-eighteenth century British literature and culture. However, doing so also initially requires re-visiting some contemporary assumptions within literary criticism and theory about the nature of narrative self-reflexivity. The current dominant practice is to approach self-reflexive texts through the critical lens of *metafiction*. Yet the potential applicability of this literary concept may be narrower than it initially appears. As I argue, the critical discourse around metafiction demonstrates that the term remains closely intertwined with the specific language-centred concerns of the postmodern aesthetic from which it emerged and to which it was originally applied. As a result, the significance of self-reflexivity in eighteenth-century sentimental fiction has either been largely ignored, or, as in the case of *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67), has been misconstrued as anticipating the concerns of the postmodern linguistic turn. The sentimental novels of Sterne, Smollett,

and Mackenzie, by contrast, more often employ self-reflexive techniques to ends that are specific to the culture of sensibility, ends that are quite distinct from the language-centred concerns of postmodern metafiction. In particular, by disrupting the linear flow of words – through intrusions, interruptions, fragmentations, and digressions – often in ways that draw attention toward the corporeal aspects of literary production and reception, the self-referential practices found in these novels undermine the centrality of language in favour of a privileging of physicality.

These novels self-reflexively engage with their own status as printed matter in part through their manipulations of typography. Furthermore, the typographical self-reflexivity found in sentimental fiction tends not simply to call attention to the physicality of texts, but also to draw analogies between printed texts and human bodies. In particular, gestures, blushes, tears and other embodied manifestations of feeling are often described as *impressed* or *imprinted* on the surface of the body in ways that mirror the impression of printed characters on a sheet of paper. However, here the boundaries between language and sensibility once again begin to blur. While still engaging with materiality and typography, in these cases sensibility comes to be treated as not simply distinct from or opposed to the more rational and abstract territory of language, but also as a kind of alternative sign system in its own right, analogous to conventional language though grounded in the corporeal body. Thus, even as sentimental fiction ostensibly describes a realm of embodied feeling that exists beyond words, instances of self-reflexivity demonstrate that sentimentalism continues to rely on and exploit analogies between the communicative capacity of sensitive bodies and of conventional language.

This duality embedded in sentimental self-reflexivity suggests that the relationship between words and feelings (and also between words and bodies) within the culture of sensibility cannot be described in terms of simple oppositions or absolute dichotomies, even though sentimental writers themselves often represent the relationship along those lines. Instead, the intersection of words and feelings produce simultaneous sites of tension and reciprocity. Furthermore, expanding the scope reveals that this Janus-faced treatment of language is not specific to self-reflexive sentimental fiction but characterizes other forms of canonical sentimental writing as well. In the work of prominent theorists of sensibility like Lord Kames, Adam Smith, and David Hartley, it becomes clear that other authors similarly alternate between marginalizing the significance of language and attempting to reconcile the realm of language and signs with their embodied models of sympathetic human nature. While this might seem to indicate disorder or inconsistency in sentimental constructions of language, I believe that this points to a consistent and intelligible pattern. In fact, thought of alongside the insights gleaned from a close analysis of self-reflexivity in sentimental fiction, the work of Kames, Smith and Hartley supports the possibility that sentimental concepts of language are later manifestations of *somaticism*, a worldview that Richard Kroll argues rose to prominence in Britain around the turn of the eighteenth century. As with somatic approaches advocated by Locke and other intellectual predecessors, sentimental writing privileges the sensible body as the origin of experience, but does so without denying the significant mediating impact of language-like signs on knowledge, culture and identity.

Part I: Sterne, Metafiction and Self-Reflexivity in Art and Literature

Since the twentieth century, scholars have offered a variety of attempts to account for the significance of self-reflexivity in literature and art. In his influential essay, “Modernist Art” (1965), Clement Greenberg attempts to account for the recent unprecedented and supposedly revolutionary experiments in the discipline of painting. Greenberg takes issue with the widespread assumption that modernist painting represents a rupture with the past. Rather than a radical break with previous traditions, Greenberg views modernist experimentation across all forms of art as a logical extension of the self-reflexivity inherent in a Kantian adherence to disciplinarity. He defines modernism as “the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence” (5). The self-consciously anti-realist and anti-representationalist aesthetic of early twentieth-century painting is an extension of the impetus to reflect back on one’s own medium and to explore and defend the borders of this medium by stripping away all non-essential elements that each discipline shares with others. The teleological end of the process of self-interrogation is for a mode of art to discover and explore that which is unique and particular to itself. In other words, self-reflexivity in this context is directed to uncovering essential features of various art forms. For painting, Greenberg argues, this essential element is flatness: “Flatness, two-dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else” (6). Rather than subvert previous traditions of visual art, this discovery actually

represents the culmination of years of effort to uncover and establish the proper focus for painting.

In a somewhat similar manner, though in the realm of *post*-modernist rather than modernist criticism, over the last few decades, literary critics have noted with increasing frequency a trend within fiction to similarly reflect back on itself. And while Greenberg observes that this exploration in painting led visual artists to turn to the characteristic features of their medium such as the flatness of the canvas, literary critics have observed how the self-reflexive strain in literature has led authors to focus instead on their own use of *language*. For instance, in a passage that echoes Greenberg from *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (1970), William Gass writes of the trend toward self-conscious narrative experimentation in contemporary fiction and asserts, “the novelist now better understands his medium; he is ceasing to pretend that his business is to render the world; he knows, more often now, that his business is to *make* one, and to make one from the only medium of which he is a master – language” (24). To describe the new type of novel that self-critically reflects on its own status as a linguistic construction, Gass coins the term *metafiction*.

Metafiction has since been enthusiastically adopted as the dominant critical discourse through which to approach the prevalence of self-reflexivity in postmodern fiction and is regularly used to describe self-reflexive novels by contemporary authors including Salman Rushdie, Margaret Atwood, Kurt Vonnegut, Robert Coover, Umberto Eco, John Fowles and even William Gass himself. As Stanley Trachtenberg notes, metafiction is now “central to any definition of postmodernism” (6). Furthermore, rather than thought of as part of a Kantian teleology toward disciplinary self-criticism, many

critics have explored how metafictional novels follow the anti-essentialist strain in postmodern literary and cultural theory by looking beyond the role of language within literature to the means by which language and systems of signification also mediate culture, knowledge, history, and subjectivity. As Patricia Waugh writes in her book-length study, *Metafiction*, “If our knowledge of the world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of ‘reality’ itself” (2-3). The intimate connection between metafiction and poststructuralist linguistic theory, meanwhile, leads Mark Currie to suggest that metafiction does not designate a particular kind of fiction so much as “a kind of problem in the philosophy of language” (15). Metafictional works not only realize the potential within fiction to reflect on how language mediates reality and knowledge, but, as Linda Hutcheon argues, these novels also perform a political function. By simultaneously invoking and undermining the conventions of realist narrative, these works problematize and denaturalize the boundaries between “the world and the text, thereby making us aware of the irreducible ideological nature of every representation” (50). In the end, while debates over the precise definition of metafiction abound, one thing that remains constant is that the rise of metafiction is tied to a new appreciation for the central importance of language.

The rise of metafiction must be given credit for bringing renewed critical attention to narrative self-reflexivity in literature. As metafiction has become the dominant paradigm for thinking through the significance of self-reflexivity in literary works, earlier self-referential texts once dismissed as marginal or lowbrow have been recuperated as predecessors to the serious play of postmodern literature. One such text is among those at

the centre of this study: Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Wayne Booth notes that Sterne's novel was once derided as "a mad, inexplicable thing [. . .] having real kinship in literature only with other mad books, most of them since wisely forgotten" (163). And yet, remarkably, the centuries-old *Tristram Shandy* has been embraced by postmodern criticism with such enthusiasm that it has become as synonymous with the term metafiction as any contemporary text. As Mark Currie writes, *Tristram Shandy* has been embraced as one of a small set of "early metafiction" that critics consistently regard as "precursors for the origins of postmodern sensibility" (5). Waugh's book, meanwhile, opens with an epigram not from Rushdie or Eco, but from *Tristram Shandy*, suggesting Sterne's novel can serve interchangeably with any late twentieth-century author's work as a representative of this new postmodern literary mode. A strong connection between *Tristram Shandy* and metafiction is even assumed by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, which defines metafiction as "fiction about fiction; or more especially a kind of fiction that openly comments on its own fictional status" and then adds "the most celebrated case is Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, which makes a continuous joke of its own digressive form" (Baldick 133). Perhaps it should come as no surprise, then, that, as Larry McCaffery observes in *Postmodern Fiction* (1986), it is now a commonplace in critical discourse to assume "that *Tristram Shandy* is a thoroughly postmodern work in every respect but the period in which it is written" (xv).

However, attempts to characterize *Tristram Shandy* as a postmodern novel *avant la lettre* reveal a curious irony. These attempts involve more than simply recognizing that *Tristram Shandy* is "fiction about fiction." They also suggest that the self-reflexivity in the novel is ultimately directed, as with postmodern fiction, toward the novel's own

status as a linguistic construction. As Hutcheon argues, this linguistic self-awareness is part of postmodernism's poststructuralist concern with denaturalizing or "de-doxifying" (to use the term Hutcheon borrows from Barthes) the discursive origins of knowledge, culture and subjectivity, and thus draws attention to the historically and culturally constructed nature of our primary assumptions. At the same time, however, to posit that an eighteenth-century text employs narrative self-reflexivity to the same end is to assume that self-reflexivity always performs the same function regardless of context. In a strange turn of events, then, the narrative technique that Hutcheon has argued contemporary authors employ in order to unveil the culturally and historically mediated nature of our primary assumptions has itself come to be treated as a dehistoricized, acultural formal tool, and not, as is more likely the case, as a social technology deployed to serve the specific ideological concerns of a particular cultural context.¹ Furthermore, as this project argues, if we do look at the specific context within which *Tristram Shandy* emerges, it becomes clear that the novel is not the historical anomaly it is often assumed to be.

¹ Consequently, discussions of *Tristram Shandy*'s anticipation of twentieth century thought have a habit of either ignoring or downplaying his sentimentalism. Within his own time, of course, Sterne was not considered an anomaly, but instead was embraced as a sentimentalist with a (sometimes regrettable) weakness for satire and excessive sensuality. For example, see Vicesimus Knox's "On the Moral Tendency of the Writings of Sterne," from his *Essays Moral and Literary* (1782) or Scott's treatment of Sterne in relation to Mackenzie in *Lives of the Novelists* (1823). In the introduction I suggested that the modern trend to suppress the significance of Sterne's sentimental reputation is perhaps traceable to Shklovsky, whose essay, "The Parody Novel," helped draw critical attention to the remarkable formal self-consciousness of *Tristram Shandy*, (200). A similar inability or unwillingness to account for the sentimental elements in Sterne's writing runs throughout the 1995 essay collection *Laurence Sterne in Modernism and Postmodernism*. Stuart Sim's essay is one of the few that directly addresses sentimentalism, but describes Sterne's emphasis on feeling as a regrettable "retreat" from the radically antifoundational scepticism that the author explores elsewhere (114).

Sterne's "mad, inexplicable thing" and the Culture of Sensibility

I am by no means the first to raise concerns about the perceived uniqueness of *Tristram Shandy*. In his 1952 article, "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction Before *Tristram Shandy*," Wayne Booth notes that the novel's reputation as a "mad, inexplicable thing" led critics to believe that systematic attempts "to see [*Tristram Shandy*] in its historical context were doomed to failure" (163). The ease with which contemporary critics feel they can take Sterne's novel out of its historical context and transport it to the present can be considered as fallout from these earlier misconceptions. However, Booth challenges the perception that Sterne's narrative methods are too "unreasonable" or "inexplicable" to be contextualized. Focusing on Sterne's use of the self-conscious narrator "who intrudes into his novel to comment on himself as a writer, and on his book [. . .] as a created literary product" (165), Booth examines precedents from earlier generations of authors like Cervantes, Rabelais and Swift. More importantly, however, he draws attention to some often overlooked early British and French novels, many published just before *Tristram Shandy* in the 1750s, that seem to exploit the intrusive, self-conscious narrator with the same dexterity as Sterne: Marivaux's *Pharsomon, ou les Folies Romanesques* (1737); William Goodall's *Captain Greenland* (1752); *The History of Charlotte Summers* (1749), a novel often attributed to Sarah Fielding; and *The Life and Memoirs of Mr. Ephraim Bates* (1756), a novel that has been suggested as a possible source for the form and materials of *Tristram Shandy*.

But one could also look more specifically at other texts written around the same time that not only employ self-conscious narrative techniques but, like *Tristram Shandy*,

intermingle their playful self-consciousness with the generic conventions of sentimental literature. The narrative disruptions, digressions, misplaced chapters, gaps and blank spaces, torn pages, authorial and editorial intrusions, typographical extravagances, anti-linear structures, and generally parodic engagements with print culture found in, among others, Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), and Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1771) all contribute to a narrative tone of heightened self-consciousness that qualifies a novel as metafictional, at least in the broad sense outlined in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. And yet, despite sharing *Tristram Shandy*'s propensity for employing self-referential narrative practices, since their rather rapid descent from popularity and critical favour in the 1790s, canonical sentimental novels and novelists continue to be disparaged for their lack of perceivable aesthetic worth. An illustrative example is Henry Mackenzie, whose sentimental writing was originally considered comparable to Sterne's in both style and aesthetic quality. More than one early review of *The Man of Feeling* noted the obvious parallels between the styles of Mackenzie and Sterne.² And in his *Lives of Novelists*, Sir Walter Scott pairs Mackenzie with Sterne, citing the two as authors that "must be accounted as belonging to the same class" (qtd. in Harkin, 212). Yet as Sterne's reputation has risen, Mackenzie continues to be treated by most modern scholars, as Barbara Benedict points out, "as an imitative, third-rate novelist whose works repay only an historical or philosophical interest in the theory of sentimentalism" (118). In fact, Vickers' introduction to the Oxford Edition of *The Man of Feeling* asserts that the novel

² *The Monthly Review* of May 1771 notes that *The Man of Feeling* is clearly "written after the manner of Sterne," a sentiment echoed almost verbatim by *The Scots Magazine* published in August of the same year.

“has little absolute literary value” (xxiii). John Dwyer, meanwhile, offers a similar assessment in *Virtuous Discourse*, when he describes *The Man of Feeling* as having “little literary merit” (147). In an era of literary studies where the possibility of any objective qualitative aesthetic evaluation has been problematized by theorists like Bourdieu and Foucault, critics and historians continue to deny sentimental fiction any aesthetic worth with surprising confidence and consistency. Maureen Harkin offers a potential explanation for this phenomena in the Broadview edition of *The Man of Feeling* when she notes that, from our (post)modern perspective, “it takes quite an effort of historical imagination to reconstruct a literary culture in which the term ‘sentimental’ was not automatically understood as a pejorative, when admissions of weeping did not mark one as an unsophisticated reader” (9). This fits with John Mullan’s observation from *Sentiment and Sociability* (1988) that, among critics and literary historians, sentimentalism has usually been framed as an uncomfortable “oddity or a problem [. . .] to be explained away” (14).

In the end, the linguistic bias embedded within the critical discourse around metafiction is both a help and a hindrance to the study of the intersection of self-reflexivity and sentimental fiction in the eighteenth century. For one, this project would not be viable without the new and widespread appreciation for the significance of self-reflexive literature brought by the linguistic turn. And the rise of the concept of metafiction has been essential in re-assessing the significance of novels like *Tristram Shandy* that had been previously marginalized or dismissed as “mad” and “inexplicable” things. However, instead of transcending its historical context and anticipating the postmodern turn, there is ample evidence to suggest that *Tristram Shandy* employs self-

referential techniques to serve the sentimental concerns of its own time. Just as Greenberg's essay suggests that the motivation for self-reflection in modernist painting derives from the very *un*-postmodern essentialist philosophy of Kant, so sentimental novels reflect back on themselves for historically specific reasons. Furthermore, these concerns are not only distinct from the language-centred motivations of postmodern metafictional texts, but involve exploring forms of meaning and systems of communication that potentially exist beyond the realm of words.

Part II: Language, Self-Reflexivity and Sentimentalism

Men of Feeling "Put in Jeopardy by Words"

Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) may appear to represent a typically Enlightenment rationalist effort to systematize and stabilize the foundations of the English language. In this light, the project fits in seamlessly with the eighteenth-century's traditional reputation as embracing reason, order, and progress. Surprisingly, however, Johnson's comments from his preface to the *Dictionary*, as with those found in his periodical *The Rambler* (1750-52), describe language as perpetually unstable, susceptible to decay, and open to corruption. In his preface, Johnson writes "language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas: I wish, however, that the instrument might be less apt to decay, and that signs might be permanent" (7). And later he notes that "tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration" (24). Though Johnson acknowledges that some have embraced his dictionary because they believe "it should fix our language" and even admits that "with this consequence I

flattered myself for a while,” he claims to have since become convinced that any attempt to render language stable and firmly grounded is naïve and doomed to failure:

may the lexicographer be derided, who, being able to produce no example of a nation that has preserved their words and phrases from mutability, shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language, and secure it from corruption and decay. (24)

One of the inevitable causes for the “corruption and decay” of the English tongue, according to Johnson, is commerce: “Commerce, however necessary, however lucrative, as it depraves the manners, corrupts the language” (25). The increased circulation of ideas and conversation between classes and between nations encouraged by the rise of commerce guarantees that languages will constantly change and be corrupted by outside influences.

A few years before the publication of his dictionary, in *The Rambler* no. 168, Johnson voiced similar concerns. Focusing on the influence of fashion and custom, the author, biographer, and linguist displays an acute awareness of the arbitrary value of linguistic signs, as he asserts “no word is naturally or intrinsically meaner than another; our opinion therefore of words, as of other things arbitrarily and capriciously established, depends wholly upon accident and custom” (1005). Furthermore, as customs change (which they invariably do in a world governed by fashion) terms and phrases that were once associated with virtue or refinement become vulgar and debased: “words which convey ideas of dignity in one age, are banished from elegant writing or conversation in another, because they are in time debased by vulgar mouths” (1004). While these facts regarding the arbitrary and mutable value of words may be regrettable, Johnson also

argues that they nevertheless cannot be ignored or avoided by aspiring participants in the literary public sphere: “he that will not condescend to recommend himself by external embellishments, must submit to the fate of just sentiments meanly expressed, and be ridiculed and forgotten before he is understood” (1005). When put in words, true knowledge and virtuous ideas do not simply stand on their own, but must accommodate themselves to a linguistic realm beholden to superficial appearances and popular opinion; ideas cannot simply *be* virtuous or true, but must also be made to *appear* virtuous and truthful through appropriate linguistic ornamentation. The wider and more disturbing implication is that in an age of increasing commercial and social exchange, language cannot be relied upon as a stable and transparent source of knowledge and value.

The new cultural concern for feeling that was beginning to emerge around the time of Johnson’s observations partly arises out of an attempt to find a potential grounding for virtue and value in light of the destabilizing impact of commercial modernity on the traditional order of things in British society. Johnson’s observations suggest that the state of language was regarded more as symptomatic of uncertain times than as a potential source of stability. Perhaps it is not too surprising, then, that sentimental fiction tends not to embrace a language-centred worldview and instead foregrounds sites of tension and discontinuity between the realm of feeling and the realm of words. One of the principle means by which sentimental fiction dissociates language from sensibility is through the figure of the man of feeling. In Mackenzie’s novel, Harley’s virtuous character and overabundance of sensibility is frequently associated with difficulties in linguistic expression. Some of these difficulties are logistical – feelings can be too numerous or too delicately mixed to fit into the limited scope of a single verbal

utterance – and some of these difficulties have to do with problems with language itself as a reliable and stable source of meaning. When Harley is in the presence of the virginal Miss Walton, the narrator observes, “There were a thousand sentiments; --but they gushed so impetuously on his heart, that he could not utter a syllable” (120). Later, Harley’s reflections on his own sentiments lead him to comment explicitly on the relation between feelings and words in a poem about his tragically unexpressed love: “It ne’er was apparell’d with art,/ *On words it could never rely;/* It reign’d in the throb of my heart,/ It gleam’d in the glance of my eye” (127, emphasis mine).

This pattern manifests itself as well in the men of feeling of *Humphry Clinker*. Matthew Bramble’s eponymous man-servant, Humphry, demonstrates a surprising delicacy of feeling that at times rivals his employer’s. And, as with Harley, Humphry’s sensibility represents itself through sympathy-inspiring stutters and silences: “O ‘squire! (cried he, sobbing) wha shall I say? – I can’t – no, I can’t speak – my poor heart is bursting with gratitude” (154). After a happy reunion with old friends, meanwhile, the more conventional man of feeling of the novel, Matthew Bramble, writes that “I cannot express the half of what I felt at this casual meeting” (65). In a description that evokes the “agreeable melancholy” Hume tethers to delicate sensibility in his *Essays* (7), Bramble elaborates that seeing these old friends combines what seem like opposite feelings of pain (at the recognition of how long they have been separated from him) and pleasure (of seeing them anew). The result is a typically sentimental climax of sympathy that is not only “pleasing for being mixed with a strain of melancholy” (66), but, as importantly, too delicately mixed to be adequately conveyed through words.

In *Tristram Shandy* the benevolent sensibility of Uncle Toby originates to a great degree from an endearing fallibility when it comes to language, which contrasts starkly with the verbal excessiveness of his brother. After receiving a blow to the groin in the siege of Namur – a physical blow that Tristram suggests is the origin of Toby’s “female” delicacy [54-55] – one of the great hindrances to Toby’s recovery is his frustration with his own lack of skill in linguistic expression. Because of the “almost insurmountable difficulties he found in telling his story intelligibly,” Toby cannot satisfactorily explain how he was injured (72). The consequent frustration has such a negative impact on Toby’s physical health that Tristram observes “His life was put in jeopardy by words” (72). Sterne thus represents language as not simply distinct from feeling, but even as a potentially serious threat to the psychological and physical health of those with delicate sensibilities.

The benevolent sentimentalism associated with Toby’s lack of rhetorical proficiency is counterpointed throughout the novel by his brother, Walter, whose obsessive attention to overblown rhetoric and digressive ratiocination often jeopardizes his son Tristram. Tristram is a man of sentiment in his own right, and here again, language is portrayed as a threat to the physical well-being of a sentimental protagonist. Walter’s complete devotion to writing a *Tristrapoedia*, for instance, takes up so much of his time that he ends up ignoring the son the text is intended for (309). Partly as a consequence of Walter’s inattention, Tristram is accidentally circumcised by a window-sash, an event made all the more tragically ironic by the fact that Walter had included an eloquent chapter upon window-sashes within the *Tristrapedia* (317). Undeterred, Walter later proposes another language-centred method of child-rearing, and tells his brother that

Tristram “shall be made to conjugate every word in the dictionary, backwards and forwards the same way” (340). In a corrupted and confused echo of Locke’s associationist view of the connection between language and cognition, Walter explains to Toby that words produce hypotheses that in turn “have an offspring of propositions,” and each of these propositions “has its own consequences and conclusions, every one of which leads the mind on again” (340). Walter’s ambitious project relies on the premise that acquiring language is essential to a child’s development: “the force of this engine, added my father, is incredible, in opening a child’s head”. True to form, the man of feeling in this relationship, Toby, is suspicious of Walter’s theory, and responds with the opinion that memorizing the dictionary would not just open the child’s head but “burst it into a thousand splinters” (340). As these examples demonstrate, sentimental texts frequently focus on how the exquisite sensibilities of men of feeling tend to operate either in opposition to, or, at the very least, separately from the domain of linguistic expression. Conventional language, meanwhile, is consistently represented as an inadequate medium for the communication of feeling, and even a potential threat to sentimental subjectivity.

Sentimentalism: A “Complexional Philosophy”

In contrast to the postmodern emphasis on the ubiquitous influence of language, sentimental writing of all kinds – literary, scientific, aesthetic, moral, historical, etc. – emphasizes the primacy of embodied experience, and the role that corporeal practices play in the circulation of feeling. In the realm of popular medical science, for instance, thinkers like George Cheyne and David Hartley influentially traced the origins of human

nature to the material and mechanical operations of the nerves. As Van Sant observes, these eighteenth-century theories of nervous sensibility helped to define knowledge and cognition in physiological, even tactile terms: “in both epistemology and psychology, sensibility moved experience into the realm of touch. As we can see from the rephysicalized language for describing emotional life [. . .] psychological experience was prominently located in the body” (97). “Touch” is, of course, a synonym for “feel” in both a physical and emotional sense. And in *Observations on Man* (1749), when Hartley considers all five senses in their turn, he privileges the sense of touch or “feeling” above the others. Not only does he describe the senses of smell and taste as simply specialized extensions of touch (117), but he also argues that all five senses operate so analogously that “all the Senses may be considered as so many Kinds of Feeling” (11).

In sentimental fiction, men of feeling also employ “rephysicalized” vocabulary to describe their emotional life, and often do so in ways derived from popular and scientific accounts of the connections between nerves and feeling. As a result, both psychology and literature are centrally concerned with “touching” in the interrelated physical and emotional sense of the term. Matthew Bramble’s sensibility is often explicitly tied to the fluctuations in his physical state, and the state of his nerves in particular. One doctor observes that Bramble has “nerves of uncommon sensibility” (74) while Bramble’s nephew, Jerry Melford, writes to a friend that his uncle “is extravagantly delicate in all his sensations” (75). Melford also describes his uncle as being “as tender as a man without skin; who cannot bear the slightest touch without flinching” (59). Bramble’s sensibility is thus compared to a kind of overactive, exposed nervous system. He is as sensitive to being touched as he is to that which is “touching” (i.e. sympathetically engaging). In A

Sentimental Journey, Yorick consistently draws attention to the effect that witnessing acts of sensibility has on his nerves. As he arrives at Calais, Yorick reflects on the bodily impact of witnessing the benevolent sociability of a world where “man is at peace with man”: “I felt every vessel in my frame dilate—the arteries beat all cheerily together, and every power which sustained life, performed it with so little friction” (4). These texts respond to a new concern with the embodied origins of sentiment by consistently aligning men of feeling with delicate nerves.

By highlighting the tensions or gaps between words and sentiments while at the same time tethering feeling to nervous sensation, sentimental fiction sets up an implicit but consistent dichotomy between the discursive and the embodied, a dichotomy that tends to privilege the latter over the former. This implicit tension is also at play in cases where embodied practices – gestures, tears, blushes, looks – are represented as rivalling or even surpassing words in their ability to communicate sentimental forms of meaning and knowledge. Another characteristic of the man of feeling, alongside his delicate nerves, is his attentiveness to the means by which sympathy and benevolence communicate through the body. Matthew Bramble, for instance, is particularly sensitive to the impact of wordless gestures. Jerry Melford recalls witnessing Humphry Clinker, freshly freed from jail, attempting to thank Bramble for his support: “Humphry was discharged [. . .] here his elocution failed him, but his silence was pathetic; he fell down at his feet, and embraced his knees, shedding a flood of tears, which my uncle did not see without emotion – He took snuff in some confusion” (162). Bramble is overcome with sympathy as he reacts to the pathos communicated to him by his servant’s mute tears and prostration. The delicate sensibility of *Uncle Toby*, as mentioned before, originates not

from his facility with words – of words, Tristram points out, Toby was “so unhappy to have very little choice in them” (55) – but from a physical blow. And just as his sensibility has a brutally physical origin, it also expresses itself in physical acts – gestures, whistling, looks – which themselves cause physical reactions in others. In one typically sentimental vignette, Tristram recalls seeing his uncle harmlessly trap a fly and release it out the window and observes, “the action [was] in unison to my nerves [and] instantly set my whole frame into one vibration of most pleasurable sensation” (91). It is also worth noting that, while Tristram is notorious for his self-awareness as an author, here we see an example – just one of many – where Tristram demonstrates an equal self-awareness of his status as a sensitive body.

When not reflecting, like Tristram, on the dilations of his own nerves, Yorick often also observes how sympathetic sociability circulates via the surface of the body. The good parson is particularly sensitive to the power of facial expressions and notes at one point that “there are certain combined looks of simple subtlety—where whim, and sense, and seriousness, and nonsense, are so blended, that all the languages of Babel set loose together could not express them” (55). Once again, the body surpasses language in its ability to convey meaning. Later on, Yorick returns to the communicative capacity of facial expressions when observing his French servant La Fleur. He notes that La Fleur’s infectious “festivity of temper” is embedded in his physiognomy. In fact, his unshakably amiable facial expressions, along with other subtle gestures that communicate loyalty and love, function as a kind of embodied “complexional” philosophy that significantly supplements Yorick’s own sentimental meditations:

I had a constant resource in his looks in all difficulties and distresses of my own [. . .] so that if I am a piece of a philosopher [. . .] it always mortifies the pride of the conceit, by reflecting on how much I owe to the complexional philosophy of this poor fellow for shaming me into one of a better kind. (33)

“Philosophy” is a term more typically reserved for the domain of intellectual speculation than that of embodied practice, but here Sterne’s writing suggests that sentimentalism may challenge these conventional distinctions. As Tristram observes in Sterne’s other novel, “our minds shine not through the body, but are wrapt up here in a dark covering of uncrystallized flesh and blood; so that if we would come to the specifick characters of them, we must go some other way to work” (60). Perhaps, in a world where minds are cloaked by bodies, a complexional philosophy that operates within a hermeneutics of flesh and blood has more relevance than abstract ratiocination.

As with Sterne’s Yorick, Mackenzie’s Harley is an amateur practitioner of physiognomy, and his sympathetic tendencies lead him to look for evidence of benevolence in physical characteristics. However, his misadventures suggests that the complex, ambiguous mixtures of “whim, and sense, and seriousness, and nonsense” conveyed by the body not only defy linguistic description, as Yorick asserts, but can also lead to hermeneutic difficulties. Harley’s aunt considers his faith in physiognomy a potential “weakness” and often reminds Harley that “all’s not gold that glisters” (78). Nevertheless, soon after his arrival in London, Harley befriends an old man whose face seems to communicate a virtuous nature. He forms a bond with what appears to be a fellow man of sensibility, but the old man turns out to be a confidence artist who tricks Harley into losing money at cards (77, 84). When Harley later proclaims to some

companions, incredulously, that “he never saw a face promise more honesty than that of the old man he had met with” (83), one listener responds disparagingly that “as for faces----you may look into them to know, whether a man’s nose be a long or a short one” (84). Undeterred by cynical warnings about his susceptibility to deception, Harley continues to be influenced by physiognomy as he decides to help a prostitute (who, incidentally, turns out to be victimized by her own innocent misinterpretation of benevolent appearances) and as he analyzes companions when travelling by stage-coach back to the country (82, 99). And in these cases, Harley is not punished but rewarded with sympathy-inspiring tales and insights.

The anxieties and uncertainties associated with embodied forms of knowledge and meaning will be discussed at greater length in a later chapter, but for now it is worth noting that, while men of feeling may observe physical bodies as sources of sentimental knowledge, the novels themselves occasionally question the certainty of that knowledge. Nevertheless, as all the above examples demonstrate, sympathetic feelings of sociability and benevolence are consistently shown to communicate primarily through the body. And, while not immune to deception or misinterpretation, men of feeling tend to resemble “complexional philosophers” whose delicate sensibilities manifest themselves through their attentiveness to the communicative capacities of embodied practices.

Sentimentalism and Narrative Form

Rather than metafictionally exploring the means by which language mediates knowledge and experience, the self-reflexive practices found in these novels more often

support sentimentalism's tendencies to privilege the realm of the embodied and to draw attentions to limits of the discursive. Admittedly, there is an inherent potential irony in attempting to represent the limitations and inadequacies of language in fictional narratives that themselves rely so heavily on words. However, the irony is perhaps no stronger here than it is in the case of Johnson, who prefaces his seminal attempt to systematize and standardize the English language with observations that raise serious doubts about the very conditions of possibility of his own project. Furthermore, this apparent incongruity is mitigated by literary techniques that point away from the words on the page and draw attention to the material properties of the book itself. By defamiliarizing the means by which words are embedded in the material substrate of printed books, these authors not only bring literary experience within the domain of embodied sensation but, in doing so, represent their novels as first and foremost physical objects and only secondarily linguistic texts. Furthermore, the printerly puns, asterisks, symbols, squiggles, digressions, textual fragments, and other interruptions of linguistic flow also supplement the sentimental aims of these novels through their associations with sympathetic feeling. Just as the physical body communicates sympathy more effectively than language, these texts explore whether the physicality of books communicates sympathy more effectively than the words on the page. *Tristram Shandy's* notorious black page, for instance, is not only a sentimental commemoration of Yorick's death designed to evoke the reader's sympathy, but is also importantly an interruption in the linear train of words as well as a novelty of print that lays bear *Tristram Shandy's* status as a mechanically-reproduced book. Analogously, the various interruptions, digressions and footnotes by the fictional editor of *The Man of Feeling* halt the linear narrative

progression to call attention to gaps, inconsistencies and sites of illegibility. In doing so, these fictional editorial manipulations also serve as consistent reminders that all of the sentimental scenes in the narrative originate from a fragmented, physically-flawed manuscript.

A Sentimental Journey employs a similar conceit to that of Mackenzie when Yorick discovers a few torn pages of a story told in the manner of Rabelais used as waste paper by La Fleur to deliver his breakfast (105). In another instance of Sterne's manipulation of print convention, Yorick provides his own translation of the story interspersed with his own commentary, much of which, like the incidental observation that "By this it seems, as if the author of the fragment had not been a Frenchman" (103), tends to raise implicit questions about Yorick's reliability as a narrator and a translator. The fragment itself, meanwhile, is a story about writing stories that also promises to fulfil the generic expectations of sentimental literature. The tale revolves around a gentleman on his deathbed who requests a notary to write down his will and testament. In a twist, the dying man says he has nothing to bequeath "except the history of myself" which "is a story so uncommon, it must be read by all mankind" (105). As the notary holds up his pen to begin writing the man interjects: "It is a story, Monsieur le Notaire [. . .] which will rouse up every affection in nature—it will kill the humane, and touch the heart of cruelty itself with pity" (105). In short, the dying man's autobiographical narrative promises to be the ultimate sentimental vignette. The notary dips his pen a second and third time, "inflamed with a desire to begin" and the gentleman "began to dictate his story in these words—" (105). Here, however, the narrative abruptly cuts off because the fragment ends. In desperation, Yorick learns the remainder of the tale was given away

with a bouquet of flowers by La Fleur for a new lover, and is permanently lost. The fragment plays with the expectations of the sentimental reader, but also self-consciously foregrounds the material boundaries of narrative. As with Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, the beginning and ending of the stream of words are dictated not by the logic of the story, but by the compromised state of the physical pages upon which the words are inscribed – a compromised physical state, it is worth noting, brought about by La Fleur's devotion to that pinnacle of sympathetic feeling, love. We are left, as in the case of *The Man of Feeling*, with physical flaws introducing gaps, silences and uncertainties.

As one recent editor of *The Man of Feeling* observes, the trope of the “found manuscript” is a characteristic feature of sentimental novels (Harkin 49). In the same year that Mackenzie published his popular novel, Smollett would also employ this trope as the fictional justification for *Humphry Clinker*'s epistolary form. And as with Mackenzie's novel, Smollett's introductory chapter is devoted to an account of the means by which the scattered and incomplete collection of pages of the forthcoming sentimental tale came to be printed and circulated. However, the physicality of literary production also manifests itself in this novel in scenes strikingly reminiscent of earlier satires of commercial print culture like Pope's *The Dunciad*, Swift's *Tale of a Tub* and Fielding's *The Author's Farce*. For instance, in a lengthy digression from the central plot, Jery Melford is invited by a friend to attend dinner with a group of hack writers. The dinner is hosted by a thinly veiled avatar of Smollett himself, a well-respected author named “Mr. S_____” (130). A number of the hack writers at the table appear to have been physically deformed by their profession, though many of these defects turn out to be affectations. One hack wears spectacles though he “was never known to labour under any weakness or defect of

vision” while another perpetually wears crutches “because, once in his life, he had been laid up with a broken leg, though no man could leap over a stick with more agility” (131). These signs of physical disability were originally adopted to help their literary reputations by either inspiring sympathy in social circles or providing external signs of intelligence. However, what began as an affectation can sometimes transform the body through the effect of custom or habit. One of the hacks purposefully adopted a stutter because affected stuttering “w-will p-pass for w-wit w-with nine-nine-teen out of t-twenty” (131). Unfortunately, as Mr. S___ observes, the hack now could not stop stuttering even if he chose to: “that imperfection, which he had at first counterfeited, was now become so habitual, that he could not lay it aside” (131). Thus, through embodied habit, this falsely witty affectation becomes incorporated into the writer's identity as a real physical flaw. Melford and his friend speculate that these deformed and corrupt writers are only tolerated by the host so that he can later satirize them in a novel. Given that “Mr. S___” refers to Smollett, Melford’s comment is a playfully self-reflexive reference to the fictionality of the scene that we have just read. Furthermore, the scene embraces its own fictional status while drawing attention to the corrupting and deformative effects that literary life can have on the body.

Within the novels of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie men of feeling consistently draw attention to the sites of friction and distance between sentiment and language. Rather than circulating through words, sentimental knowledge and meaning are represented as communicated more effectively through embodied modes of experience and practice – receptive nerves, affecting complexions and gestures, etc. Curiously, these novels also share a tendency to employ self-reflexive narrative techniques that potentially

suggest commonalities with the language-centred concerns of postmodern metafiction. However, as the above examples demonstrate, self-reflexive moments in these novels more often support the specific concerns the culture of sensibility. Playful digressions on authorship and the body, manipulations of print convention, references to the tactile properties of texts, all serve to defamiliarize the corporeal aspects of literary production and reception, and, in turn, contribute to sentimentalism's focus on the embodied over the discursive.

"Emotion beyond Words": Corporeal Defamiliarization and Print Culture

Consider Janet Todd's reflections on the relationship between language, feeling and typography in sentimental fiction:

In the sentimental work words are not left to carry a message alone, but are augmented by other heightening devices. Exclamation marks, brackets, italics and capitals pepper and disturb the flow of sentences. At the same time they are shunted into declaring their inadequacy and their subordination to gesture. A physical reaction may, for example, be conveyed through a description which is made deficient or foolish because of the sheer number of words needed to contain what was instantaneous. Or it may be given through typographical devices stressing the absence of words and so the presence of other methods of communication. A work such as Richardson's *Clarissa* is full of lacunae, asterisks, dashes and disturbed or aberrant typography, indicating emotion beyond words, presumably in imitation of the communication of penmanship which the

printed novel cannot deliver. In the extreme case of *Tristram Shandy*, black and marbled pages are substituted for verbal descriptions. (6)

As Todd's comments suggest and the preceding examples confirm, sentimental fiction employs self-reflexive narrative practices, including manipulations of print and typographical convention, to ends that are significantly distinct and even largely opposed to those of language-centred works of postmodern metafiction. Instead, they disrupt the linear narration to self-referentially engage with the physicality of literary production in ways that parallel and support the sentimental emphasis on the physicality of feeling. In doing so, these texts also reveal themselves to be well-suited to an age that saw the emergence of a literary public sphere and the commercial expansion of print. Consequently, instead of anticipating the postmodern linguistic turn, these self-reflexive sentimental novels seem instead to be a product of what Deidre Lynch has referred to as mid-eighteenth-century Britain's "typographical culture" (6).

In *The Economy of Character* (1998), Lynch argues that the traditional order of eighteenth-century British culture was profoundly destabilized by two interrelated changes: first, the expansion of commerce that brought with it an unprecedented influx and proliferation of material goods, novelties, and curiosities available for popular consumption; and second, the expansion of print and the consequent excitement and anxieties surrounding a national identity increasingly tethered to "printing presses in overdrive" (5, 24). The interactions of these social, economic and technological developments had a significant impact on popular representations of "character" in printed texts and images. Lynch observes that characters in the mid-eighteenth century by and large do not correspond to our modern notion of the term, a notion that privileges

private interiority and inner depth: “most talk about character was not talk about individualities or inner lives. It was talk about the systems of semiotic and fiduciary exchange – the machinery of interconnectedness – that made a commercial society go” (6). As opposed to the post-Romantic approach to character – an approach that presents people within the text as fully-fleshed out individuals with deep inner consciousnesses – much of eighteenth-century literature sticks to the material surface of things (and people).

Rather than dismiss this perspective or fold it in to a traditional master narrative that treats eighteenth-century texts as part of the pre-history of the Romantic turn, Lynch explores how this interest in materiality and surfaces actually results in a curious form of self-awareness that disappears after the rise of Romanticism and the coincidental ascendance of modern individualism. Eighteenth-century typographical culture expresses through its texts and images “an interest in the material grounds of meaning and a fascination with the puns that could link the person ‘in’ a text to the printed letters (alphabetical symbols, or ‘characters’ in another sense) that elaborated the text’s surface” (6). These puns, in turn, reveal that characters were generally thought of “not as persons but as so much writing” (16). This notion of *character* as simultaneously denoting a person in a text and the typeface symbols used to represent that person is precisely the type of textual self-reflexivity that seems to run through sentimental fiction. Not only do these practices reflect back on the novel as a printed thing, but they also reflect back on the nature of identity more generally by tethering characters to the mechanical processes and material properties involved in printing. Lynch argues that the aspects of character that she so convincingly draws attention to have been largely overlooked, partly because, even though we have come to question the Romantic valorisation of the individual, we

have continued to embrace the narrative presented by a handful of “romantic critics and canon-makers” that the rise of the novel culminates in the discovery (or construction) of the individual (9). Metanarratives of the rise of the individual and the rise of the novel have been questioned in recent years, but they still remain the most familiar and most influential ways of organizing the study of literature. Meanwhile, the conditions that gave rise to this alternative, typographical perspective on character “seem alien to us now”(9).

The significance of the relationship between technologies of print and the emergence of sentimentalism will be explored in more detail in the following chapter. For now, I only wish to contextualize the typographical or printerly orientation of many self-reflexive instances in these sentimental novels in order to demonstrate how attention to sentimental self-reflexivity reveals more than a simple and naively materialist scepticism toward language. As discussed earlier, Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie each tend to explore how feeling communicates itself in embodied reactions like tears, sighs, palpitations, facial expressions and especially blushes. As Mullan observes, “these signs of sensibility are the most obviously distinct features of ‘sentimental’ writing” (74). Furthermore, he suggests we could refer to these physical signs as “*symptoms*, as it is according to an idea of the body [. . .] as a visible and describable register of effects that these signs appear” (74). And while these embodied reactions prove themselves a superior and distinct alternative to conventional words as a means of circulating sympathy, they are also treated as functioning like words in that they operate like signs in an embodied sign system. This is particularly evident in self-reflexive moments that describe sentiments as imprinted or impressed on the sentimental body much like characters are imprinted on the pages of a book. Thus, as I hoped to convey in the title of

this chapter – “Body/Language” – the self-reflexivity in sentimentalism represents the relationship between language and the body as simultaneously opposed and intimately intertwined. The sentimental body is both a superior alternative to language as a source for the communication of feeling, and, at the same time, is represented as communicating these feeling through a kind of “body language” whose validity is grounded in analogies with more traditional discursive communication.

In *The Man of Feeling*, Harley, of course, is constantly exchanging wordless yet communicative tears and blushes with the stock sentimental characters he encounters. And his “weakness” or “foible” for physiognomy, even after he is deceived, suggests an inherent affinity between men of feeling and the conception of the surfaces of bodies as things to be read, as sources of “characters” in the double sense outlined by Lynch (Mackenzie 78). As Barbara Benedict observes, “Harley’s ‘foible’ is one that deludes many a sentimental hero: the belief that he can read a person’s character in his face and that this character is benevolent” (123). In a related manner, Mackenzie’s sentimental protagonist is consistently aligned with material inscription practices. Harley is first mentioned as the editor comes across his initials carved in a tree trunk (48). Later, following a contemporary British trend, Harley is shown meticulously copying down “quotations” he finds scratched in windows and on glasses at an inn (102). The references to etching, carving, scratching, present writing as an embodied activity, and also denaturalize words as objects that exist in the material world.

In *Humphry Clinker*, emotion is often described as manifesting itself in “marks” on the body. And these “marks” or signs often effectively inspire sympathy in observers. For instance, in the preface, the fictional editor who supplies the letters for the novel is

threatened by a soldier, but “as I exhibited marks of bodily fear in more ways than one [. . .] I bound him over” (xiii). Matthew Bramble, in a similar (yet more typically sentimental) scene, reconnects with an old acquaintance and much of the emotional power is conveyed through silence and tears that function again as ‘marks’: “I was so affected by the subject, that I could not help mingling tears with my remonstrances, and Baynard was so penetrated with these *marks of my affection*, that he lost all power of utterance” (292, emphasis added). Servants, meanwhile, seem to exhibit particular talents for gestural rhetoric and embodied eloquence. In a scene mentioned earlier, where Humphry Clinker is released from prison, he is overcome by gratitude. In the face of overwhelming feeling, Melford recalls that Clinker’s “elocution failed him” but his “silence” manages to communicate pathos to Matthew Bramble through physical demonstrations – tears, falling to his feet, knee-grabbing – that serve more effectively as signs of Clinker’s gratitude (162).

As we have already seen in *La Fleur*, the servants in Sterne’s writing tend, like Clinker, to have a talent for gestural rhetoric or embodied eloquence. The connections drawn between servants and an embodied language of sensibility in these novels explore the democratic potential inherent in sentimental views of human nature, but in a way that parallels what G.J. Barker-Benfield has described as the double-edged sentimental treatment of women. Both servants and women are frequently depicted as possessing a good deal of natural sentimentalism, but unlike conventional men of feeling, these characters are also potentially too closely identified with their bodies to be considered rational agents. In *Tristram Shandy*, Toby’s servant Trim is simultaneously satirized and embraced in the narrative for his (sometimes too literal) attention to the physical. As

alluded to in the introduction, when asked whether a “sailing chariot” might be found in a book, Trim picks up the book and shakes it, looking for an actual chariot to fall out (96). Rather than merely satirizing Trim’s uneducated and excessively literal approach to books, Trim’s actions are rewarded, in a way, when a physical object does fall out: a sermon. Trim then reads the sermon, while Tristram meditates not on the words, but on the contribution made to the meaning of the sermon by Trim’s classically perfect posture. Similarly, in a later episode, when Trim is asked to philosophize about death, he states “are we not here now [. . .] and gone in a moment?” (298). Tristram points out that “there was nothing to the sentence” and yet of the gesture that accompanies it – Trim punctuates the sentence by tossing his hat dramatically to the ground – Tristram writes “nothing could have expressed the sentiment of mortality [. . .] like it” (299). Finally, Trim’s remarkable propensity for embodied rhetorical flourishes also manifests itself in one of the novel’s more notorious instances of typographical self-reflexivity. Talking to Toby about liberty, Corporal Trim cries “Whilst a man is free—“ then gives a flourish in the air with his stick. The flourish is reproduced as a long squiggle in the book, to which Tristram adds that “A thousand of my father’s most subtle syllogisms could not have said more” (506).

Trim, Clinker, and Harley all point to the fact that the sensitive body, despite being treated in sentimental fiction as distinct from language, can sometimes also be considered as communicating through signs and gestures that are described as being like the words, phrases, syllogisms, and rhetorical structures found in conventional language. This suggests that the relationship between words and feelings alternates between being oppositional and being reciprocal. As Yorick later concludes, the primary task of the

sentimental traveller is to act as a kind of translator for the language of feeling that manifests itself in the body – to take the embodied signifiers of feeling and translate them as accurately as possible into conventional words:

There is not a secret so aiding to the progress of sociality, as to get master of this short hand, and be quick in rendering several turns of looks and limbs, with all their inflections and delineations, into plain words. For my own part, by long habitude, I do it so mechanically, that when I walk the streets of London, I go translating all the way. (57)

Thus, sentimental fiction self-reflexively treats the sympathetic body as communicating feeling through means that are analogous to and occasionally explicitly equated with communicative capacities of signs and language. Sentimental fiction, then, continues to exploit analogies with language even as it ostensibly describes a realm of feeling that, as Mullan and Todd observe, exists beyond words (Mullan 15, Todd 6). Furthermore, by treating the body as an inscribable text, these works also draw attention to the means by which signs are embedded in the physical realm, whether it be the surface of the body or the face of the page.

Rather than constructing an absolute dichotomy, then, attention to self-reflexive moments suggest that sentimental fiction displays a consistent, if Janus-faced, relationship to language. On the one hand, conventional words are treated as inadequate and limited when it comes to communicating sentiment. On the other hand, sentiment is represented as circulating by embodied means that are described as analogous to the circulation of linguistic signs in print and conversation. Sentimental fiction appears to alternate between treating the realm of embodied feeling as entirely separate from the

realm of language and acknowledging the importance of signs within the realm of sensibility. Far from an anomaly, as the following section will examine, this dual tendency is actually consistent with sentimentalism more generally. Prominent thinkers like David Hartley, Lord Kames, and Adam Smith each explore sentimental models of human nature that privilege the sensitive body as the primary register of knowledge, meaning, and value. And yet, despite theorizing sentiment in ways that potentially challenge the authority of words, these thinkers nevertheless consistently incorporate within their writing surprisingly complex considerations of language and linguistic mediation. As will be shown, the key to understanding this seemingly contradictory impulse toward language within sentimentalism is to contextualize it as a later manifestation of what Richard Kroll dubs the “somatic culture” that emerges with Locke and others around the turn of the eighteenth century.

Part III: Body/Language and Sentimental Philosophy

Background: Locke, Language and Somaticism

In *The Material Word*, Richard Kroll examines the political and epistemological implications of concepts of language in Britain from the Restoration to the early eighteenth-century. In analogous fashion to my own concern with the limits of contemporary concepts of metafiction, Kroll finds the linguistic turn in contemporary literary and cultural theory to be both a help and a hindrance. On the one hand, the influence of poststructuralist linguistic theory on Anglo-American research has helped bring attention to the importance of language as a means of understanding the study of

any culture or historical moment. In Kroll's words, poststructuralism has made a virtue "of moving from an analysis of epistemology, to an analysis of language, to an analysis of the politics implied by that conjunction" (16). However, while the linguistic turn has radically reconfigured the study of culture by drawing attention to the means by which signs mediate knowledge and subjectivity, the poststructuralist linguistic theory that stands behind this turn has been surprisingly willing to uphold the traditional canon of history of linguistic philosophy, particularly regarding assumptions about the poverty of pre-Romantic British concepts of language. Not only have "poststructuralist linguistics [. . .] so far had very little interesting to say about Hobbes or Locke," but, moreover, "the developments in poststructuralist theory have been so determined by their own (post-Romantic) genealogies that they have [. . .] contributed to the misappropriation of the eighteenth century as a cultural fiction" (2).

Contemporary literary and cultural theory tends to uncritically accept the conventional view that eighteenth-century British intellectual culture was generally resistant to the concept of linguistic mediation. This assumption can be traced to traditional intellectual histories of the period that asserted a connection between the rise of modern science, the empirical privileging of physical sense experience, and a naïvely realist philosophy of language and meaning. Influential arguments first put forward in the early twentieth century by R.F. Jones and Robert K. Merton (and still largely accepted by contemporary scholars) assert that, as a consequence of the rise of modern science in the eighteenth century, philosophical realism permeated all fields of inquiry, including the study of language and literature, and "produced an ideology that treated language as transparent or referential" (Kroll 3). This commonly held belief has had a wide-ranging

impact. In linguistics, the supposed unrefined and crude realism of eighteenth-century theories of language has supported the longstanding assumption that, as Hans Aarsleff points out, “the modern study of language was created in the second decade of the nineteenth century” and “all language study before that date was irrelevant or prescientific” (6). In literary studies, meanwhile, the birth of realist thought is a central feature of Ian Watt’s account of *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). As Watt defines it, the central premise of philosophical realism is “the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through the senses” (12). Put another way, realism asserts that “the external world is real, and [. . .] our senses give a true report of it” (12). Watt argues that this shift to a realist belief in an individual’s unmediated access to truth through the senses granted authority to private experience and gave rise to modern individualism, as well as a modern literary form, the novel, devoted to reflecting on this new individual authority. Watt’s argument about the rise of novels has, in turn, influenced some approaches to sentimental literature. R.F. Brissenden writes in his study of sentiment and the novel, *Virtue in Distress* (1974), that “sentimental ideas are complex and to some extent contradictory [. . .]. But like so many other ideas in the eighteenth century, they all derive from one basic notion. This is that the source of all knowledge and all values is the individual human experience” (22). The supposed individualism inherent in sentimentalism leads Brissenden to assert that the distinguishing feature of sentimental protagonists is “their belief in the sanctity and authority of their private judgments” (24).

However, Kroll’s research raises some questions about this master narrative: “I question the Jonesian thesis that the scientific world view produced an ideology that treated language as transparent of referential—as an instrument, that is, to an unmediated

cognitive and experimental grasp of objects in the world” (3). Rather than resisting the concept of mediation, Kroll argues, by contrast, the episteme of this period actually supported a sophisticated sense of the linguistic mediations that play a determining role in structuring and enabling knowledge, but this has been overlooked because of the period’s embodied or “somatic” (to use Kroll’s term) understanding of the nature of signs. This somatic view approached signs as material, sensible objects that are more opaque than transparent and communicate in a fashion similar to the performative or dramatistic elements of the discourse of manners:

Language does not provide a transparent medium of knowledge, but composes a series of opaque verbal cues that reinforce the external symbolism of cultural behavior. The palpable quality of words—commonly illustrated by metaphors of writing and printing, a consciousness of typography, and an interest in hieroglyphics—approximates something of the palpable quality of the discourse of manners. (4)

As a result, “Words [. . .] come endowed with almost tactile properties in their own right” (4).

To illustrate the somatic approach to linguistic mediation, Kroll turns to the cognitive and epistemological theories of Locke. Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) is, of course, one of the most influential theories of cognition of the period and is generally recognized for calling attention to the importance of physical sense experience as the foundation of knowledge and subjectivity. However, critics often overlook the importance that Locke also grants to language as integral to cognition and knowledge. Locke devotes the third book of his treatise to the nature of language and

justifies it with the following remarks: “upon a nearer approach, I find, that there is so close a connexion between ideas and words [. . .] that it is impossible to speak clearly and distinctly of our knowledge [. . .] without considering, first, the nature, use, and signification of language” (360). According to the dominant atomistic and associationist models of cognition advocated by Locke (and later embraced by Hume, Hartley, Smith and others), ideas originate in atoms of sensory experience that, as Kroll observes, can best be understood as sensible signs. These signs or atoms are combined and recombined in cognitive processes that mirror figural devices like analogy, synecdoche and metaphor and mimic the grammatical structuring of words into sentences.

For instance, in discussing the materialist approaches to visual sense from Locke as well as Hobbes, Kroll notes “both Hobbes’s and Locke’s versions [. . .] presuppose that the original elements of experience are the literal and kinematic effects of atomic particles striking the eye to create a representation of the object perceived” (Kroll 76). This cognitive process that produces a visual whole out of a sensibly imprinted part is material, atomistic, and automatic, but importantly, also *synecdochic*. Locke asserts that “the mind is struck by synecdochic elements of the world (‘perhaps the 1/1000 or 1/10000 part coming to the eye’), producing sensations painted on ‘the bottom of the eye or retina’” (Kroll 76). The borders of our epistemology are thus determined by cognitive processes that are simultaneously material, mechanical and rhetorical. Hence, Kroll observes, Locke’s fondness for printerly metaphors (a fondness that manifests itself also characteristically in sentimental fiction) when describing the mind: “it is no accident Locke’s primary figures for the mediated action of the world upon the mind and for the traffic of ideas are drawn from printing” (69). Moreover, according to this worldview,

“signs, in short, mediate between us, the world, God, and others, and even our cognitive processes” (63). Though grounded in sensible experience and the product of sensible signs, the kind of knowledge that ultimately emerges is uncertain, limited, and offers no clear view of an objective external reality: “If all knowledge now derives its main metaphors from the atomistic model, and if we create coherence from cultural atoms [. . .] by acts of inference and analogy, then we must be especially conscious of the artificiality, the contingency, of the final result” (86). Although cognition and knowledge arise from embodied experience, the language-like structure of their atomic constituents renders the final result profoundly mediated.

Somaticism and Sentimentalism: Hartley, Kames, and Smith

Though Kroll focuses his discussion on the early eighteenth century, it is not difficult to imagine how this somatic understanding of the relationship between signs, bodies, and knowledge could have informed sentimental concepts of language as well. After all, many of sentimentalism’s most influential theorists – Adam Smith, Lord Kames, David Hume, Francis Hutcheson and David Hartley – were themselves heavily indebted to Locke’s views on the mind, sense experience, epistemology and association.³

³ In fact, G.S. Rousseau names Locke’s *Essay* in his influential essay, “Nerves, Spirits and Fibres” (1976), as perhaps the main influence behind the paradigm shift in science and literature toward sensibility: “What I am therefore suggesting is that the eighteenth-century revolution in intellectual thinking regarding the ‘science of man’ owes its superlative debt to John Locke. Secondly – and this is the more important of the two points—that sensibility[. . .]is at the very heart of this revolution” (141). Rousseau’s work on sensibility, Lockean sensationalism and the influence of the “nerve paradigm” in medical science and sentimental literature will be treated at greater length in subsequent chapters.

David Hartley

Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749) attempts to merge Newton's doctrine of vibration of the nerves with Locke's doctrine of association in order to explain how all aspects of cognition and experience can be traced to the corporeal and mechanical operations of the nervous system. By focusing on nervous sensation, Hartley offers a mechanistic and physiological account of human nature that traces the origins of psychological phenomena as diverse as ambition, religious faith, sexual desire and sympathy to embodied sensibility. As Huguelet notes in his introduction to the text, "Hartley became the first philosopher to relate the bodily frame, with all its complicated apparatus of sense organs and nerves, to all the phenomena of sensation, imagination, memory, understanding, affection, and will" (ix). And yet, despite this privileging of the physical body, Hartley is willing, not unlike his predecessor Locke, to acknowledge that language is integral to intellectual and moral development. Hartley writes: "it is evident, that the Use of Words adds much to the Number and Complexness of our Ideas, and is the principal Means by which we make intellectual and moral Improvements" (287). Rather than resisting the notion of linguistic mediation, or denying the figural nature of language in favour of a naïve faith in the transparent referentiality of words, Hartley actually consistently relies on analogies between cognitive and linguistic structures to strengthen his arguments and frequently digresses to contemplate the interrelations of words and sensation. Nevertheless, Hartley ultimately does so all within an overall materialist framework that treats words as embodied phenomena.

By exploring the means by which impressions on the nerves transform into ideas in the brain, Hartley's associationist account of cognition depends on a Lockean appreciation of the language-like (and printerly) nature of basic mental processes. Hartley argues that sensations of all kinds are impressed on the sense organs and travel to the brain via the vibration of the nerves where they produce "copies" of the original impressions (56). Like Locke's account of the miniature synecdochic image of an object that impresses itself on the eye, Hartley asserts that once the vibrations arrive at the brain (and as long as the original sensation is "vigorously impressed") they produce miniature versions of themselves called "vibratiuncles" (58). According to the doctrine of association, these synecdochic miniatures of nervous sensations, when repeated often enough, give rise to ideas in the brain that are copies of the original sense impressions. The fundamental process by which sensations produces ideas is thus explicitly *mechanistic* – not a surprising fact given that Hartley concludes the first half of his treatise by defending his "Opinion of the Mechanism of human Actions" (500). And the process is also *corporeal*. On this last point, Hartley writes "Since therefore Sensations are conveyed to the Mind, by the Efficiency of corporeal Causes [. . .] it seems to me, that the Powers of generating Ideas, and raising them by Association must also arise from corporeal Causes" (72). But as Hartley describes it, this power to generate ideas also involves producing copies that are synecdochic metonyms of original sensations, suggesting that the basic processes of nervous sensibility mirror figural devices. Thus, Hartley's model of cognition, like Locke's, is simultaneously mechanistic, embodied, and linguistic.

The importance of language to Hartley's theory is also evident in the frequency with which Hartley draws analogies between the features of his mechanistic and embodied model of subjectivity and the rudimentary features of words and symbols. These analogies crop up most frequently in relation to his explanation of the doctrine of association. To provide a few examples, Hartley writes of the fact that some associations are more frequent than others:

The simple Ideas of Sensation are not all equally and uniformly concerned in forming complex and decomplex Ideas [. . .]. All which corresponds to what happens in real Languages; some Letters, and Combination of Letters, occur much more frequently than others, and some Combinations never occur at all.
(77)

And of the means by which certain simple ideas of sensation can call up more complex ideas associated with it, Hartley compares this process to the symbolic function of words:

When a Variety of Ideas are associated together, the visible Idea, being more glaring and distinct than the rest, performs the Office of a Symbol to all the rest, suggests them, and connects them together. In this it somewhat resembles the first Letter in a Word, or first Word of a Sentence. (78)

Elsewhere, Hartley attempts to explain how associations between simple ideas can produce higher order "complex ideas" that, when regarded on their own, seem to have no discernible connection to their supposed origins in physical sensation. To explain, Hartley finds it necessary to compare this phenomena to the relationship between the complexity of a spoken language and the comparative simplicity of the sounds or phonemes that produce it:

To resume the Illustration [. . .] taken from Language, it does not at all appear to Persons ignorant of the Arts of Reading and Writing, that the great Variety of complex Words of Languages can be analysed up to a few Simple Sounds. (75)

The consistency with which Hartley forms these analogies suggests that both language and nervous sensibility are governed by a shared logic. In fact, Hartley suggests that the mind's tendency to form associations often appears closely related to its natural affinity for constructing analogies (a process that seems to both enable thought, and inspire deviations from truth):

The mind once initiated into the Method of discovering Analogies, and expressing them, does by Association persevere in this Method, and even force things into its System by concealing Disparities, magnifying Resemblances, and accommodating Language thereto. (296)

As these various comparisons between the features of cognition and language suggest, Hartley's theory of nervous sensibility draws a surprising number of parallels between the realm of linguistic signs and the realm of embodied sensation.

However, when Hartley attempts to define language in relation to his theory, in a section titled "Of Words, and the Ideas associated with them," it also becomes clear that, while language may be integral to understanding cognition and morality and may function in ways that are usefully analogous to nervous feeling, words are nevertheless first and foremost embodied phenomena. Hartley opens this section, like most other sections, with a list. This list is particularly revelatory in that it enumerates the "four lights" in which words can be considered:

First, As Impressions upon the Ear.

Second, As the Actions of the Organs of Speech.

Thirdly, As Impressions made upon the Eye by Characters.

Fourthly, As the Actions of the Hand in Writing. (268)

Hartley thus outlines the borders of what can be known about language in exclusively embodied terms, as either impressions on or the actions by different sensory organs. Furthermore, *Observations of Man* treats the impact of words as often more physically felt than abstractly and intellectually contemplated. For example, in the case of words associated with feelings of pain, Hartley even goes so far as to describe the impact of language as a kind of physical trauma. Words closely connected to pain can communicate compounds of associations, and, as a result, the physical impact of these words word can sometimes be felt more strongly than the original sensations they are meant to signify.

Hartley writes

By degrees the miniature Pains will be transferred upon the Words, and other Symbols [. . .]. But then [. . .] it comes to pass at last, that the various verbal and other Symbols of the Pains of Feeling, also of Pains bodily and mental, excite a compound Vibration formed from a Variety of Miniatures, which exceeds ordinary actual Pains in Strength (143).

In the end, rather than describing the materialist and mechanistic operation of the nerves in ways that express a naïve faith in the unmediated nature of sense experience, Hartley's theory acknowledges analogies between the function of nervous sensibility and the function of figural devices, and accepts the possibility of language mediating our knowledge, reason, and moral sense, even to the degree that it distorts truth.

Nevertheless, this appreciation for linguistic mediation operates within a worldview that traces all phenomena, including signs, to embodied sense experience.

Henry Home, Lord Kames

Lord Kames' *Elements of Criticism* (1762), a sentimental approach to the criticism of literature and the arts, is a work of "aesthetics" in both the eighteenth-century sense and our contemporary sense of the term. The term "aesthetic" was coined 1735 by Alexander Baumgarten, but as Peter de Bolla observes in his essay, "Toward the Materiality of Aesthetic Experience" (2002), the term was not applied as it is today to refer to the study of paintings, poems, sculptures, and other recognized forms of art: "Baumgarten's use of the term was not primarily angled at what today might be unproblematically called 'artworks' [. . .] his new kind of investigation was to be a 'science of sensual recognition,' that is, a general inquiry into how we come to know the world from the evidence of our senses" (19). Lord Kames' *Elements of Criticism*, however, merges these two ways of considering aesthetics by applying theories about sensibility and human nature explored by his Scottish contemporaries to the evaluation of artistic works. As evidence of the sentimentalism that informs Kames' approach to art and literature, *Elements of Criticism* notably both begins and concludes with an emphasis on the sympathetic focus of his project. Kames asserts in his introduction that "the author [. . .] assumes no merit but that of evincing, perhaps more distinctly than has hitherto been done, that *the genuine rules of criticism are all of them derived from the human heart*" (1: 16, emphasis added). In his concluding chapter, meanwhile, Kames admits a

partial defeat. The rules and principles which govern the standard of taste may still be too difficult to pin down. However, he notes, this was not his intention anyway: “What I have in view, are the principles that constitute the sensitive part of our nature. By means of these principles, common to all men, a wonderful uniformity is preserved among the emotions and feelings of different individuals; the same object making upon every person the same impression” (3: 373).

As well, one of the key concepts in Kames’ *Elements of Criticism*, the notion of “ideal presence,” has clear parallels with Adam Smith’s model of sympathy from *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Both Smith and Kames grant a great deal of explanatory power to the mind’s ability to imaginatively place itself in the role of the spectator. Kames argues that the power of literature derives from its ability to engage our sympathies, and through sympathetic identification, literature inspires us to imaginatively place ourselves in the scene described for us: “the reader’s passions are never sensibly moved, till he be thrown into a kind of reverie; in which state, losing consciousness of self, and of reading, his present occupation, he conceives every incident as passing in his presence, precisely as if he were an eye-witness” (1: 112). Kames concludes his discussion of ideal presence by giving primary importance to sympathetic engagement and to affective proximity, without which aesthetic works would lose their ability to engage their reader, and more importantly, without which they would lose their capacity to engage a reader’s moral sense and promote the cause of virtue (1: 121-22).

In a later chapter, entitled “External Signs of Emotions and Passions,” Kames turns his attention to what I have been arguing is another typical preoccupation of sentimental writing: the intersection of language and the body. Kames begins, “So

intimately connected are the soul and body, that there is not a single agitation in the former, but what produceth a visible effect upon the latter [. . .]. These external appearances or signs, may not improperly be considered as a natural language, expressing to all beholders the several emotions and passions as they arise in the heart” (2: 116). These signs include gestures such as leaping when joyful or prostrating oneself when mournful (which can, with considerable effort and through refinement and cultivation, be suppressed), but also involuntary actions such as blushing, trembling, and starting. Kames also describes strong emotions like anger as displaying themselves in “legible characters” on the body (2: 116). By describing the physical indicators of specific feelings as simultaneously like the signs in a conventional language and like typographic characters materially imprinted on the body, Kames’ model of sentimental communication has much in common with self-reflexive sentimental fiction. In treating bodies as printed texts, sentimental fiction and Kames’ theory both explore how the body is discursive as well as how language is embodied.

However, also like sentimental fiction, even as his theory engages with the mutual entanglement of bodies and words, Kames unambiguously privileges the role of the body over that of words in communicating sentimental knowledge and meaning. For Kames, the signs produced by the body are culturally and historically transcendent and surpass conventional words whose meanings tend to be arbitrary and culturally specific: “The natural signs of emotions [. . .] being nearly the same in all men, form an universal language, which no distance of place, no difference of tribe, no diversity of tongue, can darken or render obscure” (2: 127). This embodied language of sentiment has a number of positive effects. For one, it promotes sympathy and social affection by providing direct

access to the heart of other men even when their words may try to mask their motivations. But not only are people incapable of halting the involuntary inscription of sentiment on their bodies, they are also incapable of being a spectator to emotional signs on others without engaging the sensibilities. This embodied language also aids self-preservation by revealing to a witness when someone is angry or about to turn violent. Furthermore, the body can communicate and circulate emotions faster and more widely than words. Kames describes an assembly gathered to debate a subject when one joyful face in the crowd quickly and efficiently changes the countenance of others more quickly than any words or reasoning could (2: 141). Kames' account could quite easily be dismissed as utopian, especially regarding the universality and transparency of external signs. The fiction of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie tend to show their sentimental protagonists with a similarly utopian view of the legibility of characters and bodies, but their "men of feeling" are as often deceived by their initial emotional reactions as they are rewarded (recall Harley's misadventures in physiognomy). Nevertheless, all of these writers were, like Kames, concerned with the possibility of an alternative and potent language of sentiment emitted by the body.

Adam Smith

Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was enormously influential in the rise of a culture of sensibility and argues for the centrality of sympathetic feeling in human nature. As noted earlier, Kames' concept of ideal presence seems to draw quite directly from Smith's exploration of sympathy, moral virtue and spectatorship. And yet, around the

same time that Smith was grounding moral value and the benevolent sociability of human nature in sentiment, he was also working on a conjectural history of the origins of language.⁴ Smith's "Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages," (1761) describes the origins of language in terms that seem to correspond quite nicely to Kroll's understanding of somaticism. In the essay, Smith conjectures that the first developments in language would have been to assign particular names to particular objects. Smith imagines two savages, motivated by an inherent sociable desire to make their wants intelligible to one another (the same sociability of human nature that motivates sympathy in *TMS*), who are compelled to assign certain sounds to denote certain material objects that surround them (caves, fountains, trees, etc.) (203). However, as their sphere of sense experience enlarged to include more trees, fountains, and caves Smith speculates that these savages would likely use the same sounds that at first designated the single, particular object to describe these other objects, since their minds would have formed an association between the two. As Smith observes, "It was impossible that those savages could behold the new objects, without recollecting the old ones" (204). In this way, fairly early on in the history of human society and in the history

⁴ As Mark Salber Phillips points out in *Society and Sentiment* (2000), the tendency to produce conjectural histories is quite prominent among the same Scottish Enlightenment thinkers behind the rise of sentimentalism. Works by Scottish thinkers like Lord Kames' *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774) and Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) devote themselves to speculation about developments in human nature before historical documentation. By breaking with classical historical writing that emphasized exemplary figures and moral didacticism in favour of increased attention to "everyday and inward experience," conjectural histories represent for Phillips "the most ambitious development in eighteenth-century historical writing" (171). Drawing on Kroll, the drive to speculate about the origins of society, virtue, language, cognition, property, etc. can be thought of as an etiological fixation not so much concerned with uncovering historical truth as with using these grand narratives of origins as a means of self-consciously mythologizing certain philosophical and ideological concepts about human nature (Kroll 69).

of language, particular objects and particular atoms of experience quickly come to form the basis for more general categories through the use of signs.

Furthermore, Smith considers this the foundation of language and the origins of generalization in thought:

It is this appellation of the name of an individual to a great multitude of objects, whose resemblance naturally recalls the idea of that individual, and of the name which expresses it, that seems originally to have given occasion to the formation of those classes and assortments, which, in the schools, are called genera and species. (205)

As language progresses, names and signs come to be able to stand in for more general and more abstract categories of objects. Smith goes on to look at other elements of language – pronouns, gender, tenses, prepositions, etc. – and in each case explores how these constituent elements could find their origin in atoms of individual experience that then come to be abstracted into general categories. Of verbs, for instance, Smith discusses the verb *venit*, or *it comes*: “Let us suppose, for example, that the word *venit* [. . .] denoted, not the coming of something in general, as at present, but the coming of a particular object, such as the Lion. The first savage inventors of language, we shall suppose, when they observed the approach of this terrible animal, were accustomed to cry out to one another, *venit*, that is, *the lion comes*” (216). However, as Smith continues, with the progress of language, these savages would begin to draw analogies between the coming of the lion and the coming of other threatening animals, like bears or wolves and these savages would cry out “*venit ursus*” or “*venit lupus*” (216). At this point, with the introduction of these associations formed by analogies, the word becomes more abstract

and general: “It would now, therefore, express, not the coming of a particular object, but the coming of an object of a particular kind” (217). The verb would continue to develop in this direction, taking us up to its use in the present day: “We may easily conceive how, in the further progress of society, it might still grow more general in its signification, and come to signify, as at present, the approach of anything whatever, whether good, bad, or indifferent” (217). Verbs, like all parts of language, though originally grounded in particular atoms of sense experience, become more general and abstract as history develops.

Not unlike Tristram’s description of Shandean narrative as concurrently progressive and regressive, Smith interprets his own narrative of the historical development of language as a story of simultaneous improvement and regression. In order to retain its connection with the concrete particulars of sense experience that form the origins of knowledge and cognition, words would have to continue to stand in for particular objects and would thus inevitably quickly proliferate beyond bounds of human memory:

But as the number of words must, in this case, have become really infinite, in consequence of the really infinite variety of events, men found themselves partly compelled by necessity, and partly conducted by nature, to divide every event into what may be called its metaphysical elements, and to institute words, which should denote not so much the events, as the elements of which they were composed. The expression of every particular event, became in this manner more intricate and complex, but the whole system of language became more coherent, more connected, more easily retained and comprehended. (218)

As language becomes more general and abstract, it becomes more effective at communicating, but in doing so, words also become less closely tied to their concrete, material origins in sensory experience. In the end, though knowledge and experience originate from particular material sensations, language both enables and distorts knowledge and experience by introducing generality and abstractness. The final result, is a picture of the relationship between the self and the world that is simultaneously materialist in its foundations and significantly linguistically mediated.

A Final Word on Words (and Feelings)

In each case, these thinkers grant a privileged space to linguistic signs within their sentimental accounts of human nature. David Hartley, like Locke, describes fundamental cognitive processes as operating in parallel fashion to figural devices like synecdoche and analogy and even acknowledges that words can distort our access to truth and mediate our nervous reactions. Lord Kames argues in *Elements of Criticism* that the external signs that inscribe themselves on the body constitute a natural and universal language that has the potential to unify humanity and render society virtuous and harmonious. And Adam Smith provides a conjectural history of the origins of language, describing the development of language as a foundational event in the history of human society that emerges from humanity's innate quest for sociable interaction and sympathetic communication. Rather than being resistant to the notion of language mediating human experience, these important sentimental thinkers appear to embrace that possibility. However, they do so within an overall worldview that tends to treat signs as traceable to

corporeal origins. Hartley's consideration of the nature of language centres around the sensible properties of words, treating the atomic constituents of language as material objects that are either heard, seen, spoken or materially inscribed. Kames betrays a typically sentimental preoccupation with material signs of feeling – blushes, tears, gestures – that inscribe themselves visibly on the body like printed characters on the page of a book. Smith, meanwhile, traces language to its origins in concrete particulars of sensory experience. Sentimentalism thus espouses a consistent preoccupation with language and its potential to mediate experience and knowledge. Yet it does so within a worldview that ultimately privileges embodied experience.

These theories thus suggest that sentimentalism might be considered as adapting and extending the somatic worldview that begins to emerge in the early eighteenth-century. Though tied more closely to contemporary sympathetic models of human nature and theories of nervous sensibility, sentimental philosophical writing demonstrates a somatic balance of privileging the sensible body as a primary register of meaning, knowledge and value with a consistent concern for the susceptibility of embodied sensation to forms of mediation, particularly *linguistic* mediation. Equally significantly, attending the work of Hartley, Smith and Kames also has ramifications for our understanding of the self-reflexive practices found in sentimental fiction that seem to alternately affirm and subvert the body/language dichotomy. Through these narrative techniques sentimental fiction expresses an appreciation for the physicality of textual and sympathetic experience over and above a concern for the realm of words. However, this does not necessarily entail a naïve concept of the transparent and unmediated nature of embodied sentimental forms of knowledge and communication. Instead, sentimental

fiction's complex structural and stylistic engagements with sites of tension and reciprocity between words and feelings reveal a somatic appreciation for the potential uncertainties and layers of mediation surrounding embodied experience.

Chapter 2 – Feeling/Machines

From the beginning of this, you see, I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within the other, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going.

Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, 1760-67.

We should sometimes increase the motion of the machine, to unclog the wheels of life; and now and then take a plunge amidst the waves of excess, in order to case-harden the constitution.

Tobias Smollett, *Humphry Clinker*, 1771.

Human nature is a complicated machine.

Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 1762.

Introduction: Private Copies and Public Sentiments

In 1796, a short pamphlet was produced by a Mr. Derok that offers an interesting example of an imagined development in eighteenth-century print technology. The pamphlet, titled “A New Method for Copying Instantaneously, Without Machines and Without Expence, Letters, Accounts, and All Other Writings,” promises to bring the ability to make copies of texts – a fundamental process in the expansion of print culture – out of public institutions and into the domestic homes of merchants, students and other private individuals. The text that follows describes a process whereby one could produce copies of texts in one’s home merely by ironing together a regular sheet of writing with some silver paper and blotting paper (9). This process would eliminate the need to purchase and house the expensive and cumbersome cylindrical copying machines used by “public offices” (3). Despite the pamphlet’s self-aggrandizing predictions, this new method’s influence on the history of print and copying technology was, I suspect,

marginal, given that we still regularly employ large and expensive copying machines that still tend not to be kept in private homes. Nevertheless, the pamphlet is notable in that it justifies itself by appealing to the need for a private alternative to a public technology. In this sense, the pamphlet can appear to serve as evidence of the new significance granted to the private sphere in the later decades of the late eighteenth century. However, the desire for domestic copying technology is evidence not merely of the new authority and importance granted to private affairs but more precisely of the increasing *interpenetration* of public and private as the century progresses. After all, to make copies of writing is in a sense to publish them; copying multiplies and increases a text's public presence. So, at the same time that domestic copying would grant private individuals greater access to public technologies, it would also contribute to the increased public circulation of previously private forms of writing and communication.

In a parallel manner, sentimental writing, by privileging sensation and emotion often while representing the virtues of domestic life, appears initially to privilege the private realm over the public. And, indeed, much criticism of sentimentalism folds this new cultural concern for feeling into Enlightenment master narratives of the rise of interiority and private individualism.¹ However, recent scholarship devoted to the sociability of sentimentalism by John Mullan, John Dwyer, G.J. Barker-Benfield and others has cast doubt on the uniformly private nature of sensibility. In fact, even within the period, the cult or culture of feeling could appear to evacuate the private sphere of its privacy by rendering emotional reactions a matter of public scrutiny. As Sir Sedley

¹ See, for example, R.F. Brissenden's *Virtue in Distress* (1974), which, as mentioned in the previous chapter, asserts that "sentimental ideas" can be reduced to the notion that "the source of all knowledge and all values is the individual human experience" (22).

wittily observes in Frances Burney's *Camilla* (1796), "We are at such a prodigious expense of sensibility in public, for tales of sorrow told about pathetically [. . .] that if we suffered much for our for our private concerns to boot, we must always meet one another with tears in our eyes" (3: 353). Claudia Johnson discusses this passage in *Equivocal Beings* (1995), and also helpfully points out that Sedley's witty remark is exaggerating the case to prove a point: "The importance of [. . .] displaying the right sentiments has not supplanted private emotion, as Sir Sedley playfully suggests. If anything, it has exacerbated it: what and how one feels is a matter of public consequence" (2). By grounding aesthetic and moral value in personal feeling, sentimentalism privatizes previously public concepts like virtue and beauty. But as Sedley's remarks suggest, by producing and circulating literary works that centre around sensibility, sentimentalism also transforms the previously private realm of feeling into matter for public consumption. As with developments in copying techniques (proposed and actual), sentimentalism points to the breakdown of conventional and foundational divisions between public and private. As this chapter explores, the rise of the culture of feeling and the expansion of print technology are interlinked on a number of fronts – including not only the way they intersect with shifts between the categories of public and private, but related divisions as well, such as mind and body, masculine and feminine, virtue and self-interest. Significantly, many of these links reveal themselves through close attention to the self-reflexive narrative practices of sentimental fiction.

In the previous chapter I argue that the sentimental novels of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie deploy self-reflexive narrative structures that are less oriented toward engaging with the text as a linguistic construction and, instead, more consistently engage

with their own texts as material, printed books. This concern with the materiality of the text is intricately intertwined with the fact that these works emerge out of a culture of sensibility that privileges embodied feeling as a central register of knowledge, meaning and value. Through narrative strategies of corporeal defamiliarization that denaturalize the physicality of books and explore the parallels between printed books and human bodies, sentimental novels grant a central importance to the embodied elements of literary and affective experience. Despite treating the feeling body as a foundational resource for social and sympathetic exchange, sentimental writing nevertheless expresses a complex and consistent awareness of the mediated and uncertain nature of embodied knowledge and experience. Indeed, writers such as David Hartley and Adam Smith provide theories of sentimental human nature that openly accommodate the concept of linguistic mediation and build upon a Lockean fascination with how cognitive processes mirror figural and rhetorical devices. Thus, while sentimental writing may set up an opposition between the realm of embodied sensibility and the realm of language, the relationship between these two realms is in the end more complex and reciprocal than it initially appears.

In this chapter I would like to change the focus away from what insights the formal techniques of sentimental fiction provide into the relationship between words and feelings and examine instead the implications of sentimental self-reflexivity for the relationship between sensibility and the realm of the mechanical. Many of the same narrative techniques that draw attention to the materiality of the text – the proliferation of asterisks, dashes, and other symbols; the references to publishers, copyists, editors, booksellers and other members of print culture; Sterne's black, blank and marbled pages;

the textual fragments, torn out pages, and found manuscripts – also draw attention to books as mechanically-reproduced printed objects. Thus, at the same time that these novels demonstrate a self-awareness of their own physicality, they also betray a self-awareness of their indebtedness to modern technological developments and, specifically, the expansion of technologies of textual reproduction. Furthermore, by drawing attention to the means by which sensitive bodies have the capacity to resemble printed pages through their tendency to exhibit physical signs or marks imbued with sympathetic significance, strategies of corporeal defamiliarization suggest that the origins of the embodied sensation, may, like those of texts, be traceable to mechanical processes. While these texts demonstrate a self-awareness of their own status as mechanically-reproduced technological artifacts of contemporary print culture, they also expose the conceptual parallels between the mechanical processes of print and the mechanistic reactions of sentimental subjects.

In these ways, sentimental self-reflexivity ties in with another aspect of Lockean theory that was alluded to in the previous chapter and that I would like to place in a slightly different context here. Locke conceives of language in material terms as composed of printed characters and demonstrates a proclivity for print metaphors throughout his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). This proclivity continues among later theorists of cognition, sensation, and human nature within the culture of sensibility, such as David Hartley. In *Observations on Man* (1749), Hartley adapts Locke's associationist model of cognition to new medical theories about the centrality of nerves, but he also incorporates Locke's fondness for printerly metaphors in his account of the means by which ideas come to be "imprinted" on the mind through the

mechanical operations of the nerves and the senses. Hartley argues that sensations of all kinds are impressed on the sense organs and travel to the brain via the vibration of the nerves where they produce “copies” of the original impressions called “vibratiuncles” (56). According to his view, the nervous system functions like a vast, intricate mechanistic copying device analogous to a printing press. Hartley thus embraces a vision of human nature that not only privileges the nervous body, but also, significantly, treats the nervous body as resembling an artificially-constructed machine.

Also along these lines, in his attempts to examine “the mechanism of the body,” Hartley even goes so far as to invoke the figure of the automaton, defining motions of the body as “automatic” due to their “resemblance to the motions of automata, or machines, whose principle of motion is within themselves” (iii). In drawing out these parallels, Hartley was not alone among scientists and philosophers at this time since, as Clark Lawlor points out, other contemporary investigators into the nervous system, including George Cheyne, similarly conceived of the body as a “human machine” (xvi), and specifically as “an hydraulic system governed by the laws of hydrodynamics: a combination of pipes and pressurized fluids” (xvi). These ideas about the mechanical nature of the nerve-governed body circulated between sentimental writing of all kinds, influencing Scottish moral theorists like Hume, Smith, and Hutcheson, but also sentimental novelists like Samuel Richardson, a close friend and patient of Cheyne’s, as well as Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie.² Drawing on the interrelations between the mechanical copying of printing presses, mechanistic theories of nervous sensibility and printerly narrative self-reflexivity, this chapter takes a critical look at the role of the

² G.J. Barker-Benfield traces out many of these lines of influence in *The Culture of Sensibility* (1992).

mechanical in the culture of sensibility. In particular, I focus on the potential parallels between the figure of the man of feeling as represented in sentimental narratives and contemporary representations of the automaton. As I argue, parallels between these two figures offer insights into important cultural shifts in the status of the mechanical and the machine-like after the rise of sentimentalism.

Social Butterflies and Mechanical Pineapples: Gender and the Automaton

In recent years, cultural debates about the changing relations between technology, subjectivity, and the commercial social order in the eighteenth century have increasingly converged in the figure of the automaton. Nor is this a purely retrospective insight. David Hartley, as we have seen, invokes the automaton in his materialist theory of human nature. Automata emerge as potential metaphors for social order, meanwhile, at least as early as Hobbes' influential description of society as an "Artificial Man" from *Leviathan* (1651). As Simon Schaffer observes, automata manifest themselves in the eighteenth-century both as "machines in the form of humans" and as "humans who perform like machines" (126). These figures may have helped shape intellectual debates around materialist philosophy, but they also impacted material culture as "commodity fetishes" that "played a significant role in the manufacturing economy and the mercantile system" (Schaffer 128). In literary studies, a number of recent critics have been compelled by revisitations of Frances Burney's novels and personal writing to situate the automaton in the context of eighteenth-century constructions of femininity. Deidre Lynch discusses a sketch found in Burney's personal notes of a woman that resembles a hybrid of human

and steam-engine and relates it to eighteenth-century “depictions of fashionable consumption” in which women’s bodies consistently “disrupt basic definitions of selfhood and agency” because “their locomotion looks to be compelled [. . .]. by commodities” (194). Julie Park has argued that the automata encountered by the eponymous hero of Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) at Cox’s museum – including a mechanical pineapple that opens to reveal a nest of singing birds and then closes – serve as apt symbols of the “open yet controlled” ideal of polite femininity disseminated by “conduct books of the period” (38). Finally, Claudia Johnson has explored various instances in Burney’s fiction where emotionally sensitive women are compared to unconscious machines. For instance, Johnson draws attention to Indiana from *Camilla* who is regarded as a feminine ideal by the male characters in the novel, but who is also at one point referred to as an “automaton” (Burney 191). In Burney’s fiction, she notes, female characters that display “inhuman vacancy” are “also compelling spectacles of ‘sensibility personified’” (Johnson 154), and Johnson thus aligns the “abhorred” and “desired” figure of the “female automaton” with the sexual politics of the culture of sensibility (155).

Although these sorts of accounts have helped complicate our understanding of female subjectivity in this period, comparably little attention has been paid to the automaton’s relationship to constructions of identity on the other side of the gender divide. In light of this, by considering parallels between the automaton and the figure of the man of feeling, I build on the work of these recent critics while, at the same time, offering novel insights into the relationship between technology, gender and identity in eighteenth-century Britain. The man of feeling rose to prominence in British literature and culture in the latter half of the eighteenth century and in doing so, as Janet Todd, G.J.

Barker-Benfield and others have noted, subverted gender norms by offering an alternative ideal of masculinity that incorporated traditionally feminine traits such as sympathy, passivity, and physical and emotional delicacy (Todd 89, Barker-Benfield 142). As Todd observes, novels featuring male sentimental protagonists grapple “with the philosophical and narrative problems of what to do with the man of feeling who has [. . .] avoided manly power and assumed the womanly qualities of tenderness and susceptibility” (89). Dror Wahrman has astutely described the man of feeling as the complementary inverse of the Amazon, another prominent figure in eighteenth-century Britain’s popular consciousness. If the Amazon was an example of a woman who exhibited conventional signs of masculinity – she was active rather than passive, physically strong rather than weak, stoic rather than emotional – then the figure of the man of feeling was “the flipside of the female warrior,” and an “alternative model for masculine behavior” (Wahrman 37-38). Moreover, Wahrman cites the man of feeling’s capacity to subvert gender divisions as evidence of the culture of sensibility’s participation within a pre-modern “*ancien régime*” of identity. In contrast to post-Romantic modernity’s “axiomatic presupposition of a deep inner core of selfhood” (198), this *ancien régime* approached the borders of the self as “mutable, malleable, unreliable, divisible, replaceable, transferable, manipulable, escapable, or otherwise fuzzy around the edges” (198) and did so partly through its preoccupation with figures – like the man of feeling and the Amazon, but also the noble savage and the Ourang-Outan – that transgressed categories of identity such as race, class, gender and the division between humans and animals.

The man of feeling's tendency to exhibit conventionally feminine characteristics thus raises important questions about the stability of gender divisions in the eighteenth century. However, of more central concern here is that, as Johnson has already shown in her analysis of Burney's women, the characteristic behaviours associated with sensibility that the man of feeling exhibits also leave him open to potential comparisons with the automaton. In fact, novels that centre around men of feeling have a habit of exposing similarities between their sentimental protagonists and automatic machines. The clearest examples of this pattern can be found in the consistent analogies drawn by these texts between sentimental characters and mechanical devices. Yet, as alluded to earlier, the connection between sensitive men and machines is also strengthened, importantly, at the level of narrative form. The shared use of self-reflexive narrative structures in novels such as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768); Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1772); and Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1772), draw attention to the points of convergence between mechanical processes and sympathetic feeling.

By blurring the lines separating men of feeling from feeling machines, these canonical sentimental novels stand in contrast to writing from the earlier part of the century, in which the realms of sensibility and technology were typically represented as distinct and bound up with the separate spheres of public and private. As will be explored shortly, possessing sympathy for others and a virtuous concern for the common good was traditionally considered the exclusive purview of liberal-minded public citizens. Meanwhile, technological developments, as with all matters categorized as "mechanical," were associated with the private sphere of commerce and physical labour and were

generally thought to promote the vices of self-interest, effeminacy and luxury.

However, in the later decades of the century, the traditional understanding of the relationship between liberal and mechanical was challenged by, among other things, spectacles of automata like Cox's Museum that at least one observer regarded as a sign of the apocalypse. The sentimental novels of Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie, I argue, parallel Cox's "apocalyptic" exhibition by similarly treating the categories of liberal and mechanical as intertwined rather than distinct. Exploring the interconnections between the man of feeling and the automaton thus yields at least two significant observations: (1) the man of feeling's hyper-reactive sensibilities raise questions not only about the stability of gender, as Wahrman argues, but also about the stability and certainty of eighteenth-century boundaries between humans and machines; (2) perhaps more importantly, the porous borders between men of feeling and automatic feeling machines points to important shifts in the relationship between the mechanical and the virtuous, a porousness that also manifests itself in the narrative structure of canonical representations of sentimental masculinity by Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie. This, in turn, reveals new aspects of how the wider culture of sensibility both engages with and resists the hegemonic discourse of civic humanism it inherits from an earlier generation.

"An engine, the parts of which are men": Commerce, Civic Humanism and the Mechanical

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Jürgen Habermas asserts that Britain's emergence as a commercial society in the eighteenth century

coincides with the breakdown of the traditional separation between the realms of public and private. The arrival of a newly affluent middle class led to the formation of a public sphere in which, for the first time, private citizens acquired a voice in debates over traditionally public and courtly matters including taste, manners, morality, and politics. The emergence of this commercial and bourgeois public sphere was also aided by the expansion of print, which helped establish networks of communication between *salons*, literary circles and coffeehouses. While Habermas emphasizes that these social and technological changes aided the progress of enlightenment ideals such as democracy, equality, and freedom of expression, other critics including Michael McKeon, J.G.A. Pocock, John Barrell and Robert Jones have shown that the increased circulation between the traditionally separate categories of public and private also produced widespread anxiety, bitter debate, and epistemological uncertainty. As Jones writes in *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1998), “numerous writers regarded the relationship between the new public sphere and commerce as the source of corruption and effeminacy, and not, as Habermas suggests, rationality and renewal” (34). In particular, for defenders of the civic humanist ideal of a republic centred around public virtue, the increased influence of commerce and private individuals in the public sphere could only lead to the spread of vice and the moral degradation of the state.

To understand how this relates to eighteenth-century approaches to machines and the machine-like, however, it is important to note that proponents of civic humanist values often conceived of the proper relationship between public and private in terms of the classical division between *liberal* and *mechanic*. Adam Ferguson, for instance, employs these binary terms throughout his 1767 conjectural political history *An Essay on*

the History of Civil Society, a work that Fania Oz-Salzberger observes, “was a bid to reclaim the idea of civic virtue on behalf of the modern, commercial state” (xvii). The *Essay* traces the origins of the liberal and mechanic divide to a division inherent in human nature between private self-interest and benevolent sociability. Ferguson asserts, for example, that “Man has one set of dispositions which refer to his animal preservation, and to the continuance of his race; another which lead to society” (16). From this view, as civil society emerges, the duality between our public and private natures gives rise to distinctly mechanical or liberal pursuits. As Ferguson observes,

Some employments are liberal, others mechanic. They require different talents, and inspire different sentiments [. . .] the labourer, who toils that he may eat; the mechanic, whose art requires no exertion of genius, are degraded by the object they pursue, and by the means they employ to attain it. (175-176)

While mechanics and labourers are “degraded” by their employments and therefore only concerned with self-interested and physical concerns like food and survival, the liberal professions, by contrast, “place the artist in a superior class [. . .] they are left to follow the dispositions of the mind, and to take that part in society, to which they are led by the sentiments of the heart, or by the calls of the public” (176). Ferguson’s discussion of liberal and mechanic thus reveals some of the ways in which this classical dichotomy was used to distinguish and naturalize social divisions. Those involved with mechanical employments are aligned with physical labour rather than the intellect and genius, as well as with individual self-interest and self-preservation, and are considered “degraded” members of a lower class. Those involved in liberal professions, on the other hand, are in “a superior class,” free to “follow the dispositions of the mind” rather than forced to

focus on physical toil and needs. Consequently, this group is more capable of feeling sympathy towards others and better equipped to understand and promote the public good.

Ferguson's work also usefully illustrates how civic humanist concepts of liberal and mechanic mediated interpretations of the moral value and social impact of technology. As *Essay on the History of Civil Society* turns from a conjectural history of society to an analysis of the increasingly commercial and industrial Britain, Ferguson depicts the realm of the mechanical as extending beyond its conventional bounds, transforming labouring humans into automata and transforming formerly liberal pursuits into mechanical trades. One of the key insights of Ferguson's work is that as society develops, it increasingly depends upon the division of labour to flourish. As he asserts, "by the separation of arts and professions, the sources of wealth are laid open" (172). However, one of the regrettable consequences of the capitalist logic of separation is that, in the modern workplace, men are degraded by their mindless, physical labour to the point where they begin to resemble the parts of a machine:

Many mechanical arts [. . .] prosper most, where the mind is least consulted, and where the workshop may, without any great effort of imagination, be considered as an engine, the parts of which are men. (174)

Perhaps even more disturbingly, though the impact is first noticeable among physical labourers involved in the mechanical professions, Ferguson notes that the same economically-driven logic of division threatens to re-structure traditionally liberal realms like reason and abstract thought:

Thinking itself, in this age of separations, may become a peculiar craft [. . .]

The productions of ingenuity are brought to the market; and men are willing to pay for whatever has a tendency to inform or amuse. (175)³

In the end, the division of labour threatens to spread from its origins in the private realm of the mechanical and commercial arts and to re-structure society as a whole. To describe the outcome, Ferguson invokes his original vision of the mechanized worker as a synecdoche for the transformative impact of commercial society more generally. The *Essay* concludes that the separate members of society in a commercial and industrial nation “are made, like the parts of an engine, to concur to a purpose, without any concert of their own” (173). This final image captures the threat that modern commercial society poses for civic humanists. The division of labour has the potential to radically re-structure liberal realms of philosophy and reason and transform society as a whole into a vast machine, “the parts of which are men.” Through its association with the rise of vicious private self-interest, the expanding domain of the mechanical threatened to undermine a classically-structured virtuous republic devoted to liberal values.

“The Vulgar Idea of Imitation”: Mechanical Copying and the Liberal Arts

Civic humanism’s antipathy toward the mechanical permeated a variety of discourses and heavily influenced debates over aesthetic and literary value. The categories of liberal and mechanical were, after all, used not only to distinguish

³ Adam Smith makes a very similar assessment of the impact of the division of labour in *Wealth of Nations* (1776): “In the progress of society, philosophy or speculation becomes, like every other employment, the principal or sole trade and occupation of a particular class of citizens” (18).

professional and social classes, but were also invoked as a means of classifying the arts. In *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (1986), Barrell argues that civic humanist aesthetics structured the fine arts “as a political republic” and hierarchized genres according to their ability to promote the values of a virtuous state (1). For example, because eighteenth-century visual art involved the mimetic representation of material objects and physical bodies, theories of painting were continuously forced to contend with the accusation that the genre relied too heavily on the mechanical skills of a copyist. As a result, Barrell explains, “all writers on painting” were obliged to address the question of whether the genre, despite commonalities “with the mechanical arts,” was “truly a liberal art, and worth the attention of the gentleman-citizen” (12). Much of the defence of painting, therefore, involved justifying its inclusion among the liberal arts by first distancing it from the practice of “mechanically” copying nature.⁴

Shaftesbury, a firm defender of both painting and of maintaining the traditional separation of public and private, argues that the true value of a painted scene does not reside in its correspondence to objects in the material world, but in its public didacticism and its ability to encourage the contemplation of general principles. He rails against mere copyists in *Characteristics* (1711), asserting that “a painter, if he has any genius, understands the truth and unity of design; and knows he is even then unnatural when he follows nature too close, and strictly copies Life” (1: 94). Rather than privileging representationality, Shaftesbury argues that painters of “genius” recognize that “the most natural beauty in the world is [. . .] moral truth” (1: 94). Shaftesbury further argues that

⁴ Debates around the status of painting as a mechanical or liberal art can be traced back to the Italian Renaissance and Leon Battista Alberti’s *Della Pittura* (1436). Discussing Barrell’s research, Martin Myrone notes the indebtedness of British civic humanist aesthetic theory to Alberti in his 2005 book *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art, 1750-1810* (4-5).

artists ignore the particulars of physical surroundings and physical bodies in order to attend to the more general and intellectual principles of harmony, uniformity and rational order:

particulars, on this occasion, must yield to the general design, and all things be subservient to that which is principal; in order to form a certain easiness of sight, a simple, clear, and united view, which would be broken and disturbed by the expression of any thing peculiar or distinct. (1: 94)

Elsewhere in *Characteristics*, Shaftesbury similarly argues against copying the physical particularities of real human models and suggests that visual artists study only other preferably classical examples of paintings and sculptures that have the proper level of general beauty and classical proportion:

the mere face-painter, indeed has little in common with the poet; but, like the mere historian, copies what he sees, and minutely traces every feature and odd mark. 'Tis otherwise with men of invention and design. 'Tis from the many objects of nature, and not from a particular one, that those geniuses form the idea of their work. Thus the best artists are said to have been indefatigable in studying the best statues: as esteeming them a better rule than the perfectest human bodies could afford. (1: 96)

Characteristics thus advocates turning away from the excessive particularity of human bodies and material nature that he associates with “face-painters” and other members of a lower class of copyists (a class that includes “mere historians”). Instead, artists “of invention and design” seek to transcend materiality in favour of more intellectual and more universal – and therefore more liberal – concerns.

Later in the period, Reynolds' *Discourses* would similarly argue against defining painting in terms of mechanical copying: "a mere copier of nature can never produce anything great, can never raise and enlarge the conceptions, or warm the heart of the spectator" (1205).⁵ Reynolds goes so far as to assert that

painting [. . .] ought to be as far removed from the vulgar Idea of Imitation, as the refined civilized state in which we live, is removed from a gross state of nature; and those who have not cultivated their imaginations, which the majority of mankind certainly have not, may be said, (in regards to arts) to continue in this state of nature. Such men will always prefer imitation. (*Discourse XIII*, 1223)

For Reynolds and Shaftesbury, those who find pleasure in art that copies the material and particular aspects of nature are unrefined, vulgar and lacking in polite taste. They continue to live in a state of nature governed by self-interest and material concerns and therefore should not be included in civil society.

Moreover, as with Ferguson, these anxieties about the influence of the mechanical give rise to concerns about the impact of technological processes. The development in optics of the *camera obscura*, for instance, enabled visual artists to copy the details and minutiae of external, material nature with more precision than before. Not surprisingly, Reynolds regards this visual copying technology as a distraction from the true purpose of art:

If we suppose a view of nature represented with all the truth of the *camera obscura*, and the same scene represented by a great Artist, how little and mean

⁵ Notably, in this passage Reynolds also implies an innate division between art that appeals to sensibility – or “warms the heart” – and art that is merely a degraded mechanical copy of material nature.

will the one appear in comparison of the other, where no superiority is supposed from the choice of subject. (Discourse XIII, 1225)

Equally significantly, Gillen D’Arcy Wood has convincingly demonstrated that a consistent (though implicit) subtext of Reynolds’ arguments against mechanical copying is a desire to suppress and undermine the emerging commercial print culture. Wood maintains that Reynolds transfers “conventional academic antipathy toward copying nature to the facsimile process of mechanical reproduction associated with the print trade” (71). Reynolds’ civic humanist resistance to the mechanical thus not only applies to the copying practices of painters and engravers, but also extends, often implicitly, to technological forms of reproduction.

And yet, as John Brewer notes in *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1997), Reynolds’ own career owed a great deal to the commercial sale of copies and the technological developments that enabled the circulation of mechanically-reproduced copies of his own works. Brewer writes that as print culture expanded

British art was reproduced as never before. Recognizing that the sale of mezzotint copies of their work might be just as profitable as the fee earned from the original painting, such painters as Reynolds, West and John Singleton Copley did their best to keep control over the reproductions of their paintings. (456)

As well, history painting – the genre Reynolds asserted represented as the pinnacle of painting’s ability to transcend mechanical imitation of nature and promote liberal ideals – actually, paradoxically, depended for its popularity and economic viability on the mechanical production and circulation of copies:

History paintings were rarely commissioned by aristocratic patrons, because they were too large and their public didacticism unsuitable for hanging in private houses. But a history painting could become profitable if its exhibition was combined with the sale of high-quality reproductions of it. Ironically, what was regarded by Reynolds and his colleagues in the Royal Academy as the highest form of visual art now came to depend for its success on mechanical reproduction. (458)

So while Reynolds publicly argued against the corrupting influence of mechanical copying and commercialization in art, he also, ironically, depended upon the new commercial print culture and its ability to produce and circulate copies.

As with the visual arts, literature was undergoing radical transformations brought about by the rapid expansion of print technology and the widespread access to mechanically-reproduced copies of texts and images. And analogously to Reynolds and Shaftesbury, authors and critics reacted to the increasing influence of mechanical processes by expressing anxiety about copying too closely. Many writers expressed fear that providing too many particular details about a character would, as in painting, distract from the more abstract concepts and moral-didactic purpose that should be the liberal aim of literature, and transform authors into mere slavish copyists of the material world. As Deidre Lynch observes,

alarms over the overloading of character [. . .] call attention to the proliferation of print commodities. They suggest how printing presses in overdrive – producing ever more fleshed-out characters – destabilized the early eighteenth-century order of things. (24)

Lynch's analysis of the impact of "printing presses in overdrive" on representations of character suggests more ways in which eighteenth-century British constructions of human identity became intertwined with technology. As well, anxieties over "overloaded" characters show the degree to which the classical division between liberal and mechanical was mediated by eighteenth-century Britain's specific concerns over the expansion of print.

Early eighteenth-century Augustan satires of commercial print culture quite clearly equate the proliferation of mechanical copies of books with disruptions of the traditional "order of things." Intriguingly, many of these works, including Swift's *Tale of a Tub* (1704), Pope's *The Dunciad* (1728), and Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (1730) employ self-reflexive narrative practices that anticipate those found in sentimental novels later in the period. *Tale of a Tub*, for example, makes repeated references to its origins as a mechanically-manufactured object – particularly through techniques that anticipate Sterne's typographical pyrotechnics and Mackenzie's faux-editorial narrative frame, including manipulations of asterisks and other symbols to represent gaps in legibility, omitted phrases, and spelling errors. These playfully deliberate flaws, in turn, alert the reader to the fact that the text is satirically presented as a hastily and carelessly produced work authored by a Grub Street hack. The text's degraded physical condition thus serves as a sign of the grotesque and corrupt nature of literary works produced by authors operating under the influence of commercial interest. Furthermore, Swift's hack alter-ego self-consciously acknowledges that the print world has become disordered and destabilized by the proliferation of print commodities. As proof, he reports on his difficulties with the seemingly modest task of providing a complete list of printed works

distributed in London in a single day. Determining to provide a full account of the daily advertisements for texts “posted fresh upon all Gates and Corners of Streets” he returns “in a very few Hours to take a Review” and notices that these recent posts are already “all torn down and fresh ones in their Places” (583).

In a similar reference to the unchecked proliferation of textual copies, Fielding’s *Author’s Farce* (written, incidentally, under a pseudonym “Scriblerus Secundus” that positions the work self-consciously in the Scriblerian tradition of Swift, Pope, Arbuthnot and Gay), contains a scene in which a bookseller named “Bookweight” is conversing with some of his hired hacks named Quibble, Dash, and Blotpage. One of the writers, Quibble, has recently produced a pamphlet titled “Letter from a Friend in the Country,” and Bookweight asks him to produce his own response to the text. The names of these commercially self-interested participants in print culture represent more examples of the playful links exploited by eighteenth-century wordplay between characters as representations of people and characters as the products of print. Moreover, Bookweight’s comments satirically suggest that the tendency to produce and answer one’s own pamphlets, which encourages the manufacture of textual copies for merely commercial interest, was an increasingly common practice. He notes “I have had authors who have writ a pamphlet in the morning, answered in the afternoon, and compromised the matter at night” (29). The printerly puns, typographical manipulation, and references to the unchecked proliferation of authors and texts all point to the anxiety that the commercial expansion of print technology is contributing to the transformation of literature from a liberal pursuit to a morally debased mechanical trade. These texts call attention to their own status as debased physical objects, but also mechanically-

reproduced copies, and do so to expose how the influence of commerce on literature transforms literary works into grotesquely deformed excessively corporeal artifacts that are mechanically churned out by writers in the same manner that they are mechanically-reproduced by printing machines, with the same lack of conscious consideration for rational thought or public good.

“Sacred Symbols Poured on Cox’s Mind”: The Automaton in Eighteenth-Century Britain

From the middle decades of the century onwards, however, the traditional understanding of the status of the mechanical in Britain was gradually and subtly challenged on a number of cultural fronts. In intellectual circles, influential Scottish sentimental theorists such as David Hume and Adam Smith offered narratives of economic and political progress that re-theorized the liberal/mechanical relationship as interdependent rather than antagonistic and treated liberal arts and values as enabled by – rather than threatened by – developments in the mechanical and commercial arts. For instance, in Hume’s essay, “Of Commerce” (1741), he argues,

When a nation abounds in manufactures and mechanic arts [. . .] The superfluity, which arises from their labour, is not lost; but is exchanged with manufactures for those commodities, which men’s luxury now makes them covet [. . .] In times of peace and tranquility, this superfluity goes to the maintenance of manufactures, and the improvers of liberal arts. (261)

While Ferguson expresses anxieties over the influence of commerce on the proper division between liberal and mechanical, for Hume advancements in labour, commerce

and the mechanical arts are good for the health of the nation and necessary to the flourishing of higher liberal pursuits.

In *The Rambler* no. 145 (1752), Samuel Johnson similarly re-imagines the liberal/mechanic division in relation to the realm of literature in his defence of the commercial hack London authors so mercilessly attacked by Swift. Referring to Swift explicitly, Johnson aligns these “drudges of the pen” and “manufacturers of literature” with mechanics and labourers, whose role in the welfare of the nation Johnson argues deserves more esteem than they traditionally receive (5: 80). Though these writers only produce “papers of the day” and the “*Ephemera* of learning” with no long-lasting value, they nevertheless produce works “more adequate to the purposes of common life than more pompous and durable volumes” (5: 82). Thus, he concludes, the commercial author, though a “manufacturer” on par with the common labourer and the mechanic, “must be considered a liberal dispenser of beneficial knowledge” (5: 82). As with Hume, Johnson depicts the relationship between the mechanical and the liberal in terms that undermine any sense of absolute or strict antagonism. Even mechanical, commercial forms of literary production can contribute to liberal ends.

Another possible sign of changes in the perceived moral and aesthetic status of the mechanical can be found in the rising popularity in London of public spectacles of automata. As Richard Altick has demonstrated in *The Shows of London* (1978), exhibits such as Jaquet-Droz’s humanoid writer (exhibited in 1776), Vaucanson’s digesting duck (exhibited in 1742), and Kempelen’s chess-playing Turk (exhibited from 1783-84) were

enormously popular attractions.⁶ By performing actions designed to imitate the lifelike behaviour of humans and animals, these celebrated automata could be thought of as further examples of “mechanical” copies that civic humanists associated with frivolous, corrupt private pleasures and distractions from the pursuit of virtue. And yet, while civic-minded critics like Ferguson tended to describe their cultural surroundings as a morally degraded realm where the mechanical was too often overstepping its proper bounds, these exhibitions depended for their success on a curious public that, in contrast with Ferguson, found spectatorial pleasure in observing machines specifically designed to transgress their traditional categorical limitations.

To illustrate the subversive potential inherent in eighteenth-century automata, and also to illuminate important parallels between automata and men of feeling, I want to turn, for a moment, to a remarkable anonymous pamphlet titled *The Divine Predictions of Daniel and St. John Demonstrated in a Symbolical Theological Dissertation on Cox’s Museum* (1774). The subject of the pamphlet, Cox’s Museum, was no mere sideshow, but instead “the most elegant of eighteenth-century London exhibitions in respect to both contents and clientele” (Altick 69). The exhibition opened at Spring Gardens in 1772 and featured a collection of ornate and enormous mechanisms (many described as near or above ten feet in height) covered in precious metals and stones and representing fantastic, mythical and exotic scenes and figures. As the published guide or *Descriptive Catalogue* (1772) to the exhibition describes in lavish detail, some of the nearly two dozen automata included a piece “nine feet high” depicting a Griffin surrounding by palm trees and

⁶ For historical overviews and analyses of eighteenth-century exhibitions of automata and other mechanical novelties see Simon Schaffer’s “Enlightenment Automata” from *the Sciences in Enlightened Europe* (1999) and Richard Altick’s *The Shows of London* (1978). Dates are from Altick (65-68).

“artificial water works,” possessing “a number of mechanical motions” (3); a “pine-apple copied from nature,” “richly gilt” in silver which “bursts open upon the playing of chimes” to uncover “a nest of six birds” (16);⁷ and a structure measuring “twelve feet high” consisting of a “richly-caparisoned” elephant supporting a pedestal that in turn supported both a “sumptuous” golden chariot drawn by a bejewelled “Dragon,” and a second chariot “drawn by horses” that circled a “Gothic Temple of agate” (6).⁸

Inspired by the prophetic writing of religious critic William Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester (to whom the pamphlet is dedicated), as well as by Edmund Burke’s theory of the power of obscure and ambiguous imagery from *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), the author of *Divine Predictions* sets out with the hope of encouraging “a proper zeal for our holy religion” in this “sceptical age” (3) by proving that Cox’s automata contain cryptic Christian symbolism. With this goal in mind, he suggests in a rhyming quatrain that Cox was unconsciously inspired by God:

Heaven, that fills prophets with their secret qualms,
 Makes saints to dance, and swadlers screech their psalms:
 The sacred symbols poured on Cox’s mind,
 And sent his dragons to convert mankind. (20)

As evidence of the divinely-inspired significance of the museum’s automata, the pamphlet juxtaposes, in parallel columns, extensive passages from the museum’s *Descriptive Catalogue* with passages from the books of Daniel and Revelations. For

⁷ Likely the source of the image alluded to in Burney’s *Evelina*.

⁸ From Cox’s *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Several Superb and Magnificent Pieces of Mechanism and Jewellery, Exhibited in Mr. Cox’s Museum, at Spring Gardens, Charing Cross* (1772).

example, the main section of the pamphlet opens with a verse from the Book of Daniel describing a “Ram” and a “He-Goat” which is set beside descriptions from Cox’s guide of an automaton ram with “ornaments of gold” and a goat “made of molten copper” (21). Elsewhere, the pamphlet juxtaposes a description from the book of Revelation of a throne before which “there was a sea of glass, like unto Chrystal” with a passage from the museum guide that similarly describes a throne surrounded by “a large plate of looking glass” (24). The significance of these parallels is not analyzed directly. Instead, the author adds a typological angle and peppers the cited texts with footnotes connecting the imagery to recent historical events including “the present war” between “the Turks and the Russians” (23), the rise of the “American Colonies,” and “Dr. Franklin’s” discovery of “electricity” (26). As the author explains

though I think several of Daniel and St. John’s prophecies are absolutely accomplished at present, in the *primary sense*, by the exhibition at Cox’s Museum, yet I farther believe and confess that the wonderful pieces of mechanism [can be] considered in a *secondary sense* as *types* and *emblems* of actual events now fulfilling, or fulfilled in the world. (14)

The pamphlet thus treats the “symbolical” significance of Cox’s Museum as bifurcated, referring at once to scenes from the Bible and to recent events, doubly confirming that many of the conditions for the prophesied end of days have been fulfilled.

Grounded in under-analyzed, largely superficial similarities between the imagery in Cox’s Museum and Biblical prophecy, and tied to an assortment of global historical and political events whose collective significance is ambiguous at best, the argument presented by *Divine Predictions* is, on the whole, poorly articulated, confusing, and less

than convincing. Indeed, the author acknowledges in a concluding remark that even potentially sympathetic contemporary theologians have not been persuaded by his interpretation: “I communicated my *Idea* to his Grace of ---- and to the Bishops of ---- and ---- but they all excused themselves in a manner that does them very little credit” (32). Nevertheless, *Divine Predictions* is useful to consider in the context of this work because it raises an important and intriguing question: to what extent could eighteenth-century automata, and Cox’s automata in particular, be considered signs of apocalyptic change? I believe it is possible, and even productive, to approach Cox’s Museum as emblematic of impending and ongoing radical upheaval, though not in quite the same sense intended by the pamphlet’s author. Thus I would argue that, despite its flaws, *Divine Predictions* points to an important underlying truth about the social and ideological significance of Cox’s exhibition.

Cox’s Museum differed from other similar public spectacles in that it presented mechanical wonders with a pretence to beauty rather than mimetic representationality. In this way, Cox’s bejewelled dragons and animated griffins distinguished themselves from other popular exhibits such as the digesting duck or the humanoid writer, whose interest primarily resided in their capacity to imitate lifelike human and animal behaviour. While the automata in Cox’s Museum included life-like animated representations of humans and animals, these were generally part of larger structures that, as Altick observes, were considered, unlike their competitors, to be “splendid works of art” (69). Given that the exhibition presented overtly mechanical devices as aesthetically-pleasing “works of art,” one might expect Cox’s Museum to distance itself from key civic humanist concepts such as liberal and mechanic. Yet, provocatively, the *Descriptive Catalogue* prominently

advertises that the space in Spring Gardens where these mechanisms are displayed is adorned with illustrations of the Liberal Arts:

The Room is fitted up and decorated in an elegant manner; On the ceiling of the dome are fine paintings in *chiaro oscuro*, by a celebrated artist, as are the sides of the dome by the same, with the emblems of the Liberal Arts, Music, Sculpture, Painting, and Mathematics, which are, in this Museum, so eminently displayed.

(3)

As this opening passage to the catalogue suggests, the automata on display in Cox's Museum were not to be dismissed as mere mechanical wonders, but were instead quite explicitly positioned, spatially and ideologically, within the more refined discourse of the liberal arts. In drawing attention to this spatial and ideological context, Cox's marketing strategy explicitly capitalizes on the potential for these automata to transgress the conventional limitations of the mechanical in a slightly different manner than other manifestations of the automaton: by aligning themselves with the kinds of abstract, intellectual and virtuous pleasures commonly associated with liberal pursuits such as "Music, Sculpture, Painting, and Mathematics." Cox's beautiful machines thus represent a curious hybrid of liberal aesthetic principles and mechanical functionality. As a result, the exhibition destabilizes even as it invokes the liberal/mechanic divide that was foundational to the once-hegemonic civic humanist discourse. From this perspective, as a sign of a breakdown in foundational categorical distinctions and as an example of the increasing penetration of the mechanical and the machine-like into the traditional territory of the liberal, the exhibition could be construed as a symbol of foundational ideological and social transformations. While not strictly a sign of the end of the world in

the theological sense, then, Cox's beautiful machines nevertheless symbolize the imminent end of a widely embraced way of ordering and understanding the world.

Something like an Automaton: Men of Feeling as Sentimental Machines

Notably, Cox's Museum opened its doors only a year after the publication of Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* and Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, when the culture of sensibility was at its height. While the timing may be coincidental, there are significant parallels between Cox's Museum and these sentimental representations of men of feeling that are worth exploring. One important parallel is the fact that the sentimental novels of Smollett and Mackenzie (along with those of Sterne) consistently align men of feeling with mechanistic behaviours strikingly similar to those of automata. In a revealing passage from *Humphry Clinker*, Matthew Bramble frustratedly reflects on the volatility that comes with being as "tender as a man without skin" and writes to his friend, "I have perceived that my opinion of mankind, like mercury in the thermometer, rises and falls according to the variations of the weather" (84). Terry Castle notes that newly available thermometers or "weatherglasses," "with their curious, seemingly animate capacity to 'feel' alterations in the atmosphere," became widely used emblems of sensibility "in the hands of eighteenth-century wits" (2). Smollett's reference to the parallels between this instrument and Bramble's volatile emotional reactivity thus foregrounds the reciprocity between the technological artifacts of eighteenth-century material culture and constructions of identity. Bramble also, notably, alludes to his body as a "machine" in the conclusion of *Humphry Clinker*, using the term as Hartley and Cheyne do in their

medical treatises. Bramble states that “We should sometimes increase the motion of the machine, to unclog the wheels of life” (337). As will be examined in greater detail in the chapter that follows, Smollett was, of course, a physician as well as a novelist, and a vocal participant in medical debates. He thus would have been quite familiar, as his language here suggests, with contemporary medical interpretations of the machine-like, automatic behaviours of sensible bodies.

In *The Man of Feeling*, the protagonist, Harley, and his friend Ben Silton stop at an inn on their way out of London where Harley pauses to meticulously copy down poetic phrases he finds etched in “windows and drinking glasses” (101). While Harley seems to find these phrases meaningful, Silton suggests that, by copying these phrases down, Harley is associating himself with fellow travellers who are “machines at least containing poetry, which the motion of a journey emptied of their contents” (101). Invoking the civic humanist antipathy toward mechanical copying, Silton questions whether it is through “a mere mechanical imitation of the custom of others, that we are tempted to scrawl rhyme upon such places” (101-2). Mackenzie’s novel suggests that Harley is inspired by his sentimental nature to mechanically copy phrases that are themselves “mechanical” copies created by unconscious automata inspired less by intellectual genius than the physical motion of travel. Curiously, this notion of the sentimental traveller as automatic copying machine is invoked as well, though less disparagingly, in Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*. As alluded to in a different context in “Body/Language,” the benevolent Parson Yorick notes that, as a sociable and sentimental flaneur, one of his primary tools is his ability to translate the emotional signifiers of the body. Yorick states,

There is not a secret so aiding to the progress of sociality, as to get master of this short hand, and be quick in rendering several turns of looks and limbs, with all their inflections and delineations, into plain words.

Yorick claims that through custom or “habitude,” he now performs the act of copying embodied signs into words “so *mechanically*” that as he walks the streets, he says “I go translating all the way” (57).

One of the more intriguing scenes in which men of sensibility are aligned with mechanical processes also comes from *A Sentimental Journey* and involves a speaking starling. Yorick encounters the trained bird “hung in a little cage” while in France and recounts, “—‘I can’t get out—I can’t get out,’ said the starling . . . I vow I never had my affections more tenderly awakened” (71). Yorick’s “affections” have never been “more tenderly awakened” and yet he is also aware that the bird repeats the phrase automatically, without any sense of the meaning of what it says. The parson reflects, “*Mechanical as the notes were*, yet so true in tune to nature were they chanted, that in one moment they overthrew all my systematic reasonings” (71-72, emphasis added). In reaction to the deep, irrational impact the starling’s “mechanical” notes have on his sensibilities, Yorick retreats to his room to contemplate the nature of imprisonment and slavery. Meanwhile, his servant purchases the bird and they bring it to England, where it circulates widely and becomes a kind of touring curiosity. Eventually, Yorick reveals that he has incorporated the speaking bird into his family crest – “I have borne this poor starling as the crest to my arms” – and, in a characteristically Sternean manipulation of print convention, offers an illustration of the crest to demonstrate (75). Yorick incorporates the bird into the symbolic representation of his name, suggesting that he

quite strongly associates the bird with his own sentimental identity. And yet, the bird itself is a creature that inspires sympathy through mechanical, automatic expression, through the artificially trained copying or imitating of “natural” human linguistic expression. The scene harkens back to Yorick’s earlier reference to his own tendency to “mechanically” read or translate the embodied gestures of the people that he passes in the street. This man of feeling identifies himself most intimately with a creature that inspires virtuous and sympathetic sentiments, yet which does so through actions that are ultimately imitative and mechanical in nature.

While the parallels between sensitive subjects and automatic machines manifest themselves most overtly in passages like those above, these connections are also strengthened by the self-reflexive structure of these novels. As mentioned earlier, the typographical playfulness, editorial and narratorial unreliability, textual fragmentations, authorial intrusions, and manipulations of digression and intertextuality that can be found throughout these novels defamiliarize sentimental novels as mechanically-manufactured printed books. The self-referential narrative practices adopted by these works thus display a concern for books as technological artifacts, which is a reflection of their participation within Britain’s “typographical culture” (Lynch 6). In addition, this self-awareness not only addresses the mechanical origins of books, but also, in some cases, extends to a consideration of how the fictional narratives within these printed texts might be themselves aligned with machines. In one of Sterne’s notorious digressions in *Tristram Shandy*, Tristram describes the anti-linear structure of his narrative as a kind of dialectical perpetual-motion machine:

The machinery of my work is of a species by itself [. . .] I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within the other, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going;---and, what's more, it shall be kept a-going these forty years, if it pleases the fountain of health to bless me so long with life and good spirits. (58-59)

John Brewer has demonstrated that Sterne was not the only one thinking about literary texts as machines at the time. Debates around copyright and authorship hinged to an extent on whether an authored text could be equated with a mechanical invention:

it was said that a literary work could not be held as property because it was not a thing but a set of ideas, over which no one person could assert his rights. A book was therefore analogous to a mechanical invention and, like an invention, might be patented for a number of years but could not be held permanently. As one commentator put it: 'A literary Composition is *an Assemblage of Ideas* [. . .] A mechanic Invention, and a literary Composition, exactly agree in Point of Similarity.' (153)

Sentimental texts thus engage with contemporary debates surrounding the status of texts and their relationship to technology at a variety of levels.

Typographically self-reflexive practices also betray a consistent fascination with the conceptual parallels between printed books and human bodies. Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie frequently treat the embodied signs of sympathetic feeling – tears, blushes, gestures, facial expressions – as analogous to characters imprinted or impressed on pages by a printing press. Yorick's assertion that his primary task as a sentimental flâneur is to

read people's corporeal "short hand" is just one example of how the surface of the body is treated as a text-like legible surface. As explored in the previous chapter, Mackenzie's Harley expresses a similar tendency to read imprinted characters on the surface of the body through his various attempts to demonstrate "skill" in physiognomy (77). More generally, these sentimental novels are filled with legible bodies that exhibit the "marks," "imprints" and "impressions" of feeling. Recall a scene in which Bramble reconnects with his old acquaintance, Baynard, and displays sympathy-inspiring "marks" of emotion: "I was so affected by the subject, that I could not help mingling tears with my remonstrances, and Baynard was so penetrated with these marks of my affection, that he lost all power of utterance" (292). As with the mechanical processes of print, Bramble's embodied sentimental reactions are automatic and involuntary; he "could not help" but display the embodied "marks" of affection that penetrate his friend so deeply. Ultimately, then, these narrative practices not only blur the line between the material surface of sensitive bodies and the material surface of printed texts, but also suggest that the processes behind the production of the signs of sensibility may, like the workings of the printing press, be automatic and mechanical. Self-reflexive narrative practices in sentimental novels thus offer another way in which the poetics of sentimentalism aligns sensitive subjects with the behaviour of machines.

And yet, like Cox's golden chariots, animated birds, and silver pineapples, these "mechanical" men of feeling occupy a space (in this case a textual space) associated with the values of the liberal-minded. In earlier Augustan satires, self-referential techniques satirically draw attention to the text as a grotesquely material and manufactured product of commercial interest. However, while these techniques re-appear in sentimental fiction,

the satirical tone is filtered through and counterbalanced by the genre's overtly didactic aims of engaging the sympathies and promoting virtuous fellow-feeling.⁹ In this context, then, the same techniques that once pointed toward degradation and moral corruption caused by private self-interest in earlier Scriblerian texts, are now ostensibly serving the cause of virtue through their presence in texts that represent the sociable pleasures of sympathy and benevolence. Instances of self-reflexivity thus reveal the fact that sentimentalism destabilizes conventional divisions between public and private as well as between liberal and mechanic. The men of feeling within these texts are compelled by their mechanistic sympathetic sensitivity toward the traditionally liberal pursuits of sociability, benevolence and concern for the common good. Considered in relation to the liberal/mechanic divide, these novels which revolve around men of feeling draw from both sides of seemingly irreconcilable divisions: in this way, representations of the man of feeling embody the potential for the mechanical and liberal elements of human nature to be reconciled. As a result, men of feeling appear to offer an alternative model of subjectivity in which virtue can continue to exist once dichotomies such as liberal/mechanic and public/private are no longer intelligible.

⁹ This is not to say that writing after the rise of sentimentalism no longer expressed concerns like those of Augustan satire about the overproduction of printed material. In the satirical *London Unmask'd: Or the New Town Spy* (1784), the anonymous author laments that "fresh Adventures start up every Day, and the press teems with a more redundant and complicated farrago of productions than ever" (ii). And *Humphry Clinker* contains a scene almost identical to that of Fielding's *The Author's Farce* in which an Irish "Grub" political writer using the pseudonym "Lord Potatoe" admits to producing false responses to his own pamphlets and manufacturing scandal and debate (133). Anxieties about the destabilizing impact of "printing presses in overdrive" persist, but I argue here that in sentimental fiction the connection between drawing attention to the materiality and mechanically-copied nature of texts, on the one hand, and satirizing commercial modernity, on the other, is no longer quite as strong or unambiguous.

At the same time, however, men of feeling can also appear, at times, to be an awkward hybrid of liberal values and mechanical functionality. This hybridity can lead to some curious scenes where men of feeling invoke aspects of the civic humanist tradition that sentimentalism simultaneously draws on and undermines. In *A Sentimental Journey*, Yorick describes the dilation of his nerves in reaction to performing a benevolent act and, despite drawing on a Hartleyan mechanistic vocabulary of the body, treats his reaction as proof he has a soul and is not a materialist machine:

In doing this, I felt every vessel in my frame dilate—the arteries beat all chearily together, and every power which sustained life, perform'd it with so little friction, that 'twould have confounded the most *physical precieuse* in France: with all her materialism, she could scarce have called me a machine. (4)

In *Tristram Shandy*, meanwhile, Tristram at one point attempts to “draw uncle Toby’s character” using “no mechanical help whatever” (60) and, in doing so, rehearses the Shaftesburian resistance to copying: “writers of my stamp have one principle in common with painters.—Where an exact copying makes our pictures less striking, we choose the less evil; deeming it even more pardonable to trespass against truth, than beauty” (74). Finally, in *Humphry Clinker*, Bramble invokes the civic humanist tradition when he rails against the circulation between classes he witnesses in London and Bath. In London he remarks that

The different departments of life are jumbled together – the hod-carrier, the *low mechanic*, the tapster, the publican, the shop-keeper, the pettifogger, the *citizen*, and courtier [. . .] they are seen every where rambling, riding, rolling, justling,

mixing, bouncing, cracking and crashing into one vile ferment of stupidity and corruption. (96: emphasis added)

Later, he adds

When I see a man of birth, education, and fortune, put himself on a level with the dregs of the people, mingle with low mechanics, feed with them at the same board, and drink with them in the same cup [. . .] I cannot help despising him, as a man guilty of the vilest prostitution, in order to effect a purpose equally selfish and illiberal. (111-112)

Despite acknowledging the parallels between his own sensibility and the automatic functioning of modern scientific devices, Bramble, ironically, “cannot help” but be automatically repelled by witnessing the liberal-minded and mechanically-minded mingle together in society.

Sentimental Reconciliations

Ultimately, I believe these tendencies can be partly traced to the man of feeling’s origins in sentimental constructions of human nature offered by Scottish Enlightenment intellectuals such as Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith. As with their economic and political writing, the sentimental theories of these thinkers emerge partly as a response to the interpenetration of categories like public and private and liberal and mechanic, offering alternative models of virtue in a world where the once-foundational categorical divisions no longer hold. By grounding sympathy and sociability in what Smith names “immediate sense and feeling” (320), Scottish sentimental philosophers

offered models of human nature in which the privately-oriented pursuit of pleasurable sensations and a publicly-oriented concern for virtue and the common good are coordinated rather than opposed. Interestingly, while these sentimental theories helped give birth to the man of feeling as a masculine ideal, they also subtly re-interpret the moral and aesthetic status of technology in ways that parallel Cox's automata in that they challenge the absolute categorical divisions upon which civic humanism was founded.

In particular, the sentimental theories of Hutcheson and Hume each consider the apparently undeniable pleasure of observing modern machines at work and tether this pleasure to a sympathy-centred understanding of human nature. Hutcheson, whose *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) heavily influenced both Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals* (1751) and Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), writes that "everyone has a certain Pleasure in seeing any Design well executed by a curious Mechanism, even when his own Advantage is no way concerned" (45). Hutcheson attributes this pleasure to a disinterested appreciation for the correspondence of a machine to its original design or intention and includes the pleasure of observing machines within the class of pleasures of "relative or comparative beauty" that come from apprehending "the conformity or unity between a copy and an original" (42). The category of "relative or comparative beauty" is secondary to that of "absolute beauty" which originates within an object itself and emerges out of the Shaftesburyan principle of "uniformity amongst variety" (42). Despite deriving many of his ideas from Shaftesbury, Hutcheson here diverges from his predecessor by acknowledging the beauty of objects that copy or imitate originals. Furthermore, by breaking with Shaftesbury in this way, Hutcheson also opens the door for a consideration of the moral virtue and

aesthetic beauty of mechanical phenomena more generally. Rather than strictly adhering to the classical separation of liberal and mechanic sources of pleasure (in which liberal pleasures are general and sociable while mechanical pleasures are self-interested and particular) Hutcheson describes mechanical objects as inspiring a kind of pleasure that cannot be strictly reduced to self-interest, the evidence being that we feel it even when our “own Advantage is no way concerned” (45). Hutcheson’s account thus incorporates forms of pleasure that destabilize the traditional division between liberal and mechanic.

In *Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals* (1751), Hume shares Hutcheson’s primary assumption that human nature is innately sociable rather than governed by self-interest. The *Enquiry* opens by arguing that we must “renounce the theory, which accounts for every moral sentiment by the principle of self love” and acknowledge instead “that the interests of society are not [. . .] entirely indifferent to us” (37-8). Hume differs from Hutcheson in that he does not ground the sympathetic concern for others in a moral sense organ, but instead in an immediate reactivity to the principle of social utility. Sympathy is inspired by an instantly felt recognition of the utility of something designed for the greater common good. For Hume, the grounding of sympathetic pleasure in social utility also implies that machines and other artificially-constructed objects fall, as Hutcheson argued, within the purview of virtue and beauty. When recognized as useful for the common good, “a machine, a piece of furniture, a vestment, a house well contrived for use and conveniency, is so far beautiful, and is contemplated with pleasure and approbation” (10). In *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith rejects Hume’s principle of “virtue in utility” because “it is the same principle with that by which we approve of a

well-contrived machine” (327). Smith’s comment, though critical of Hume’s theory, nevertheless demonstrates that Hume’s moral system denies any absolute division between the sympathetic pleasure of observing humans performing virtuous acts, on the one hand, and the pleasure of observing socially-beneficial or aesthetically-pleasing technological artifacts, on the other.

Ultimately, Hume and Hutcheson each offer ways of thinking about the pleasure of observing machines that subtly re-envision the moral and aesthetic status of public exhibitions of mechanical wonders such as Cox’s museum. For both philosophers, the pleasure of observing an ingenious mechanism like an automaton is closely related to the pleasure of observing a virtuous act, and has less to do with “self-love” than a reaction to technology’s aesthetic beauty or public worth. According to this view, the overtly mechanical nature of Cox’s automata, as well as their overtly commercial status as luxurious commodities, are not necessarily incompatible with claims, like those in the *Descriptive Catalogue*, that Cox’s automata belong within the discourse of the liberal arts. These thinkers thus challenge the conventional civic humanist connection between private self-interest and the category of the mechanical, showing instead how machines and mechanical processes could also serve to promote liberal aesthetic and moral ideals. At the same time, in doing so, Hume and Hutcheson lay the ideological groundwork for the emergence of the man of feeling, who is defined at once by his mechanistic reactions and his virtuous sensibility.

Furthermore, while Hume and Hutcheson re-think moral-aesthetic value in ways that are more inclusive regarding machines and the mechanical, these thinkers are more often credited, along with their Scottish contemporaries, with helping re-conceive virtue

in ways that were more inclusive for women. On a number of occasions, Hume, in his *Essays*, ties the progress of politeness and civility in modern British society to the fact that “Both sexes meet in an easy and sociable manner; and the tempers of men, as well as their behaviour, refine apace” (271). Scottish sentimental philosophy helped introduce a new image of women as exemplars of virtuous sensibility whose capacity for sympathetic feeling men would do well to try to emulate, rather than as promoters of vicious effeminacy and sensual distraction. Yet these new approaches to the public benefit of women and to that of machines need not be considered as isolated phenomena. Returning to Castle’s work, she observes in “The Female Thermometer” (1987) that before the rise of sentimentalism, images and textual descriptions of women as resembling technological artifacts, particularly thermometers or “weatherglasses,” proliferated in Britain, and symbolized patriarchal anxieties surrounding the perceived instability, unconsciousness, and vicious “mercuriality” of feminine sensibility (3). However, in the later decades of the eighteenth-century, this connection between women and a dangerous form of automatic, machine-like emotional reactivity gradually loses force, a change Castle attributes to the “weakening of sexual polarities” facilitated by the rise of a “cult of feeling” (13). The “gender-flexing” man of feeling emerges out of this new cultural context in which men are allowed and even encouraged to exhibit traditionally feminine traits. However, the same Scottish thinkers that helped initiate changes in concepts of gender also encourage re-visiting the status of machines. In literature, this culminates in the emergence of men of feeling who exhibit the automatic, mechanical reactions once associated with mercurial feminine “thermometers” and yet come to represent ideals of masculine virtue.

As Barrell, Copley and R.W. Jones have argued, the discourse of civic humanism continued to dominate the vocabulary of literary and artistic criticism for many decades. It was not challenged directly, but instead gradually eroded from within.¹⁰ Hutcheson's inclusion of "relative beauty" – the beauty associated with copying – as a legitimate (if secondary) kind of aesthetic pleasure undermines the strict divisions upon which civic humanism relied. Sentimental fiction's ambiguous, sometimes schizophrenic, relationship to the mechanical, I argue, can be partly explained by sentimentalism's participation in the erosion of civic humanist values. The novels of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie still claim, at times, to be defenders of increasingly outdated civic ideals. But even as they invoke conventional criticisms of commerce, circulation between classes or the copying of nature, these novels undermine civic humanism through self-reflexive references to sentimental texts as mechanical copies, or to the parallels between signs of sensibility and printed characters, or through comparisons between men of feeling and machines. As with contemporary displays of the automaton, the man of feeling draws attention to the porous borders separating human identity and machines in eighteenth-century Britain. However, juxtaposing the man of feeling with the automaton also reveals how both figures challenge hegemonic civic humanist assumptions about the moral and aesthetic value of the mechanical.

¹⁰ See, for example, John Barrell's *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (1986), which argues that civic humanism "was not so much challenged as attenuated in the middle decades of the century" (1). Similarly Stephen Copley asserts in "The Fine Arts in the Eighteenth Century" (1992) that "the terms of this civic discourse are undermined from within as the period develops" (14). Jones traces a similar trajectory for civic humanism, but examines the specific ramifications for representations of femininity in *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1998).

Chapter 3 – Public/Health

Whereas all Writers and Reasoners have agreed, that there is a strict universal Resemblance between the natural and the political Body, can there be any thing more evident, than that the Health of both must be preserved, and the Diseases cured by the same Prescriptions?

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726.

Introduction: Physical Books and Books of "Physick"

In his enormously popular and influential medical treatise *The English Malady* (1733), George Cheyne declares in a moment of literary self-awareness that he has written his work in "a plain narrative stile, with the fewest terms of art possible" (363). As Roy Porter points out in his introduction to the text, Cheyne's "plain" style was generally effective and he was "perhaps the most popular English writer of practical medical works targeted at the 'general reader'" (ix). Interestingly, however, Cheyne specifies that he has adopted this accessible "narrative stile" to appeal to "readers" who have never before encountered "a *physical* book" (363). By "*physical* book" Cheyne is not referring, of course, to *The English Malady*'s status as a material, printed artifact. Instead, he uses the term in its common eighteenth-century usage to refer to a book of "Physick" or medicine. Cheyne, then, claims to have adjusted his writing to address a wider untrained public, unfamiliar with the specialized scientific terms and concepts used by the field of medicine, a field that in eighteenth-century Britain, as Porter notes in introducing Cheyne as well as in works such as *Health for Sale* (1989), was in the midst of unprecedented institutional and commercial expansion (*Health* 29).

In this thesis, I have been arguing that the sentimental novels of Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie are “physical books” of a different kind. These works consistently employ self-reflexive techniques that defamiliarize their own physicality in order to draw attention to the embodied aspects of both literary and sentimental experience. However, without stretching the meaning a great deal, sentimental novels could also be productively approached as “physical books” in Cheyne’s sense. As critics such as G.S. Rousseau, G.J. Barker-Benfield, John Mullan and Ann Van Sant have explored, sentimental fiction as a whole is heavily indebted to eighteenth-century books of “Physick,” including Cheyne’s *English Malady*, that gave a new centrality to the nerves and nervous sensibility. Novels featuring men of feeling, including those at the centre of this study – Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), Smollett’s *Humphry Clinker* (1771), and Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771) – draw on these medical theories in their articulation of a new ideal of sympathetic masculinity whose benevolent feelings arise out of particularly sensitive nervous reactions. These novels also engage with “physick” through their consistent pre-occupations with medical themes including health, disease, madness, nerves, quack doctors, physiognomy, and the rising popularity of spa towns.

This chapter builds on these types of interconnections in order to consider the relationship between sentimentalism and the realms of health and medicine. Along these lines, what follows could be framed as an exploration of the ways in which two seemingly distinct meanings of the term “physical book” – one referring to books about medicine and/or health and the other referring, as I do throughout this dissertation, to

books that are self-consciously physical objects – are, in fact, deeply interrelated. As we have seen thus far, analyzing the intersection of sentiment and narrative self-reflexivity offers some useful insights into the relationship in eighteenth-century Britain between sensibility and language and between sensibility and the mechanical. And while I change the focus of analysis here away from language and technology to consider instead the relationship between sentimentalism and health, this chapter also builds on the arguments from these previous discussions. In particular, the chapter builds on assertions about somaticism and the simultaneous primacy and scepticism attributed to embodied experience from “Body/Language” and assertions about contemporary medical theories of nerves and nervous sensibility as well as about the relations between civic virtue and commercial modernity from “Feeling/Machines.”

As I argue, close attention to the way these two seemingly distinct senses of “physical book” converge in novels featuring men of feeling sheds light on important tensions within sentimental fiction’s investment in medical theories and debates. From one perspective, instances of narrative self-reflexivity in these works frequently strengthen sentimental fiction’s association with good health, both moral and physical, partly by supporting the genre’s concern with privileging and strengthening the body’s nervous sensibility. In these cases, sentimental narrative practices appear to respond to an emerging medical discourse surrounding the interdependence of virtuous sensibility and physical well-being. However, these same types of narrative practices can also be seen to consistently problematize the connection between good health and virtuous sensibility by (a) linking sentimental subjectivity to illness and disability, and (b) raising questions

about the field of medicine and its ability to understand and alleviate the sensitive body. The final section of this chapter addresses the tensions between these two seemingly competing strains by taking them together as yet more evidence of the culture of sensibility's somatic worldview. And I conclude by placing the rise of sentimental fiction in the context of parallel medical developments in eighteenth-century Britain, including the emergence of the nervous paradigm, the popular fascination with physiognomy, and the growth of spa towns as fashionable health resorts. Each of these is a product of early modern medicine that manifests itself in one or more of the novels in question. Representations of spa towns exhibit a Janus-faced relationship to health and medicine that suggestively mirrors sentimental fiction. From one perspective, the spa town is a cultural site closely associated with the promotion of healthy sensibilities, both physical and moral. From another, however, these spaces ostensibly devoted to health were aligned with the spread of illness among the British public, understood once again in both physiological and moral terms. Rather than mere inconsistencies, these parallels between the self-consciously "physical books" of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie and the rise of spa towns offer evidence that sentimental fiction's complex relationship to health and medicine is part of a larger pattern of somaticism within the culture of sensibility, a pattern that treats embodied forms and practices as integral to human nature and yet, at the same time, as invariably shrouded in layers of mediation and epistemological uncertainty.

Part I: "Sound Health" and Virtuous Sensibility

In order to account for how sentimentalism comes to be associated with the promotion of good health, both within these novels and within eighteenth-century British culture, it is important to begin by considering the concept of health in a broad sense.¹ As with so many issues in this era of porous disciplinary and epistemological boundaries, concerns about health tended to migrate between what we often think of as discrete fields such as medicine, moral philosophy, aesthetics, and politics. In aesthetic theory, for instance, the once hegemonic civic humanist tradition – a tradition that I have been arguing sentimentalism simultaneously incorporates and undermines – concerned itself with literature and the arts insofar as they could promote what J.G.A. Pocock and John Barrell have referred to as a “healthy” republic (Barrell 3). The primary means by which literary and artistic works could help maintain a healthy republic is by promoting the

¹ In this way, I frame the issue in a manner can be seen to both build on and diverge from Mary Poovey’s *Making A Social Body* (1995). In her work, Poovey traces the emergence in the nineteenth-century of the concept of a coherent, mass culture or “social body” to an earlier tension that emerges in the later decades of the eighteenth-century between the traditional notions of the “body politic” – made up of an elite sphere of “political subjects” including “Parliament” and “gentlemen” – and a new concept introduced by Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations* (1776) of “the great body of the people” – referring “not to the well-to-do but to the mass of labouring poor” (Poovey 7). Poovey thus ties the emergence of mass culture as an interconnected “social body” in the nineteenth-century to shifting ideas of the “public” in the later eighteenth-century, a concept that through social (and sentimental) theorists such as Smith and Hume was gradually widening in the late eighteenth-century to include parts of society once excluded. Most notably, however, Poovey also examines in essays such as, “Curing the Social Body in 1832,” and “Anatomical Realism and Social Investigation,” how the metaphor of the nation as a “body” mediates concepts of material human bodies bringing together the discourses of medical science and social theory. For instance, she draws attention to how physician turned social reformer John Phillips Kay’s self-documented “experience – and failure – as a medical man led him to recast physiological disorders into more general social political terms” and also led to his observation that there is an “inseparable connection between the mental and moral condition of the people and their physical well-being” (57). While I follow Poovey in examining the connections between moral, social and physical health, I present evidence to suggest that these domains intersected quite deeply and complexly in the cultural debates of the eighteenth-century as well.

cause of virtue, a concept closely aligned and virtually synonymous with a sociable concern for the public good over private self-interest. And while the culture of sensibility challenged many aspects of civic humanist aesthetics – including, as I asserted in the previous chapter, the strict divisions separating the categories liberal and mechanical – it also continued to valorize the promotion of virtue as a primary focus of literature and the arts.

In line with this view, the rise of sentimentalism in literature coincides with a emerging belief that the still relatively new genre of the novel has the potential to function primarily as a didactic medium that might, in fact, surpass more traditional forms such as sermons and histories in its capacity to promote virtue among the public. In *The Rambler* no. 4, Samuel Johnson notes that novels are written “chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle” and as such they function primarily as “lectures of conduct” (1: 29). Johnson goes on to argue that these “fictions” “may perhaps be made of greater use than the solemnities of professed morality, and convey the knowledge of vice and virtue with more efficacy than axioms and idioms” (1: 31). Likewise, in *Elements of Criticism*, Lord Kames argues that the main purpose of fiction is to provide instructive examples upon which we can exercise our sympathetic feelings and direct them toward virtue. Interestingly, he equates exercising virtuous feeling with physical exercise: “every exercise of virtue, internal and external, leads to habit; for a disposition or propensity of the mind, like a limb of the body, becomes stronger by exercise” (1: 75). Furthermore, by providing instructive examples, fiction supplements and even surpasses historical writing in its capacity to encourage strong, healthy sentimental habits. Because examples of

virtue, when “confined to real events,” are “not so frequent,” fiction offers “examples to improve us in virtue” that “may be multiplied without end” (1: 126-27). Kames positions novels within a discourse of health by figuring them as moral “exercises” that resemble physical exercises designed strengthen bodies. However, he also shares with Johnson and other contemporaries a belief that novels are well suited to promote the cause of virtue and, by extension, promote the moral and political health of the wider public sphere. As Kames concludes, fiction “has the command of our sympathy for the good of others” (1: 126) and, as a result, “such amusement [. . .] improves society” (1: 127).

These claims, admittedly, should be placed in their proper context. Despite Kames’ and Johnson’s arguments regarding the unique didactic potential of fiction, histories and sermons remained valuable and popular sources of instruction throughout the period. As well, arguments for the moral-didactic potential of novels were not uncontested, and contended with contemporary anxieties that this new genre dangerously mixed virtue and vice in ways that undermined its instructive potential. Some of these tensions will be discussed in the following chapter in relation to attempts to discipline women’s reading habits. For now I’d like to point out that critics themselves seemed to be torn over this issue. While Johnson praises novels as excellent vehicles for “conveying knowledge of vice and virtue” he expresses anxiety elsewhere in *The Rambler* no. 4 that some novels “so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages, that [. . .] we lose the abhorrence of their faults, because they do not hinder our pleasure, or perhaps, regard them with some kindness, for being united with so much merit” (1: 33).

Rather than viewing novels purely as “lectures of conduct,” Johnson voices contemporary doubts whether these fictional narratives necessarily provide clear moral instruction.

Nevertheless, it is within this context – in which the arts are seen to encourage a healthy public sphere by promoting virtue, and, secondly, defence of the novel increasingly revolves around its ability to support this aim – that the genre of sentimental fiction emerges. By presenting episodic narratives centring around benevolent protagonists that model sympathetic human nature, the sentimental novels at the centre of this study certainly appear squarely positioned within this emerging understanding of fiction as a didactic medium that seeks primarily to promote “the knowledge of vice and virtue.” Janet Todd remarks that “most sentimental novels with heroes insist on their instructional nature” (91). Sterne’s novels, despite their indulgences in sensuality and bawdy humour, were generally embraced at the time as didactic sentimental texts:

later works keep up the insistence on instruction through sentiments [. . .]. The Advertisement to Sterne’s complete works in 1780 declared that the more they were read the more benevolence would be fostered in society. (Todd 91)

Indeed, Thomas Jefferson asserted that Sterne’s writings were “the best course of morality that ever was written” (Howes, 216). The moral didacticism of *The Man of Feeling* is even more prevalent, to the extent that it is difficult for modern critics to see beyond it. John Dwyer observes of Mackenzie’s work that “the novel’s characterizations are so stereotypically black or white that the reader is constantly reminded of the moral, rather than mimetic, purpose of the work” (147). Through sentimental fiction’s widely

recognized moral didacticism and devotion to the promotion of virtuous sympathetic feeling this genre became aligned with the moral health of the literary public sphere.

By privileging virtue and promoting a healthy concern for the public good, sentimentalism continues to support certain key civic humanist principles. However, sentimentalism also significantly departs from civic humanism by aligning virtue much more closely with the body and embodied sensibility. Within civic humanism, the realm of the body and physical sensation tends to be associated with self-interest and moral corruption, while authors like Shaftesbury and Pope characterized the more abstract, intellectual realm of reason as the house of virtue. By contrast, men of feeling constitute ideals of virtuous, benevolent human nature within the culture of sensibility. Yet the sentimental modes of knowledge and communication that form the basis of the man of feeling's morally virtuous sensibility tend to circulate through embodied means. This is particularly evident in the novels at the centre of this study, which consistently depict virtuous sympathetic feeling as rooted in the body's nerves and senses.

Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, such as Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith, retain the valorisation of sociable virtue in their new sympathy-centred models of benevolent human nature, but also ground moral value in what Smith in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) refers to as the realm of "immediate sense and feeling" (320). In doing so, these thinkers, to paraphrase from Robert Jones' analysis of aesthetics, morality and sexuality in the period, helped bring the bodily sensation and pleasure "within the orbit of virtue" (Jones 23). And, as many critics have argued, by drawing on these new sympathy-centred models of benevolent human nature, novels featuring men of feeling do the same (Todd

98, Ellison 12, Mullan 144, Barker-Benfield 132). However, these sentimental novels not only respond to new concepts of benevolent and sympathetic human nature put forward by Scottish moralists, but also to new concepts about the relationship between moral virtue and physical health in medical discourse. The work of “physical” writers such as Cheyne, Whytt, Haller, Boerhaave, and Hartley offered theories that had important implications for popular understandings of how the health of the body, and particularly the state of the body’s nerves, fundamentally shapes a person’s capacity for virtuous feeling. In fact, as Barker-Benfield asserts, Scottish moral philosophy was itself heavily influenced by Edinburgh physicians Robert Whytt and William Cullen, whose ideas circulated among philosophers and novelists (7). In particular, he states “Smith’s absorption of the ideas of Cullen and Whytt in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was in turn propagated by the best-selling novels of Henry Mackenzie” (15). As a result of this circulation between medicine, literature, and moral-psychological theory, in sentimental writing concerns about moral virtue and the public good began to revolve less around rational ideals and gravitate increasingly toward healthy bodies and healthy nerves.

Once again, Cheyne is a useful reference point, as he opens *The English Malady* by asserting

A person of sound health, of strong spirits, and firm fibres, may be able to combat, struggle with, and nobly to bear and even brave the misfortunes, pains, and miseries of this mortal life, when the same person, broken and dispirited by weakness of nerves, vapours, melancholy, or age, shall become dejected,

oppress'd, peevish, and sunk even below the weakness of a greensickness
maid, or a child. (2)

Cheyne asserts that “sound health” allows a person to act “nobly” and be “brave.” Yet the same person when suffering from poor health – perhaps due to “weakness of the nerves” – invariably becomes “dejected” and loses that noble, virtuous capacity for courage and stoicism. Physical health is thus a necessary foundation to virtuous behaviour. Cheyne adds that, for the ill, “to expect fortitude, patience, tranquility, and resignation from the most heroic of the children of men, under such circumstances” is “absurd” (2). Even among humanity’s most “heroic,” their ability to exhibit virtuous characteristics “depends much upon the degrees of the distemper, and the original frame and make of the body, even more than can be readily imagin’d” (2).

Cheyne’s thoughts on the interdependence of mind, body, and moral sensibility echoed widely within the period. Decades after Cheyne’s *English Malady* was first published, Vicesimus Knox would write that “Cheyney” helped shed light on the singular importance of health as a necessary condition for virtuous thought (Knox 2: 78).² The sentimental writing of Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie also echo Cheyne, first by tethering virtue to the physical realm and, secondly, by asserting the mutually dependent relationship between mental and physical well-being. Sterne’s novels frequently suggest,

² See his essay “On the Effects of Intemperate Study on the Health, and on the Duty of Paying Regard to the Preservation of Health” from the second volume of *Essays Moral and Literary* (1782). Some of Knox’s arguments can be usefully compared to the spa literature discussed later in this chapter, including Goulding’s *An Essay Against Too Much Reading* (1728) and an invocation titled “Oh Health!,” that opens a tour guide to the spa town of Cheltenham (1781) in which “Health” is described as the “best companion” of “virtue” (2). These references point to the influence of writers like Cheyne, who argued that the disposition of the mind to feelings of virtue depends, first and foremost, on the good physical health of the body in which the mind is housed.

as Cheyne does, that the dispositions of the mind are affected by the body (and vice versa). In *Tristram Shandy*, for instance, Tristram weighs in on contemporary philosophical debates about mind/body dualism and asserts “a Man’s body and his mind, with the utmost reverence to both I speak it, are exactly like a jerkin, and a jerkin’s lining;---rumple the one--- you rumple the other” (132). Tristram then argues that many ancient thinkers assumed all their “jerkens” and “linings” were separate, so the body could be ‘rumpled’ without affecting the mind. However, the impact of Tristram’s own health problems on his life and opinions serves as irrefutable proof that body and mind are inseparable. Tristram laments to fate, “how could you slash my jerkin as you did?---- how did you know, but you would cut my lining too?” (132-3). This sentiment is echoed by Matthew Bramble who, in a less ambitiously metaphorical passage, describes himself in a manner that supports Tristram’s belief that mental and physical health mutually affect one another: “I find my spirits and my health affect each other reciprocally” (158).

What comments like those by Tristram and Matthew Bramble ultimately suggest is that sentimental writing, while it maintains a civic humanist faith in the importance of virtue for the health of society, also breaks with civic humanist principles by grounding virtue in the body. As a result, a person’s capacity for virtuous feeling, as writers like Cheyne asserted, depended more on the state of one’s physical health “than can be readily imagin’d” (2). Moreover, this meant that the state of British society’s moral and political health was increasingly viewed as intimately intertwined with the physical health of its citizens. David Weed has asserted a similar point in his analysis of *Humphry Clinker*, which he maintains is predicated on an interconnectedness of physical, moral,

and national health: “the connection between an individual’s physical health and moral well-being [. . .] also correlates to the health of the nation’s social body, which, in the novel’s view, is diseased and in need of a cure” (615). However, Smollett’s is not the only text to explore these interrelations. By grounding sympathetic feeling in embodied sensibility, the sentimental novels of Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie each reflect a growing belief in eighteenth-century British culture that a healthy, virtuous public sphere and healthy, virtuous physical bodies are interdependent phenomena.

Sentimental fiction therefore aligns itself with the spread of good health on a number of intersecting fronts. As fictional narratives devoted to moral instruction, these texts promote the cause of virtue, which, according to the aesthetic principles of the period, aligned them with the defence of a healthy (re)public. As well, as narratives that also attend to the embodied characteristics of virtuous feeling, these texts align themselves with good health in another way by incorporating insights from medical writers regarding the interdependence of virtue and physical well-being. The specific novels at the centre of this study – *Humphry Clinker*, *Tristram Shandy*, *A Sentimental Journey*, and *The Man of Feeling* – incorporate these two senses of health (as both an ethical and physiological state) by depicting men of feeling that model the paradigmatic virtuous physiological reaction to sympathetic scenes, either by shedding tears, blushing, expressing joy or sorrow through gesture, casting significant looks, or reflecting on the pleasurable effects of benevolence on their nervous bodies.

Healthy Fiction and Corporeal Defamiliarization

As this work has argued, the embodied turn in sentimental novels – and particularly in those of Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie – can not only be seen at work in the plot and characters of these texts, but also in their self-reflexive narrative forms. Practices such as typographical manipulations and printerly metaphors, authorial and narratorial intrusions, incorporation of textual fragments, and multiple references to torn out chapters, etched inscriptions, tear-blotted pages, are part of a pattern of what I have called *corporeal defamiliarization* that draws attention to the materiality of texts and exploits the potential analogies between printed books and sentimental bodies. In doing so, these narrative practices help fold together the explicit moral didacticism of sentimental novels with a self-awareness of these didactic works as material objects capable of having an embodied impact on the sensibilities. Narrative self-reflexivity supports the tendency within sentimental writing to bring bodily pleasure “within the orbit of virtue” by grounding the virtuous sociable pleasure of sympathetic feeling in embodied sensibility. As a result, the embodied orientation of sentimental self-reflexivity could be viewed within the context of this new understanding of the interplay between physical, moral, and public health. These novels employ textual practices that encourage the spread of virtue, and hence help them promote the health of the British public, by awakening and strengthening the audience’s awareness of the embodied, sensual origins of sympathetic feeling.

Occasionally, self-reflexive moments align sentimental fiction with the spread of health more explicitly. Sterne’s writing, in particular, contains explicit references to the

potential medicinal and therapeutic effects of literary works that are worth close analysis. First, in an amusing and bawdy fragmentary digression in *Tristram Shandy*, Parson Yorick displays an acute awareness of the chemical properties involved in the printing process and the effects of these properties on physical wounds. Yorick's expert knowledge arises when, sitting at a table with a group of local intellectuals, a rival of Yorick's named Phutatorius has a very hot chestnut fall into the crotch of his pants.³ As Phutatorius struggles with his burning physical pain, the other members of the intellectual circle debate how best to relieve it. One member, Eugenius, suggests applying fresh printer's paper to the wound. However, Yorick counters that paper is merely a vehicle for the ink, and only holds healing powers when both ink and paper are combined by passing through the printing press. He explains,

if the type is a very small one [. . .] the sanative particles, which come into contact in this form, have the advantage of being spread so infinitely thin and with such mathematical equality (fresh paragraphs and large capitals excepted) as no art or management of the spatula can come up to. (268)

Phutatorius, desperate for relief, replies, "It falls out very luckily [. . .] that the second edition of my treatise *de Concubinis retinendis*, is at this instant in the press" (268).

Someone is then sent to fetch a freshly printed chapter of Phutatorius' own book so that it

³ Melvyn and Joan New's encyclopedic "Florida Edition" of *Tristram Shandy* addresses the curious names of Yorick's companions. "Phutatorius" is a bawdy Latin pun from the Latin "fututor" meaning "copulator" (3: 237). Meanwhile, "The name Eugenius was traditionally applied as a compliment in the eighteenth century" (3: 71). New's notes draw attention to a passage from *Spectator* 177 that describes this name as associated with a benevolence that resembles men of feeling: "*Eugenius* is a Man of an Universal Good-Nature, and Generous beyond the Extent of his fortune" (3: 71). While no real life equivalent is suggested for Phutatorius, Eugenius is widely believed to be a tribute to Sterne's friend John Hall-Stevenson.

can be applied to relieve his injury. As with much of Sterne's writing, in this scene it is hard (if not impossible) to disentangle the layers of play, misdirection, and satire from any coherent and singular underlying message. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the passage playfully denaturalizes material books as chemical combinations of ink and paper while attributing to texts healing properties. As well, it is importantly Yorick, a man of feeling, who displays the most profound expertise regarding how books can heal wounded bodies. Further, it is Yorick's self-awareness of books as physical objects that allows him to recognize the healing potential in texts.

The specific details of Yorick's assertion are also worth analyzing. He argues first, that it is not the properties of the paper that are essential, but the reaction between paper and ink. Moreover, the ideal page for healing wounds would be one whose "type is a very small one" because this leads to a thin, even spread of ink across the page. Interestingly, Yorick's own words add a new layer to the significance of how his death is represented in *Tristram Shandy*. Tristram famously commemorates Yorick's death with a black page. It is a gesture that combines sentiment and black humour with a self-referential print novelty. However, according to Yorick's own assertions, a completely black printed page, by spreading the ink completely evenly, without blank spaces caused by "fresh paragraphs" or "large capitals," would also have the greatest healing power. In this light, the scene with Phutatorius not only highlights the material properties of books in general, but also reflects back particularly on the significance of an earlier scene from *Tristram Shandy* itself. While all printed books have physical properties that can help

heal wounds, the presence of the black page offers proof that *Tristram Shandy* does so potentially better than most.

Tristram Shandy also refers to its own particular capacity to heal the body in another passage not long after the chestnut emergency. In a characteristic narratorial intrusion, Tristram concludes Volume IV by stating:

And now that you have gotten to the end of these four volumes ---- the thing I have to *ask* is, how you feel your heads? my own akes dismally --- as for your healths, I know they are much better ---- True *Shandeism*, think what you will against it, opens the heart and lungs, and like all those affections which partake of its nature, it forces the blood and other vital fluids of the body to run freely thro' its channels, and makes the wheel of life run cheerfully around. (278)

This passage sheds light on a number of connections between Sterne, sentiment and health. Its disruption of the narrative flow is doubled by its reflection on the impact of Sterne's "Shandean" style of narration, a style that mixes sentimental scenes (scenes that contemporaries like Knox lauded as evidence of Sterne's genius for "shaking the nerves" [*Essays* II.251]) with layers of playful self-irony. Interestingly, Tristram describes the effect of the Shandean spirit of writing as giving people headaches, while improving their "healths." Shandeism thus appears to concern itself more with physical health than with the abstract, intellectual realm of the mind. Furthermore, Tristram maintains that this narrative technique has a primarily embodied impact. Shandeism "opens the heart and lungs" and promotes a healthy circulation of blood and other fluids throughout the body.

Notably, the passage also continues a pattern within sentimental fiction of invoking aspects of Augustan satire to different ideological and moral-aesthetic ends. In *Peri Bathous* (1727), Pope humorously describes poetry in embodied, corporeal terms and as having a similar effect to Shandeism on physical health. According to Pope's satirical theory, poetry, especially bad poetry, originates from physical illness:

Poetry is a *natural* or *morbid Secretion from the Brain*. As I would not suddenly stop a Cold in the Head, or dry up my Neighbor's Issue, I would as little hinder him from necessary Writing. It may be affirm'd with great truth, that there is hardly any human Creature past Childhood, but at one time or other has had some Poetical Evacuation, and no question was much the better for it in his Health. (90)

Pope thus associates literary production with health and aligns literature with a healthy flow of vital bodily fluids. However, he does so in the context of a bathetic literary theory in which traditionally high subject matter – poetry – is treated as low and debased by describing poems as the mere evacuations of the body rather than products of intellectual genius. By contrast, Sterne's comments, though also tinged with satire, play on the commonly held view in the culture of feeling that the sensual body is a potential source of benevolent and pleasurable feeling rather than low and debased. Sterne draws on the narrative techniques of earlier writers who supported neoclassical views regarding the body as a site of vicious self-interest and corruption. Yet, by aligning the body with health and benevolent sympathy, he deploys these techniques in ways that resist and diverge from their views.

In doing so, as with the preceding scene involving freshly-printed manuscripts and Phutatorius' burned nether regions, *Tristram Shandy* playfully invokes a connection that runs throughout sentimental novels: namely, that texts, and particularly sentimental texts, have the potential to improve health. Sterne's account of the impact of Shandeism could be extended to apply to the other texts in this study. Each work employs techniques of narrative defamiliarization in conjunction with sentimental scenes that target the body's sensibilities and that seek to "shake the nerves" by inspiring sympathetic reactions. The target of this narrative method is not the rational mind – indeed, Sterne suggests the mind could likely be hurt and confounded by these practices – but the more centrally-important physical "healths" of the reading public. By drawing attention to the embodied pleasures of sympathetic and benevolent feeling, these novels further the morally-didactic thrust of sentimental writing to promote the cause of virtue. At the same time, these texts have a physiological impact on readers by dilating the nerves and improving circulation, thus helping "the wheel of life run cheerfully around." Ultimately, they encourage the development of a healthy society populated by sociable, benevolent readers with nervous sensibilities awakened and attuned to the pleasures of public virtue.

Part II: Sentimentalism and "The Spectre of Illness"

While the "narrative stile" of these texts consistently intersects with the culture of sensibility's medically-inspired tendency to align health and virtue, Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie also engage with health in ways that problematize this relationship by, on the one hand, aligning men of feeling – whether characters or authors – with disease,

distempers, and decay and, on the other, by undermining the authority and certainty of the medical knowledge that underpins sentimentalism through satires of quacks and hacks. Despite the fact that sentimental literature offers healthy doses of sympathetic scenes which activate and strengthen the sensibilities, men who possess heightened sensibilities within sentimental novels are themselves not typically pinnacles of robustness or vigour.⁴ By contrast, the identities of men of feeling such as Tristram, Uncle Toby, Parson Yorick, Harley, and Matthew Bramble are inseparable from the fact that they are consistently depicted as hypochondriacal, consumptive, wounded, vulnerable, weak or otherwise in degraded physical condition.

Self-referential practices in sentimental fiction tend to support this connection between men of feeling and degraded health. To return briefly to *Tristram Shandy*, Tristram's definition of "Shandeism" certainly appears to draw clear connections between Sterne's narrative style and a focus on improving health. However, Tristram almost immediately follows up his intrusive digression by concluding volume IV with one of many references to his own failing constitution. He writes "I take my leave of you till this time twelve-month [. . .] (unless this vile cough kills me in the mean time)" (278). He mentions this consumptive "vile cough" again in a later intrusion at the beginning of Volume VII. In this scene, Tristram's failing health leads Death to knock on his door. As Death grabs Tristram by the throat, Tristram exclaims to Eugenius "I have forty volumes

⁴ Todd remarks on this in *Sensibility: An Introduction* (98) as does Mullan, who notes that in sentimental writing "a privileged delicacy or refinement can forbode illness" (16). Clark Lawlor, meanwhile, has examined the close connection between sentimental subjectivity, nervous diseases and illness as contributing to rise of consumption as the archetypical "Romantic disease" in *Consumption and Literature* (2006). He asserts "Smollett, and more so Sterne, announce their superior powers of thought and feeling through their consumptive illness" (99), an observation that supports my later analysis of sentiment and authorship.

to write, and forty things to say and do [. . .]. Had I not better, Eugenius, fly for my life?" (396). Tristram thus runs away from Death, according to his own reasoning, largely so he might finish the book we are reading.

The Man of Feeling offers a similar example to that from *Tristram Shandy* of a narrative intrusion which draws attention to a sentimental protagonist's poor health. Toward the end of the text, not long after Harley falls into a melancholic depression after believing Miss Walton has married, the fictional editor of *The Man of Feeling* interrupts to draw attention regretfully to a point where the manuscript loses coherence. After a series of asterisks, the editor intrudes to comment, in brackets,

At this place had the greatest depredations of the curate begun. There were so very few connected passages of the subsequent passages remaining, that even the partiality of an editor could not offer them to the public. (134)

The editorial intrusion thus breaks the narrative flow in order to focus on the degraded physical state of the manuscript from which the text originates, but also on that of the text's main character. The editor notes that, "from the mutilated passages" that eluded the curate's gun barrel, it becomes clear that Miss Walton did not marry Sir Harry Benson, as Harley assumed, but that "Harley had not profited on the occasion by making any declaration of his own passion" because "the state of his health for some part of this period, appears to have been such as to forbid any thoughts of that kind" (135). Harley's sympathetic tendencies leads him to selflessly help a sick friend, and while his friend recovers, Harley catches an "infectious" fever and from then on his "health was manifestly on the decline" (135). As with Tristram's interruption, the editorial

intrusiveness in *The Man of Feeling* employs textual practices which not only reflect back on the text as a physical object, but also problematize the connection between sentimentalism and good health by aligning sentimental subjectivity with physical weakness and a potentially fatal susceptibility to fevers, infections and disease.

Significantly, Tristram and Harley are not merely men of feeling, but also writers. Mackenzie's protagonist is an amateur poet who scribbles down poetic phrases he uncovers in his travels (101) and, at one point, writes a pastoral poem about unrequited love that he wraps around the handle of a neighbor's tea-kettle (126). Sterne, meanwhile, often adopted the persona of Tristram Shandy (as well as Parson Yorick) in correspondence and in public appearances, blurring the lines between author, narrator and protagonist. However, in doing so, Sterne fashioned an image of himself as, like Tristram, an ailing, decaying, disabled author with extraordinary sensibility. John Mullan explores in *Sentiment and Sociability* how this image of literary authors was not an anomaly as medical symptoms became markers of legitimate authorship after the rise of sentimentalism. Placing Sterne alongside two other canonical sentimental writers – fellow novelist Samuel Richardson and philosopher David Hume – Mullan argues that each displayed “various dispositions to melancholy, hypochondria, or ‘spleen’” (17). He writes of Hume, Sterne, and Richardson, that “all three were to acknowledge (as fashion seemed to dictate) the private susceptibilities which were the price of their capacity for feeling” (17). As their writing suggests, “the sensitive and penetrating writer was held to be more at risk than most” and under a constant “spectre of illness” (17).

Alongside Sterne, Hume and Richardson, Mullan could quite easily have included Tobias Smollett, whose public reputation mirrored that of his hypochondriacal protagonist Matthew Bramble. In particular, in *Travels through France and Italy* (1766), a predecessor to Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, Smollett's published letters resemble those of Bramble by merging a description of the author's travels with accounts of the fluctuations in his medical symptoms and ailments. While providing an account of Nice in Letter 24, Smollett writes "Ever since my arrival [. . .] I have had a scorbutical eruption on my hand, which diminishes and increases according to the state of my health" (160). Smollett attributes this "eruption" to the fact that "the atmosphere" at Nice "is undoubtedly impregnated with sea-salt," and he recalls a previous visit to the town in which, due to Nice's salty air, "my gums [. . .] began to swell, and grow painful [. . .] and I was seized with violent pains in the joints of my knees" (160). Aileen Douglas notes in *Uneasy Sensations* (1995) that the primary reason Smollett undertakes his travels is, like Bramble, "in search of health" (31). And, also like Bramble, "bodily discomfort and unease are major themes" that run through Smollett's epistolary travel writing (31). Smollett thus fits the mould examined by Mullan of the sentimental author whose sensitivity is aligned with being "more at risk than most" to distempers, disorders, and other "eruptions" of bad health.

Sterne, in fact, mocks this tendency in Smollett's *Travels* in his *A Sentimental Journey* and refers to Smollett jokingly as "Smelfungus":

The learned SMELFUNGUS travelled from Boulogne to Paris—from Paris to Rome—and so on—but he set out with the spleen and jaundice, and every object

he pass'd by was discoloured or distorted—He wrote an account of them, but 'twas nothing but the account of his miserable feelings (29).

Later, Sterne adds, “I’ll tell it, cried Smelfungus, to the world. You had better tell it, I said, to your physician” (29). Douglas draws on Sterne’s notorious satire of Smollett to note that it is possible to see Smollett’s *Travels* as “the fruit of a diseased body, concerned only with itself. Smollett may travel through France and Italy, but his true subject is his own, miserable body” (32). Equally noteworthy, in this case, Sterne appears to distance Yorick’s “sentimental” travel writing from a mere account of “miserable feelings,” but as Mullan’s analysis suggests, the line between writer of sensibility and self-indulgent medical case study is not particularly clear. Moreover, as we see throughout *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne’s writing often indulges in the same tendencies for which he satirizes Smollett. In the end, as with the men of extraordinary tenderness and sensitivity they describe in their sentimental plots, these authors self-consciously fashioned themselves as fashionably incapacitated by the same delicate sensibilities that helped them produce sentimental literature.

Hacks and Quacks

These insights add new layers of significance to the densely self-referential scene in *Humphry Clinker* in which Bramble’s nephew Jerry Melford is invited by his friend Dick Ivy to dine at Smollett’s own house with a group of hack writers. Many of these hacks or “Grubs” have the appearance of suffering under various mental and physical disabilities, which invariably turn out to be affectations. As Jerry notes,

one of them wore spectacles at dinner, and another, his hat flapped; though (as Ivy told me) the first was noted for having a seaman's eye, when a bailiff was in the wind; and the other was never known to labour under any weakness or defect of vision, except about five years ago, when he was complimented with a couple of black eyes. (125)

Jery also points out “a third” hack who “wore a laced stocking” and “made use of crutches” even though “no man could leap over a stick with more agility (125). We are eventually introduced as well to a hack who affects madness and another who affects stuttering. Smollett's depiction of “grub” authors provides more examples of how the culture of feeling gave rise to an image of authors as peculiarly susceptible to disease, nervous disorders and physical decay. These hacks are satirized for their vain and self-interested attempts to capitalize on the fashionable connection between authorship and degraded health within the culture of sensibility. Ironically, *Humphry Clinker* satirizes hacks for public affectations of disability that Smollett himself, along with Sterne, Richardson, Hume and other respectable authors also practiced. This passage also illustrates how, throughout *Humphry Clinker*, Smollett depicts the popular concern for medicine and health – the same realms that helped give rise to culture of sensibility – as problematically intertwined with modern vices of fashion and self-interest. As a result, while sentimental fiction typically treats bodily surfaces as text-like sources of embodied sentimental signifiers, the scene also demonstrates how these same texts also troublingly

reveal that the signs and symptoms of the body are potentially subject to deceit and artifice.⁵

As markers of the anxieties surrounding the potential for medical symptoms to be corrupted and obscured by the forces of fashion and self-love, Smollett's depiction of deceitfully debilitated hacks parallels his satires of quacks, including "Dr. L----N," a deluded and self-absorbed spa doctor, who will be dealt with at greater length in the final section of this chapter. While sentimental texts like *Humphry Clinker* depicts outward medical symptoms as less than trustworthy, they also do not restrain from satirizing the doctors and medical authorities whose professions involved diagnosing and treating these symptoms. Indeed, Smollett and Sterne both satirize quack doctors, a character type that was a stock feature of eighteenth-century literature and reflected widespread concern about the state of medicine in the period. In *Health for Sale*, Roy Porter examines the quack as a product of the two intersecting cultural developments in eighteenth-century Britain: an unprecedented expansion of the field of medicine, and the rise of commercial modernity. Though resistant to essentializing the category, Porter loosely defines quacks as "frontiersmen" of the "sick-trade" who generally operated "at the hard commercial end

⁵ The impulse to affect disorders and disabilities is not limited to aspiring authors in *Humphry Clinker*. In fact, the scene at Smollett's house closely resembles a separate incident in the spa town of Harrogate when Matthew Bramble and his entourage encounter a Scottish advocate named Micklewhimmen who Tabitha becomes briefly enamoured with. Micklewhimmen claims to have lost the use of his limbs, but Bramble suspects him partly because the advocate is so adept at using his medical condition to manipulate the sympathy of those around him (particularly the women). Bramble comments, "I could not help thinking this lawyer was not such an invalid as he pretended to be" (177). Bramble's suspicions are later confirmed when a kitchen fire raises an alarm in the inn and the "invalid" races out of the building in a panic, but also in perfect health. The episode thus offers another social critique of the fact that poor health had become fashionable in eighteenth-century Britain and suggests that, as a result of this fashion, those governed by self-interest could be tempted to affect medical symptoms and physical disabilities.

of medicine” (vii). As Porter later sums up, “quackery was the capitalist mode of production in its medical face” (43). However, while respectable doctors would never acknowledge their own resemblances to quacks, a label always reserved for “others,” the troubling fact about quacks in the eighteenth-century was that there was little to distinguish them from legitimate medical authorities. In eighteenth-century medicine, “a free market [. . .] became the norm, in which [. . .] even regular practitioners (those who had completed formal apprenticeship or a university education) often found themselves competing for custom with their colleagues” (29). Within this competitive environment, “regular practitioners” often resorted to quackish practices – self-advertisement, selling nostrums, etc. – and also frequently labelled their legitimate competitors as quacks. As a result, quack medicine could appear to be the norm in British medicine rather than a fringe practice.

Textual representations of the figure of the quack respond to widespread concern in the period that health and medicine were increasingly vulnerable to corruption by, among other things, the forces of commercial self-interest. Mandeville satirizes medicine in this vein when he writes in *The Fable of the Bees* (1714),

Physicians valu’d Fame and Wealth
 Above the drooping Patient’s Health,
 Or their own Skill: The greatest part
 Study’d, instead of Rules of Art. (25)

It is an interesting passage given the fact that Mandeville was himself a physician, but also fits well with Porter’s observations that quackery was frequently bemoaned by

doctors themselves, including those guilty of quackish practices. Henry Fielding expresses similar concerns when he writes in *The Author's Farce* (1730),

Betwixt the quack and highwayman
What difference can there be?
Though this with pistol, that with pen,
Both kill you for a fee. (62)

The quack doctor permeates eighteenth-century literature and was a familiar target for satire. Contrary to Enlightenment master narratives of scientific progress, these excerpts from Mandeville and Fielding suggest that early modern medicine had actually regressed and the spread of commercial self-interest endangered the health of the nation.

In *Tristram Shandy*, the figure of the quack takes the form of Dr. Slop, a doctor working in the burgeoning field of obstetrics whom Walter Shandy insists on bringing into his home to take the place of the reliable midwife as the primary interventionist in the birth of Tristram. Dr. Slop brings with him new tools, techniques and ideas associated with modern medicine – he brings his “forceps,” “critchets,” “squirts” and all other “instruments of salvation” in his handbag (89) – but he largely serves as evidence that perceived advancements in knowledge are sometimes in actuality signs of regression.⁶ Significantly, Slop also serves as a source of some of the novel’s more notable moments of typographic play and corporeal defamiliarization. As he is first introduced, Slop crosses himself and the cross appears in the book (86). It is one of numerous examples of

⁶ For a useful discussion of Sterne’s use and abuse of medicine and obstetrics through Dr. Slop see Hawley’s “The Anatomy of Tristram Shandy” in *Literature and Medicine during the Eighteenth Century* (1993). As well see, A.H. Cash’s “The Birth of Tristram Shandy” from *Studies in the Eighteenth Century* (1968) and Erickson’s *Mother Midnight: Birth, Sex, and Fate in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne) (1986).

physical gestures that are represented within the text as printed signs or symbols.

More memorably, perhaps, Slop is an integral part of two conversations in which manipulations of typography and attention to the corporeal intersect as references to body parts are replaced by asterisks. As Walter and Uncle Toby debate why Walter's wife does not want Dr. Slop present at the birth, Toby speculates, in his naïve way, that "My sister, I dare say [. . .] does not care to let a man come so near her *****" (81). In a later scene, when Slop discusses his forceps, this "man-midwife" expresses the dangers of mistaking hips and heads: "Sir, if the hip is mistaken for the head,--there is a possibility (if it is a boy) that the forceps *****" (153). As with Sterne's earlier digressions on books and health, there is a good deal of room to interpret the significance of these manoeuvres. For now I only wish to note that both these scenes merge typographical play with references to medical interventions on the body. Slop's intrusive incompetence, particularly when compared with the novel's much more sympathetic treatment of the traditional midwife, undermines the authority and reliability of modern medical professionals. Considered alongside the hermeneutic ambiguities surrounding the names of body parts introduced by Sterne's typographical play, the quackishness of Slop analogously foregrounds gaps in modern medicine and its attempts to access and improve the body.

Many critics have explored the indebtedness of sentimental fiction to developments in the field of medicine. In the same vein, I have argued that new medical theories of nerves, sensation, and physiology undeniably mediated eighteenth-century literary representations of sympathetic feeling. Curiously, however, through

representations of deluded quacks and deceitfully debilitated hacks, the same novels that draw so heavily on these developments in medical science also raise deep questions about the reliability, transparency and progress of medical knowledge. In doing so, these novels reflect wider cultural concerns about the state of medicine in the eighteenth-century by giving shape to fears that the realms of health and medicine had become problematically bound up with self-interest, corruption and ignorance. As well, in these cases, narrative self-reflexivity engages with health along lines that portray the body as a potentially deceptive, elusive, and untrustworthy source of knowledge and meaning. Even doctors, those whose task it is to interpret and diagnose the signs or symptoms of the body, are not necessarily able to do so effectively, either due to their own incompetence, their biased self-interestedness or through the obscurity of the subject matter. Ultimately, as with references to the diseased and decaying bodies of sentimental subjects, the tendencies within the novels of Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie to satirize the field of medicine are difficult to reconcile with sentimental fiction's perceived connections with attempts to improve moral, physical and public health.

Part III: Medicine, Sensibility and Somatic Scepticism

So what are we to make of these two apparently contradictory strains? On the one side, the novels of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie could be viewed as promoting the health of the public by spreading virtuous fellow-feeling and awakening the sensibilities. On the other, these works undermine the connection between sentimentalism and health

by representing sensitive subjects – whether they be writers or men of feeling – as peculiarly susceptible to disease and illness, and by drawing attention to doubts and limitations surrounding attempts to systematically improve physical well-being through satirical and sceptical treatments of medicine and medical practitioners. The self-reflexive instances in sentimental fiction reveal what initially appears to be a potentially inconsistent and incoherent relationship to health and medicine. However, I would like to suggest that these contradictory strains can be more productively accounted for as part of a consistent pattern within the literature – and, by extension, the *culture* – of sensibility. These apparently conflicting engagements with health offer further evidence of the culture of sensibility's *somatic* worldview, an worldview that privileges embodied sensation as the primary origin of knowledge and experience.

Post-Romantic intellectual and cultural historians often assume that eighteenth-century culture approached embodied experience as unmediated and transparent, and, consequently, as a solid foundation for knowledge, meaning and identity. However, Richard Kroll has usefully demonstrated that this somatic perspective actually espoused a sophisticated appreciation for the contingent, uncertain, and profoundly mediated nature of our relationship to embodied modes of knowing and experiencing the world. Neoclassical somatic thinkers subscribed to a doctrine Kroll calls “*the necessity of obscurity*,” which stipulates that

obscurity is an inevitable consequence of our sceptical condition. We see through a glass darkly – almost everything we deem to be highest in our aspirations is

hidden from us, and the reified or quasi-material nature of what we treat as
 originary ideas or signs obscures as much as it reveals. (74)

I have argued that the culture of feeling, which emerges in the middle decades of the eighteenth-century, continues to support this pattern of thinking through its valorisation of sensibility. As I examined in “Body/Language,” the self-reflexive practices of sentimental fiction consistently draw attention to the limits of conventional language and instead privilege the potential of embodied forms of communication to surpass words in their capacity to circulate thoughts and sentiments. However, these practices also demonstrate a self-awareness of the susceptibility of corporeal signs to mediation. Rather than espousing a naively empiricist and realist faith in the unmediated nature of embodied modes of communication, sentimentalism has a propensity to foreground the means by which the forms of meaning and knowledge yielded by corporeal sensation are mediated in ways that, among other things, mirror linguistic structures. The final result is a view of knowledge, meaning, and subjectivity as emerging out of embodied experience and yet nevertheless perpetually clouded by doubt and uncertainty.

Analogously, it is possible to approach the divergent ways these practices engage with health as further evidence of a somatic ideology that balances privileging embodied experience with a concern for the limited capacity of the sensitive body to provide solid epistemological and hermeneutic foundations. By aligning moral and public health with physical well-being, these sentimental novels point to the central importance of the body and embodied sensibility in the cultural imaginary of eighteenth-century Britain. At the same time, the means by which these novels incorporate references to the precariousness

of health and the problematics of the emerging health industry point to the layers of instability, mediation and uncertainty that surround embodied, sentimental experience. As this last section explores, this perspective is further strengthened if we take a closer look at some important developments in the cultural history of medicine that take place around the rise of sentimentalism. Each of these developments is directly engaged with by one or more of the novels at the centre of this study and can help shed light on the somatic nature of sentimentalism's relationship to health.

"A Sensible Fluidity": Sentimentalism and the Nervous Paradigm

The development of what G.S. Rousseau dubs the "nervous paradigm" in medical science opened up the possibility of grounding knowledge, value and identity in the body's malleable nerves. This, in turn, gave simultaneous rise, on the one hand, to hope for social change through education and reform and, on the other, to fears that the foundations of knowledge, value and identity were ultimately irrational and perpetually in flux. Regarding the former, the emergence of the nervous paradigm could fold quite nicely into eighteenth-century discourses of improvement and education. Because sensibility was grounded in the nerves and nerves were susceptible to change, it was believed that feelings – and by extension taste, morality and manners – could be cultivated, refined, and re-formed. G.J. Barker-Benfield has argued, for instance, that the perceived susceptibility of sensibility to improvement and refinement through custom underpinned the initial hopes of women's rights advocates that the rise of sentimentalism could help the cause of reform. Like G.S. Rousseau, Barker-Benfield discusses sensibility

as a cultural development that straddles the line between science and literature. He frames sensibility as a “psychoperceptual paradigm” whose influence bridges the divide between literature, science, and philosophy. Furthermore, Barker-Benfield maintains that “the promise that the new psychoperceptual paradigm held for women’s equal mental development was recognized immediately” because sensibility introduced the possibility that “human selves were made, not born” (xvii).

In fact, he asserts, it is possible to argue that “feminism was in part born in the culture of sensibility” (xviii). The malleability of the nerves suggested that women were not innately inferior or weak or irrational, but that their sensibilities had been merely trained to exhibit these characteristics. As a result, the paradigm of sensibility opened up the possibility that sexual difference was a cultural construct rather than an innate universal truth and, as such, women’s behaviour and capabilities could be improved and altered through proper education and training. Of course, as Barker-Benfield’s work also acknowledges, many advocates for education reform for women, including Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft, would eventually grow sceptical of the effect of the culture of sensibility on women. More about these specific issues around sensibility and gender will be addressed in the next chapter. Of central concern here is that the nervous paradigm offered a view of human nature as susceptible to change, and this susceptibility to change underpinned strategies of improvement that could be folded into narratives of enlightened progress. In this way, the nervous paradigm not only influenced contemporary arguments around sexual difference and human rights, but also influenced the sentimental aesthetic

that seeks to improve morals and spread virtue by affecting and moulding the sensibilities.

However, acknowledging that the body's nervous sensibilities are susceptible to improvement first required accepting that the body's sensibilities were susceptible to change. The psychoperceptual paradigm of sensibility offered by medical science presented the nervous body as a mutable, plastic, unstable entity. Barbara Maria Stafford's *Body Criticism* (1991) very usefully points out the less orderly and enlightened side to new medical insights into the role of the nervous system. Many thinkers looked to the "subcutaneous" fluctuations and reactions of the nerves as sources of meaning and knowledge, and some major figures – Stafford mentions Lavater and Mesmer, but we could also include British thinkers like Kames – attempted to systematize nervous reactions in an effort to rationalize and discipline the body. Despite these efforts, Stafford argues that the ultimate effect of the development of the nervous paradigm in science and culture was to "liquefy" the body:

the volatile nervous system—governed by an impressionable *sensibilité* responsive to environmental effluvia—created a new medium or 'atmospheric' third world of fleeting emotions and fluid instincts coursing beneath the skin. (38)

Stafford examines how Willis and Cheyne, along with Albrecht von Haller and Scottish physician Robert Whytt "elevated the nervous system to lead role in the body" (405), but in doing so developed a science of physiology that tracked how "data drizzled, cascaded, or rushed into the understanding and flooded the corpus" (406). Stafford's watery language is no accident. She argues that, while nerve theory helped establish the

centrality of the body to human experience and consciousness, it did so while at the same time constructing the body as more and more ethereal and fluid. The constant shifting and overwhelming flow of sensation throughout the nervous system transformed the body into something that had the impermanence of liquid or air. As Stafford concludes,

the organism was a *sensible* fluidity, shaped by the equally mutable environment. Both morphology and psychology existed only from moment to moment. The midcentury revelation of a pneumatical nervous system helped unseat the model of a hard-core character persisting through time. Fixed identity was increasingly dissolved into a succession of airy phantoms. (417)

Stafford employs a vocabulary of fluidity and pneumatic airiness to suggest that eighteenth-century artistic and scientific practices turned to the human body, but in ways that ultimately etherealized and dematerialized bodies in a search for the visible, material signs of immaterial and spiritual meaning. My own sense, however, is that the body did not become any less material. Instead, what emerged is a sense that materiality itself was less solid and permanent. As a result, in the end the same scientific developments that gave hope for change and progress in medical diagnosis, moral education, and, as Barker-Benfield argues, equal rights, also gave birth to new concerns about the volatility, instability and unreliability of the body and, consequently, embodied sentimental identity.

This volatility suggests that possessing malleable sensibilities was, in the eighteenth-century, regarded as both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, delicacy of sensibility helped determine one's potential for refinement and improvement. Those with

malleable nerves could attain the heights and exclusive pleasures associated with sympathetic virtue. At the same time, malleable nerves also left sentimental subjects perpetually susceptible to regression and decay. And it is this inherent volatility that enabled sentimental subjectivity to become associated, seemingly paradoxically, with positive images of health and the spread of virtuous sociability as well as with negative images of disease, decay and anti-social isolation. As well, developments in medical science regarding the nerves not only yielded a plethora of information about bodies, but also, ironically (if not paradoxically), made the task of the medical practitioner more difficult than ever. The nervous body, constantly shifting according to the flux and flow of sensation, was perpetually shrouded in obscurity and ambiguity. The body in the age of sensibility became difficult to know, to diagnose, to read, and to treat. It could not be accessed by any straightforward, unmediated means.

Physiognomy: or, Momus' Glass Revisited

The sentimental fiction of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie corresponds to Stafford's depiction of the reciprocation between medicine and the arts in the eighteenth century, as well as to the mediated nature of embodied knowledge. As often as these texts advocate the importance of embodied signs and practices in the production and circulation of feeling, they also nearly as frequently draw attention to the epistemological uncertainties and mediating forces that surround these signs and practices. A few paradigmatic passages – one from *Tristram Shandy* and one from *Humphry Clinker* – can help illuminate the issues at hand. The first is an observation from Tristram on the

difficulties of accessing knowledge about the interior truths of characters resulting from the inescapable and mute materiality of corporeal existence. Tristram laments that we do not possess Momus' glass offering a transparent, direct window onto the hearts of men. If we possessed this glass, he writes,

Nothing more would have been wanting, in order to take a man's character, but to have taken a chair and gone softly, as you would to a dioptrical bee-hive, and look'd in,--view'd the soul stark naked;---observed all her motions,-- her machinations [. . .] then taken your pen and ink and set down nothing but what you had seen, and could have sworn to:--- But this is an advantage not to be had by a biographer in this planet. (59)

Instead, Tristram observes, "our minds shine not through the body, but are wrapt up here in a dark covering of uncrystallized flesh and blood; so that if we would come to the specifick characters of them, we must go some other way to work" (60). As Tristram asserts, the body is a source of epistemological obscurity, a "dark covering" of "flesh and blood" that does not shed light.

In *Humphry Clinker*, Matthew Bramble seems particularly aware of the dark covering that inevitably filters and obscures any systematic and scientific attempts to access objective, certain, transparent knowledge of the material world, and particularly of the material human body. He comments to his friend, Dr. Lewis, that "There are mysteries in physick, as well as in religion" (33). One of these medical mysteries is Bramble's own body, which exhibits a variety of symptoms that confound his doctors as well as himself. Bramble is acutely self-aware of his own fluctuating physical condition

(which, as we have seen, mirrors the unconscious fluctuations of a “thermometer”), and he is equally aware of the epistemological obscurities and ambiguities that challenge any attempt to rationalize and systematize his volatile, mutable body:

For my own part, I have had an hospital these fourteen years within myself, and studied my own case with the most painful attention [. . .]. I have for some time been of opinion (no offence, dear Doctor) that the sum of all your medical discoveries amounts to this, that *the more you study the less you know*. (33; emphasis added)

Bramble expresses doubt that “medical discoveries” are in fact leading to any perceivable advancement in knowledge or any progress toward a greater enlightenment. Instead, the field of medicine, according to him, only uncovers more and more mysteries that render our bodies and the signs yielded by them all the more opaque and incomprehensible.

This somatic scepticism also operates within sentimental engagements with physiognomy. In “Body/Language” I treated examples of physiognomic interpretation as evidence of sentimentalism’s investment in the reciprocity between bodies and texts. Here I return to this subject matter and build on this previous discussion, while also tying these insights to physiognomy’s origins in medical science. Along these lines, Stafford defines physiognomy as a type of “body criticism” that blurs the division between medical diagnosis and literary interpretation. The science of physiognomy

linked medical diagnostics to textual criticism and cerebral expertise. Symptoms, or marks visible to ordinary laymen, were converted into esoteric graphic signs.

These physical enigmas were indicative of hidden causes legible only to specialized interpreters. (84)

From this perspective, physiognomy emerged as a form of inquiry that simultaneously constructed the body as meaningful, and yet, like a literary text, filled with types of meaning that are not immediately apparent and require the trained expertise of a specialist to discern. For those within the period, the meaning yielded by physiognomic readings of the body were potentially essential to an understanding of human nature. As Lavater asserts in *Essays on Physiognomy* (1772), “what is universal nature but physiognomy?” (1: 32). At the same time, the need for physiognomy as a specialized science points to the fact that “universal nature,” if it exists, is cloaked in, as Sterne puts it, “uncrystallized flesh and blood” (85).

Indeed, Sterne and the early developers of physiognomy express a similar desire, however impossible, to overcome the fact that we lack a direct view into the heart, and both do so by invoking Momus’ glass. Marin Cureau de la Chambre, the French physician Stafford credits with reviving modern physiognomy, aspires to develop the field in order to address the common complaint “that nature did not place a window in front of the heart to see the thoughts and designs of men” (Stafford 85). The development of physiognomy as a science points to the eighteenth-century tendency to seek meaning in material surfaces (Lynch 6), but the expertise required to discern or interpret these meanings points as well to the ways in which the meaning of fleshly surfaces is obscure.

While we have already seen the myth of Momus’ glass invoked in *Tristram Shandy*, in *A Sentimental Journey* Yorick seems equally to aspire to find a way to

overcome the opacity of our fleshly existence. When a French Count suggests that Yorick was not inspired to travel in order to “spy the nakedness of the land” but instead to spy the nakedness “of our women,” Yorick responds,

as for the nakedness of your land, if I saw it, I should cast my eyes over it with tears in them—and for that of your women (blushing at the idea he had excited in me) I [. . .] have such a fellow-feeling for what ever is weak about them, that I would cover it with a garment, if I knew how to throw it on—But I could wish, continued I, to spy the nakedness of their hearts. (84)

As with Tristram, Yorick specifies a desire – a desire one could consider a distinguishing characteristic of the *sentimental* observer – to make the path to the heart, like Momus’ glass, transparent. Interestingly, the means by which Yorick seeks to overcome the burden of living in a fleshly world in which hearts are not transparent, follows quite closely the example of De la Chambre. Yorick looks for access to the sentiments of the heart through the practice of reading the signs of the body. In this way, Yorick offers a paradigmatic example of how a great deal of sentimental writing’s preoccupation with physiognomy emerges out of the problematics of finding alternative pathways to the heart in a fallen world where hearts and thoughts and characters are cloaked in shadowy flesh.

Yet sentimental texts have a propensity to treat physiognomic practices alternately with reverence and scepticism. Yorick and Harley, in particular, seek out meaning in the surface of the body in ways that link “medical diagnostics with textual criticism” (Stafford 84). These practices stand behind many significant scenes of sympathetic exchange. And though Yorick typifies physiognomic thinking by reading the bodily

surfaces out of a desire to find an alternate route to the “nakedness” of hearts, he also is willing to acknowledge the sheer over-abundance of information yielded by corporeal surfaces that cast doubt on any attempt to provide a complete encyclopedic and scientific account. Yorick asserts,

there are certain combined looks of simple subtlety — where whim, and sense, and seriousness, and nonsense, are so blended, that all the languages of Babel set loose together could not express them. (55)

Harley, meanwhile, indulges in physiognomy when he confidently claims that the tears of a prostitute he encounters communicate corporeal signs of the true virtue of her character. When she passes out in Harley’s presence, apparently from hunger, Harley’s sympathies are engaged and he resolves to help her. He offers her money, but she says “to bestow it on me is to take it from the virtuous” and bursts into tears— he responds “there is virtue in these tears; let the fruit of them be virtue” (82). In this case, Harley is ultimately rewarded for his faith in his abilities to expertly discern virtue from external appearances and her tears turn out to be honest. Eventually, this reward comes in the form of being allowed to witness an affecting scene in which the virtuous prostitute is re-united with her equally virtuous father.

However, this plot development is interlaced with another plotline in the chapters entitled “His skill in physiognomy” and “His skill in physiognomy doubted.” In these chapters, as discussed earlier in “Body/Language,” Harley’s ability to discern virtue from external appearances is questioned as con men capitalize on his willingness to read benevolence into their facial features. As well, friends speculate in these chapters that the

prostitute, like the con men, is taking advantage of Harley's naïve sentimentality. In the end, surrounded by a cloud of uncertain motivations and ambiguous embodied signifiers, Mackenzie's man of feeling is sometimes punished and sometimes rewarded for his faith in benevolence and his tendency to treat bodies as legible texts. Through the figure of the man of feeling, sentimentalism is closely associated with the physiognomic practices of reading corporeal surfaces. Yet the novels themselves often raise concerns about the ultimate legibility and transparency of corporeal signs and symptoms, and about the susceptibility of the reader to misinterpretation and deception. The medical field of physiognomy looked to the corporeal as a potential alternative source of knowledge and insight that could rival Momus's glass. However, implicit in the myth of Momus' glass is an understanding that we exist in a world where transparent knowledge is denied us, and the means by which we seek knowledge require overcoming the epistemological limits imposed on us by our fleshly existence. In a similar fashion, sentimental engagements with physiognomy acknowledge its potential to yield knowledge, but do so without denying the profound doubt and uncertainty that surround corporeal forms of knowing.

The Rise of the English Spa

Interestingly, Bramble's comment regarding medical attempts to penetrate the body, that "the more you study, the less you know," is uttered as he is on a tour of English spa towns. Along with physiognomy and nerve theory, the spa town – both as is

it is represented in *Humphry Clinker* and as it is represented in “spa literature”⁷ – deserves a closer look in the context of this chapter. As with sentimental fiction, British “Spa mania” (Cottom 157) emerges out of a new sense, supported and articulated by medical and scientific texts, of the importance of good physical health and its close connection to moral sensibility. However, though spa towns on the surface operate within the intersecting discourses of health and virtue, there is a competing strain in the literature around these spaces that questions these connections. These competing strains are at work, for example, in Smollett’s writing both in *Humphry Clinker* and in his foray into spa literature in his 1752 medical pamphlet *On the External Use of Water*. Smollett’s work reflects wider debates about the status of spa towns as promoters of the public good either in their medical claims or their claims to offer retreat from vice and commercial self-interest. In the end, though spa towns appear, on the surface, to be cultural sites produced by the expanding influence of medicine and devoted to physical and moral health, they could also appear as vice-ridden products of commercial modernity that potentially contribute, as with sentimental fiction, to the spread of ill health and to the spread of confusion and uncertainty surrounding medical knowledge.

Phyllis Hembry’s *The English Spa: 1560-1815* traces the origins of the modern spa town to the Elizabethan era. The practice of bathing and consuming healing waters is traceable to antiquity, but Hembry notes that these practices were suppressed in Britain during the Reformation because they were associated with Catholic superstition and were

⁷ “Spa literature” is a term scholars such as Hembry, David Harley, Christopher Hamlin and Roy Porter use to refer to the volumes of medical pamphlets, travel guides, advertisements and (occasionally) poetry devoted to bathing, water-drinking, and the benefits and diversions of particular springs and wells.

a cultural space in which conspirators and other enemies of the state tended to congregate. By Elizabethan times, this same anti-establishment population continued to seek out “the cure” for various health problems, real or pretended, in baths, which provided a legitimate excuse to travel outside of England to the town of Spa in the Spanish Netherlands (now Belgium). For the governing aristocracy, this was problematic because Spa was becoming a place where potential conspirators could meet and plan beyond state surveillance. However, the practice of bathing was becoming so common that a wholesale ban on travel was not enforceable. As Hembry notes, in order to keep these people within the kingdom, the “Establishment” decided to encourage the re-opening of baths within its borders that had previously been closed and forbidden. While motivated by political concerns, the official reasoning was grounded in secular medical justifications. The undertaking was moderately successful and helped stem the tide of bathers leaving the country. However, the re-opened baths continued to bear the traces of “superstition” – among these traces was the widespread belief in the possibility of the waters to effect miraculous cures – and there remained a stigma even into the eighteenth-century that spas were potential meeting places for Catholic plotters and conspirators.⁸ Regardless, when re-opened, spa towns were officially framed within the discourse of secular medicine, a field whose authority continued to grow for the next century (2).

Hembry further argues that the popular fashion for visiting spa towns reached its peak of popularity and cultural importance in the latter decades of the eighteenth-century,

⁸ See, for instance, Goulding’s *An Essay Against Too Much Reading* (1728) which tries to dispel rumours that Bath is a safe-haven for political conspirators and secret plots after a “malicious report” revealed that members of the town were concealing weapons destined for “the Rebellion in Scotland” (3).

notably around the same time as the peak of sentimentalism. Emerging out of what J.H Plumb (1982) refers to as the “leisure industry” of the eighteenth-century – an industry produced by the growth of “consumer society” and the rise of a commercial public sphere (74) – the middle ranks of society began at this time to participate in the once elite and aristocratic practices of “taking the waters” (Hembry 111). These sites, in turn, appealed to the growing market of health-oriented travellers through spa pamphlets and travel guides, both of which “saw a rapid growth” in this period (Hembry 151). Originally most of the texts published on the subject of “spaws and bathes” were in the form of medical pamphlets written by propagandistic doctors commissioned to espouse the unique medicinal and therapeutic qualities of a particular town’s waters. In later years, these medical treatises were increasingly supplemented and gradually overtaken by other information, as spa town pamphlets began to resemble modern tourist guides. This change can be seen in texts like *The New Bath Guide* (1762, and later published annually from 1770-1801 – not to be confused with Christopher Anstey’s satirical poem of the same name), John Hatfield’s *New Scarborough Guide* (1797), Weeden Butler’s *Cheltenham Guide* (1781) as well as similar works published for Tunbridge Wells in 1766 and Harrogate in 1775. As Hembry notes, these later guides were “more practical accounts than the earlier medical ‘puffs’ – usually a history of the town and a description of its mineral waters, places of amusement and worship, transport services and charges, posts and other information calculated to help the visitor find his bearings” (151).

These texts in many cases promised miraculous cures for a variety of ailments, but also – somewhat ironically, given their status as products of commercial modernity –

cast “spaws and welles” as idyllic, restorative retreats from the vicious, disease-infested world of modern, urban, commercial life. In a typical example of these kinds of representations in spa pamphlets, Butler’s *Cheltenham Guide* opens with an invocation to health:

OH HEALTH!

Best companion of temperance and virtue

Most venerable of the powers of heaven

With thee may the remnant of my life be passed:

Nor do thou refuse to bless me with thy residence:

For in thy presence,

Thou parent of happiness:

Every joy buds forth and flourishes:

In thy presence

Blooms the fair spring of

PLEASURE

And without thee no man is happy. (2)

Butler’s travel guide not only constructs Cheltenham Spa as a site predominantly devoted to physiological well-being but also, following previous “physical writers” and spa experts, including George Cheyne, describes health as a close “companion” of virtue, both of which are necessary to “Happiness” and flow from the common “spring” of “PLEASURE.”

This image of spa towns as respites devoted to moral and physical healing also frequently appears in a small, rarely discussed sub-genre of eighteenth-century literature one might call “spa poetry.” Poems such as Samuel Jones’ *Whitby, a Poem* (1718), Joseph Giles’ *Dosthill-Spaw* (1771), Charles Coffey’s *The Temple-Oagg; Or, the Spaw-Well* (1723) and John Merrick’s *Heliocrene: a poem in Latin and English: on the Chalybeate Well at Sunning Hill in Windsor Forest* (1725) describe their respective spa towns as virtuous, pastoral retreats from modern life as well as resources for therapy and recuperation. Jones’ work, for instance, is inspired by a friend’s “recovery from the jaundice, by drinking of Whitby spaw-waters” (4). While part of his friend’s recovery is attributed to the “vertue” of the water (6), these virtuous waters are poetically juxtaposed with descriptions of the surrounding town of Whitby, which is virtuous in the more conventional moral sense of the term: “Whitby Town remains/ Where Loyalty in Truth and Candor Reigns; Our Gracious George’s Kingdoms cannot shew,/ Subjects that to their Sovereign are more true” (8).⁹ The connection between health and virtue is even

⁹ Along similar lines, though the connections are less explicit, in *The Temple Oagg* (1723), Charles Coffey writes

NEAR Temple-Oagg the springing Waters rise
From forth the Earth’s internal Cavities;
Which kindly flow, from whence the People draw
The WATER, naming IT, the healthful SPAW;
Whose VIRTUE has medicinal been prov’d,
By Which the FEEBLE have their Ills remov’d.

AT th’End of which a decent FABRICK stands
Which gives a Prospect of the Neighboring Lands,
Built in the midst of a Delightful GREEN,
Where nought but NATURE all around is seen. (6)

more explicit in Giles' *Dosthill-Spaw*, which opens with the following lines: "You that prefer the joys of health,/ Before the sordid gains of wealth;/ The grave, the gay, the young, the fair,/ Who'd breathe the pure and wholesome air,/ Go visit Dosthill's happy springs,/ Where health descends on balmy wings" (96). Here health is shown as separate from and incompatible with the impure realm of commercial interest. Dosthill-Spaw, meanwhile, is a space outside the world of luxury and wealth. As Giles' adds later, "For what is equipage and wealth,/ When there is wanting ease and health?" (97). Invocations of health in travel guides and poems thus tend to describe spa towns as resources for health as well as virtuously separate from the morally corrupting influence of commercial modernity. As with sentimental fiction, these literary works draw on popular conceptions of the interdependence of physical health and moral virtue.

Merrick's *Heliocrene* strengthens the parallels with sentimental fiction further and intertwines health and authorship by tracing the mythological origins of British springs to Apollo, god of both healing and literature. Indeed, Apollo was an apt mythic reference point for spas since, as Hembry notes, health resorts and literary pursuits were closely aligned: "eminent literary men were [. . .] drawn to spa centres," among them Smollett, Pope, Richardson, and Fielding, and "they enriched English literature by their descriptions of the scene at Bath, Epsom, Harrogate [. . .] and other resorts" (153). Meanwhile, on the consumption side, mid-eighteenth-century spa towns tended also to be at the forefront of rural and provincial bookselling and textual circulation. Around this time, "investment in circulating libraries funded by subscriptions for the leisured society

Coffey represents the "spaw-well" as a site of healing, but also emphasizes that it is surrounded entirely by the "Delightful Green" of nature. This distance from urban life is implicated in the "medicinal" effects and "VIRTUE" of the well-spring.

became a practice in spa towns” and, in fact, “Bath [. . .] was possibly the first English town with a community library” (149). Playing with these connections, Merrick adopts the voice of Apollo, and writes of the Sunning Hill waters:

To clear the Body and the Brain
 (From Dullness this, and That from Pain),
 I patron of the Healing art,
 And God of Wit both Gifts impart,
 Its waters health unto the sick
 Restore; And Poets splenetick,
 Whose *Muses* have lethargic fits,
 Are here restored unto their Wits! (16)

Later, in the a more satirical and farcical context, Christopher Anstey would make a similar claim in his long poem *The New Bath Guide*:

From Waters Sprung, Like Flowers from Dew,
 What Troops of Bards appear!
 The God of Verse, and Physic Too
 Inspires them twice a Year. (10)

Both these texts associate through the figure of Apollo the complementary relationship of good literature and good health, both of which claim to be promoted in spa resorts.

Overall, a great deal of the poems, pamphlets and tour guides that form the category of “spa literature” tend to represent towns like Harrogate, Bath, Epsom, Tunbridge Wells and Sunning Hill as spaces conducive to the restoration of moral virtue

and physical health (and, occasionally, literary inspiration). Yet, these spaces, despite claims to the contrary, could equally be seen to distract from and corrupt the moral and physical health of the British public. And rather than being viewed as products of the progress of medicine, they could appear to draw attention to the epistemological uncertainties inherent in contemporary medical approaches to the body. In response to the eighteenth-century fashion for health, inspired in part by medical theories of nerves and nervous disorders, spa towns became extremely popular and fashionable places for social congregation. One of the ironic results of this popularity is that, rather than a retreat from urban, commercial life, spa towns could be seen from another angle to be extensions of the modern commercial and fashionable world from which they claimed to offer escape.

Hembry notes that eighteenth-century spas became increasingly commercialized and expanded to include pleasures and diversions: “By the early eighteenth-century spas offered ‘diversions’ such as music and concerts and the performance of plays in a local barn” (67). And as the century progressed, “the emphasis of spa life became more a search for pleasure and entertainment, although still under pretence of taking the waters for health reasons” (68). Around the time of the emergence of a culture of sensibility, then, the spa town acquired a reputation for fashion and pleasurable diversion that competed with its original focus on health. In response, as Roy Porter notes in his introduction to *The Medical History of Waters and Spas*, “critics of Bath, Buxton, and Harrogate, of Brighton and Scarborough, naturally thundered that the therapeutic imperative was being countermanded by the pleasure principle” (x). As Eliza Haywood writes in a digression in *The Wife* (1756),

A medicinal spring is no sooner discovered than a new scene of luxury is opened; ---- a magnificent room is built for the convenience of music, dancing, gaming [. . .] the rich, the gay, the great, immediately crowd thither in shoals; not to drink the waters but to share in the diversions of the place. (112)

Instead of resources of health and virtue, spa towns could seem to be symbols of all that is wrong and corrupt in modern British society. The “medicinal spring” is merely a pretext for fashionable society to indulge in luxury, novelty and diversion.

From this perspective, the influx of writers and bookshops, rather than evidence of an Apollonian harmonious balance of health and literature, could be seen as contributing to the corruption of these health resorts by privileging the “pleasure principle” over the “therapeutic imperative.” Thomas Goulding expresses this alternative view in his pamphlet, *An Essay Against Too Much Reading* (1728), in which he complains that the practice of reading books after “drinking the waters” is threatening the health of patients at Bath. Citing the support of “Physicians,” Goulding maintains that reading, on the whole, “occasions Deformity by constant sitting, swell’d legs [. . .] and staring Eyes” (23) and is “the forerunner of all Distempers” (1). Thus, he concludes, “for Health’s sake we ought to restrain ourselves as much as possible from it” (1). In addition, he argues that reading practices are particularly unhealthy in Bath, where the population’s avidity for reading runs directly counter to the medical concerns that should be the central concern in spa town life. Goulding blames the current fashion for reading in this spa town on the establishment of Leake’s bookshop, a development that has had a corrupting and distracting influence on visitors comparable to other common vices like gambling and

toy shopping (21). Patients visit Leake's "contrary to Doctor's Order" and carry "so many Books to their Lodgings" that they are thus "injuring the quick Passage of Waters" (21). *An Essay Against Too Much Reading* offers an amusing argument, but it also registers the anxieties associated with the commercial and cultural expansion of spa towns, and points to a tension between their status as either idyllic and harmonious Apollonian retreats or unhealthy, grotesque products of commerce and fashion.

"Hospital of the Nation" or "Rendez-Vous of the Diseased"? Smollett and Spa Towns

Echoing these types of concerns, in *Humphry Clinker* much of the medical satire profits from exposing the inherent irony of spaces ostensibly devoted to good health that actually contribute in the opposite direction – to the spread of disease, disability, and disorder. Through Matthew Bramble, Smollett suggests that spa towns have become so fashionable and popular that they overwhelm the very same over-sensitive nerves they claim to soothe and heal. As Bramble complains in a letter from Bath,

The inconveniences which I overlooked in the high-day of health, will naturally strike with an exaggerated impression on the irritable nerves of an invalid [. . .].

[T]his place, which Nature and Providence seem to have intended as a resource from distemper and disquiet, is become the very center of racket and dissipation.

(43)

Bramble's comments offer more evidence of Weed's observation that *Humphry Clinker* is predicated on a fundamental interconnectedness between the physical and moral well-being, and further, that the "nation's social body [. . .] in the novel's view, is diseased and

in need of a cure” (615). As well, Smollett’s representations of the questionable medicinal virtues of spas and wells are inseparable from his social commentary on the questionable moral status of the social spaces that have been built up around them. Rather than offering a cure for medical and social ills, places like Bath, Bristol, and Harrogate exhibit the diseased symptoms of modern society.

After returning to Bath for the first time in years, Bramble is horrified at the change and worries “What sort of monster Bath will become in a few years” (46). Many of the problems Bramble finds with Bath fall under the rubric of an issue that bothers him throughout the novel: circulation. Bath’s emergence as a “monster” and a “centre of racket and dissipation,” arises from the increased circulation in this spa town between people, classes, genders, and ethnicities. It is a criticism that Bramble ties to the disordered and deformed state of modern eighteenth-century British society more generally. In the same vein as his anxieties over the intermingling of liberal-minded and low mechanics explored in “Feeling/Machines,” Bramble observes,

Every upstart of fortune, harnessed in the trappings of the mode, presents himself at Bath [. . .] Clerks and factors from the East Indies, loaded with the spoil of plundered provinces; planters, negro-drivers, and hucksters, from our American plantations [. . .] usurers, brokers, and jobbers of every kind; men of low birth, and no breeding, have found themselves suddenly translated into a state of affluence [. . .]. Knowing no other criterion of greatness, but the ostentation of wealth, they discharge their affluence without taste or conduct, through every channel of the most absurd extravagance. (46)

With more people travelling greater distances, and more people adopting the traditionally aristocratic practices of attending spas and seeking diversions, the social circulation between places and between classes were contributing to the unhealthy, deformed growth of the English spa.

In an analogous manner, Bramble's more specifically medical concerns about the healthiness of Bath also centre around "circulation," though of a slightly different kind. Upon Bramble's first visit to the actual baths of Bath, he is horrified at observing the circulation of water between diseased bodies. Bramble writes,

The first object that saluted my eye, was a child full of scrophulous ulcers [. . .]. I was so shocked at the sight, that I retired immediately with indignation and disgust – Suppose the matter of those ulcers, floating on the water, come in contact with my skin, when the pores are all open? [. . .] We know not what sores may be running in the water while we are bathing, and what sort of matter we may thus imbibe: the king's evil, the scurvy, the cancer, and the pox. (55)

These fears about being exposed to the water that circulates in the wells also shape his scepticism about the health benefits of drinking the water:

I am now as much afraid of drinking, as of bathing; for, after a long conversation with the Doctor, about the construction of the pump and the cistern, it is very far from clear with me, that the patients in the Pump-room don't swallow the scourings of the bathers [. . .] what a delicate beverage is every day quaffed by the drinkers; medicated with the sweat, and dirt, and dandriff; and the abominable

discharges of various kinds, from twenty different diseased bodies, parboiling
in the kettle below. (55)

For Bramble, this town, which purports to be devoted to health and recuperation, and “a resource from distemper and disquiet,” is, in actuality, merely the site for a variety of unhealthy forms of transgressive circulation. Smollett had earlier observed in *An Essay on the External Use of Water* that Bath had recently become “the Hospital of the Nation,” and in *Humphry Clinker* he reflects on the anxieties associated with this socio-medical development: “the very air we breathe, is loaded with contagion. We cannot even sleep, without risque of infection. I say infection – This place is the rendez-vous of the diseased” (56). Smollett interweaves Bramble’s complaints about the monstrous and mob-like circulation of society with complaints about the unchecked and disease-spreading circulation of spa water, suggesting important analogies between the moral and physiological unhealthiness of spa towns.

The commercial, self-interested competition between spa towns could also be seen to corrupt medical knowledge, as doctors were hired to propagandize the therapeutic benefits of particular wells, often while undermining the claims of others. In *Humphry Clinker*, one such commercially self-interested and untrustworthy spa doctor is “Dr. L----N,” quite likely based on Dr. Diedrick Linden who, as Rousseau points out in “Smollett and the Eighteenth-Century Sulphur Controversy” (1982), was a well known figure often accused of quackery, and who Smollett was likely familiar with through his own forays into spa water debates (Rousseau 145). In the novel, Dr. L----N puts on a public display of his questionable expertise, quarrelling with the modern distaste for “filth” and offering

to drink Bramble's "abdomen water" (29). As Bramble's nephew Melford recounts, an amused Bramble politely refuses the offer, and adds that this supposed expert, likely in town for commercial motives to "ply at the Well for patients" (27), endeavored to "persuade us out of our senses" (28). As with Sterne's Dr. Slop, the quackish "Dr. L----- N," draws attention to the fact that medical professionals entrusted with the difficult task of interpreting the subtle, unstable signs and symptoms of nerve-filled bodies were not themselves typically reliable, objective or disinterested.

Indeed, the uncertainty surrounding medical knowledge is a thematic concern that runs through Smollett's novel and beyond. Bramble is acutely self-aware of his own fluctuating physical condition, and he is equally aware of the epistemological obscurities and ambiguities that challenge any attempt to rationalize and systematize a volatile, mutable body. It is on his way to his encounter with Linden at Bristol Hot Wells that Bramble reflects on the medical mysteries that surround his own body, and concludes that the only thing recent "medical discoveries" have proven is that "the more you study the less you know" (33). Bramble makes this remark partly in reaction to conflicting reports about the benefits of Bristol Hot Wells.¹⁰ And the line recalls Smollett's own foray into the spa water debate.¹¹ His medical pamphlet, *An Essay On the External Use of Water*, provides an overview of various respected authorities on the medicinal use of water in

¹⁰ Bramble writes "I have read all that has been written on the Hot Wells, and what I can collect from the whole, is, that the water contains nothing but a little salt, and calcareous earth, mixed in such inconsiderable proportion, as can have very little, if any, effect on the animal economy" (33).

¹¹ For an admirably fleshed out account of Smollett, *Humphry Clinker* and medical debates about spa water see G.S. Rousseau's "Smollett and the Eighteenth-Century Sulphur Controversy" (1982). For more on the subject of Smollett's scepticism toward spa medicine, see Cottom's "In the Bowels of the Novel" (1999).

spas and wells. Smollett then concludes that all the various medical pamphlets on the virtues of spring water published to date cancel each other out:

One writer denies that the Water in the generality of Hot Wells, is impregnated with *Sulphur*; while another affirms, that, without *Sulphur*, no such natural Hot Waters can exist. Yet, both these authors quote experiments to vouch for the truth of their different assertions [. . .] Nor are the opinions less contradictory in their *Analyzations* of cold chalybeate Waters. (2)

Given the proliferation of contradictory medical information about spas, Smollett acknowledges that it is nearly impossible to uncover the truth about the effects of spring water. “Such diversity of opinions,” Smollett argues, “among those who have laid themselves out for analyzing Mineral Waters, cannot fail to perplex and embarrass people who attempt to reason upon the use of them” (3).

In fact, Smollett’s scepticism expressed in his medical and fictional texts reflects widespread problems in eighteenth-century spa medicine that Hamlin examines in “Chemistry, Medicine, and the Legitimization of English Spas, 1740-1840” (1990). For one thing, “All too often an author’s protestation that his work, unlike those of his predecessors and colleagues, would stick to the path of ‘science,’ ‘experiment,’ ‘sober induction’ and ‘truth and right reason,’ was but an effort to sanction another commercial venture with the image of objectivity” (69). Like the quack, the self-interested and biased spa pamphlet was a problematic product of the eighteenth century’s growing “sick trade.” As a result, while spa pamphlets emerged out of British society’s heightened concern for health and interest in the body, these “physical” texts also foreground the layers of

mediation and uncertainty that surrounded trying to improve health and understand the body in an age increasingly devoted to commerce and fashion. Adding to the problem, as Hamlin notes, was the fact that science had not progressed to the point where objective, rational, experimentally-sound studies of spa water were even possible. Analyzing the chemical composition of spa water was a great source of income for doctors and chemists, but it also tended to reveal the limitations of contemporary scientific inquiry. Late eighteenth-century debates around the effects of spa water eventually culminated around the turn of the century in “a growing scepticism from within chemistry itself about the validity of chemical knowledge and a corresponding need to reconsider and revise the arguments of the applicability of chemistry to mineral waters” (Hamlin 75). The scientific debates surrounding spa water thus confirm Bramble's belief about medical knowledge of the body, that increased study only resulted in increased uncertainty.

As with the narrative style of sentimental novels, looking at the way spa towns engage with health and medicine reveals apparently competing strains. On the one hand, spa towns originate out of a new concern in the British cultural imaginary for physical health, a concern that was reinforced by popular medical treatises, like Cheyne's *English Malady*, that gave new prominence to the role of the nerves in shaping subjectivity, and asserted the reciprocity between bodily health and virtuous sensibility. Sites like Bath, Harrogate, Tunbridge, Cheltenham, and Bristol Hot Wells thus rose to new heights of popularity out of a widespread concern for corporeal matters supported by the rise of a culture of sensibility that was itself enabled by medical developments. In the mass of spa

literature, springs and baths promised to soothe the nerves and heal the body, while providing a rejuvenating escape from modern, increasingly commercial and urban, life. However, these same towns were at the same time aligned by critics and sceptics with the opposite of these promised virtuous ends. Rather than promoting health and virtue, spa towns could be considered as deeply implicated in the social spread of diseases and disorders, both moral and medical. Further, as the history and literature of eighteenth-century spa towns indicate, attempts to diagnose and treat the body inspired perpetual, irresolvable debate that shrouded the signs and symptoms emitted by bodies in epistemological obscurity. Knowledge of the body was particularly susceptible to mediation, partly through the corrupting influence of self-interest on doctors and patients. Rather than virtuous retreats from commerce and self-interest, these health resorts could be seen to symbolize the greatest corruptions of commercial modernity on knowledge, health, and the social order.

The structural homologies between representations of spa towns and sentimental novels thus suggest that their relationship to health and medicine is part of a wider pattern in the culture of sensibility. Rather than a mere anomaly or inconsistency, then, this points to a deeper relevance to the way the various senses of “physical book” converge in the fiction of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie. Considering self-reflexive narrative engagements with health and medicine in sentimental fiction alongside contemporary developments in the history of medicine – including nerve theory, physiognomy and spa towns – reveals what little faith eighteenth-century British culture expressed in embodied feeling as a transparent and unmediated source of knowledge, value, and meaning. The

body's nervous sensibility emerged in eighteenth-century British culture as a central nodal point in the exchange of sympathetic feeling and, by extension, as a key element in the health of society. And yet, eighteenth-century Britain's culture of sensibility, at the same time, consistently balances this privileging of embodied experience with a self-awareness of the severe limitations and layers of mediation that undermined any direct or uncomplicated access to the corporeal realm. The culture of sensibility thus continues to support a somatic scepticism that, as Kroll observes, permeated eighteenth-century thought more generally.

Chapter 4 – Sensible/Women

Introduction

Thus far my thesis has revolved around novels written by men and that feature men of feeling. However, in this last main chapter I would like to shift the focus to consider how the convergence of narrative self-reflexivity and sentimentalism in eighteenth-century literature relates to constructions of femininity. As the first section explores, women's relationship to sentimentalism was importantly distinct from that of men. And while the culture of sensibility offered justifications for women's increased presence and agency in the public sphere, these justifications aligned femininity with sensibility in sometimes deeply problematic ways. Anxieties around feminine sensibility tend to coalesce around women's reading habits, and, particularly their weakness for novels of sentiment. In this context, the various issues surrounding women, literature and sensibility tend to converge through textual representations of the quixotic female reader, a figure whose fate during the rise and fall of sentimentalism, I argue, is intertwined with that of the man of feeling. While at one level the fate of men of feeling and female quixotes parallel each other, at other levels representations of female quixotes operate in dialectical tension with representations of sentimental masculinity, even when, as in the case of *Humphry Clinker*, they appear in the same work. Furthermore, the female quixote draws attention to the importance of gender difference in accounting for the relationship between the culture of sensibility and self-referential narrative form. While texts featuring men of sensibility, as we have seen, tend to deploy self-reflexive practices in order to support a sentimental aesthetic, representations of quixotic female readers more

often self-reflexively betray anxieties about the culture of feeling and the effects of this cultural turn on women's susceptibility to literature and moral corruption.

Women's reading practices feature prominently early on in the history of sentimental fiction. A great deal of Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) revolves around the reading and writing of correspondence. Interestingly for this project, these practices are also focused on in Sarah Fielding's 1741 novel *The Adventures of David Simple*, one of the first novels to feature a recognizable man of feeling. In this work Simple's affections are torn between two women, each of whom is described as representing a different type of virtuous femininity. The first is Cynthia, a unapologetically rational and intelligent woman abused by a society and a family that refuse to accept her. Cynthia is also, significantly, a voracious reader and her rational nature is conveyed through her conventionally masculine reading habits. In recounting her history to Simple, Cynthia states "I loved reading, and had a great Desire of Attaining Knowledge," but she is denied an education and denied free access to literature by her parents because "Reading and poring on Books, would never get me a Husband" (80).¹ As evidence of Cynthia's learning she proceeds to quote Pope's *Essay on Criticism* at length (81). Anticipating the travails of Martha from Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter* (1799) (a text that will be discussed later in this chapter), Cynthia is soon after kicked out of her house by her father and forced to try to live by her wits, and she is constantly abused and imperilled.

¹ In an example of the sentimental pre-occupation with the embodied impact of literature, Cynthia recalls that her brother, on the other hand, "hated reading to such a degree, he had a perfect Aversion to the very Sight of a Book" (80). Eventually, just as the parents refuse to allow their daughter to develop the perceived masculine attributes of a wit and intellectual, they also force their son through physical abuse to correspond to the expectations of the proper male reader. As Cynthia recollects, "he had a weakly Constitution, and the continual tormenting and beating him, to make him learn his Book (which was utterly impossible) had such an Effect on the poor boy, it threw him into a Consumption, and killed him" (88).

David Simple helps her as much as she allows when he encounters her, but he also expresses affection and admiration for her character. Simple's attraction to Cynthia may derive from the fact that she resembles the counterpart of Simple's sentimental masculinity; while he is a man who possesses the tenderness and emotional delicacy resembling that of a woman – Fielding notes that “When he is with any one he loves, and Tenderness is uppermost, he is melted into a Softness equal to that of a fond Mother” (204) – Cynthia possesses the learning and rational nature traditionally reserved for men. Despite their opposed natures, Cynthia is presented as a possible match for the man of feeling.

The second woman presented as an appropriate mate for David Simple is Camilla, who, rather than impressing Simple with her wit and learning, enchants him with her tender sensibility for her brother, a sensibility that mirrors his own. After debating with himself, David decides that his strongest attachment is to Camilla, the woman of sensibility:

He began to feel for *Camilla*, (for so we shall call the young Woman for the future) something more soft than Friendship [. . .] for though *Cynthia* appeared to be a Person perfectly deserving of his Esteem [. . .] yet there was something which more nearly touched his Heart in this young Woman. (103)

Despite the fact that one woman represents an ideal of rationality and the other of sensibility, the two women turn out to have a great deal in common. Most notably, Camilla and Cynthia turn out to be favoured childhood reading companions, who used to consume books enthusiastically together before they lost touch and moved on to their respective misadventures. David Simple then, through a generically typical happy

coincidence, re-unites these two women with each other, and re-unites Cynthia with her lover, Camilla's sick brother (144). Ultimately, both women are depicted as examples of virtuous women and virtuous readers. Furthermore, the rational, independent woman and the woman of sensibility are represented as kindred spirits, not only with each other but also with a man of feeling.

By the 1790s the landscape of gender had considerably changed. As Claudia Johnson explores in *Equivocal Beings* (1995), rather than kindred spirits, rational women like Mary Wollstonecraft defined themselves in opposition to "hyperfeminine" sentimental women. Furthermore, Johnson notes that this polarization could be partly attributed to the emergence of the man of feeling as a dominant model of masculinity in late-century British culture. In Sarah Fielding's work, men of feeling were represented as anomalous, but her novel along with those of Sterne, Mackenzie and Smollett helped make this figure culturally ubiquitous. As a result, Johnson argues that, by the 1790s, "sentimentalized masculinity has become so prevalent" she finds it necessary to adjust the common master narrative of the rise of sentimentalism: "Whereas many literary and social historians hold that sentimentality spelled the 'feminization' of culture [. . .] I will maintain that [. . .] sentimentality entailed instead the 'masculinization' of formerly feminine gender traits" (14). To illustrate this difference, she turns to men like Edmund Burke who, in defending his views in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and in personal correspondence, adopted the rhetorical strategies of Sterne and Mackenzie in order to claim masculine authority over the previously feminine realm of sentiment and direct sympathetic feeling toward the defence of chivalry and the conservative patriarchal social order.

In a letter to Sir Phillip Francis dated February 20, 1790, Burke defends the naturalness of his anti-revolutionary sympathies expressed in *Reflections* from accusations of “foppery” and effeminacy. He recounts “the abominable scene of 1789” and adds that these recollections draw “Tears” that wet his paper. As Johnson argues, “Laurence Sterne’s description of ‘poor Maria’ in *Sentimental Journey* [. . .] is a conspicuous antecedent to Burke’s militant tearfulness [. . .]. Yorick’s comically saturated handkerchief here, like Burke’s tear-sodden paper in his letter to Francis, testifies to superior humanity” (5). Notably, Burke’s reference to the tears that blot the pages of his letter is also a self-referential move that, following Sterne and Mackenzie, draws attention to the materiality of the text. The reference also operates at the interface of material books and sensitive bodies, imbuing the material book with embodied sympathetic significance. In the context of Johnson’s argument, these parallels suggest that “sentimental man, having taken over once-feminine attributes, leaves to women only two choices: either the unequivocal or the hyperfeminine” (12). The rise of the man of feeling resulted in women losing authority over the once “once-feminine” domain of sensibility, and, in response, they were forced to either become “unsexed” rational Amazons or pathologically hyper-sentimental irrational creatures: “For if the man [. . .] is already the culture’s paragon of feeling, then any feeling differentially attributed to women must be excessively delicate, morbidly *oversensitive*” (12). In this context, the potential has been foreclosed for representations like those we see in *David Simple*. Sentimental and rational women are no longer unproblematically regarded as similar types, who read the same texts and symbolize equally virtuous examples of femininity.

The ubiquity of male feeling has resulted in the polarization of rational and sentimental femininity.

One of Burke's harshest critics in her political writing, Mary Wollstonecraft, was herself often associated with the excesses of the Amazonian intellectual side of the equation. Wollstonecraft's treatment of Burke and sentimentalism in her treatises on the rights of men and women reveal that she "saw little hope for social change so long as men like Burke unsexed themselves" (Johnson 8). However, Wollstonecraft was often criticized in turn for unsexing herself by advocating that women pursue the cultivation of manly virtues like reason. In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) Wollstonecraft rejects the false dichotomy set up between "manly virtues" (75) and "female excellence" (78), and proposes that women, by cultivating knowledge and reason, seek to grow "everyday more and more masculine" (75). In reaction to statements like these, Wollstonecraft was targeted by critics and satirists like Richard Polwhele in *The Unsex'd Females* (1798) and T.J. Mathias in *Pursuits of Literature* (1793-97). Mathias clearly has Wollstonecraft in mind when he writes "Our *unsex'd* female writers now instruct or confuse us and themselves in the labyrinth of politics, or turn us wild with Gallic frenzy" (ii). The passage, notably, recalls Lady Macbeth's famous appeal, "Come, you spirits/ That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,/ And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full/ Of direst cruelty" (1.5 2572), and thus invokes a famous literary precursor of an ambitious woman who uses her powers of persuasion to justify an illegitimate regicide. It also aligns women authors such as Wollstonecraft with ideological disruptions on a number of fronts: not only do these "unsex'd" writers transgress the proper boundaries of gender, but they also destabilize national boundaries by inspiring Britain with "Gallic"

revolutionary sentiments, thus adding confusion to an already complex political situation. These types of comments demonstrate the acute anxiety surrounding female philosophers and authors in the period. By attempting to occupy positions in the world of letters deemed traditionally male, and by distancing themselves from their conventional role as inherently sentimental creatures, these women transgressed the proper boundaries of gender identity, and represented a threat to the stability of the traditional social order. Thus, while women authors like Wollstonecraft express anxiety regarding the ideological implications of sentimental masculinity, many critics expressed anxiety and concern over perceived transgressions in the other direction as well.

Importantly, taken together, these tensions all play into Dror Wahrman's narrative from *The Making of the Modern Self* about the dramatic disappearing act performed by hybrid, transgressive figures around the turn of the century. As Wahrman argues, liminal figures like the "moist-eyed" man of feeling and the Amazon, who were once tolerated and even embraced in the *ancien régime* of identity, all came under attack in the polarizing context of the late-eighteenth century. He asserts that in earlier decades,

although expectations of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' were generally well defined, contemporaries [. . .] could readily be found to react to an apparent subversion of these expectations [. . .] with resignation, tolerance, or sometimes even appreciation. (40)

However, he adds:

But then, in the closing two decades of the century, this relative porousness which allowed eighteenth-century categories of gender to be imagined as occasionally

mutable, potentially unfixed, and even as a matter of choice, disappeared with remarkable speed. (40)

The man of feeling threatens the categorical boundaries of gender by co-opting the conventional traits of feminine sensibility, but literary women – or “amazons of the pen” as Samuel Johnson playfully referred to them in *The Adventurer* no. 115 (254) – equally posed a threat by co-opting traditionally masculine domains of reason, learning and authorship. Wahrman considers Amazons and men of feeling as, like the intellectual Cynthia and the sentimental David Simple in Sarah Fielding’s novel, complementary opposites, who, despite differences, both point to the plasticity of gender categories in the earlier years of the century.

In this chapter, I will add another figure into the mix, a figure that also emerges alongside “sentimental man” in the eighteenth-century, and who could equally be seen, perhaps more explicitly in the early stages, to represent a hybrid of traditionally male and female elements. This figure is the quixotic female reader, who consumes fiction with dangerous zeal, and whose sensibilities and concept of reality are mediated by novels and romances. By the 1790s, the image of the deluded fiction reader who confuses fiction with reality is gendered almost exclusively female. This tendency is illustrated in a letter to Mr. Urban published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* “On Reading Novels” (1797). The letter begins by claiming to discuss the negative effects of reading novels among “young people” of both genders, asserting that “of all reading, that of novels is the most frivolous, and frequently the most pernicious” (33). But as the short letter progresses it quickly becomes clear that the focus of the author’s concern is exclusively young women.

The young female novel reader, the letter claims, sends servants to the “Circulating Library” who return “loaded with volumes” containing “pathetic tales,” ones

which fill her head with the most ridiculous chimeras; with romantic schemes of gallantry; with an admiration of young rakes of spirit; with dreams of conquests, amorous interviews, and matrimonial excursions; with a detestation of all prudential advice, impatience of controul, love of imaginary liberty, and an abjuration of all parental authority. (33)

As the letter indicates, at this juncture, the susceptibility of readers to the influence of fiction over their understanding of reality has become synonymous with the assumed susceptibility and corruptibility of feminine sensibility. This development, in turn, coincides with the rise of the figure, first popularized by Charlotte Lennox, of the female quixote.

However, it is important to remember that the literary character from which this figure originates, Don Quixote, is male and is deluded by chivalric romances into playing out hyper-masculine fantasies of knight-errantry and heroism. These more masculine origins would have been widely recognized among the eighteenth-century reading public considering the enormous popularity of translations of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605) in Britain in this time. Julie Chandler Hayes observes in “Tobias Smollett and the Translators of *Don Quixote*” (2004), that “English appreciation for the novel’s social and epistemological complexity deepened during the eighteenth-century” (653) and Ronald Paulson argues that Cervantes’ work is one of “two books that profoundly shaped English writing in the eighteenth century” (ix).² As Hayes further observes, Smollett’s translation

² The other book, for Paulson, is Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

was extremely popular throughout the second half of the century, a fact whose significance I will return to in a moment, but for now I merely mention it as further proof that, as Wendy Motooka succinctly observes, “Don Quixote was everywhere in eighteenth-century England” (2). Given this widespread awareness of the male original in the century, the rise of the female quixote points, like the Amazon and the man of feeling, to the blurred identity categories of the age. As one might expect, given Wahrman’s analysis of the trajectory of similarly transgressive figures, in its earlier articulations – as we will see in Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote*, but also in Smollett’s *Humphry Clinker* – the female quixotes are, on the whole, tolerated and even embraced. While this figure begins to dramatize the concerns surrounding female sensibility and fiction reading, her problematic and deluded state is ultimately resolved before any permanent harm takes place, and her narrative ends happily, in classic comedic fashion. Moreover, these novels’ criticisms of feminine sensibility are (perhaps most understandably in the case of *Humphry Clinker*) decidedly muted. In later works, however, such as Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) and Mary Robinson’s *The Natural Daughter* (1799), female quixotes receive a much harsher treatment – the stakes are higher and the consequences more often tragic. As well, female quixotes appear in novels that satirize sentimental novels harshly, implicating the culture and literature of sensibility in the moral corruption of women and in the worst offences of the French Revolution. Thus, while “unsex’d” “amazons of the pen” like Wollstonecraft occupy one end of the spectrum of transgressive femininity, the female quixote comes to occupy the other end and represents the potential dangers facing excessively irrational, oversensitive, hyperfeminine women. Interestingly, the origins of all three figures – rational amazons,

men of feeling, and female quixotes – begin as examples of cultural cross-dressing.

By the turn of the century, however, men of feeling and female quixotes have become paradigms of their gender rather than anomalies and aberrations. Men of feeling have become the rule rather than the exception, while quixotic reading habits have become synonymous with women rather than with aspiring male heroes.

Perhaps inevitably, novels featuring female quixotes are self-referential, given that Cervantes' original from which these texts borrow their conceit is "a book as much about books and the writers and readers of books as it is about the mad adventures of its redoubtable protagonist" (Gerli 2). As a result, these representations of quixotic women offer insights into how sentimentalism and self-reflexive narrative practices intersect with contemporary constructions of femininity. Further, they reflect heightening anxieties about women and sensibility that Johnson suggests could be partly attributed to the prevalence of cultural representations of masculine sentimentality. In this light, the fate of the female quixote seems intertwined with that of the man of feeling. Both emerge during the rise of the culture of sensibility and both come under increasing attack in the waning years of the eighteenth century, when, as Wahrman has argued, the "gender play" that characterized the century gave way to "gender panic" (57) in the "Age of Revolutions" (xiii).

Before proceeding further, it is worthwhile to outline in broad strokes women's position in relation to the rise of a culture of feeling.³ This will provide a fuller picture of how representations of female quixotes respond to the tensions and anxieties revolving around women and the rise of sentimentalism. One significant feature of the culture of feeling is that it helped justify women's increasing presence in and influence upon the eighteenth-century public sphere. Whereas the early-century neoclassical discourse of gender tended to express misogynistic fears that women's influence on society would result in the spread of moral corruption and effeminacy, later sentimental writers expressed more leniency and even praised the modern trend toward the intermixing of men and women in society. As Harriet Guest observes in *Small Change* (2000), in the second half of the eighteenth century "women acquire a new importance in the narratives of the progress of civilization produced, most distinctively, by the theorists of the Scottish enlightenment" (17). Along these lines, Hume argues in "The Rise of the Arts and Sciences" that the increased circulation between men and women is a sign of modern England's advanced civility, and that women have a tendency to moderate and soften the rougher and excessively rational characteristics of men:

The more these refined arts advance, the more sociable men become [. . .]

Particular clubs and societies are every where formed: Both sexes meet in an easy and sociable manner; and the tempers of men, as well as their behavior, refine apace. (271)

³ For the narrative of gender and sensibility I present here, I am particularly indebted to Janet Todd's *Sensibility: An Introduction* (1986), G.J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility* (1992), John Mullan's *Sentiment and Sociability* (1988), John Dwyer's *Virtuous Discourse* (1987), and Barbara Benedict's *Framing Feeling* (1994), among others.

Hume's intertwining of modern sociability and feminine influence expands on Addison's and Steele's discussions of gender from *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* in which they argued that "Women were formed to temper Mankind, and Sooth them into tenderness and compassion" (Addison 519). According to thinkers such as Hume, Steele, and Addison, women and men should be encouraged to intermix socially, partly because women can engage the sympathies of men and awaken their sensibilities to the virtuous pleasures of sociability. These ideas gave a new and more central importance to women's influence on society. This more prominent and public role, in turn, was bound up with a new emphasis on the centrality of virtuous sensibility.

These changing views can also be observed at play in representations of women in canonical sentimental fiction. In *A Sentimental Journey*, Parson Yorick discusses his public devotion to women as an important inspiration behind his virtuous sympathy. Without women to desire and praise, Yorick's heart is "locked up," deprived of the pleasures of sociability and benevolence. Yorick claims to have "been in love with one princess or another almost all my life" and credits his various infatuations with driving his benevolent sensibility:

I hope I shall go on so, till I die, being firmly persuaded, that if ever I do a mean action, it must be some interval betwixt one passion and another; whilst this interregnum lasts, I always perceive my heart locked up [. . .] and the moment I am rekindled, I am all generosity and good will again. (34).

In *The Man of Feeling*, Harley's love of Miss Walton is similarly bound up with his love of virtue. According to the narrator, Harley's sentimental definition of beauty differs

from the “common” view because it is inseparable from his devotion to sympathetic feeling:

a blush, a phrase of affability to an inferior, a tear at a moving tale, were to him, like the Cestus of Cytherea, unequalled in conferring beauty. For all these, Miss Walton was remarkable. (56)

While Harley’s love for Miss Walton is partly sensually inspired by her physical charms, or “beauty, commonly so called,” the novel maintains that it is equally rooted in his observations of her virtuous sympathetic tendencies. Cases like these differ drastically from once dominant view of women as a threat to virtue and a private, domestic distraction from sympathy for the common good. Instead, among male sentimental writers, the public presence of women, whether as objects of desire or merely as social companions, help inspire men’s desires for the common good and thus promote the cause of civility and virtue in society.

Contemporary conceptions of women’s influence in the field of literature followed along similar lines. The eighteenth-century not only witnessed an unprecedented emergence of women as consumers in the commercial public sphere, but also as producers. As Benedict notes in *Framing Feeling*, “at this period, women won a place in the world of letters; their concerns were the concerns of writers, and they were writers themselves, forging a literary culture in opposition to the previous neoclassical literary tradition” (13). While some contemporary critics continued to argue that women authors cheapened literature and threatened literature’s traditionally high status as a liberal art, the popularity of women writers, and particularly women novelists, was also frequently defended as having a positive influence on the morality of the literary public

sphere. Reflecting these views, Jerry Melford relates in *Humphry Clinker* the case of Tim, a friend and struggling author, who gives up writing novels:

Tim had made shift to live many years by writing novels, at the rate of five pounds a volume; but that branch of business is now engrossed by female authors, who publish merely for the propagation of virtue, with so much ease and spirit, and delicacy, and knowledge of the human heart, that the reader is not only enchanted by their genius, but reformed by their morality. (133)

Though ostensibly a statement that could be taken at face value, the observation is a curious one to find in a novel written by a male author, Smollett, who, through benevolent characters like Matthew Bramble and Humphry Clinker, accommodates his writing style to these latest novelistic trends toward the “propagation of virtue” and the reformation of “morality.” Nevertheless, the passage supports Benedict’s assessment that women authors took greater control of the fiction market at this juncture. It also confirms Benedict’s observations that “through literary sentimentalism, women’s feelings were figured as a serious subject, one that offered challenges to the social order to reform according to new values” (13). Just as views concerning women’s influence on the public sphere were changing, so were views of their influence on the sphere of literature. Rather than corrupting taste and posing a threat to the moral foundations of society, women writers were increasingly aligned with teaching morals and promoting the sentimental values of benevolence, sociability, and sympathy.

Indeed, femininity and virtue were so closely intertwined after the rise of sentimentalism that one of the prerequisites of men of feeling is that their virtuous sensibility resembles that of women. For example, Tristram Shandy tells an invented

female reader that Uncle Toby possesses a “modesty” that is “almost equal” to “the modesty of a woman” as well as “That female nicety, Madam, and inward cleanliness of mind and fancy, in your sex” (55). Yorick, meanwhile, similarly draws comparisons between his delicate feelings and those of women. He writes “I burst into a flood of tears—but I am as weak as a woman; and I beg the world not to smile, but pity me.” (21). Later, Yorick adds that, of women, he has “such a fellow-feeling for what ever is weak about them” and desires “to spy the nakedness of their hearts, and through the different disguises of customs, climates and religion, find out what is good in them, to fashion my own by” (84). Matthew Bramble is similarly characterized by the conventionally feminine virtues of weakness and tenderness. Jerry observes: “He affects misanthropy, in order to conceal the sensibility of a heart, which is tender, even to a degree of weakness. This delicacy of feeling, or soreness of the mind, makes him timorous and fearful” (38). In *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel* (1993), Ann Van Sant draws on descriptions like these of Bramble to argue that the masculine sentimental body is inherently parodic because it exhibits conventionally feminine traits such as emotional delicacy and physiological susceptibility (105). While I do not disagree with Van Sant’s assertion that the feminine characteristics of men of feeling lead to parodic literary possibilities, I would also add that these characteristics were just as importantly signs of innate virtuousness.

Apparent improvements to the reputation of women in British society during the rise of sentimentalism did not come without some important limitations. Even for prominent sentimental advocates for the social intermixing of sexes, women's status in society was still characterized as unambiguously subordinate to that of men. For instance, while Hume in "The Rise of The Arts and Sciences" may defend the influence of women's more public role in society on the manners and morality of men, he is also quick to add within the same essay that the intermingling of the sexes should not be confused with equality. The modern culture of polite conversation has its foundations in gallantry, which, Hume points out, is predicated on the fact that "nature has given *man* the superiority above *woman*, by endowing him with greater strength both of mind and body" (133). While men benefit from their exposure through social conversation to the sentimental virtues of women, and while Hume encourages men to be open to more conventionally feminine virtues, he nevertheless re-affirms a fairly stable and rigid hierarchical power divide between the genders.

Along similar lines, in the moral schemata of Scottish thinkers generally, the types of virtues that philosophers attributed to femininity were regarded as secondary and subordinate to more "manly" virtues such as stoic self-command, self-denial, and generosity. For instance, in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith claims there are "two different sets of virtues." He writes:

The soft, gentle, the amiable virtues, the virtues of candid condescension and indulgent humanity, are founded upon the one; the great, the awful and respectable, the virtues of self-denial, of self-government, of that command of the passions which subjects all the movements of our nature to what our own dignity

and honour, and the propriety of our own conduct require, take their origin from the other. (23)

Later it becomes clear that, while women are allowed the “soft, gentle” and “amiable” virtues aligned with sympathetic sensibility, they are denied any access to a higher order of masculine virtue that merges sympathetic feeling with stoicism and individual agency:

Humanity is the virtue of a woman, generosity of a man. The fair-sex, who have commonly much more tenderness than ours, have seldom so much generosity [. . .]. Humanity consists merely in the exquisite fellow-feeling which the spectator entertains with the sentiments of the persons principally concerned [. . .]. The most humane actions require no self-denial, no self-command, no great exertion of the sense of propriety. They consist only in doing what this exquisite sympathy would of its own accord prompt us to do. But it is otherwise with generosity. We never are generous except when in some respect we prefer some other persons to ourselves (190).⁴

As John Dwyer argues, in the views of Scottish moralists including Smith, Hugh Blair, and Henry Mackenzie, “While [women] had much greater moral potential than men, they were not designed for activities involving rigorous self-discipline” (137). Dwyer suggests this as evidence that there is an underlying strain of Stoicism in sentimental writing and,

⁴ Nor were these views confined to the Scottish Enlightenment. In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke divides the primary sources of nervous sensations into those aligned with “self-preservation” and those aligned with “society”. Sensations of self-preservation are rooted in concepts of pain and danger and are therefore the most powerful emotions (38-39). Burke thus defines the “sublime” as anything operating in a manner analogous to terror, a feeling which results from self-preservation, but is also more powerful, violent and masculine than “beauty,” which he defines as social, weaker and, by extension, implicitly feminine. Thus, the types of pleasure and virtue that for Burke and Smith form the basis of our sympathetic human nature were consistently divided along gendered lines.

further, this strain implies that “the empire of sentiment was not nearly as liberating as some historians would have us believe” (137). Smith, in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, quite clearly denies women access to masculine and Stoic virtues of self-denial and self-command, and thus affirms and naturalizes a gender division in moral potential.

These kinds of divisions offer further evidence that, despite privileging polite sociability and granting an important role to women in moderating and tempering the rougher, coarser features of men, many thinkers nevertheless continued to ideologically support a fundamental imbalance of sexual power. From this perspective, there remain apparent and disturbing continuities between the age of sensibility and the deeply misogynistic culture of early eighteenth-century neoclassicism. The culture of sensibility undeniably introduced significant changes to the popular perception of women’s relationship to virtue and vice. In the dominant discourse of gender, feminine qualities had previously been quite closely aligned with effeminacy and the spread of moral corruption in modern society, but this gradually changed as femininity became associated with domestic virtue, beauty, and polite sociability. However, the virtues that women came to symbolize were still in many cases regarded as separate and unequal, as can be seen in the hierarchized moral system of Smith. For writers and thinkers who aspired to greater equality among the sexes, then, there could appear to be some serious and potentially insurmountable problems with the culture of sensibility.

Indeed, rather than helping women, it could be argued, as Dwyer points out, that the rise of sentimentalism posed an active impediment to gender equality. Women’s (limited) entry into the literary and social marketplace as beacons of virtue came at the cost of becoming vulnerable to characterizations as irrational, hyper-emotional,

hysterical, passive, and too delicate for the rigors of manly public life. The prevailing notion that women innately possessed more delicate sensibilities to men thus proved to be a double-edged sword. G.J. Barker-Benfield usefully and succinctly sums up the initial promise of sensibility for advocates of reform in the opening words of *The Culture of Sensibility* (1992). He asserts that the term “sensibility,” “signified revolution, promised freedom, threatened subversion, and became convention” (xvii). The initial promise of “revolution,” “freedom” and “subversion” inhered in the fact that the culture of sensibility grounded subjectivity in nervous sensation and, as such, offered a “psycho-perceptual paradigm” that raised the possibility that the characteristic features of gender, class, and race were a result of social conditioning rather than innate nature. However, the nervous paradigm’s potential as a ground for greater equality among the sexes was threatened by “the restoration of a model of innate sexual difference” (xvii). Even as sensibility threatened to undermine traditional hierarchical differences, it also provided grounds for re-constructing the female body as inherently more receptive to nervous sensation. In doing so, rather than promising change, the culture of sensibility re-affirmed in medical and literary texts traditional associations between women, irrationality, hysteria, and passivity. Ultimately, while the supposedly innately more delicate sensibilities of women gave them a certain authority over matters of feeling and sympathy, it also, as Barker-Benfield quite rightly points out, undermined efforts to argue for full equality between the sexes.

It is these types of concerns that informed a wave of critiques of sentimentalism in the wake of its rise to cultural prominence. In *Mary, A Fiction* (1788), Mary Wollstonecraft had initially embraced sensibility and adopted many of sentimental fiction's generic conventions, but in subsequent texts her writing expresses disenchantment with the impact that sentimentalism has had on attempts to reform and improve the socio-political position of women. Todd describes *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), published four years later, as Wollstonecraft's "most sustained attack on sensibility" (135). *Vindication* argues that "soft phrases, susceptibility of the heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness [. . .] those beings who are only the objects of pity [. . .] will soon become objects of contempt" (76). *Vindication* reacts against the tendency in British society for "false notions of beauty, and false descriptions of sensibility" to become "entangled" in women's "motives of action" (115). As a result of this emphasis on physical beauty and sensibility, she observes, while "most men are sometimes obliged to bear with bodily inconveniences," women "are, literally speaking, slaves to their bodies, and glory in their subjection" (115).

Rather than cultivating supposedly feminine virtue associated with delicate sensibilities, Wollstonecraft proposes that women should be more focused on cultivating the conventionally "manly" virtue of reason. She asserts that there has developed a "false system of education" arising from "books written on this subject by men" which are designed to produce "alluring mistresses" rather than "rational mothers" (74). As an alternative, Wollstonecraft proposes that woman and men attempt to adopt the distinct virtues attributed to each other's gender: "Let men become more chaste and modest, and

if women do not grow wiser in the same ratio, it will be clearer they have the weaker understandings” (78). Wollstonecraft’s treatise thus expresses a deep scepticism toward British society’s valorisation of feminine feeling and its implications for social equality. She argues that aligning women with sensibility – a cultural development she attributes, significantly, to print culture and “books” written by “men,” – has made them “slaves to their bodies.” In doing so, Wollstonecraft implicates contemporary literature, particularly literature directed at women, including conduct books, but also novels, in the propagation of negative stereotypes of feminine sensibility. The assessment resonates with an earlier review of Charlotte Smith’s *Emmeline* from the *Analytical Review* (July 1788), in which Wollstonecraft wrote “few of the numerous productions termed novels, claim any attention; and while we distinguish this one, we cannot help lamenting that it has the same tendency as the generality, whose preposterous sentiments our young females imbibe with such avidity” (7: 26).

However, one didn’t have to believe in the (then) radical principle of equality to raise concerns about women’s reading habits and their impact on the contemporary tendency to privilege “preposterous sentiments” at the expense of the cultivation of virtue. In fact, it is interesting to note the remarkable consistencies within the discourse against sentimentalism and sentimental literature even when espoused by women writers on opposite sides of most political divisions. Hannah More expressed views that, in many cases, were directly opposed to those of Wollstonecraft.⁵ More openly defends the

⁵ Interestingly, More, like Wollstonecraft, also produced literary works that supported sentimentalism earlier on in her career. Barker-Benfield draws attention to “Sensibility, a Poem” (1784) in which More exclaims “Sweet Sensibility! Thou keen delight! Thou hasty moral! sudden sense of right! Thou untaught goodness! Virtue’s precious seed! Thou sweet precursor of the gen’rous Deed!” (Barker-Benfield 264-265).

existence of fundamental hierarchical differences between men and women and also, of course, differed greatly from Wollstonecraft by emphasizing the importance of Christian faith rather than secular reason as a primary guiding principle for society.⁶ Despite these fundamental ideological differences, however, More's opinion of sentimentalism is remarkably similar to that of Wollstonecraft and similarly sets up a dichotomy between, on the one hand, the current misguided cultural emphasis on women's bodies and sensibility and, on the other, the more proper focus of women's education: reason and understanding.⁷ As Harriet Guest argues in *Small Change* (2000), for both critics

the feminine subject is represented as peculiarly the creature of her material circumstances, which absorb her perceptions and adapt or accommodate them to their own nature [. . .]. As a result of their preoccupation with trivial and unconnected phenomena, women are unable to generalize their ideas, are peculiarly localized, and cannot maintain a coherent train of thought. They are

⁶ In direct contrast to Wollstonecraft, she asserts in *Strictures on Female Education* (1799) that "each sex has its proper excellences, which would be lost were they melted down into the common character by the fusion of the new philosophy" (343). Rather than being jealous of manly virtues, More suggests that "the true value of woman is not diminished by the imputations of inferiority in those talents which do not belong to her" (344). Rather, "she has other requisites, better adapted to answer the end and purposes of her being" (344).

⁷ As Brewer notes in *Pleasures of the Imagination*, More and Wollstonecraft are typical of critics of sentimental literature and culture: "the usual object of sensibility's critics was a woman who indulged or was controlled by feelings provoked by literature and romance. As we shall see, the ill-disciplined reader of novels, the giddy girl who loses all practical sense of the world because she is misled by the romantic tales of sensibility was a figure repeatedly invoked, satirized and attacked, not least because it was feared that such women were easily seduced and likely to lose their virtue. The heroines of sentimental literature, physically feeble to the point of sickness, so sensitive as to have little or no control over their powerful bodily impulses and, because of their weaknesses, devastatingly attractive to young men, were also disliked by such female critics as Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft" (121).

enthralled by novels; fascinated by manners, superficial appearances, surface ornamentation [. . .]. These habits of mind produce a debilitating absorption in the sensible body. (276)

More and Wollstonecraft share a number of views on the problematic state of women. Notably, both suggest that the susceptibility of women to novels was a sign of their corrupt superficiality and their “debilitating absorption” in the material, sensible realm.

Women’s devotion to novels was often construed not simply as a sign of corrupt femininity, but also a cause. More, in particular, focuses on the role of sentimental novels as ideological vehicles for perpetuating problematic stereotypes of women. In Chapter 8, entitled “On Female Study,” from *Strictures on Female Education* (1799), More laments “that profusion of little, amusing, sentimental books with which the youthful library overflows” (339). Echoing neoclassical anxieties about the proliferation of popular printed texts, More asserts that “abundance has its dangers” and asks, “may not the multiplicity of these alluring little works increase the natural reluctance to those more dry and uninteresting studies, of which, after all, the rudiments of every part of learning *must* consist?” (339). More’s main concern with this overflowing “multiplicity” of sentimental texts is that she believes these texts distract attention away from the proper foundations of virtue and morality by emphasizing the centrality of feeling: “Is there not some danger [. . .] that the benevolent actions with the recital of which [sentimental books] abound, when they are not made to flow from any source but *feeling*, may tend to inspire a self-complacency, a self-congratulation?” (339). Her fear, like Wollstonecraft’s, flows from a belief that sentimental literature’s emphasis on the centrality of sensibility lures women

away from the cultivation of higher (and less corporeal) virtues of knowledge and understanding:

frivolous reading will produce its correspondent effect, in much less time than books of solid instruction; the imagination being liable to be worked upon, and the feelings to be set a going, much faster than the understanding can be opened and the judgment enlightened. (340)

Indeed, she goes so far as to claim that “the corruption occasioned by these books has spread so wide, and descended so low, as to have become one of the most universal, as well as most pernicious, sources of corruption among us” (342).

To illustrate, More provides a hypothetical account of female educational development. This account conforms to the prevailing assumption in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that cultivating feeling ultimately infantilizes women. And it does so by distinguishing two types of reading practices, one type employed by “girls who have been accustomed to devour a multitude of frivolous books” and the other by girls “who are under the discipline of severer studies” (340). While the first group might initially appear to advance earlier and more quickly in their learning, they eventually plateau, and betray the disadvantages of an underdeveloped, undisciplined mind. The second group, however, eventually attain true knowledge and higher virtues:

the former having early attained to that low standard which had been held out to them, become stationary; while the latter, quietly progressive, are passing through just gradations to a higher strain of mind; and those who early begin with talking and writing like women, commonly end with thinking and acting like children.

(340)

For this reason, More advocates for women what would traditionally be considered masculine texts that target the rational faculties over the sensibilities:

For what is called dry tough reading, independent of the knowledge it conveys, is useful as a habit, and wholesome as an exercise. Serious study serves to harden the mind for more trying conflicts; it lifts the reader from sensation to intellect [. . .] it divorces her from matter. (340)

More's *Strictures* explores the concern that many critics expressed for the undisciplined nature of female reading. By failing to encourage young women to cultivate reason and knowledge through "dry tough reading," women never rise from "sensation" to "intellect" and fail to divorce themselves from "matter." The overproduction and overconsumption of sentimental novels thus contribute to the fact that, as Wollstonecraft feared, women have become "slaves to their bodies."

Quixotic Female Readers I: Arabella and Lydia

Treatises like More's *Strictures* and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* were not the only venue where writers expressed concern about the literature of sensibility. Novels themselves consistently draw upon many of the same themes and anxieties rehearsed in more explicitly didactic and philosophical texts.⁸ Of particular concern in this chapter,

⁸ As Godwin recognized in his preface to *Caleb Williams* (1794), novels had the capacity to resonate with "persons whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach," including women readers (55). And Paul Keen points out in "Intellectual History and Political Theory," that in the 1790s, writers from all points along the political spectrum recognized and responded to this power of novels. Conservatives may have scoffed at Godwin and Hays whose novels dramatized perceived injustices, but "conservative novelists proved to be just as adept at all of these strategies," (147) as can be seen in Charles Lloyd's *Edmund Oliver* (1798), and Jane West's *A Tale of the Times* (1799). Notably, these texts also often, ironically, incorporate

however, is that the anxieties outlined by these authors about the relations between feeling, literary genre and gender in British society also appear in a variety of profoundly self-referential novels featuring quixotic women readers, including Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), Robinson's *The Natural Daughter* (1799), Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), as well as a novel already much discussed in this work, Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1771). Consistently, these novels tend to incorporate self-reflexive practices in ways that reflect emerging contemporary concerns about the effect of aligning women with delicate sensibility, and about the potentially corrupting influence of sentimental literature on women's minds, morals, and social status.

"These Foolish Books [. . .] Have Turned Her Brain!": Lennox's The Female Quixote

As critics like Guest argue, concern around disciplining female reading habits reaches a new peak of intensity in the 1790s, when the status of women in society was, on the whole, a hotly contested issue. However, Jacqueline Pearson observes in *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835* (1999) that this preoccupation with the "scene of reading" (a phrase Pearson borrows from Nancy Armstrong) is already present decades earlier (2). One of the first novels to reflect back on the relationship between women and fiction reading is Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*. Lennox's work is a profoundly self-

commentary on the degraded state of the novel and its effect on readers. Along these lines, despite their stated scepticism toward the genre, both More and Wollstonecraft sought it fit to strengthen the didactic force of their respective messages by presenting their views in novel form. In *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), Wollstonecraft dramatizes the potential corrupting influence of sentimentalism. More, meanwhile, incorporates many of her lessons about women and education into the plot of her conduct novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809).

reflexive novel and is deeply invested in exploring the relationships between narrative and identity, and between fiction and reality. As Margaret Doody observes “the novel is full of parodic and self-referential explications of narration itself, and the power that narration provides” (xxvii). Indeed, much of the humour arises from the “self-referential” and “parodic” conjunction of Arabella’s mundane modern reality with her fantastic expectations, which have been shaped by the narrative conventions of poorly translated French romances. For example, in a particularly self-referential scene, Arabella orders her loyal servant Lucy (the female Sancho Panza to Arabella’s Don Quixote) to produce a complete chronicle of Arabella’s history. The scene anticipates Tristram Shandy’s humorously flawed efforts to provide a full and authoritative account of himself. Arabella tells Lucy that, like any faithful servant in a romance fiction, her history must

recount all my Words and Actions, even the smallest and inconsiderable, but also all my Thoughts, however instantaneous; relate exactly every Change of my Countenance; number all my Smiles, Half-Smiles, Blushes, Turnings pale, Glances, Pauses, Full-stops, Interruptions [. . .] nor omit the smallest Circumstance that relates to me. (122)

These impossible demands not only illustrate Arabella’s fiction-inspired deluded vanity, but also parodically raise questions about the assumption inherent in romance fiction that the self can ever be fully and accurately accounted for in a narrative.

Moreover, regarding the power of narrative, it is important to note that, though the novel ultimately ends with Arabella coming to her senses and recognizing the division between fiction and reality, for most of the work this division is constantly subverted. One of the most pleasurable and impressively sustained ironies of Lennox’s satire is that,

before the proper order of things and categorical divisions return, the real world that surrounds Arabella is continuously forced to comically accommodate itself to the generic constraints of her fiction. As a result, Lennox's work explores a worldview in which the traditional hierarchies of fiction and reality are consistently playfully inverted. Through this serious play, fictional narratives are shown not only to profoundly mediate subjectivity, but also to have the potential to help structure our understanding of reality.

Equally importantly, as Pearson notes, this novel represents not only one of the first, but also one of the most ambitious explorations of the polyvalent cultural implications of female reading practices in the eighteenth-century (201-202). *The Female Quixote* anticipates many of the concerns voiced by later critics such as More and Wollstonecraft about the potential threat posed by undisciplined female fiction reading. The quixotic delusions of Arabella originate from her unchecked exposure to a store of French romances she uncovers in her father's library. Romances were regarded as the lowest and most feminine genre. As Pearson points out, though "the novel [. . .] tended to be gendered as feminine" (19) when compared to historical or philosophical writing, in comparison to the romance "the novel tended to be gendered as masculine [. . .] romance as feminine" (199). In line with the emerging critical discourse surrounding women and fiction, devouring these doubly-feminized romances leads Arabella away from reason. Her fiction-inspired flight from reason manifests itself in two ways. First, and most obviously, Arabella's tendency to confuse fiction with reality is pathologized by many within the novel as a form of insanity. Arabella's father, for instance, laments that "These foolish Books my Nephew talks of have turned her Brain!" (55). Her uncle meanwhile reacts to her speaking in the language of romance by exclaiming "She is in a Delireum"

(60). He becomes convinced she is in a state of “Phrensy” and is firmly “persuaded her head is not quite right” (60). Even her usually supportive and patient suitor and cousin Glanville worries that she has finally truly fallen into a “Frenzy” in the denouement of the plot (335). Secondly, Arabella’s species of literary madness departs from reason because the specific fiction she confuses with reality is the kind that privileges passionate feeling as the governing principle of life. The romances she misreads as true historical accounts and from which “she [draws] all her notions and expectations” teach her to believe that “Love [is] the ruling Principle of the World” (7). Much like the profusion of “little, amusing, sentimental” novels that would later dominate the literary market – and that alarmed Hannah More by representing a world in which actions “are not made to flow from any source but *feeling*” (More 339) – the romance fiction that mediates Arabella’s expectations of reality represents the world as governed by emotional rather than rational principles.

The happy conclusion of Lennox’s novel supports the sense that the narrative is a cautionary tale about the dangers of exposing women to fiction that privileges feeling over reason. After a health scare following a leap into the Thames to escape an imagined villain, Arabella is finally brought to her senses by a benevolent “doctor” based on Samuel Johnson, who may in fact have penned this concluding chapter himself.⁹ While tending to her physical ailments, the good doctor becomes aware of the corrupting influence that romance fiction has had on Arabella’s intellect and decides to help. After

⁹ For some useful critical discussions of Johnson’s influence over Lennox’s novel see Brian Hanley’s “Henry Fielding, Samuel Johnson, Samuel Richardson and the Reception of Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote* in the Popular Press” (*ANQ*, Summer 2000) and Patricia Meyers Spacks’ “The Subtle Sophistry of Desire: Dr. Johnson and *The Female Quixote*” (*Modern Philology*, May 1988).

some false starts, Arabella challenges the doctor to prove through rational arguments three points: “First, These Histories you condemn are Fictions. Next, That they are absurd. And, lastly, that they are Criminal” (374). The ensuing discussion involves a great deal of self-referential debate around the distinction between fiction and truth, the purposes of literature, and the superiority of ancient histories over romance (378). Using rational argumentation, the doctor eventually convinces Arabella that her romances are not only fictional and absurd, but that they are criminal because they have a tendency to corrupt reason and morality. As the doctor asserts, “the immediate Tendency of these Books [. . .] is to give new Fire to the Passions of Revenge and Love; two Passions which [. . .] it is one of the severest Labours of Reason and Piety to suppress” (380). The doctor thus maintains that these works undermine morality because they are excessively passionate and anti-rational. Ultimately, through “reason and discourse” (Doody xxx), Arabella’s illusions are broken and her sanity is fully restored. As a consequence of this change, she not only gives up her irrational tendencies, but also comes to her senses about the virtuous (if not romantic) Glanville, and they are happily married.

When focusing on the conclusion, then, *The Female Quixote* thus seems to (a) promote reason and rational reading habits among women, (b) criticize and satirize fiction that (mis)represents the world as governed by emotion, and (c) explore the dangerous susceptibility of eighteenth-century women to the seductive power of literature that privileges feeling. Despite occurring in a novel written when sentimental fiction was still in its formative years, these elements of Lennox’s novel anticipate much of the criticism by later writers regarding the relationship between women, literature and sensibility.

In this early manifestation of female quixotism, the ultimate underlying message is deceptively ambiguous and it is not at all clear that the novel wholly embraces the principle of reason nor the hierarchies of reading and power that are restored in the end. Schisms in recent criticism of the novel reflect this ambiguity. Some critics have tended to treat Lennox's novel as a straightforward satire of romance. Duncan Isles, for instance, sums up the main thrust of *The Female Quixote* as a product of "Mrs. Lennox's desire to ridicule the French heroic romances, and to point out their potentially harmful effects on the minds of inexperienced readers" (420). In a similar vein, Laurie Langbauer argues that, through Arabella, "*The Female Quixote* shows that romance is excessive fiction, so excessive that it *is* nonsensical, ultimately 'mad'" (63). However, other scholars have questioned whether Lennox's narrative really is as dismissive of the romance and its values as it initially appears. As alluded to earlier, much of the pleasure of the novel emerges from the subversions of reason, order and the authority of contemporary patriarchal culture brought about by Arabella's fiction-structured delusions. Scott Paul Gordon, for instance, attempts to "pry apart the logic, or illogic" of arguments like Langbauer's and Isles' and asserts instead that *The Female Quixote* ultimately defends many of the principles of the romance traditions, and particularly the principle of disinterestedness (499-500). In a similar vein, critics have recently argued that the novel subtly supports romance values in order to undermine and criticize the subordinate position of women in society. Pearson points out that "What Arabella finds in romance and not in the real world are powerful women obeyed by their suitors, and a feminocentric love-ritual allowing women to exercise 'Authority' and 'Power'" (202). Furthermore, she adds, "while the surface of the novel seems decorously compliant to

patriarchal imperatives, this is constantly undercut in a range of startling and disturbing ways” (202). Pearson thus positions herself among a growing group of critics, which includes Margaret Doody and Debra Malina, that has “convincingly reinterpreted [*The Female Quixote*] as a covert critique of the position of women in the real world” (203).

This leaves us in a strange position. We are faced with a novel that employs self-referential narrative practices that on the surface appear to privilege reason and satirize romance, but may also covertly undermine the authority of reason and support romance values. On the one hand, Lennox’s narrative appears socially conservative and supportive of traditional patriarchal authority as represented by the “good doctor” who restores order and reason in the end. On the other, the text is potentially, under the surface, much more radical and progressive. As in Cervantes’ original, neither side can be fully dismissed. The novel can satisfactorily be approached as a satire of romance or as a satire that embraces romance as a vehicle for social criticism. Rather than arguing from either side, I maintain that *The Female Quixote* can be approached as a fundamentally contradictory text, one whose dramatic tension is organized around a deep ambivalence regarding the relationship between women, literature, and feeling. What makes Lennox’s novel so fascinating and surprisingly complex is that it manipulates and exploits, rather than attempting to ham-fistedly resolve, the emerging problematics of female reading. Thus, the competing strains of interpretation need not be weighed against each other, but could be productively viewed in conjunction as integral elements of the potentially unresolvable problematics of female reading that Lennox’s narrative engages with and attempts to work through.

Furthermore, the novel's conclusion, though it appears to foreclose any possible long-term resistance to patriarchal authority – by restoring Arabella's sanity and, with it, her recognition of her proper subordinate position in relation to reason and the social order – also, interestingly, acknowledges the possibility of a mode of literature that offers a compromise between the harsh polarities of masculine and feminine reading habits. Significantly, in the midst of their debate within this fictional work over the value of fiction, the “good doctor” acknowledges to Arabella that there are some exceptional cases where narratives that involve the passions are not criminal, and the example he provides is the work of Samuel Richardson, whose recently developed sentimental aesthetic the doctor concedes “has taught the Passions to move at the Command of Virtue” (377). Interestingly, then, in this early novel, sentimental fiction, rather than representing a disturbingly effeminate “dangerous recreation” akin to romance, is held up as a potential alternative mode of fiction whose devotion to the traditionally feminine realm of feeling is embraced for its capacity to promote virtue over disorder and irrationality. Despite the fact that Lennox's originary articulation of female quixotism examines the threat posed by undisciplined and irrational female reading, her novel regards the newly emerging genre of sentimental fiction as a sign that fiction reading can be redeemed and that more “feminocentric” narratives about feelings have the potential for virtue as well as vice.

“So Tender – Forsooth!”: Female Quixotism in Humphry Clinker

By the time of Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, the figure of the female quixotic reader has become more fully entwined with the rise of sentimentalism, which at this time was at its peak of influence. Interestingly, though Smollett was himself a devoted admirer and translator of *Don Quixote*, this work betrays the fact that quixotic reading had begun to lose its ties to its male origins and become a characteristic trait of feminine sensibility. In Smollett's novel the female quixote takes the form of Matthew Bramble's niece and travelling companion Lydia Melford, who exhibits the oversensitive, hyperfeminine attributes of the typical young, sentimental woman. Lydia, or "Liddy" as she is commonly referred to in her relatives' letters, is, like Arabella, a young, sheltered, and undisciplined fiction reader, whose impressionable mind and delicate sensibilities have been inflamed by romances. As Bramble describes her to Dr. Lewis, Lydia

dances finely, has a good figure, and is very well inclined; but she's deficient in spirit, and so susceptible—and so tender forsooth!—truly, she has got a languishing eye, and reads romances. (22)

Lydia's tenderness and susceptibility are partly attributed to the fact that she "had been so long cooped up in a boarding-school," but also, importantly to the fact that she "reads romances." As a result of her social isolation and literary consumption, Lydia has become "as inflammable as touch-wood" (22). This state of heightened sensibility leads Bramble's niece to fall in love with an actor, "a handsome young fellow that goes by the name of Wilson" (22), who pursues Lydia throughout the novel and periodically appears along the family's travels throughout England and Scotland. Implied by this romantic attachment to an actor of questionable origins is that Lydia's fiction-inspired emotional flammability has caused her to fall in love with a person of dubious merits who is himself

associated with the realm of fiction. Indeed, this sense is strengthened by the fact that Wilson almost exclusively appears in some form of disguise or costume in his various attempts to approach Lydia without alerting her disapproving family, as he does when he appears as a bearded “Jew-looking man” in Bristol Hot Wells (35). Without any stable or transparently legible character of his own outside of the various masks and guises he adopts, it seems for much of the novel as if Wilson’s attractiveness originates from Lydia’s capacity to project onto him her own fiction-inspired romantic ideals.

As with Arabella, Lydia’s quixotic tendencies toward excessive identification with the realm of fiction are criticized, and her romantic delusions lead her to be considered dangerously susceptible to emotional manipulation. Initially, Wilson’s theatricality and ambiguous personal history resembles Sir George, the deceptive rival to Lord Glanville for Arabella’s affection, who uses props and costumes to gain her favour by taking advantage of her deluded expectations of courtship. Lydia’s brother, Jerry, often a voice of reason in the novel, distrusts his sister’s romance-inspired sensibility and regards Wilson as a manipulative threat. He challenges Wilson to a duel early in the novel and expresses fears throughout about his sister’s attachment. Through the letters of Jerry and Matthew Bramble, Lydia is represented as prone to irrational behaviour and excessive feeling, two characteristics that leave her a potential victim in need of constant protection and care.

Though her female quixotism is aligned with a certain vulnerability to corruption and contributes to her inflammable sensibility, the novel’s treatment of Lydia is, on the whole, quite mild, particularly when considered alongside the later writing of Wollstonecraft and More on the potential effects of sentimental literature. Indeed, it is

hard to imagine the novel whole-heartedly rejecting Lydia's behaviour when her delicacy and tenderness so closely resembles that of her benevolent and sentimental uncle Matthew Bramble. As with Bramble, Lydia possesses "nerves of uncommon sensibility," as is evident when friends of the family cautiously reveal important news to her "gradually" so "that her delicate nerves might not suffer too sudden a shock" (327). As well, her delicate sensibility allows fluctuations in temper to affect her health, echoing Bramble's assessment that "my spirits and my health affect each other reciprocally – that is to say, every thing that discomposes my mind produces a correspondent disorder in my body" (158). Lydia demonstrates this reciprocity in response to the threat of a duel between Wilson and her brother. As Bramble describes her reaction, "the poor creature was so frightened and fluttered, by our threats and expostulations, that she fell sick [. . .] and continued so ill for a whole week, that her life was despaired of" (24). Like Bramble, Lydia is initially overwhelmed by the sensations and tumult she encounters in spa towns. In reaction to Bath she writes, "The noise [. . .], the heat and the flavour of such a crowd, and the hum and buz of their conversation, gave me a head-ach and vertigo the first day" (49). Her first reaction to the baths themselves, meanwhile, also echo Bramble's complaints of sensory overload: "The place was so hot, and the smell so different from what we are used to in the country, that I was quite feverish when we came away" (51). *Humphry Clinker* depicts men of feeling and female quixotes as analogously sentimental creatures, whose delicate nerves serve as signs of virtuous character. Uncle Matthew and niece Lydia thus may be linked not only in their literal but also in their ideological genealogy as common tropes within the culture of sensibility.

Perhaps the fact that Lydia appears in a novel that largely celebrates sensibility may explain why, like Arabella, her female quixotism does not ultimately impede her from enjoying a happy fate. Though her brother Jerry fears for Lydia's virtue and her reputation, the romantic and theatrical Wilson turns out to be a very respectable gentleman, George Dennison, who is the son of one of Matthew Bramble's oldest friends. The novel itself, rather than justifying Jerry's brotherly concern, rewards Lydia's quixotic sensibility and legitimizes her romantic fiction-inspired susceptibility to the advances of a mysterious and handsome lover. To cap things off, Dennison/Wilson convinces the entourage to stage an amateur production of *The Beaux Stratagem* with Lismahago and Dennison's former enemy, Jerry, among the cast. The threatening forces of fiction and theatricality, far from being contained or resolved in the end, happily infect characters that had formerly resisted them. Though her tendency to read romance fiction is initially seen as a sign of her potential vulnerability and irrationality, the novel ultimately accepts and embraces Lydia's female quixotism. Furthermore, in this case, the female quixote is aligned with the man of feeling, both of whom are governed by their delicate sensibilities, and both of whom finish the novel healthier and happier than when it began.

Quixotic Female Readers II: Mrs. Sedgley, Julia, and Bridgetina

As many have argued, including Claudia Johnson, Janet Todd, G.J. Barker-Benfield, and Paul Keen, the last decade of the eighteenth-century brought about significant changes to the cultural landscape in Britain, and profoundly reoriented debates surrounding women, literature, and sentimentalism. These changes are also registered in

representations of quixotic female readers in the novels of the period. In the novels of Lennox and Smollett, female quixotes Arabella and Lydia are tolerated and even tacitly (and potentially subversively) supported by their narratives. Both characters, though they occasionally appear to be threatened and imperilled by their deluded devotion to emotion-centred feminine fiction, ultimately suffer no permanent or serious consequences for their actions, and both are rewarded in the end with happy marriages. As well, *Humphry Clinker* draws attention to the potential parallels between female quixotes and benevolent men of feeling. Lydia's regrettable reading practices have made her "inflammable," but her sentimental tendencies are, on the whole, aligned with a virtuous character analogous to Bramble's sympathetic benevolence. As this section explores, in later works the female quixote continues to appear, but the context of her appearance has radically changed. Rather than tolerated, this figure is depicted as particularly susceptible to manipulation and moral corruption. The narrative arc of the undisciplined, quixotic female reader more often becomes tragic rather than comic. This shift, in turn, coincides with heightened concerns surrounding the moral, aesthetic and ideological status of sentimental literature more generally; and female quixotes appear within novels that criticize sentimental texts and characters types.

"All the Horrors of Romance": Quixotism in The Natural Daughter

The plot of Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter* initially appears to mirror Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, particularly given the way both novels open with an entourage of family members, in Robinson's case the Bradfords, on the road to a spa

town hoping to help address the health problems of an emotionally volatile, gout-ridden patriarch. As Sharon Setzer notes in her introduction to the text, with the exception of the novel's protagonist, Martha, "the other members of the Bradford family bear a striking resemblance to the stereotypical creatures ridiculed by Tobias Smollett" in *Humphry Clinker* (26). Indeed, both novels include a good deal of social satire, much of it directed at upwardly-aspiring, self-interested members of the middle class. As with *Humphry Clinker*, a large portion of the plot and social satire takes place in various spa towns including Bath, Bristol, Tunbridge Wells and even beyond British borders to the influential European resort town of Spa.

Robinson's novel also significantly diverges from Smollett's as Robinson notably re-casts the figure of the invalid patriarch. This figure takes the form of the sentimental and sympathetic (if cantankerous) Matthew Bramble in *Humphry Clinker*, but in *The Natural Daughter* this benevolent authority figure has been replaced by Peregrine Bradford.¹⁰ Bradford resembles Bramble in that he occupies a similarly authoritative subject position in his family, suffers from similar medical conditions, and his moods similarly fluctuate with his symptoms. However, while Bramble's volatility masks his benevolent sensibility, Bradford lacks any virtuous qualities and serves as a tyrannical and self-indulgent foil to the rational moral centre of the novel, his daughter Martha. As with *Humphry Clinker*, the family's adventures in Bath reveal the town to be more devoted to fashion than to health, and, in fact, the forces of fashion and self-interest are represented as often undermining any potential medicinal benefits that a watering-place like Bath can offer. However, while Bramble distances himself from these features of the

¹⁰ Bradford's given name also recalls Smollett's fiction and may refer to the satirized protagonist of *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751).

town, in Robinson's novel the over-sensitive and easily irritated Bradford is fully complicit with Bath's unhealthy side. Bradford's poor health is intertwined with his self-interested devotion to luxury and vanity. He is described as a "pompous invalid" whose "luxurious life had been the bane of his constitution" (91). And while he heads to Bath ostensibly for his health, he is ultimately more interested in making a name for himself in the fashionable society that resides there, a fact supported by the ostentatious coach in which he arrives, which is "splendidly emblazoned with richly fancied heraldry" and led by "four coal-black steeds, which might have graced the triumphal car of an Hector or an Alexander" (91). Upon his arrival he procures the services of Bath's "best physician," but when the doctor prescribes temperance, Bradford ignores his advice, stating "D—n the doctor" (106) and proceeds to refuse to drink the water (109) and indulge in excesses of food and alcohol, thus contributing to his declining health. Bradford represents a morally corrupt alternative vision of masculine sensibility. Contrasted with Bramble, whose medical problems and fluctuations in temper are ultimately inseparable from his sympathetic susceptibility, Bradford's volatile moods and physical incapacity are grounded in a fully self-interested type of sensitivity that manifests itself exclusively in vices such as vanity, luxury and a tyrannical exploitation of his male authority over his wife and daughters.

Nor is Peregrine Bradford the only family member to embody a morally corrupt form of sensibility. Bradford's youngest and favoured daughter, Julia, is introduced as a "model of feminine excellence" (93) who has a "romantic tendency" of mind and is "fair, delicately formed, humble, obedient, complacent, and accommodating" (92). Though the most explicit example of female quixotism in the novel is Mrs. Sedgley, Julia

nevertheless initially recalls the “romantic” and sentimental Lydia. It quickly becomes clear that this complimentary description is presented with a great deal of irony. Much of the evidence for Julia’s seemingly superior “feminine excellence” manifests itself through ostentatious and manipulative displays of sensibility. Julia is often shown as emotionally overwhelmed and incapacitated. At one point, her father screams in pain, and Julia faints (94). Later, she witnesses an old soldier begging for food and later, at dinner, the narrator remarks, “Julia could not eat for thinking of the soldier’s wounded arm” (103). The novel offers clues that these displays are calculated rather than sincere. When her father angrily threatens to turn the carriage away from Bath, and thus take Julia away from fashionable society, Julia manipulates his sympathies: “Julia bursting into tears, conjured her father to consider his own health beyond other things; and to compose his nerves” (94). This calculated concern for the appearance of refined feminine sensibility even influences her public reading. When the family finally does arrive in Bath and visits the town’s library, Julia refuses to be seen reading a “London Newspaper” like her sister, ostensibly because “the accounts of casualties were too distressing for her excessive sensibility” (110).

Julia’s parents are in many ways responsible for their “unnatural” (Setzer *Romancing* 535) youngest daughter’s fashionable and feminine incapacity. Her demeanour is partly attributed to her education arranged by her parents “under the care of a French governess” (93). And when Peregrine Bradford’s health takes a downward turn and Julia reacts by falling to the floor and weeping (101), Bradford rewards his youngest daughter for her passive tenderness, while he is oblivious to his older daughter Martha’s active efforts to help. Julia’s indulgence is explicitly tied to her father’s failing health.

Martha scolds Bradford for ignoring the physician's advice and is sent away. By contrast, as the narrator observes,

Julia was by her gentle acquiescence hurrying her father towards the margin of the grave. Never contradicted, he indulged in every extravagance [. . .]. His malady increased, his form became every hour more corpulent; his temper more irritable. (116)

Julia's actions (or inaction) contribute to her father's declining health and eventual death. These scenes help establish Julia as a monstrous product of her age's expectations regarding feminine sensibility. She is passive to the point of incapacity; she is irrational, overly emotional, manipulative, and self-absorbed. This is far from the virtuous ideal of sensibility described in sentimental fiction. Indeed, by the end of the novel, Julia's appearance of sensibility is exposed as a completely artificial façade constructed to manipulate sympathies and obscure a severely debased underlying character.

In the volatile, tyrannical Peregrine Bradford, and in the manipulative Julia, Robinson's *The Natural Daughter* presents morally corrupt versions of stock sentimental character types. These characters are at best flawed and unhealthy models of behaviour, and at worst corrosive to the moral fabric of society. On the opposite end, Robinson presents Martha. While Bradford and Julia consistently succumb to their base emotions, which lead to questionable decisions and behaviour, Martha just as consistently embodies an alternative ideal of rational virtue, an ideal that is supported by the novel, but depicted as tragically unrecognized by contemporary society. From the opening of Robinson's text, Martha and Julia are established as opposing models of female behaviour. While Julia is "fair, delicately formed, humble, obedient," Martha is "giddy, wild, buxom, good-

natured, and bluntly sincere” (93). Alongside her sister’s “feminine excellence,” Martha is regarded by polite society “as a mere masculine hoyden” (93). And yet, while polite society rewards Julia’s displays of sensibility and fails to appreciate Martha’s transgressively “masculine” rationality, the novel holds Martha up as a model of virtue cast in a Wollstonecraftian mould.

Consistently, when faced with moments of crisis, Julia swoons or faints or bursts into tears, actions which the novel presents as weak and ineffective. Her sister, meanwhile, reacts rationally, actively, stoically and virtuously. Julia’s indulgent tears for her father only speed up his demise, but Martha ignores the expectations of patriarchal authority, and the likelihood of being punished for her actions, and offers honest and caring (though unwelcome) criticism of her father’s behaviour. As well, while Julia is passively incapacitated and publicly claims to be unable to eat after the family encounters a begging soldier with a wounded arm, Martha acts charitably and by “private order” arranges to have the soldier “lodged near the inn” where they stay and “provided with a comfortable meal” (103). This act can also be considered in reference to *Humphry Clinker*, where we see Matthew Bramble performing private, secret acts of charity. Yet here this tendency is transposed from a man of sensibility to a rational, independent young woman. The distinctions between Martha and Julia become apparent again later, when, in response to witnessing Sir Lionel recklessly overturn his coach in a violent crash, “Julia shrieked and leant upon the servant’s arm” while “Martha flew with hasty steps towards the scene of calamity” (99). Julia is passive, helpless and self-interested, while Martha is active and selflessly motivated to help. Furthermore, Julia’s faults and weaknesses are associated with sensibility. Martha’s superior moral sense, on the other

hand, is aligned with the fact that she has resisted the social pressures to conform to feminine ideals of sensibility and has instead independently cultivated her reason.

Robinson's Anti-Sentimental Narrative Self-Awareness

While the images of false or debased sensibility are a constinual preoccupation in *The Natural Daughter*, Setzer points out that Robinson's novel also significantly ventures into the realm of "metafiction."¹¹ Because Martha is unconcerned with appearances, her virtuous acts go largely unappreciated, which leads to a series of misadventures, the most significant of which surround her attempts to care for an abandoned child named Fanny. Along the way, the narrative becomes increasingly self-referential as she is abandoned by her husband, Mr. Morley, and forced to make a living first as an actress and then as an author. These developments are, in one sense, self-referential in that they mirror Robinson's own career path, suggesting that Martha is an avatar for the novel's creator.¹² As well, Robinson exploits potential continuities between her fictional character and her own public authorial persona as a poet by having Martha compose a number of poetic

¹¹ See my discussion from the chapter titled "Body/Language" for an extended critical exploration of my decision to employ (admittedly cumbersome) terms like 'self-reflexivity' and 'self-referentiality' rather than "metafiction," a term I feel is too closely aligned with literature and theory after the postmodern turn that espouses historically specific assumptions about the primacy of language.

¹² A number of recent critics have examined Robinson's tendency to engage with her own authorial identity in this way, including Morgan Rooney, "'Belonging to No/body': Mary Robinson, *The Natural Daughter*, and Rewriting Feminine Identity" (*Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 18.3 [2006]: 355-72), Anne K. Mellor "Making an Exhibition of Her Self: Mary 'Perdita' Robinson and Nineteenth-Century Scripts of Female Sexuality" (*Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 22.3 [2000]: 271-304), Sharon Setzer, "Romancing the Reign of Terror: Sexual Politics in Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter*" (*Criticism* 39.4 [Fall 1997]: 531-555), and Eleanor Ty, *Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1896-1812* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

works that are printed in full within the narrative. Further blurring the lines between Martha and Robinson, many of the poems composed by Martha within the novel were published separately under Robinson's name in venues like *The Morning Post* and *The Oracle*. In some cases, these poems were then used to advertise Robinson's novel. For example, a short poem incorporated into chapter XLVI was printed in *The Morning Post* on September 6th, 1799 as "Stanzas, from Mrs. Robinson's Natural Daughter" (Robinson *Natural* 261). Not unlike Sterne's savvy and crassly commercial exploitation of his fictional alter-egos Tristram and Yorick, Robinson manipulates the print market to her advantage – and, like Sterne, she unabashedly uses her novel as a vehicle for the dissemination of other print commodities.

Robinson ingeniously exploits commercial print culture while at the same time satirizing the influence of commercial self-interest on literature in ways that recall neoclassicists like Pope and Swift. In a critique of the current state of literature, Robinson represents the print market as peopled by booksellers and publishers with names, like "Mr. Index," that are printerly puns (208-09). Mr. Index, meanwhile, exposes Martha to the degraded and deeply irrational nature of modern print culture. She learns through him that the literary marketplace is slavishly concerned with profit and fashion over and above aesthetic or intellectual merit. She learns further that the market for novels like her own, "was already over-stocked, and that the species of composition in which she had indulged her fancy was become a very drug, only palatable to splenetic valetudinarians and boarding-school misses" (208). While novels could be considered a drug, they are also metaphorically aligned with disease. When a young servant girl arrives at Index's bookshop looking for novels to help her mistress who is bed-ridden with a "putrid fever,"

the witty publisher amusingly equates the circulation of popular novels with the circulation of disease, exclaiming, "I have known no less than four persons destroyed within the last six weeks, merely by the infection which has been conveyed through the medium of novels. Nothing can be more destructive" (211). The passage returns to the theme of health and recalls Matthew Bramble's anxieties over unhealthy forms of circulation from *Humphry Clinker*. Whether novels are ultimately sources of disease or cures, they are in both cases satirized by bathetically equating their value with their physiological rather than intellectual impact. Novels are debased by being aligned with the body, and, in particular, with the weak feminine bodies of "young misses," sick mistresses, and "splenetic valetudinarians."¹³

By contrast with Sterne, Mackenzie and Smollett, these self-referential scenes also offer an opportunity for Robinson to playfully undermine the status of sentimental fiction. When Martha considers in what style to write her novel, she rejects sentimentalism because it is out of fashion and has lost its capacity to affect the nerves: "the sentimental would no longer suit the languid nerves of those who were devoted to dissipation" (207). Later, Mr. Index notes that "we have warehouses full of unsold sentimental novels already" (208). *The Natural Daughter* further emphasizes the low status of sentimental fiction by drawing attention to their recent fall from treasured stories

¹³ Significantly, the underlying commentary on the state of literature recalls Robinson's four-part essay "Present State of the Manners and Society &c &c of the Metropolis" printed in the *Monthly Magazine* around the same time as *The Natural Daughter*. As Jon Klancher explores in his essay, "Discriminations, or Romantic Cosmopolitanism in London" (2005), Robinson's journalistic report describes the London's public sphere of arts and letters as reflecting the "'spirit of contradiction' that now dominates London life" (68). London's patrician class ignores the genius of its own writers and artists, turning, as Klancher reports, "England's cultural producers[. . .]into London's internal exiles" (69). Martha, indeed, becomes one of the nations' "internal exiles" as her authorial abilities are ignored or exploited throughout the novel.

to concrete, material piles of paper. Index adds that sentimental novels “only sell for waste-paper” and are frequently seen “lining trunks, or enveloping the merchandise of pastry-cooks and cheese-mongers” (208-209). Ironically, the statement, though drawing attention to the materiality of sentimental texts, has less in common with Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie than with earlier Augustan satires, which attended to a text’s materiality in order to expose its debased, corrupt and commercial status. Soon after, Index compounds the satire of sentimental literature when a woman enters his bookshop looking for a title she only vaguely remembers as “something about Virtue Rewarded” (210), which, of course, is the subtitle of Richardson’s canonical sentimental novel *Pamela*. Index mocks the female customer and takes this as evidence of the inferiority, carelessness and recklessness of the fiction consumption of women. He notes “if it weren’t for the labours of some novel-manufactories, we should never be able to satisfy our female customers” (210). Re-affirming that works like Richardson’s have become irrelevant, the publisher states that “Virtue Rewarded” “is such a work of gothic antiquity, that we have not had one copy in our shop these twenty years” (210).

Robinson’s anti-sentimental narrative self-awareness is also at play in how the novel represents female quixotism. While Martha is naïve about the cruel, commercially self-interested, deceitful nature of literature, she is not in fact a female quixote, and does not demonstrate a noteworthy tendency to blur the lines between fiction and reality (though the text itself blurs those lines through Martha’s parallels with the author). However, Martha’s close friend, fellow stage actress, and the natural mother of Fanny, Mrs. Sedgley, does demonstrate quixotic tendencies. Here again, Robinson incorporates and yet reverses elements found in *Humphry Clinker*. Rather than fodder for a comic plot,

Mrs. Sedgley's fiction-inspired delusions about her surroundings are implicated in her tragic fall from virtue. Sedgley divulges to Martha that her current status as a fallen woman and morally suspect travelling stage-actress resulted initially from a resistance to patriarchal authority influenced, in part, by ideas she acquired from reading gothic romances. At eighteen years old, her "sternly and haughtily reserved" father "proposed retiring to his estate in Scotland, where a Gothic castle [. . .] was preparing for his reception" (161). Sedgley recoiled at this prospective move: "I felt my soul shudder at the thought of becoming the inmate of a dwelling so solitary, and so calculated to inspire the mind with all the horrors of romance" (161). Later, she elaborates on these imaginings:

I beheld all the visionary horrors of Drumbender Castle. I saw, in imagination, all the mystic wonders which adorn the pages of the most popular romances: I felt as though I were destined to develop mysteries, to traverse midnight glooms and subterraneous caverns. I beheld, amidst the moonlight avenues of haunted forests, pale and ghostly spectres, bearing their airy poniard drenched in blood [. . .] I was almost frantic. (162)

Terrified at the prospect of moving to Scotland with her father, Sedgley quickly accepts the offer of "a woman of rank and education" to accompany her as she travelled to Italy "for the benefit of her health" (161).

This decision, however, proves a costly one. In trying to avoid Drumbender Castle, her travels instead lead her to post-Revolution Paris, where she initially expresses support for the principles of democracy and "Rational Liberty." Despite her optimism, she is eventually imprisoned along with other British citizens. At first, she tries to escape by naively putting her trust in a British gentleman who offers to help her in exchange for

marriage. Thinking she has found a hero and saviour she recounts “on the same night we were married *à la Revolution*” (166). However, any residual idealistic faith in the Revolution is shattered when she learns after a week “that my husband had set out for England; and that the pretended priest who had united us was nothing more than the *valet de chambre* of the infamous Marat” (166). As with Wilson in *Humphry Clinker*, the full identity of Sedgley’s husband (and the father of her semi-illegitimate child), remains a mystery for most of the novel. However, unlike in *Humphry Clinker*, the husband turns out to be the irredeemable Mr. Morley, who also abandoned Martha, ironically, because she suspiciously began to take care of an abandoned child that turns out to be his own. Thus, while Lydia is rewarded for her romance-inspired leap of faith into the arms of a gentleman of uncertain reputation, Sedgley is severely punished. Adding to her misery, months later, when Sedgley is visibly pregnant, Marat himself offers her freedom in exchange for sexual favours and she is only saved from having to choose her fate by his timely death. Abandoned, pregnant, imprisoned, her virtue unsalvageably corrupted, Sedgley reflects back while in prison on how deluded and naïve she had been for having chosen to avoid her father’s castle: “how often did I sigh for the solitudes of Drumbender. How did I wish to encounter all the spectres of the Scottish Castle, rather than await the mandate of a sanguinary judge” (165). Mrs. Sedgley is the tragic victim of her quixotic fiction-inspired delusions. She fears her father’s castle because she is convinced she will suffer the adventures of a conventional gothic heroine and, as a result, ends up suffering a fate far worse.

Even more completely than Robinson's *Natural Daughter*, Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) adapts the main plot conceit of Lennox's *The Female Quixote* to the specific concerns of its time. Hamilton re-casts the figure of the female quixote in the moulds of Julia and Bridgetina, naïve converts to the radical "New Philosophy" of William Godwin and his circle. Rather than based on solid understanding and philosophical learning, *Memoirs* suggests through these characters that women are lured to radical philosophy through exposure to novels, such as Rousseau's *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761), which inflame their sensibilities and romanticize radical political ideals.¹⁴ Indeed Bridgetina openly admits as much in her account of the stages of her own intellectual development: "I expanded my imagination by novels, I strengthened my energies by romances, and at length invigorated my powers by metaphysics" (176). Both Julia (whose name recalls "Julie" from Rousseau's novel) and Bridgetina cast themselves as the heroines in Rousseau's tale and mistakenly pursue what they believe are authentic and revolutionary love affairs that defy conservative and tyrannical social mores. Bridgetina is comically thwarted as she uses her active imagination to twist circumstances and interactions with the oblivious Henry to conform to her fiction-structured expectations. For the more sympathetic Julia, however, the results are tragic as she is deceived and corrupted by the villainous Vallaton and eventually repents and dies a fallen woman. Both characters suffer from the same irrational delusions as Arabella, but

¹⁴ In "The Persistence of Reading" (2003), Katherine Binhammer explores the ways in which, though Hays and Hamilton are seemingly ideologically opposed, and though Hamilton satirizes Hays, Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* actually share some common ground regarding how they represent the potential dangers inherent in the undisciplined reading of Rousseau's sentimental novel.

here, as in *The Natural Daughter*, these delusions are tied to the tense and violent political upheavals of the day, and result in much graver consequences. Additionally, the parallels between Robinson's novel and Hamilton's add further weight to Guest's insights regarding the common critical discourse among women writers surrounding sentimental literature.

In conventional terms, *The Natural Daughter* and *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* are novels on opposite sides of the political spectrum. Despite representing the horrors and violence of the French Revolution, Robinson allied herself with radicals like Wollstonecraft and Godwin, claiming in *Letter to the Women of England* (1799), published in the same year as *The Natural Daughter*, to be "of the same school" (41) of supporters of revolutionary ideals and asserting that it would require "*a legion of Wollstonecrafts*" to combat the subjugation of women (41). Meanwhile, Hamilton's *Memoirs* was received by conservative critics as an antidote to the novels of radicals such as Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and, particularly, Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796). The *Anti-Jacobin Review*, for example, praised Hamilton's novel as an "excellent work" and proclaimed it evidence that "all the female writers of the day are not corrupted by the voluptuous dogmas of Mary Godwin, or her more profligate imitators" (Hamilton 409, 9). As Guest has argued, though, the discourse surrounding women and sentimental novels tended to cut across these conventional ideological lines, uniting political foes like Wollstonecraft and More whose writing about women's reading exhibit remarkable parallels. Representations of female quixotism in Robinson and Hamilton support this assessment. Both authors explore the anxieties surrounding undisciplined reading among women through female quixotism, and both associate the

quixotic confusion of fiction and reality with danger, corruption, and a vulnerability to the excesses of revolutionary enthusiasm.

“I Read and Sneezed and Sneezed and Read”: Situating Hamilton’s Narrative Style

Also following *The Natural Daughter*, Hamilton’s work incorporates narrative practices that are now familiar after spending some time with the self-referential fiction of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie. As with sentimental fiction, *Memoirs* engages with the weighty materiality of books from its opening scene in which the novel’s naïve fictional editor, Geoffry Jarvis, travels to London’s commercial print district in “Paternoster-Row” to visit “the birthplace of the Muses” and reverently watches a steady stream of “porters” pass by “sinking under the load of new-bound quartos” (33). In another example of Hamilton’s propensity for corporeal defamiliarization, Bridgetina recounts her first exposure to Godwinian philosophy in a scene that draws attention to the materiality of texts, and parodically corporealizes her textual interaction. Bridgetina nostalgically recalls:

My mother got a packet of brown snuff from London by the mail-coach; it was wrapped in two proof sheets of the quarto edition of the Political Justice. I eagerly snatched up the paper, and notwithstanding the frequent fits of sneezing it occasioned, from the quantity of snuff contained in every fold, I greedily devoured its contents. I read and sneezed and sneezed and read, till the germ of philosophy began to fructify my soul. (176)

Bridgetina's philosophical training, it turns out, emerges from two sheets of Godwin's writing used as packaging for snuff. Meanwhile, Hamilton conflates sneezing and reading, depicting both as equally contributing to Bridgetina's misguided and deformed intellectual development. As with the texts of Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie, Hamilton's text thus demonstrates a propensity for employing corporeal defamiliarization, and explores the potential interconnections between textual interactions and embodied practices. However, rather than doing so in order to support sentimental moral-aesthetic ends, Hamilton plays with the materiality of books and bodies satirically, in order to draw attention the debased materiality of Bridgetina's literary consumption.

More specifically, if *The Natural Daughter* can be said to invoke and subvert the elements of *Humphry Clinker*, then Hamilton's *Memoirs* can be said to do the same with Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*. The self-referential faux-editorial frame of the novel strikingly parallels Mackenzie's text. As with *The Man of Feeling*, in which the novel opens with the editor's discovery of the novel's manuscript used as wadding for a curate's gun, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers'* preface quickly follows up on Jarvis' mock-heroic descriptions of modern print culture with an account of his discovery of the physically flawed and fragmentary bundle of papers that will become the novel we are reading. In this case, Hamilton's fictional editor finds the manuscript tossed at his feet by an impatient maid, having been left in lieu of rent payment by a since deceased guest at a rooming house. Much like Mackenzie's editor, Jarvis discovers that "the first fifty pages" had already been destroyed – they were used "to kindle the morning fires" (35) – and the novel begins in *medias res*, with a footnote by the editor reminding the reader that "since the manuscript was partially destroyed by the maid, it begins in the middle of Chap. V"

(37). Further, the remainder of the text, like Mackenzie's, is interspersed with various interruptions by a sometimes unreliable editor that serve as reminders of the compromised, fragmented physical state of the manuscript.¹⁵

As we have seen, Robinson ventures into the realm of narrative self-reflexivity to pursue ends that are distinct from and even problematize the culture of feeling. In a similar fashion, Hamilton's representations of quixotic female readers lead to some satirical representations of sentimental literature and culture. While Hamilton criticizes radicals for worshipping reason to excess, she also draws attention to the absurdities of a powerful contemporary alternative to rationalism: sentimentalism. Thus, when it comes to the relationship between women and sentimental literature, Hamilton actually has quite a good deal in common with the more radical Robinson. Both authors satirize sentimental literature and align sensibility with dangerous revolutionary excess. In some cases, this satire is quite explicit. Robinson implicates sentimental novels in the crass commercialism of the print market, showing how they are produced mechanically and unconsciously in "novel-manufactories," and only useful as "waste-paper" (Robinson 208-209). Analogously, Hamilton aligns novels with crude mechanical production, labelling novelists as labouring "manufacturers," while mocking the conventionality of the language of sentimental fiction. For example, in a playful digression, the fictional editor offers this footnote "for the benefit of Novel-writers":

¹⁵ The novel's ending is also remarkably similar to *The Man of Feeling*, and offers an affecting death-bed scene of the protagonist complete with a mourning old soldier. In Mackenzie's work this subject position is occupied by the tearful Old Edwards, while in *Memoirs* his place is taken by the similarly mournful Quinten.

We here generously present the fair manufacturers in this line with a set of phrases, which, if carefully mixed up with a handful of story, a pretty quantity of moonshine, an old house [. . .] with bats and owls, and two or three ghosts, will make a couple of neat volumes. Or should the *sentimental* be preferred to the descriptive, it is only leaving out the ghosts, bats, owls, and moonlight, and the above phrases will season any tender tale to taste. (308, emphasis added)

The “set of phrases” the editor alludes to, meanwhile, include

*Moral Sensibility, thinking sensibility, importunate sensibility; mental sensation, pernicious state of protracted and uncertain feeling; congenial sentiment, congenial ardour; delicious emotions, melancholy emotions, frenzied emotions; tender feeling, energetic feeling, sublimised feeling; the germ, the bud, and the full-grown fruits of general utility, &c. &c. **” (308).

These phrases are, almost without exception, examples of the kind of language one would expect to find in a generic sentimental novel. They are drawn, it turns out, from the mock-heroic self-history that Bridgetina produces using the language of the New Philosophy – a history she assumes will one day be published. The scene recalls Arabella’s amusing attempts to produce a history of her mundane, ordinary life using the language and conventions of romance. It also highlights the contemporary reputation of sentimental (and Gothic) novels as degraded, predictable, and mechanically-manufactured.

More subtly, *Memoirs* criticizes novels of sensibility by implicating them in the insidious dissemination of dangerously radical ideas. Both of the novel’s victims of female quixotism, Bridgetina and Julia, parrot the phrases of metaphysical texts and

philosophical novels without truly understanding them. Bridgetina exhibits this tendency to an exaggerated degree, but *Memoirs* clearly accuses Julia of the same sin. In one instance, the responsible Harriet suggests that the metaphysical ideas Julia defends “have never passed under the close examination of judgment; and pop out they come again, just in the same manner as they got it” (166). As well, both Bridgetina and Julia unconsciously imitate novels they read, particularly Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Heloise*, novels that merge the tropes of sentimental fiction with revolutionary idealism. As a result, sentimental fiction is not only aligned with a lack of originality, but also with the popularization of radical ideals. Rather than offering a possible alternative to revolutionary rationalism, then, sentimental literature is implicated in its propagandistic spread.

The connection between sentimental fiction and radicalism is also visible in the origins of Julia’s quixotism, which mirror Arabella’s (from Lennox’s novel) with uncanny precision. Margaret Doody points out that “*The Female Quixote* begins with a character who is a slave to imagination – but that character is Arabella’s father, not Arabella herself. In a fantasy of power born of frustration, the Marquis has retired to his remote castle, there creating an ‘Epitome of Arcadia’” (xx). Doody further argues that the Marquis possesses an “egotistical romanticism” (xx) that he passes on to his young daughter. As with Arabella, Julia is raised by an over-indulgent father, the largely benevolent and sympathetic Captain Delmond, who may have passed along his own quixotic “egotistical romanticism.” In his youth Captain Delmond uncovers a store of romances and reads them all voraciously, acquiring notions of honour. When he runs out, he turns to works of “free-thinking philosophers” and, since his passions are still

inflamed by the romances, Delmond is inspired to reject religion (78-9). Julia's educational development follows a similar track:

Though Julia read with pleasure books of philosophy, history, and travels to her father, she found a pleasure still more poignant in devouring the pages of a novel or romance in her own apartment [. . .]. The agitation they excited was so animated, so intoxicating, that she felt a void in her breast when not under the influence of strong emotions. In vain did her reason revolt at the absurdities which abounded in these motley tales (86).

As with Arabella, Julia's father's indulgence in allowing her to read in private leads to undisciplined and unchecked exposure to emotionally-charged fiction. This, in turn, undoes any potential learning promoted by her exposure to less implicitly feminine and frivolous genres of writing.¹⁶ And like her father, Julia is attracted to narratives that inflame her sensibilities. More significantly, she also resembles her father in that the "strong emotions" inspired by novels and romances help form the foundation of her attraction to radical ideological views. Delmond's exposure to chivalric romance primed him for radically anti-religious free-thinking philosophy just as Julia is primed for Godwinian principles through novels of sensibility.

Vindicating Wollstonecraft: Hamilton's Moderate Rationalism

¹⁶ Claire Grogan's introduction to the text offers a number of insights into Hamilton's complex relationship to the implied gender divisions of genres of literature. She demonstrates that Hamilton's personal and public writing are both acutely sensitive to the boundaries of propriety that distinguish masculine from feminine forms of knowledge and reading, despite her own forays into the masculine realms of science, criticism, and experimental philosophy (12-15).

The underlying social commentary in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* regarding the dangers of undisciplined and female reading habits echoes Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More. Hamilton's writing shares with Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and More's *Strictures* a common concern about the impact of sentimental cultural products on young, inadequately educated women. Part of Julia's vulnerability to the conspiring Vallaton comes from the fact that her educational development, as with many women, does not place enough emphasis on traditionally more masculine and rational forms of reading like "books of philosophy, history, and travels" (Hamilton 86). Harriet Orwell, who represents the ideal alternative to the misguided Julia, further strengthens this point. Harriet's superiority is partly marked by her conventionally masculine reading habits. Grogan states that Harriet is distinct from Julia in that she is "a committed Christian," but also in that she is "a careful, considered reader" (18). As evidence, Harriet at one point finishes her chores before listening to Hume's *History of England* read by a child she tutors (73). Harriet not only reads the histories that Julia ignores, but teaches them to others. In doing so, she offers an example of the ideal balance of domestic/feminine duty and conventionally masculine knowledge. It is also worth noting that this scene is intruded upon by the male narrative voice, who interjects to address complaints from female readers that "men authors" are ignorant and assume that women have time for learning when the chores are done (73). Hamilton's male narrator, however, dismisses these complaints, and claims it is possible to balance masculine learning and domestic duty if women follow the self-disciplined example of Harriet. The didactic thrust of the novel clearly supports the cultivation of reason and knowledge, so long as it is tethered to moderation and Christian faith rather than

worshipped with excessive zeal. The underlying fears about the New Philosophy, meanwhile, are that it confounds minds, appeals to the sensibilities of novel-reading women, and thus potentially leads to irrationality and immorality. Rather than promoting the rationalist principles it claims to support, radical philosophy is ironically represented as aligned with forces that oppose the authority of reason in contemporary society: ignorance, zeal, sentimentalism, and madness.

Given this, it is plausible to think of the self-reflexive elements of the novel – particularly the narrative interruptions that forcefully draw attention to the fact that *Memoirs* is a work of fiction – as part of a strategic and systematic attempt to address Julia's fatal flaw, which the novel suggests is a lack of self-reflection. After hearing Bridgetina's deluded self-history modelled after Rousseau's fiction, Julia realizes how corrupted her friend's mind has become by reading novels and metaphysical philosophy. However, the novel adds, "never once did it occur to Julia, that she was herself the victim of the very same species of folly. So much easier is it for the mind's eye to pierce the faults of others, than to cast a retrospective glance upon its own" (179). *Memoirs* is, to a significant degree, a cautionary novel about the power of novels - and specifically a cautionary novel about reading novels uncritically. Hamilton's narrative disruptiveness is part of a poetics designed to encourage critical self-awareness in the audience. Thus, the novel's self-reflexive style has a didactic aim. As Grogan astutely observes,

As the work is meant to correct or modify the reader's behaviour, [Hamilton] attempts to prevent the reader escaping into a fictional reality by continually moving him/her back and forth between fiction and reality, between polemic and

novel. The reader, both *in* the novel and *of* the novel, learns that romances are quite political and that political works are quite romantic. (15)¹⁷

Memoirs of Modern Philosophers employs formal techniques to encourage a level of self-reflection among its predominantly female audience that its own characters, themselves female readers, lack. Moreover, Hamilton's novel disciplines its readers through self-reflexivity, and disciplines them in order to protect them against, among other things, the entwined dangers of excessive sensibility and female quixotism.

Conclusion

Shifting the focus away from men of feeling and examining instead how sentimentalism and narrative self-reflexivity intersect with constructions of femininity reveals important distinctions. These distinctions, in turn, draw attention to the fact that gender relations are an important mediating factor in analyzing the significance of sentimental narrative structures. While novels featuring men of feeling, as my thesis asserts, tend to deploy self-referential narrative strategies in order to support the moral and aesthetic aims of sentimentalism, novels featuring female quixotes do not necessarily deploy these same narrative strategies to the same ideological ends. In some cases, as with Lennox's *The Female Quixote* and Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, these deluded, undisciplined, irrational female readers draw attention to the dangers of exposing young women to literature that privileges feeling over reason. However, these dangers are

¹⁷ Binhammer offers a similar observation, stating, "Through [. . .] the novel's satiric self-reflectiveness, Hamilton engages her female readers on the level of active interpretation" (17). Both Binhammer and Grogan argue that Hamilton's narrative self-awareness tries to work against the dangerous lack of critical distance of women novel readers.

explored within works whose relationship to sentimentalism is, on the whole, either ambivalent (as is the case for Lennox's text) or generally supportive (as is the case for Smollett's work). In other cases, particularly among texts responding to the shifting cultural landscape of the 1790s, female quixotes are mobilized in novels that raise much deeper concerns about the literature of sensibility and its impact on women. In the post-Revolution novels of Robinson and Hamilton, quixotism becomes associated with a strain of feminine sensibility particularly susceptible to deceit and vulnerable to moral corruption.

Despite these conflicts and tensions, the fate of female quixotes and men of feeling remain intertwined. Both emerge at a time when gender categories were, as Wahrman has shown, remarkably fluid. In this context, figures that transgressed conventional boundaries – including men exhibiting feminine sensibility, and women exhibiting behaviours associated with the famous male literary hero, Don Quixote – were a perpetual fascination and preoccupation in British culture. As the century came to a close, however, conditions had changed. At the same time that critics like Wollstonecraft began questioning male sentimentality and attacking Burke for manipulating sympathies, the quixotic female reader became a significant target for critics and a source of concern. According to Claudia Johnson, the man of feeling no longer appears playfully transgressive, but instead has fully co-opted the once feminine realm of sentimentality and become mundane and hegemonic; he is the voice of patriarchal authority under Burke's conservative regime.

An analogous argument could be made for the female quixote. When first proposed by Lennox, the female quixote is quite obviously positioned as an adaptation of

an originally male type. Her novel borrows heavily from the conceits and satirical structures of Cervantes' tale of the legendary Man of La Mancha. However, by the end of the century, this originally male figure – the quixotic fiction reader – has been fully transposed onto women and become a defining feature of feminine sensibility. This image of feminine sensibility, too, is under attack as sentimentalism is viewed with increasing scepticism on all sides of the political spectrum. Looking at the figure of the female quixote provides a unique perspective regarding the relationship in eighteenth-century British literature between sentimentalism, narrative self-reflexivity and femininity. Considered alongside the man of feeling, the female quixote exposes the potential for the same techniques of narrative self-reflexivity found in Sterne, Smollett and Mackenzie, including those that engage with the materiality of texts and the parallels between books and bodies, to be deployed in ways that raise questions and concerns about the rise of sentimentalism in literature and culture.

Concluding Matter: Reflecting on/in Sentimental Fiction in the 1790s

In *The Fable of the Bees* (1723), Bernard Mandeville opens with a meditation on the connections between “political bodies” and “natural bodies” and suggests that the parallels between them may offer clues as to how best to go about uncovering the underlying principles of human nature:

as those that study the anatomy of dead carcasses may see [. . .] the chief organs and nicest springs more immediately required to continue the motion of our machine are not hard bones, strong muscles and nerves, nor the smooth white skin that so beautifully covers them, but small trifling films and little pipes that are either overlooked, or else seem inconsiderable to vulgar eyes; so they that examine into the nature of man [. . .] may observe, that what renders him a sociable animal consists not in his desire of company, good nature, pity, affability, and other graces of a fair outside; but his vilest and most hateful qualities are the most necessary accomplishments to fit him for the largest and, according to the world, the happiest and most flourishing societies. (19)

Despite espousing a view that is quite explicitly positioned in opposition to those of sentimental writers regarding the “nature of man,” the passage is rich with the kinds of interconnections that have been explored throughout this project. A doctor by trade, as was Smollett, Locke, and many writers of the period, Mandeville uses his medical knowledge to approach the human body as a “machine” whose meaning and underlying principles are deceptively complex and obscure to the casual or “vulgar” observer. As with much sentimental writing, *Fable of the Bees* implies that anatomizing the machinic

body and anatomizing the character of society may be closely intertwined projects.

The passage thus mobilizes the domains of medicine, technology, politics, and social theory – domains that were still closely interwoven despite Adam Ferguson’s claim that this was an “age of separations” (175) – in an effort to understand humankind by reasoning out from its material, physiological foundations. Where the sentimentalist uncovers evidence by these means of humanity’s benevolence and sociability, Mandeville, in typical fashion, finds fodder for his argument that human society is secretly governed by inherent viciousness and self-interestedness, by its “vilest and most hateful qualities.” Interestingly, in this case Mandeville’s argument re-affirms the traditional assumptions upheld by his main civic humanist detractors regarding the interconnectedness of the minute anatomical elements of the human body and lower moral-psychological impulses. Sentimentalism resists this downward pull from the physiological to the ethical by uncovering well-springs of sympathetic fellow-feeling through its attention to physical minutiae.

Despite these differences, through their shared valorisation of minutiae both Mandeville and sentimental authors recognize that it is in some cases the seemingly incidental, counter-intuitive, and incongruous aspects of an entity – its hidden or overlooked “little pipes” and “trifling films” – that, in the final analysis, are its “nicest springs” and demand the closest attention. Analogously, my own project has sought out a deeper understanding of the culture of sensibility through close attention to aspects of its body of literature that can appear “inconsiderable,” “trifling” or insignificant. Critics have either tended to overlook or underplay the importance of self-reflexive narrative techniques within sentimental novels. In fact, by introducing layers of formal and

affective distance, these formal practices appear to some to operate in tension with the moral and aesthetic aims of sentimentalism. These practices can also, from this perspective, play into sentimental literature's reputation as an embarrassing and incongruous "oddity" or "problem" that needs to be "explained away" rather than dealt with seriously (Mullan 14). However, through analyzing a group of texts in which sentimentalism and narrative self-reflexivity consistently intersect – *Tristram Shandy*, *A Sentimental Journey*, *The Man of Feeling*, and *Humphry Clinker* – I have attempted to demonstrate that these stylistic features are, in fact, integral to a fuller understanding of the literature of sensibility and, by extension, the wider culture of feeling from which this literature emerges.

In the process, I have also suggested reasons why the vogue for this culture of feeling passed as quickly as it did. As I mentioned in my final chapter, issues around women and reading are closely intertwined with the fate of sentimentalism after the French Revolution. Reaction to this event and its fallout polarized British society, and this polarization profoundly affected debates around sensibility. In fact, as G.J. Barker-Benfield has argued, the turbulent 1790s generated a "crisis over sensibility": "the ambiguous values of sensibility to women and men, present throughout the century, became critical problems during its last fifteen years. The French Revolution intensified and popularized earlier apprehensions" (359). Notably, the Revolution also closely coincides with the final revisions that Adam Smith would make to his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1790, and John Dwyer notes that these two events mark a transition in Scottish intellectual culture: "within a few years of the publication of Smith's final edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, there were clear signs that both the Scottish

republic of letters and its bardic function were in serious decline. In particular, it was the aftermath of the French Revolution that sounded its death knell” (190). Rather than a straight decline, though, this “crisis over sensibility” manifested itself in a double gesture: a critique of the artificialities of the culture of sensibility and a contrary insistence on the importance of genuine or “natural” feeling. As Janet Todd has argued, this double movement was equally important for both radicals and conservatives. Looking at the ambiguities surrounding both positions in regard to this “crisis” of sentimentalism, Todd helpfully sums up the complex situation:

the English reacted not only to the French Revolution and its aftermath but also to the political and social situation at home. The *Anti-Jacobin Review*, the new organ of conservative opinion, worked to bind sensibility to radicalism [. . .] and it blamed both for the unrest it feared was spreading in England [. . .]. The radicals, on their side, were just as eager as the conservatives to align sensibility with their opponents, and they attacked as sentimental the reactionary nostalgia and emotional callousness they saw promoted in the *Anti-Jacobin*. Clearly neither side wished to be left in possession of a now unfashionable sensibility, but neither side wanted entirely to abandon the power of emotive, sentimental language. (130)

In reaction to the French Revolution, British sentimental writing fell out of favour, though not out of practice. While radicals and conservatives alike accused each other of manipulating sympathies through the use of sentimental conventions and techniques, they also continued to employ these conventions and techniques in their own writing. And thus, though this period marks the beginning of the end of the hegemony of the culture of

feeling, or at least this particular type of culture of feeling, sentimentalism still exerts a great deal of influence and its traces are still quite visible in many texts.

Not surprisingly, the fate of the specifically sentimental mode of narrative self-reflexivity at the centre of this thesis followed that of sentimentalism as a whole. Its presence is still observable in the fiction of the period, but appears in texts on opposite sides of the contemporary divide between radicals and conservatives. I would like to end by illustrating this pattern through a brief discussion of the parallels and differences between, on the one hand, Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), a novel that was embraced by the conservative *Anti-Jacobin Review* and, on the other, Robert Bage's radical novel, *Hermesprong* (1796). Hamilton's novel and Bage's diverge dramatically along ideological grounds. Hamilton mocks the Rousseuian idealization of the noble savage through her satirical portrait of the misguided radicals who revere the Hottentots as primitive exemplars of rational virtue and naively plan to establish a colony in Africa. The central protagonist of *Hermesprong*, meanwhile, was raised among Native Americans and returns to Britain with the insights gleamed from having been "born a savage" (139). As a result, *Hermesprong* largely upholds the ideal of the noble savage that Hamilton's novel rejects, while conservative-minded characters are the more frequent targets of the novel's satire.

And yet, despite these differences, both novels share an indebtedness to *Tristram Shandy* through their use of a playfully intrusive and unreliable narrator. As I examined earlier, Hamilton employs self-reflexive practices in ways that recall Sterne's work by engaging with the materiality of the text, but she also adopts a male narrative voice who, as in *Tristram Shandy*, consistently interrupts the story in order to philosophize, discuss

novelistic conventions, address potential criticisms, and even debate with fictionalized women readers. On Bage's end, Pamela Perkins and Wayne Booth have both noted the presence of "elements of Sterne's style and techniques" (Perkins 22).¹ Among the Sternean elements is also an intrusive narrator, Gregory Glen, who follows the model of *Tristram Shandy* by opening the novel with a reference to the moment of his own conception. As well, in quintessential Shandean fashion, Glen interjects to, among other things, debate with his copy editor, and self-mockingly lament the limited means (financial and printerly) at his disposal:

Without an engraving, I despair of making my readers understand the ensuing description; and the patrons of this humble sort of book-making, are not sufficiently liberal to enable a poor author to gratify his readers and himself in this particular. However, when the public ask a fourth edition, I will certainly give it, with a map, at my own expence. (78)

These types of humorous interruptions and digressions, as with those of Hamilton in *Memoirs*, draw heavily on the self-referential narrative tone of *Tristram Shandy*.

Taken together, these novels illustrate the kind of pattern Todd describes, in which texts positioned on opposite sides of contemporary ideological debates define themselves against the newly unfashionable sentimentalism, while at the same time continuing to draw on sentimentalism's language and conventions. Through depictions of Julia's and Bridgetina's quixotic habits, Hamilton associates sensibility with the dangers of Godwinian and Rousseauian radicalism. Yet Julia's relationship with her benevolent and suffering father, as well as her remorseful and virtuous death bed scene (which is

¹ Perkins, interestingly, also discusses Bage's overall indebtedness to other "mid-century" novelists including Henry Mackenzie and, particularly, Tobias Smollett (19-23).

strikingly reminiscent of Harley's from *The Man of Feeling*), draw on sentimental conventions and are designed to evoke sympathetic reactions. Along similar lines, Bage's hero, Hermsprong, is a recognizable 1790s character type, who retains traces of the man of feeling through his sensibility, but merges this sensibility with rational and Stoic self-control. As Barbara Benedict notes about fiction after the French Revolution, "sentimental protagonists" often display a new propensity toward "enlightened self-discipline" and "are extraordinary not merely for their capacity to feel, but for their ability to control their feelings" (16). Despite retaining traces of the sentimental genre, *Hermsprong* distances itself from novels of sensibility by noticeably undermining some of their tropes. Perkins observes that Bage's "setpiece scenes of virtue in distress...might be taken from any sentimental novel" (22). However, when faced with "that most familiar of eighteenth-century sentimental tableaux" – a virtuous, poverty-stricken family – the novel's protagonist reacts to their "picturesque helplessness" in a "startlingly unsentimental" way by reflecting on their "weakness" and "total imbecility" (Perkins 22). As well, in one of the narrator's many self-referential interjections, Glen mocks the trope within sentimental fiction to imitate "physiologists" and adopt a medically-informed approach to the emotional signifiers of the body (194). When describing a character's sudden anger, the narrator comments,

I know not why we novel writers should be at the trouble of noting the outward marks with precision, such as redness of face, or lividity, with swearing, or gnashing of teeth. It is sufficient to say, that Lord Grondale, on reading this fatal epistle, lost at once his patience, his paternity, and his politeness. (194)

Bage and Hamilton both demonstrate a notable ambivalence toward the language and conventions of sentimental fiction. They continue to employ many of the genre's recognizable tropes and practices, yet also explicitly mock and undermine this mode of writing. Techniques of narrative self-reflexivity, meanwhile, despite their indebtedness to earlier sentimental novels, are deployed as often to invoke sentimentalism as to undermine and question its authority and influence.

Sentimental fiction's remarkable descent into obscurity in the early nineteenth century can be observed in a notorious letter composed by Lady Louisa Stuart to Walter Scott in 1826 on *The Man of Feeling*. Stuart recalls that when the novel was first published her mother and sister were "crying over it, dwelling over it with rapture," but by 1826, when Stuart exposes the novel to a group of young women, they no longer react to the novel in the same way: "Nobody cried, and at some of the passages, the touches that I used to think so exquisite—Oh Dear! They laughed!" (273). Sentimental fiction by this time has lost its currency and legibility. Inevitably, the relationship between sensibility and self-referential practices followed suit. Works like Bage's *Hermesprong* and Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* illustrate the tensions and ambivalences that led to the dissolution of this relationship. Sentiment and narrative self-reflexivity originally converged in a manner that supported the culture of sensibility by exposing and interrogating the physicality of texts and feeling. By the 1790s, however, the culture of sensibility was no longer as coherent, as unified, or as widely embraced as it once was. Though sentimentalism continued to exercise enormous influence in literature and in culture, this influence was treated on all sides of polarized British society with increasing scepticism and mistrust. Nevertheless, even works that overtly criticize

sentimentalism retain the marks or traces of the culture of feeling. While some of these traces can be found in attempts to evoke sympathy for certain causes and beliefs through sentimental language, others can be found in the continued use of self-reflexive practices such as narratorial interruption, digression, intertextuality, and typographical play, which betray an indebtedness to the sentimental novels of Sterne, Smollett, and Mackenzie. The fact that these practices arise in novels such as *Hermesprong* and *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, texts that distance themselves from each other and from the genre of sentimentalism, demonstrates that strategies of corporeal defamiliarization were beginning to be less immediately associated with the aims of the culture of sensibility, a culture that was itself heading toward increased incoherence and marginalization. Just as the significance of self-reflexive practices changed when they were appropriated from Augustan satire by a new set of sentimental authors, so too would the significance of these practices begin to change again after the fall of sentimentalism.

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